

The balance of innocence and reality in the development of a character. The idea of youth and development is widely discussed and expanded through F. Scott Fitzgerald's literature. A person's youth is often talked about being based on their physical age and appearance. However, through Fitzgerald's writing I have discovered that youth and development can be seen just as much to be dependent on innocence and their experiences with reality. *Through his short stories we learn about characters losing, gaining and reacting to youth when they face moments which compromise or reinstall their innocence.* Youth is defined by innocence: *Through his characters Fitzgerald displays youth as measured by a person's innocence. He shows us the destructive nature of losing it and the ambition and possibilities that it breeds through its return* (1).

In the short story *The Lost Decade* by F. Scott Fitzgerald we meet the character Louis Trimble, an aloof and fragile man who has missed most of the last decade being a drunk. *Trimble rediscovers the beauty of society and its surrounds as he regains an innocent viewpoint on the world* (2). Fitzgerald best displays this to the reader through his detail and broadening of simple occurrence. An example of this is a quote by Trimble early in the story "I'd like to hear what those two little girls are saying to their father. Not exactly what they're saying but whether the words float or submerge, how their mouths shut when they've finished speaking. Just a matter of rhythm." After getting over his drinking problem Trimble starts to appreciate the simple things and he teaches Brown the importance of embracing youth to stay interested and creative. As the story goes on Trimble continues to make insightful perceptions which *remind us (the reader) of the inquisitive nature that is encompassed by youth and how crucial that attribute can be in modeling our dreams, desires and thus our lives* (2).

In the short story *Babylon Revisited* we get the connection of youth and innocence further described by Fitzgerald who through his character Charlie shows the effect of losing innocence. Charlie lost his innocence early when he decided to throw away his chance at studying and developing for the fast-lane extravagant and destructive lifestyle full of booze, parties and people burying their past. He journeys back to Paris in hope of getting to know his daughter and inviting her to live with him, though as we get deeper into the story we learn that he still cannot quit drinking fully and that he has a slight longing for his former life. "There was a long silence. All of them felt their nerves straining, and for the first time in a year Charlie wanted a drink". The loss of his daughter coinciding with thoughts of relapse show the intense emotional pain that Charlie is feeling. Fitzgerald displays this *to show how important and potentially limited the attribute of innocence is and the cost of losing it. He uses first person narrating through Charlie to develop the idea of struggling with his past drinking addiction in detail and show how it is constantly in his mind, controlling him as well as punishing him for the mistakes of his youth* . (3)

Age is artificial whereas youth and innocence is natural and therefore unpredictable:
It is another common misconception that youth is something that can be controlled, slowed and sped up. This is an idea explored throughout some of Fitzgerald's short stories. *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* is a story written by F Scott Fitzgerald with a main theme of the artificial principles connected to aging by society. His main character Benjamin ages backwards from birth. He displays this main theme best when he shows Benjamin and Hildegard Moncrief, Benjamin's wife start to show signs of age differences. "Look people would remark. What a pity! A young fellow that age tied to a woman of forty-five. He must be twenty years younger than his wife. They had forgotten - as people inevitably forget that back in 1880 their mammas and papas had also remarked about this same ill-matched pair". This passage shows us that whilst Benjamin continues to change and his surroundings continue to age one thing still remains constant; the social fear of what is different. They believe age can be controlled but the truth that Fitzgerald is showing us is that it is a natural process that cannot be controlled nor forecasted. *Fitzgerald manipulates the reader through his fictional circumstances and teaches us aging is one of the few things in the world people like Benjamin cannot stop or fight against, but what truly makes someone special is their character and personal morals.* (4)

Another piece of writing where Fitzgerald speaks of age, youth and innocence is in his short story **Winter Dreams**. Dexter Green, his main character believes that you're no one until you have money and a profession. We see this when he responds to Judy's question of who he is with a mumbled "nobody" as Dexter grew up with average wealth and of average intelligence. These morals he created as an innocent youth stuck with him right through until he was rich and had his childhood love Judy. It takes until his mid adulthood for Dexter to realise he had been blinded by his innocent dreams of success and that Judy "Doesn't actually care about me. At all" This quote is used by Fitzgerald to **show us that it is not age but experience that teaches us as people and helps us to grow as characters**. Dexter goes on to enlist in the army because he realises that he was wrong to strive for wealth as a measure of success and that it just complicates things rather than makes them better. The character development is well described in detail by Fitzgerald and he **shows Dexter's character development as a result of experiencing reality that causes him to alter his innocent dreams and morals**. (5)

Innocence breed's ambition but can also create unrealistic ideals: We as humans are born with innocence; through observation and discovery of the world we learn and develop. In the short story *Winter Dreams* **Fitzgerald shows us again how our innocence and youth is the breeding ground of our hopes and dreams as we grow. However he also shows us that as we grow it is important to let reality and our experiences give us perspective on those hopes and dreams**. (6) Dexter leaves the army to find his ex-girlfriend Judy has married his best friend and has had three children who have taken her beauty and allure. Dexter always saw Judy as beautiful and perfect as he grew up and even after having a chance and losing Judy he thought of her as a "beautiful possibility". This dream was born at an early age for Dexter. This created the unrealistic ideal that she would not grow or change and that he would, always have the possibility of reconnecting with her beauty and charm.

Through his innocence Charlie is another great example of unrealistic ideas created through innocence. When he returns to Paris in *Babylon Revisited* he is hopeful of reclaiming his daughter Honoria to live with him. However throughout the story we learn that he was not quite accurate when he tells us at the start of the story that he has "been sober for a year and a half and that he is now a businessman living in Prague" We learn that he is still drinking everyday to keep his addiction in check and this is the first step where we realise that although he has regained his innocence, he has also lost sight of reality in the process and is not at good odds to reclaim his daughter. He is ultimately crushed but realises that **righting your past mistakes means facing reality and in this conclusion we see Fitzgerald fully connect the idea of innocence and reality needing a balance as they are both constantly co-existing with each other in everybody's lives**.(7)

Conclusion: In conclusion, through F. Scott Fitzgerald's short stories we can learn a lot about developing as people. We learn of the importance of having an innocent mind and holding onto our youth but we also realise through his characters that there is a balance everybody needs to strike once reality sets in and comes after your ambitions.