Lucyna Harmon

# Common Themes in F. Scott Fitzgerald's and Agatha Christie's Works




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# Andersheit – Fremdheit – Ungleichheit

ERFAHRUNGEN VON DISPARATHEIT IN DER DEUTSCHSPRACHIGEN LITERATUR

*Herausgegeben von*

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BAND 27

Die Bände dieser Reihe sind peer-reviewed.

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Gedruckt mit freundlicher Unterstützung der Universität Rzeszów.

ISSN 2699-7487
ISSN 2699-7495 (DIGITAL)
ISBN 978-3-8471-2071-1
ISBN 978-3-8470-2071-4 (PDF)
ISBN 978-3-7370-2071-8 (ELIBRARY)
DOI https://doi.org/10.14220/9783737020718

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über https://dnb.dnb.de abrufbar.

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Einbandabbildung: Erstellt mit ChatGPT / Lucyna Harmon
Druck: CPI books GmbH, Leck

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INTRODUCTION

# Different Countries, Same Generation

F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896–1940) is described by *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (2026) as "an American short-story writer and novelist famous for his depictions of the Jazz Age (the 1920s), with *The Great Gatsby* (1925) hailed as the Great American Novel". Agatha Christie (1890–1976), by contrast, is introduced, in the same source, as "an English detective novelist and playwright whose books have sold more than 100 million copies and have been translated into some 100 languages" (ibid. 2026a). These brief profiles encapsulate the disparity between two authors born within six years of each other, both shaped by the First World War but situated in distinct literary traditions. Christie is celebrated as the most widely read crime writer, while Fitzgerald is canonized as a representative of American modernism. They thus occupy opposite ends of the literary hierarchy, emblematic of so-called "lowbrow" and "highbrow" culture, so that their comparison might initially seem unproductive. Yet, despite differences in genre and readership, both writers construct remarkably similar fictional worlds, shaped by concerns with social class, wealth, marriage, and the dilemmas of the post-war period. These thematic preoccupations are deeply rooted in their lived experiences. Both authors were born into well-established families whose prosperity declined significantly during their childhood and youth, situating them on the margins of the social class to which they were heir. In both cases, marriages to their beloved partners, initially marked by happiness, ultimately resulted in disillusionment and public scandal. Moreover, each writer was, to some extent, connected to the First World War through their respective activities. They also encountered, albeit under very different circumstances, immigrants seeking new lives in their countries. Finally, both authors achieved their first notable literary successes shortly after the end of the war, in 1920, and went on – each in a distinct manner and at a different pace – to secure a lasting place on bookshelves in libraries worldwide. Whereas Fitzgerald frequently portrays the wealthy – or those aspiring to wealth – through a psychological lens, Christie more often employs such figures as functional, even ornamental, components of her criminal plots; the narrative suspense would remain largely intact even in the absence of their wealth. In Fitzgerald's work, marriage serves as a central framework for examining desire, disillusionment, and social mobility. Christie, by contrast, uses marriage primarily as a narrative catalyst for crime: spouses conspire, betray,

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and even murder one another, while engagements often structure the disclosure or resolution of the mystery. These ostensibly ornamental acts, though peripheral to the plot, nonetheless reflect Christie's engagement with prevailing cultural ideals of matrimony and her sensitivity to readerly expectations. Furthermore, while Fitzgerald occasionally depicts immigrants as intriguing yet marginal contributors to the fabric of American wealth – never placing them at the center of his narratives – Christie elevates a foreign newcomer to England, Hercule Poirot, to the status of her most enduring and iconic protagonist. Through Poirot, she offers a series of ironic and often humorous observations on English society and its customs. In what follows, the biographies and works of Fitzgerald and Christie are outlined, including the aspects mentioned above.

Both Fitzgerald and Christie left us abundant first-hand information about themselves. Fitzgerald, who has not authored an autobiography sensu stricto, collected a clips from newspapers and magazines with news on himself and his wife, maintained a *Ledger*, "a monthly account of his own life that he kept from 1919 to 1936" (Pelzer 2000, p. 4) and wrote many private and business letters – these texts were preserved and made available to the public by his successors and friends (e.g. Turnbull 1963, Bruccoli 1994, Bryer and Barks 2002). Christie wrote down her recollections that were published after her death as her autobiography (Christie 1977). Thus, both writers contributed directly to the process of their legend building, as if they knew it was underway.

Interestingly, both writers had a special relation to and interest in France, where the Fitzgeralds spent several years as expatriots and Christie attended a boarding school in her youth. France plays an important role in both authors' works, as the setting of many outstanding plots in their oeuvres. For instance, most events depicted in Fitzgerald's novel *Tender Is the Night* (1934) take place in France, with participation of French-speaking people (e.g. Nicole and Rosemary), whereas in *Babylon Revisited*, the story considered as one of his best (Cowart 1984, 21), the protagonist Charlie Wales comes to Paris to reclaim his daughter, who is living there in her aunt's custody. At the same time, in some of Christie's novels the plot is located mainly (e.g. *The Murder on the Links,* 1923; or *The Mystery of the Blue Train,* 1928) or partly (e.g. *Death in the Clouds,*1935; *The Big Four,* 1927; *Elephants Can Remember,* 1972) in France, whilst in some short stories, the case investigated leads the prominent detective to France (e.g. *The Kidnapped Prime Minister*, *The Girdle of Hyppolita*). Both authors fade in the French language in their characters'dialogues. In Christie, the Belgian native speaker of French, Hercule Poirot, frequently utters French phrases in his appearances. In Fitzgerald, the characters sometimes boast with their knowledge of French as an indicator of their education (e.g. *This Side of Para-*

*dise*, 169) or as a marker of the cosmopolitan character of the surroundings (e.g. *One Trip Abroad,*1930*; The Swimmers,* 1929).

## The Life and Work of Francis Scott Fitzgerald

Francis Scott Fitzgerald, who used his second Christian name and is known as F. Scott Fitzgerald, was born in St. Paul, Minnesota, on 24 September 1896, and spent his childhood in a family marked by both genteel aspirations and financial instability. During his youth, he experienced a precarious economic environment shaped by both modest stability and financial insecurity. His father, Edward Fitzgerald, came from an aristocratic but financially declining Southern family and struggled to maintain consistent employment. After losing his position as a salesman, the family relied largely on the inheritance and support of Fitzgerald's mother, Mary McQuillan, whose family had accumulated wealth through business ventures. Despite this support, the family's social standing often exceeded their actual financial means, fostering in Fitzgerald a lasting sensitivity to class distinctions and economic aspiration (Bruccoli, 2002; Mizener, 1951).

Fitzgerald's education began at St. Paul Academy and later continued at the Newman School in New Jersey, where his literary talents became evident. In 1913, he enrolled at Princeton University. Although he demonstrated literary promise and contributed to campus publications such as the *Princeton Triangle Club*, his academic performance suffered due to his preoccupation with writing and social activities. Consequently, he left Princeton in 1917 without completing his degree, opting instead to join the U.S. Army during World War I. It was during this period that he met his future wife and began drafting what would later become his first novel, *This Side of Paradise* (1920).

Fitzgerald's marriage to Zelda Sayre in 1920 was both passionate and fraught. Zelda, a Southern belle from Montgomery, Alabama, embodied the glamour and excess of the Jazz Age, a cultural milieu that Fitzgerald both celebrated and critiqued. Their relationship was characterized by mutual influence as well as instability, exacerbated by financial pressures, alcoholism, and Zelda's later struggles with mental illness. Despite these challenges, their marriage significantly shaped Fitzgerald's creative output, inspiring some of his most enduring characters and themes.

Fitzgerald is regarded as a canonical figure of world literature, primarily as the author of *The Great Gatsby* (1925), a work that achieved full critical recognition only after the writer's death. By contrast, his two earlier novels – *This Side of Paradise* (1920) and *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922) – enjoyed imme-

diate and considerable success, temporarily relieving the young author of financial difficulties and securing for him the status of a rising star in American literature. To the great disappointment of their creator, neither *The Great Gatsby* nor his subsequent novel, *Tender Is the Night* (1934), achieved comparable commercial success, although both received numerous favorable reviews from critics and expressions of admiration from fellow writers. Fitzgerald did not complete his final novel, *The Last Tycoon*, due to illness. His friend Edmund Wilson published the extant text in 1941, supplemented with information about the intended continuation of the plot, reconstructed from Fitzgerald's notes and conversations with informed individuals.

Fitzgerald, who supported himself throughout his life through his writing and – apart from a brief pre-debut episode in an advertising agency – never pursued any other profession, was also the author of numerous short stories. Most of these were initially published, often for substantial fees, in prestigious periodicals such as *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Scribner's Magazine*, *Smart Set*, *Metropolitan Magazine*, and *Vanity Fair*, and only later collected in book form. The exact number of these shorter works remains a matter of debate; in his study devoted to Fitzgerald's short fiction, Bryant Mangum (2002, 57) gives the figure of 178. During the author's lifetime, the following collections were published: *Flappers and Philosophers* (1920), *Tales of the Jazz Age* (1922), *All the Sad Young Men* (1926), and *Taps at Reveille* (1935). Each of these volumes appeared shortly after one of his four novels, as reflected in their respective publication dates. Notably, none of the collection titles coincides with the title of any individual story; in total, the four volumes comprise forty-six stories (eight in the first collection, eleven in the second, nine in the third, and eighteen in the fourth).

As Kirk Curnutt (2004, 7) observes, Fitzgerald's primary ambition lay in novel writing; he aspired to produce the greatest novel ever written. He neither particularly liked nor highly valued his short stories, which were composed largely for financial reasons, often under time pressure, and frequently revisited the recurring theme of youthful love and disillusionment (ibid., 9).

After the author's death, further groups of his short stories were published in volumes that typically combined selections from earlier collections with a smaller number of previously uncollected works. For example, *Babylon Revisited and Other Stories* (1960), comprising ten stories, includes only five new pieces, while the more extensive collection edited by Matthew J. Bruccoli, *The Short Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald* (1989), contains forty-three stories, of which twenty-one are new. A practice emerged of organizing collections according to a character-based principle (i.e., recurring protagonists), as exemplified by *The Basil and Josephine Stories* (1973) and *The Pat Hobby Stories* (1973).

Another practice – already evident in *Babylon Revisited and Other Stories* – involves titling the collection after one of its constituent stories, as in *The Price Was High and Other Stories* (2015). Particular attention should be given to a substantial volume edited by Anne Margaret Daniel (2017), comprising eighteen previously unpublished stories by Fitzgerald. In addition to the texts themselves, the collection includes detailed editorial commentary and extensive illustrative material; it was published under the title *I'd Die for You and Other Lost Stories*.

Scholars of F. Scott Fitzgerald's work tend to interpret it in close conjunction with the author's life: his (unfinished) studies at Princeton University, his marriage to Zelda Sayre, the places he lived and the people he encountered, his alcoholism, financial difficulties, his work as a screenwriter in Hollywood, and his unfulfilled ambitions and insecurities. Some critics reproach him for an excessive identification with the protagonists of his own novels (e.g. Eagleton 1971, 438; Diemert 1998, 135; Callahan 2006, 102).

It is difficult not to notice the recurrence of certain motifs: a man striving tirelessly for success that fails to bring personal fulfillment; a young man rejected by his beloved because of poverty; an eccentric marriage and extramarital fascinations; painful turns of fate; hedonistic excess; illness or madness. Fitzgerald experienced all of these in life – either directly or through those closest to him. The tribulations of his characters are set against the backdrop of the American reality that generated them: on the one hand, great prosperity, progress, and moral transformation; on the other, the collapse of family enterprises, the social decline of sensitive individuals, and deepening inequalities. As Paweł Stachura (2010, 113) observes, "most of Fitzgerald's works are semi-autobiographical chronicles of the so-called 'Jazz Age', that is, the lives of a generation of young people who entered adulthood in the 1920s." Such formulations are commonplace in concise overviews of the author's oeuvre, yet this does not diminish their validity. They are further complemented by references to the "Lost Generation" – those whose early adulthood coincided with the First World War – and to the myth of the American Dream, which Fitzgerald's protagonists pursue with varying degrees of success.

Numerous biographical studies have been devoted to the writer and his wife, including works by Mizener (1951), Turnbull (1962), Meyers (1994), Prigozy (2004), Donaldson (1983), Brown (2017) Rielly (2005), Spargo (2015) Stromberg (1998), Taylor (2001) and Milford (1970). Considerable interest also surrounds Zelda Fitzgerald herself, known for her artistic – including literary – ambitions. Her influence on her husband's work, whether as a model for fictional characters or as an effective adviser and critic, constitutes

a compelling subject of scholarly inquiry (e.g. Keats 2001; Bloom 2006; Stolarek 2015). Many of Fitzgerald's female characters exhibit traits reminiscent of Zelda, and in a 1921 interview Fitzgerald himself remarked that he had married the heroine of his own short stories (Milford 1970) – and, indeed, of his novels as well. Arthur Krystall, author of yet another biographic publication on F. Scott Fitzgerald, points out the biased character of some previous scholarly attempts to portray the writer, especially the abovementioned books by Meyers and Mizener (Krystall 2023, 8). As he rightly observes, though, a biographer cannot avoid looking at the object of his or her study through the lenses of their own attitudes and experiences.

Zelda Fitzgerald authored several literary works, which, like those of her husband, were published in magazines and periodicals. After her death, Matthew J. Bruccoli (1991) edited and published them in the volume *The Collected Writings of Zelda Fitzgerald*, which includes, among other texts, her novel *Save Me the Waltz*, eleven short stories, twelve articles, and twenty-six letters to her husband. As Milford (1970) notes, on the basis of the writer's correspondence and notes, some of Zelda's short stories were at times published – at the publisher's request – under the names of both spouses or even solely under Scott's name, owing to his popularity and its guarantee of higher sales.

Between 1931 and 1937, Fitzgerald wrote autobiographical essays which, like his short stories, were first published in magazines. After his death, they were edited by Edmund Wilson and issued in the volume *The Crack-Up* (1945), which also includes the author's notes and correspondence. Some of the texts are co-signed by Zelda Fitzgerald as co-author. The title essay, *The Crack-Up*, consists of three articles – *The Crack-Up*, *Pasting It Together*, and *Handle with Care* – published successively in February, March, and April 1936 in *Esquire*. In these works, ostensibly devoid of literary ambition (Banerjee 1995, 47), Fitzgerald reflects on his apathy, depression, and the depletion of his vital energies, concluding the title essay with a quotation from the Gospel of St. Matthew ("You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has lost its savor, wherewith shall it be salted?"). His account, however, is metaphorical and allusive, devoid of overtly confessional or exhibitionist detail. The central theme of the second essay is the loss of a clearly defined sense of self as a result of dependence on the influence of others, whom he does not name (with the exception of Edmund Wilson). The final essay, the most personal of the three, describes the author's self-imposed isolation in a desperate attempt to overcome creative stagnation.

## The Life and Work of Agatha Christie

Agatha Christie was born on September 15, 1890, in Torquay, into a relatively comfortable middle-class family. Her father, Frederick Alvah Miller, was an American businessman, while her mother, Clara, came from a British family. During her early childhood, the family enjoyed financial stability, supported largely by her father's inherited wealth rather than active employment. However, this security did not last. When Christie was eleven, her father died, leaving the family in a more uncertain economic situation. Her mother struggled to maintain their previous lifestyle, and they had to rely more carefully on limited resources. Despite these challenges, Christie's upbringing remained intellectually rich. She was educated at home, where her mother encouraged her imagination and love of storytelling.

As a young woman, Christie spent time in Paris studying singing and piano, though she eventually realized she lacked the talent for a professional career in music. During the First World War, she worked as a nurse and later in a pharmacy, gaining knowledge of poisons that would later influence her writing. These early life experiences – both privileged and challenging – shaped Christie's creativity and resilience, helping her become one of the most successful authors in literary history.

During the First World War, Agatha Christie served as a Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) nurse in a hospital in Torquay. She assisted wounded soldiers, performing basic nursing duties such as dressing wounds and helping with daily care. Later, she worked in the hospital dispensary, where she trained as an apothecary. This experience gave her extensive knowledge of medicines and poisons, which became a distinctive feature of her detective novels.

In 1914, she married Archibald Christie, known as Archie, a pilot in the Royal Flying Corps. Their early marriage was affected by the war, as Archie was often away on duty. After the war, they settled into family life and had a daughter, Rosalind. However, their relationship later deteriorated, eventually leading to divorce in 1928, a difficult period in Christie's personal life. Archie had fallen in love with another woman, Nancy Neele, and asked for a separation. This came shortly after the death of Christie's mother, making the situation even more distressing. In 1926, Christie famously disappeared for eleven days, an event often linked to the emotional strain she was experiencing. The divorce was finalized two years later, marking the end of their marriage. Despite the heartbreak, this difficult time ultimately preceded a new chapter in her life and career. Christie married the archeologist Max Mallowan, fourteen years her junior, in 1930. Their relationship was happy and stable, and she

often accompanied him on archaeological expeditions in the Middle East. Christie spent long periods in the Middle East with her husband, visiting places like Iraq and Syria. These stays inspired novels such as *Murder in Mesopotamia, Appointment with Death* or *Death on the Nile*, influencing her settings and characters.

At the outset of his monograph on Agatha Christie, York (2007, p. 1) anticipates potential skepticism – perhaps partly in a playful tone – by presenting numerous arguments in favor of undertaking rigorous scholarly analysis of her oeuvre. A decade later, Storm (2017, p. 1) revisits this issue in a detailed examination of Christie's debut novel as translated into German and Dutch. Christie remains among the most widely sold and translated authors in literary history. Her readership is sustained by an active and evolving fan base that continues to attract new generations of enthusiasts who engage with and discuss her works. Both original texts and their translations are continually reissued, including in digital formats such as Kindle editions and audiobooks, thereby attesting to their enduring popularity and commercial viability. For instance, Amazon currently offers numerous recent editions of Christie's works, including *The Agatha Christie Collection* (General Press, 2020), *The Man in the Brown Suit* (Independently published, 2020), *Premium Collection* (Kindle, Sanctuary Publishing, 2020), *The Ultimate Collection* (Kindle, ACC, 2021), and *The Secret of Chimneys* (MysteriousPress.com/Open Road, 2021). Notably, a selection of her most popular works is also available as audiobooks narrated by Hugh Fraser, who is widely recognized for portraying Captain Arthur Hastings in television adaptations of Poirot narratives.

Furthermore, Christie's texts are extensively employed in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) worldwide. The Collins series, for example, features abridged and simplified versions of her novels, incorporating pedagogical tools such as glossaries, character lists, and concise cultural notes. These editions are often accompanied by audio materials, in line with standard practices in foreign language instruction. Some titles, including *The Man in the Brown Suit* and *Murder on the Orient Express*, are also freely accessible on YouTube through programs such as *English through Story*, which combine narrated readings by native speakers with synchronized subtitles. In this manner, Christie's prose reaches a broad audience of language learners, including individuals who might not otherwise engage with her works for leisure reading. Significantly, these simplified adaptations may function as alternatives to translations, appealing to non-native speakers who prefer reading in the original language without prioritizing linguistic refinement.

Christie's narratives have also been extensively adapted into comics and graphic novels. One prominent series by François Rivière, available in both

French and English, includes titles such as *And Then There Were None* (1996; 2010), *Death on the Nile* (1997), *The Secret of Chimneys* (2002), *The Secret Adversary* (2003), *Endless Night* (2003; 2010), *Murder in Mesopotamia* (2005; 2009), *Murder on the Links* (2012), and *Murder on the Orient Express* (2007). Another series by Marek comprises works such as *Dumb Witness* (2009) and *Dead Man's Folly* (2011) in English, as well as *Les oiseaux du lac Stymphale* (2010) and *Le couteau sur la nuque* (2012) in French. These adaptations have, in turn, been translated into multiple languages.

In addition, Christie's detective fiction continues to inspire the development of computer and video games. Several well-known titles – including *And Then There Were None* (2000), *Peril at End House* (2009), *Death on the Nile* (2020), *The ABC Murders* (2016), and *Evil Under the Sun* (2007) – are available to players through platforms such as Amazon, further demonstrating the adaptability and sustained cultural relevance of her work.

The aforementioned editions of Agatha Christie's original works, together with their influence on diverse forms of creative production, provide sufficient evidence for the existence of what may be termed a "Christie industry," even without reference to film adaptations, which arguably constitute the most significant factor in sustaining her widespread popularity. Notably, formats such as comics, pedagogical editions, and video games entail shifts in genre, thereby contributing to a reconceptualization of adaptation. Whereas adaptation was traditionally associated primarily with cinema (Sanders 2006, 18), it is now understood to encompass a broad spectrum of artistic outputs derived from a source text, which need not be exclusively literary in nature.

## The Concept of Theme

As has been argued elsewhere (Harmon, 2024, 47–48), the distinction between theme and motif (or even character) remains ambiguous, except in cases where a work is demonstrably – however such a determination may be defined – concerned with a specific topic that may be identified as its central theme. This claim may be advanced, albeit with some reservation, in relation to certain works within Fitzgerald's oeuvre, but it is less readily applicable to those of Christie. This stems from the fact that in Christie's prose crime occupies a central position, relegating all other accompanying issues to the background. In this study, a theme is understood as a discernible and socially relevant concern that can be identified in the fictional world depicted in a given work.

## The Concept and Structure of This Book

Given that Fitzgerald's relatively brief career produced five novels and 178 short stories, whereas Christie's long and prolific career yielded sixty-six novels and 153 short stories, a balanced corpus was constructed in order to ensure representativeness. The Fitzgerald corpus comprises all five novels – *This Side of Paradise* (1920), *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922), *The Great Gatsby* (1925), *Tender Is the Night* (1934), and *The Last Tycoon* (1941) – as well as forty-three short stories drawn from *Flappers and Philosophers* (1920), *Tales of the Jazz Age* (1922), *All the Sad Young Men* (1926), and *Taps at Reveille* (1935), which, as Churchwell (2010, vii) notes, Fitzgerald himself regarded as "worthy of inclusion in four book collections". In addition, a few stories from other collections are included that, in my opnion, particularly well illustrate the themes discussed

In Christie's case, the selection generally encompasses all novels and short stories published in the 1920s, together with *Three Act Tragedy* (1934), *Sad Cypress* (1940), and the collection *The Regatta Mystery* (1939), thereby preserving both temporal correspondence with Fitzgerald's output and a degree of quantitative balance. On occasion, though, like in Fitzgerald's case, works beyond this timeframe are also included if they offer particularly salient illustrations of a given theme.

The following considerations address four discernible themes in the works of Fitzgerald and Christie, namely marriage, the upper class, immigration, and the figure of the veteran, each of which is examined in a separate chapter. Although the book has been conceived as a coherent whole, in which the selected themes are interrelated, each chapter may be read independently and in any order. The sequence of the chapters reflects the relative perceptibility of thematic similarities in the works of both authors, a criterion informed by the number of illustrative examples, yet one that remains to a considerable extent subjective.

## Technicalities

In what follows, shortened forms of titles, consisting of key identifying words, are often used to refer unambiguously to the work in question. In the case of quotations from collected short stories, in-text references may employ the key word to of the the principal collection title, while page numbers correspond to that collection. As both Fitzgerald and Christie frequently published their works in magazines prior to their appearance in book form, the

publication year of an individual work – particularly a short story – may differ from that of the collection in which it is later included.

The bibliography of works by Fitzgerald and Christie provided at the end is restricted to those discussed or mentioned herein. Comprehensive bibliographies for both authors are readily accessible through standard online resources.

CHAPTER I

# Marriage

This chapter explores marriage as both a central theme and an organizing motif in the works of Fitzgerald and Christie. It begins with Fitzgerald, whose writing places explicit emphasis on marriage, before turning to Christie, whose detective fiction typically prioritizes the demands of the "whodunnit" structure over interpersonal relationships. Initial similarities in how both authors depict marriage were identified through separate analyses conducted in earlier projects (Harmon 2023; Harmon 2024). This comparative study aims to systematically clarify the shared narrative and cultural roles of this motif. It seeks to cover as broad a selection of texts by both authors as possible, so that the combination of extensive scope and detailed analysis highlights the thematic importance of marriage across their bodies of work and underscores its deliberate recurrence within their plot structures.

## Selected Research

Scholars have long recognized recurring thematic concerns in Fitzgerald's prose. Kuehl (1959, 412) broadly categorizes these as stemming from two main areas: romanticism and social realism. Expanding on this, Higgins (1971, 3–5) identifies themes including football, the Civil War, the seductive yet corrupting nature of wealth, the femme fatale, the quest for father figures, nostalgia for a lost past, romantic illusion, disillusionment and failure, and decline through alcoholism. Similarly, Churchwell (2010, ix) emphasizes illusion and disillusionment, while also highlighting loss, transience, temporality, social hierarchy and class relations, and gendered power dynamics.

Curnutt (2001, 31–39) places the theme of early marriage in Fitzgerald's short stories within its social context, noting tensions such as the cultural stigma against premarital sex contrasted with younger generations' increasing willingness to experiment, as well as the conflict between the need for maturity in successful marriage and the intensity of youthful first love. In later work, Curmutt (2007, 53–59) discusses disappointment as an inevitable outcome of desire, alongside recurring ideas of loss, self-perfection, identity construction, the damaging effects of wealth, the indifference of the rich, and reversals of fortune. Daley (2015, 5) further points to "family and faith, and marriage and infidelity" as key themes in Fitzgerald's writing.

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Taken together, these studies reinforce Kuehl's foundational categories while showing that Fitzgerald's themes are often interconnected, with his protagonists frequently experiencing overlapping tensions and conflicts; his protagonists experience deep disillusionment when the women they love choose to marry wealthier men, highlighting the seemingly insurmountable obstacles created by class and capital. In academic discourse, the writer is most often categorized as the poet laureate of the Jazz Age (Curnutt 2010, Xu 2024, 103), a chronicler of the Roaring Twenties or the American Dream (Diadetchko 2020), a representative of the Lost Generation (Zhang 2022), or an "expert on flappers" (Čuljak 2024, 87).

Donaldson (2009) identifies two primary patterns in Fitzgerald's short fiction: stories in which a poor young man either succeeds or fails in winning a wealthy woman. However, the broader body of work considered here challenges this binary view. Among Fitzgerald's five novels and forty-three short stories, marriage emerges as a recurring and multifaceted theme rather than a single, uniform narrative outcome. Three novels – *The Beautiful and Damned*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *Tender Is the Night* – along with twelve short stories, including *The Cut-Glass Bowl*, *The Lees of Happiness*, *The Adjuster*, and *Babylon Revisited*, place marital life at their core. Two additional novels and thirteen other stories address engagements or marriages as central concerns, while others approach matrimony more indirectly through dialogue, narrative commentary, secondary storylines, or seemingly detached episodes.

## Marriage in Fitzgerald's Works

Throughout these works, Fitzgerald presents a variety of marital models that go beyond issues of class aspiration. These models can be categorized along several dimensions: (1) convenience, (2) adventure, (3) obligation, (4) love, (5) disillusionment, and (6) stereotype. A marriage of convenience typically contrasts with one rooted in genuine love, as it is entered into for reasons beyond emotional attachment, often driven by the parties' differing financial circumstances. In contrast, marriage based on love is characterized by the natural growth of affection between partners. Marriage as adventure is depicted as spontaneous rather than planned – an impulsive act rather than a calculated decision – representing a fleeting emotional impulse. The notion of marriage as obligation neither excludes nor requires love; instead, it emphasizes commitment, portraying marriage as a lifelong bond that encompasses both prosperity and hardship and is most severely tested during times of adversity.

A marriage grounded in sincere affection does not exclude the possibility of later disappointment or the emergence of conventional marital patterns. At the same time, love can coexist with, or eventually foster, a strong sense of obligation when circumstances demand it. Marital disillusionment occurs when the idealized vision of marriage as a space of mutual support and harmony is challenged by the realities of everyday life. Such disillusionment may, though not inevitably, lead to separation. In other cases, it may produce a resigned acknowledgment of life's difficulties or a passive readjustment of personal expectations. The traditional model of marriage characteristic of Fitzgerald's era, in which the husband serves as the family's provider and authority figure while the wife assumes responsibility for the household, does not necessarily contradict the dimensions of marriage discussed above. Instead, it may function as a separate framework in which these dimensions remain unquestioned and unchanged.

Fitzgerald's portrayals frequently merge several of these aspects, exposing both the attraction and the limitations of matrimony. In his fiction, marriage becomes a site for examining the moral and psychological vulnerability of modern life, while continuing to occupy a central social role.

Marriages of convenience appear repeatedly throughout Fitzgerald's novels. In *This Side of Paradise*, Rosalind yields to her mother's influence and marries the wealthy Dawson Ryder, thereby breaking the heart of Amory Blaine, whom she genuinely loves. During their farewell exchange (188–193), Rosalind pragmatically justifies her choice by emphasizing her future husband's respectable character and the financial security he can provide, ultimately sacrificing love for material stability. As McGowan (2020, 212) observes, "Rosalind's rejection of Amory, based purely on his lack of a substantial bank balance, may well be viewed as cynical, but she makes a cold-hearted choice in her own future interests".

In *The Beautiful and Damned*, Gloria identifies three types of husbands she would refuse to marry: the domestic homebody, the excessively masculine man, and the worshipper. Instead, she expresses a preference for a "lover-husband" (...), "a temporarily passionate lover with wisdom enough to realise when it has flown and that it must fly" (70). At first, Anthony appears to fulfil this ideal. At the age of twenty-two, Gloria perceives marriage less as a union based on love than as a means of self-fulfilment. Critics often describe her marriage to Anthony as unsuccessful (cf. Pelzer 2000, 54); however, this interpretation overlooks the novel's ending. In spite of poverty, infidelity, and illness, the couple remains together, and their persistence ultimately reflects the notion of marriage as obligation.

In *The Great Gatsby*, Daisy marries Tom Buchanan after abandoning hope that Gatsby will return. As Saunders (2018, 139) observes, "Daisy's physical beauty and social gifts are as striking as Tom's wealth". Their marriage rests upon Daisy's deliberate acceptance of Tom's extramarital affairs and his sincere commitment to the family unit. Although Daisy briefly rekindles her feelings for Gatsby, she ultimately chooses to remain with Tom, who, despite his injured pride, is determined to keep her.

In *Tender Is the Night*, described as "the story of an American marriage" (Shain 1961, 139), Dick Diver marries his patient Nicole and enjoys a life of privilege supported by her wealth. As Fetterley (2006, 106) points out, their relationship reverses conventional gender roles: Dick assumes the role of caretaker, while Nicole gradually acquires emotional strength and independence. This reversal may be interpreted as the cost of the eight years of financial security he enjoys. Their relationship fluctuates between affection and duty, further complicated by Nicole's trauma and Dick's moral responsibility toward her. Nevertheless, it remains uncertain whether their marriage is rooted in genuine love or rather in Nicole's adolescent infatuation – formed in the aftermath of incestuous abuse – and Dick's conviction that he is morally obliged to love the woman who has become his wife.

In Fitzgerald's unfinished and posthumously published novel *The Last Tycoon* (1941), Kathleen Moore ultimately chooses the security offered by her fiancé over a short-lived romance with the film producer Stahr. A widower still haunted by the memory of his deceased wife, Stahr serves as a reminder of the enduring strength and importance of marital bonds. Significantly, Fitzgerald originally contemplated the title *Love of the Last Tycoon*, thereby emphasizing the novel's romantic dimension, which has often been overshadowed in criticism focusing primarily on its Hollywood setting (Hext 2025). Stahr is drawn to Kathleen largely because of her physical resemblance to his late wife. In this respect, his former marriage symbolically survives through Kathleen until she decides to end their relationship in favour of the security associated with a conventional marriage. Although Stahr senses that Kathleen would likely choose to marry him if he were to propose, he refrains from doing so, arguably because of the terminal illness he conceals from others. This situation creates a tension between the familiar motif of a woman seeking stability through marriage and the ethical position of a self-aware man who understands her need for security while recognising that he will not live long enough to provide it.

Fitzgerald's short stories similarly examine marriages of convenience, both on a conceptual level through the characters' reflections and in practice through the marriages they enter into. In *The Ice Palace* (1920), Sally Carrol

becomes engaged to a northern man out of ambition rather than affection, as she openly admits to a friend: "Clark, I don't know. I'm not sure what I'll do, but – well, I want to go places and see people. I want my mind to grow. I want to live where things happen on a big scale" (*Collected*, 31). However, after meeting her prospective in-laws and confronting the unfamiliar, icy atmosphere of the northern city, she abandons the engagement and returns home, where she feels she truly belongs. Neither she nor her former fiancé displays any significant emotional suffering, suggesting the absence of genuine love between them.

A comparable pattern appears in *Majesty* (1929), where the adventurous Emily agrees to marry the wealthy Brevoort Blair primarily because of social expectations, despite lacking any real affection for him: "I shall learn to love him (…) Love will come with marriage. Now, isn't that a hell of a prospect?" (*Complete*, 235). At the last moment, however, she breaks off the engagement, seemingly motivated by a fear of monotony and confinement. Blair, concerned about the social embarrassment sible signs of heartbreak. Together with Olive, who believes that "women are incomplete unless they are married and have children" (ibid., 234), he creates a stable and successful domestic life. Emily, in contrast, continues to seek adventure and eventually marries a foreign adventurer who later becomes the ruler of a small country, making her its queen. The closing scene, in which the prosperous Blair family watches a royal procession featuring Emily in her new position, places side by side two contrasting visions of marriage: one based on security and practicality, the other on excitement and adventure. Fitzgerald leaves unresolved the question of which model is ultimately more fulfilling. The young daughter's preference for her father over the spectacle of royalty merely reflects a child's natural idealization of her parents rather than a clear endorsement of either form of marriage.

In *O, Russet Witch* (1922), the bookstore clerk Merlin Grainger marries his co-worker Olive despite continuing to long for the elusive figure of "Caroline," thus opting for stability instead of unattainable desire. Although Merlin and Olive never develop genuine romantic feelings for one another, they nonetheless establish a conventional household, have a child, and lead a married life resembling that of many ordinary couples. Merlin represents the figure of the average young man, lacking extraordinary ambitions, who allows himself moments of fantasy yet ultimately remains grounded in realism and shapes his choices according to what is realistically within reach.

The concept of marriage as an adventure – that is, as a spontaneous and insufficiently considered decision to marry, motivated either by affection or by the desire for excitement – recurs throughout several of Fitzgerald's short

stories in a variety of forms, ranging from unsuccessful attempts at impulsive unions to marriages that ultimately result in literal royal status.

In *First Blood* (1930), the young couple Josephine and Travis impulsively attempt to marry, having "adventurously driven twenty miles to New Ulm, but they had been unable to find a minister willing to marry them" (*Taps*, 13). In *The Offshore Pirate* (1920), Ardita, the wealthy heiress to a large fortune, agrees to marry the outlaw whom she believes has abducted her, only to discover that he is in fact the conventional and tedious suitor from whom she had been trying to escape. Ardita embodies the type of privileged young woman who longs for passion and excitement unavailable within the rigid social order associated with wealth and respectability.

A more ironic variation of the same motif appears in *The Camel's Back* (1922). There, a marriage contracted during a masquerade ball between a man disguised as a camel and his temperamental former fiancée unexpectedly proves legally valid and is eventually accepted by both participants. The heroine, who had previously broken off the engagement because her fiancé seemed incapable of providing the excitement she desired, finds herself newly fascinated by the mystery and strangeness created by his disguise. In this respect, the story closely parallels the narrative pattern of *The Offshore Pirate*. Similarly, in *Rags Martin-Jones and the Prince of Wales*, the heroine decides to "rescue" through marriage the man who has charmed her through the imaginative power of his fantasies.

In *Jelly-Bean*, Fitzgerald presents yet another impulsive marriage motivated less by romance than by recklessness and intoxication. Four drunken young people "got another bottle of corn, got tight and decided to shock the town – so Nancy and that fella Merritt were married in Rockville at seven o'clock this morning." Afterwards, "Nancy sobered up and rushed back into town, crying and frightened to death – claimed it'd all been a mistake", but eventually "they got it patched up some way, and Nancy and Merritt went to Savannah on the two-thirty train" (*Collected*, 132). The episode illustrates Fitzgerald's recurring interest in marriage as a sudden, adventurous act driven by emotion, impulse, or social performance rather than by careful reflection.

In *May Day*, the protagonist Gordon Sterrett commits suicide after sobering up and realizing that he has married a woman from a lower social class. His reaction may suggest a belief in the dissolubility of marriage; rather than spend his life bound to what he perceives as an unsuitable match, he chooses to end his life altogether.

In *The Diamond as Big as the Ritz*, sixteen-year-old John Unger, having survived a bizarre and dangerous adventure, proposes bringing his companion Kismine home to his parents as his fiancée. The episode can be interpreted as

a satire on adolescent romantic idealism: prompted by an emerging sense of responsibility, John perceives marriage less as the culmination of mature love than as a practical solution to ensure Kismine's safety. A similarly ironic treatment of marriage appears in *Jemina, the Mountain Girl*. There, the businessman Edgar Edison, trapped in a ridiculous local feud and facing imminent death in a fire alongside the young Jemina, suddenly delivers a humorously pragmatic declaration concerning matrimony: "We will die together," he said. "If we had lived I would have taken you to the city and married you. With your ability to hold liquor, your social success would have been assured" (*Complete*, 273). The satirical tone of the scene underscores Fitzgerald's tendency to portray marriage not primarily as a romantic union, but as a practical and socially advantageous arrangement.

In summary, these narratives reveal a recurring pattern: marriage is consistently associated with adventure, whether as an expression of youthful longing for excitement and novelty or as the accidental result of recklessness and impulse. The consequences of such spontaneous unions, however, remain uncertain. Either the marriage never ultimately occurs, or the narrative leaves its future unresolved. Fitzgerald rarely presents these relationships as unequivocally happy endings and avoids concluding such stories with any clear suggestion of lasting marital fulfillment.

By contrast, the idea of marriage as obligation is represented through couples who endure hardship with perseverance and moral commitment. In *The Lees of Happiness*, Roxanne devotes eleven years to caring for her disabled husband Jeffrey and continues to grieve deeply after his death. In *The Adjuster*, Luella, initially portrayed as selfish and dissatisfied, abandons thoughts of divorce once her husband becomes ill; in the process, she develops domestic competence and gradually assumes the role of a devoted and caring wife. Likewise, in *Magnetism*, Kay remains loyal to her husband George when scandal threatens his professional reputation, sacrificing her own desire for independence out of solidarity with him. In *Two Wrongs*, Emmy McChesney prioritizes her career over supporting her alcoholic husband, a decision that leaves her burdened with guilt, while he responds with understanding and continues to hope for reconciliation. In these stories, Fitzgerald presents love and obligation not as opposing forces, but as complementary elements that contribute to the endurance and stability of marriage.

Marriages explicitly grounded in love constitute another recurring model in Fitzgerald's fiction. In *Head and Shoulders*, Horace Tarbox abandons his scholarly ambitions in order to marry Marcia Meadow, motivated by sincere youthful affection. Although the marriage survives, it develops in an unexpected and ironic direction: Marcia achieves literary success, while Horace's intellec-

tual potential is displaced into a career based on physical performance as an acrobat, leaving him frustrated and resentful. His final warning to visitors not to answer a knock at the door functions symbolically, suggesting that marriage has signified the death of his earlier aspirations.

In *Gretchen's Forty Winks*, mutual affection ultimately proves insufficient to preserve domestic harmony, as ambition and financial pressure gradually undermine the relationship. Gretchen criticizes her husband Roger for his obsessive devotion to work and comes close to leaving him altogether. She is subsequently "neutralized" through deception, being induced to sleep for the period necessary for Roger to complete his professional undertaking. The story therefore presents the wife as an obstacle to progress, incapable of participating in or sharing responsibility for securing the family's future.

A contrasting representation appears in *The Lees of Happiness*, where love serves as the foundation of Roxanne's unwavering dedication to her incapacitated husband. Her steadfast care and enduring grief after his death exemplify the capacity of deep emotional attachment to sustain the marital commitment embodied in the vow "till death do us part."

The motif of disillusionment permeates Fitzgerald's portrayals of both married and unmarried characters who perceive marriage less as fulfillment than as a form of confinement. In *The Lees of Happiness*, the secondary character, Kitty, rejects her role as wife and mother, yearning instead for wealth, elegance, and social refinement. She ultimately abandons her husband for a wealthier man who values her primarily for her physical attractiveness. In *The Rich Boy*, Paula divorces her emotionally detached husband, explaining simply: "Lowell was like a stranger to me" (*Complete*, 833), thereby emphasizing that the legal institution of marriage cannot compensate for the absence of genuine emotional intimacy. Similarly, Anson's aunt enters into a relationship with another man as a means of escaping the monotony and emotional emptiness of married life.

In *Berenice Bobs Her Hair*, the engaged couple Jim and Ethel are briefly mentioned (*Flappers*, 342), yet their relationship appears shaped more by social expectation than by authentic affection, with their visible boredom foreshadowing future marital stagnation. Comparable forms of disappointment emerge elsewhere in Fitzgerald's fiction. Horace Tarbox's bitterness over the loss of his intellectual ambitions in *Head and Shoulders* and Judy Jones's faded beauty and diminished vitality within an unhappy and abusive marriage, as described in *Winter Dreams* (*Complete*, 382), both illustrate the gradual erosion of youthful idealism brought about by love, marriage, and disillusionment.

Taken together, these narratives depict marriage as oscillating between obligation, affection, and disenchantment. Fitzgerald consistently uses mari-