

On Climate Difference as Covert Progression in Fitzgerald's "The Ice Palace"

LI Ying

University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China

In "The Ice Palace," F. Scott Fitzgerald utilizes the depiction of climate difference between the American south and north to show the nostalgia and topophilia of Sally Carrol, a southern "flapper." The article situates this short story in the context of the social bias and regional stereotypes in American society in the 1920s. It focuses on the climate narratives and argues that the narration of climate difference between the South and the North serves as a covert progression in the story. This study may provide a new perspective to understanding Fitzgerald's topographical consciousness in his fiction writing.

Keywords: climate difference, covert progression, nostalgia

Introduction

Fitzgerald's short story "The Ice Palace" was first published in *The Saturday Evening Post*, and then anthologized into his short story collection *Flappers and Philosophers* published in 1920. Fitzgerald depicts the living conditions and spiritual outlook of the young generation in America in his time. Many of his novels, such as *The Great Gatsby*, *Tender is the Night*, and *This Side of Paradise*, focus on the love stories of young people with their pursuit of American Dream. He satirizes the status quo of the American society he lived in through his writings of the 1920s and 1930s where the pursuits of material enjoyment were prevalent.

Most of the heroines in his novels come from the South, and reputedly the archetype of them is Fitzgerald's southern wife Zelda (Cheng, 2012, p. 79). "The Ice Palace" tells that the southern girl Sally Carrol fails to get married to a northern boy due to cultural differences. The story happens in a fictional town of Georgia in the South, Tarleton. Fitzgerald bases this story on his "fascination with the South" (Mangum, 2013, p. 15) and many critics trace his South complex to his Maryland-born father and Alabama wife Zelda (Mangum, 2013, p. 15; Donaldson, 1973, p. 3; Karaarslan, 2016, p. 181). It is evident that his preference to the South is affected by his southern father, wife and the time of his stationed in Alabama. "The Ice Palace" expresses the "discoloring of established values and traditions of the Old South" (Karaarslan, 2016, p. 181).

Scholars have interpreted "The Ice Palace," paying much attention to the plot development of the sad love story by analyzing cultural differences of both the North and the South and their influences on young people. Edwin Moses explains the imagery of water and ice to shed light on the existential importance of location (Moses, 1974, p. 12). Barbara Drushell looks at the fact that the four necessities of life—earth, air, fire, and water in the

North make it difficult for Sally Carroll to survive and push her to return south (Drushell, 1991, p. 238). They recognize the fact that the climate and environment are of vital importance in personal temperaments and choices. Their analyses indicate that locations are important cultural determinants as well as necessities for survival. Donaldson thinks Fitzgerald appears to have "environment determinism" in educating his daughter to "grow up tough and strong in a hardier region" rather than warmer and softer climates (Donaldson, 1973, p.10). To be exact, we can see that climate difference in this short story, especially temperature, is portrayed as an undercurrent which runs below the plot of love story to demonstrate the protagonist's hidden personalities and their cultural implications.

David W. Ullrich points out that in the short story, the "ice Palace" represents the "monument" of the North, while the "cemetery" where Sally and Harry got engaged represents the nostalgia for the South. From a historical perspective, Ullrich points out the social environment of the South after the Civil War and of the North after the First World War are represented by Sally and Harry respectively (Ullrich, 1999, p. 417). He detects a dual plot of time and geography in "The Ice Palace." But he merely sees the ice Palace as a symbol of the North and the South and fails to see the climate change narrative as a paralleled plot with the main plot of love story. What we cannot ignore is the narrative undercurrent that develops in parallel with the plot development, which can be seen as "covert progression." Shen Dan defines it as a narrative progression which "conveys a different thematic import" and contains seemingly "peripheral or irrelevant" details as a complement to overt plot and theme (Shen, 2014, p. 3). In this article, I argue that the climate difference between the South and the North as covert narrative progression pushes forward the story. The nostalgia of Sally Carrol and her topophilia are demonstrated by the climate differences, which directly leads to the return of Sally along with the unfamiliar Northern culture.

Climate Difference as Covert Progression in "The Ice Palace"

The American North and South have very different climate conditions which influences the way people live and think. Sally Carrol comes from Tarleton, Georgia, a southwest coastal state. Due to the moderate temperature in the South, "human settlement" has been successful in this region (Lewis, 1992, p. 58). The perennial warm and comfortable environment lead to the temperament of idleness and latitude. Sally defends people in her hometown that "they may be lazy—anybody would be in that climate" (Fitzgerald, 1920, p. 75). By contrast, the North is comparatively bleak and wild coupled with the cold weather. People need to try hard to start life. Harry Bellamy is the third generation in the North and in his house, in which "a lot of fairly expensive things in it that all looked about fifteen years old" (Fitzgerald, 1920, p. 63). The cold temperature and tough climate condition fostered a habit of aggressiveness. Climate plays a pivotal role in molding the local customs and practices and eventually pushes forward the plot in the story by demonstrating a completely distinctive climate condition of the South and the North.

At the beginning of "The Ice Palace", Fitzgerald depicts a radiant picture of an afternoon scenery in which sun shines and the trees dance. The nineteen-year-old Sally and Clark Darrow are in the car. "Savory breeze fans her eyes" and "bright-green coppice and grass and tall trees" provide a cool shade (Fitzgerald, 1920, p. 55). In the distance, spots of damp with vines grown over provide humid and comfortable air. Fitzgerald draws a picture of the tranquil and peaceful life in the pleasant climate and delightful sights in the America south. He even uses such words as "cheerful" to describe the falling sun and "golden-green" to depict the gloomy cemetery grass. The

warmth and coziness here pave the way for the development of the love story between Sally and Harry. It is also the fundamental reason why Sally escapes from the North and returns to the South at the end of the story.

Things in the North are completely different. Everything feels chilly due to the cold climate there. Sally says that she is a "summer child" (Fitzgerald, 1920, p. 60). When she asks Harry, her fiancé, whether she will be cold in the North, Harry just assumes that she will adjust to the frigid cold weather and ignores her anxiety before leaving for the North. On the train "Pullman" to the North, she is too frozen to sleep. Outside the window, she sees hills and valleys of snow and feels wasted and desperate in the chilly environment. To a girl who has lived in the warm climate and a green world, the snowy and freezing weather is not only beyond her imagination and also beyond her physical endurance. After Sally Carrol arrives in the North, almost all the conversations between Sally and Harry involve complaints about coldness. When she arrives at Harry's town the first time, she got an eye-ful of snowy streets and houses. The climate exerts an influence on Sally's emotions when Harry tries to kiss her, for she thinks it is not a "kissable climate" (Fitzgerald, 1920, p. 65). It is too cold for her to perceive love. The coldness and howling wind make her sad. She thinks the town is "dismal" when the sky is dark and an army of snowflakes approaches. The north wind blows and the houses are isolated "as though no one lived here" (Fitzgerald, 1920, p. 77). Sally feels depressed in the northern climate.

The climate to her is so gloomy that she even thinks of her grave with snow instead of sunshine and flowers. Actually, the cold and snowy climate reminds her of damp tombs and death three times in the short story. The first time is at the cold night when she envisions her tombs covered with snow. She is afraid that her grave may be in such a bleak situation rather than "flower-strewn and washed with sun and rain" (Fitzgerald, 1920, p. 77). The second time is that when she collapses in the ice palace, she thinks she is in the damp empty tombs. The third time is that she pictures in her mind that the tombs in her hometown should be re-painted. Other words about death are mentioned such as corpses, whitened bones, and icy breath of death. The sepulchral atmosphere haunts Sally Carrol all the time. The most frank and direct words about the coldness Sally Carrol thought to herself are "ice was a ghost" (Fitzgerald, 1920, p. 78). She is afraid of living there in the icy north. The climax of her anxiety is revealed when she is lost in the ice palace, which covers six thousand square yards with a maze that Southerners seldom encounter. The giant ice palace frightens her to death and she wants go home more than ever. She collapses in the ice palace and froze with ice, which directly leads to her returning to Tarleton. By comparison, the tombs in the South are cheerful and covered with grass and flowers. Sally Carrol likes the graveyards in the South and worships the dead "Confederate" (Fitzgerald, 1920, p. 58). The warm weather provides both an amiable living environment and languid atmosphere for Sally, which is in sharp contrast with the Northern coldness, progressiveness, and the newly-established culture. The descriptions of climate differences all over the story thus works as a covert progression. The completely different climatic conditions in the South and the North strengthens the "confrontation of a young man from the North with the girl he loves from the South" (Donaldson, 1973, p. 4).

A Paradox between Flapper and Nostalgia

Fitzgerald creates many female characters in his fiction, and almost all of them are categorized as flappers, like Daisy in *The Great Gatsby*. In "The Ice Palace", Sally is also a flapper who tries to move to the North but fails due to the unbearable climate and the indifferent social environment there. But deep down her mind is her

attachment to her home. The climate difference, combined with the social difference, develops the plot to the her final return to the South. Climate differences act as the covert progression in the narrative progress of the whole story. Shen believes that "the covert textual progression is an ethical-aesthetic undercurrent running throughout the text behind the overt plot development" and "the significance generated by the covert progression" can go either the opposite way or the same way as the overt plot, "ranging from supplementation to subversion" (Shen, 2014, p. 3). In "The Ice Palace," the covert progression supplements the overt plot to achieve the thematic purpose. The plot development suggests that cultural differences in these two societies force Sally to give up her engagement and go back to the South. "In the South, an engaged girl, or even a married young woman, expected the same amount of half-affectionate badinage and flattery" (Fitzgerald, 1920, p. 67). But in the North, Sally encounters disparate modes of life and attitudes towards women. The Northerners are of the opinion that her life should center around her fiancé. People stops the small talk with her when they hear that she is getting married. The most interesting example is a man who, upon learning that Sally is engaged, thinks of the earlier flirtations about her beauty as frivolous and disrespectful. Men just discuss things with her about Harry and seemingly do not view her as an individual woman after they know her engagement. In addition, men do all the talking, while women remain silent during conversations. Sally "felt a definite hostility" toward women, including herself (Fitzgerald, 1920, p. 72). Her future sister-in-law sticks to conventionality and Mrs. Bellamy is "innately hostile to strangers" (Fitzgerald, 1920, p. 73). As a woman of charm and assurance, Sally thinks little of them. Sally is quite the opposite to them. She is a new woman at her time. She seeks her love outside the South, longing to construct her images and identity, making them different from those she was born with by deserting laziness and peacefulness. Back in Tarleton, Sally once says to Clark that she has two sides of mind. One side is the typical southern "sleepy old side" that enjoys the peaceful life and another one is "a sort of energy" that makes her do wild and adventurous things (Fitzgerald, 1920, p. 54). She chooses to marry to the North to experience the aggressiveness and aspiration of the Northerners. But this flapper fails to see the new thoughts in the North. She also does not get real happiness and doesn't see any aspiring spirit, which indicates social and cultural differences between the South and the North. The Southern values have been engraved in her blood. Her personalities and the up-rooted southern social customs prompted her to return home. From the overt plot analysis, we can conclude that Sally Carrol's flapper identity and consciousness drives her to escapes from the South. But what we see is her struggle to adapt to the social circumstances in the North.

The Covert narrative progression, that is, the sharp contrast of climate difference between the North and the South runs parallel to the social distinctions that lead to the final ending. The social differences make her uncomfortable but somehow it is easy to deal with. In the story, thousands of Swedes settles down and some even are governors. They manage to live there "because the climate is very much like their own" (Fitzgerald, 1920, p. 70). It stands stark contrast that Swedes conquer the national border to be part of the North and Sally Carrol fails to settle in the same country. Sally Carrol could pretend to like the people there as she has already "act[ed] a part" (Fitzgerald, 1920, p. 66) to please Harry that she is glad to be in the North even if she does not fancy the coldness. The description of the warm South and the cold North runs through the story. The distinctive climate difference pushes forward the narrative and reveals that Sally Carrol is not only a typical "flapper" but a nostalgic girl. She might adapt to the climate like the Swedes do. But she does not because she never lives a cold place.

The climate difference acts as an important narrative element to explain how the story ends. Sally's feeling of struggling to relocate finally emerges as she fails to adapt to the cold, dry north and the social environment there. Yi-Fu Tuan points out that "home is a meaningless word apart from 'journey' and 'foreign country'" (Tuan, 1974, p. 102). Only when Sally leaves home does she realize that she is rooted in the South. She feels the deep attachment to her home in the South, which gives her material and emotional support in her growth. The plot development highlights the cultural clashes between the South and the North. And the covert narrative helps us to see Sally's topophilia of her Southern home, and her incompetence to move elsewhere. The inborn attachment to the warm South makes her unable to settle in the freezing North. Her failure of adapting to a completely different environment is not something that love can overcome. It is determined by both her topographical consciousness and the cultural differences induced by the climate differences between the South and the North. That's why we see the paradox between being a flapper and a nostalgic in Sally.

Conclusion

"The Ice Palace" is one of Fitzgerald's trilogy stories of Tarleton, the other two being "The Jelly Bean" and "The Last of the Belles." Bryant Mangum, Karaarslan, and Scott Donaldson have explored Fitzgerald's southern description basically from the cultural and social aspects. They agree that "The Ice Palace" is also the embodiment of the conflicts between the South and the North during the 1920s (Karaarslan, 2016, p. 181; Mangum, 2013, p. 157). Fitzgerald's preference to the South in his early times manifests in "The Ice Palace" through Sally's return to the South. Fitzgerald also reveals that climate has a strong influence on people and their life. Climate affects people greatly. The warm weather molds the idleness and indolence, and similarly the cold climate breeds progression and aggression. This article has investigated the depiction of climate difference as the covert progression in the short story. The climate differences between the South and the North act as the covert narrative progression, which helps explain that the protagonist Sally is more than a flapper, because we detect her strong topophilia towards the South. This also proves Fitzgerald's belief in environmental determinism.

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