

The Paradigm of Paris as a Modernist City in the Prose of F. Scott Fitzgerald Summary

Urban models, which are one of the most interesting concepts of modernism, are actively studied in foreign literature.

Paris occupies a special place in such models. It is sometimes compared to an “indissoluble celebration”, sometimes referred to as the “Babylon of the Jazz Age” by various authors.

The concept of the modernist city is particularly prominent in the works of F. Scott Fitzgerald. Paris, presented as a city of bohemia, is portrayed through the character’s perception in these completely incomparable works of literature.

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According to American criticism, there was something special about F. Scott Fitzgerald, like every outstanding writer. He gave a name to an era – the Jazz Age, saw its birth, and lived in this space.

Russian researcher A. Dolinin reviews the most essential moments in the development of American fiction at the beginning of the twentieth century, and notes that almost every writer paid tribute to the so-called short form, although only Francis Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, and Catherine Ann Porter became great masters of the genre.

The paradigm of modernist Paris is also highly relevant in the work of Georgian authors. Examples include Paolo Iashvili’s «Europe», Konstantine Gamsakhurdia’s novel «The Smile of Dionysus», or the anticipatory poem «Paris in 1919».

Paris (more specifically, its enigma – the Eiffel Tower) is Babylon (Godolya) for Gamsakhurdia – just like it is for Francis Scott Fitzgerald, who titled his conceptual novella «Return to Babylon» exactly like that. For Fitzgerald, Paris is a city of «incredible palaces, nightclubs, hotels.»

The title of the story identifies cosmopolitan Paris of the 1920s with Babylon in two mythological senses: Babylon as the place of confusion of languages and as the mother of harlots.

The writer presents the character’s perception of Paris, which had been emptied as a result of the crisis, in one of his novels. Charles found Paris empty, and the hotel bar was strangely quiet. It no longer resembled an American bar – you had to be polite, you couldn’t control yourself like a bar owner, «it had become a French bar again.»

Konstantine Gamsakhurdia also points out in the episode of Slansky in «The Smile of Dionysus» that in the 1910s and 1920s, guests in Paris behaved like masters. Arrogant Slansky even dares to forbid Savarsamidze and Khalil-Bey from singing in Georgian in a Parisian restaurant.

When we talk about the urban model, it is unthinkable to review it without understanding the night panorama. That is why, “the protagonist does not go home after dinner – he wants to see Paris at night more clearly, with a more sober eye than before.” [Fitzgerald, 2004: 133].

Fitzgerald’s novella emphasizes that traditional generosity has disappeared from the city’s life, the vast majority of people also lack a living wage, which, naturally, is reflected in the model of existence, where lies and fraud prevail.

One of the most imposing characters, Charlie, seems to find himself in a completely unfamiliar urban environment. Paris, a city of choice, once represented the center of the world for Charlie, where he could spend money carelessly and thoughtlessly, and on a stolen bicycle, from midnight to dawn, ride around the Place des Etoiles with his lover, in order to fully absorb the sweet nectar of worldly life [ariliamag.ge/K.Tomaradze], where, surrounded by friends, intoxicated by alcohol, he filled his life with thousands of adventures. Having returned to Paris, he sees the unmasked face of the city he loves the most, the mistakes of his youth, and becomes convinced of how great the price of wasted time and mistakes is. «The ruthless law of life leaves Fitzgerald’s character only a small chance to realize the ideal to which his inner voice, bitter life experience, has pushed him.»

According to American criticism, “the wandering, cultural pilgrimage of Scott Fitzgerald is, at the same time, a reflection of an older, cosmopolitan pilgrimage. Its basis is the character’s realization of his guilt and his desire to atone for it – the Eumenides took possession of Orestes and wandered from country to country.” [Gaysmar M., 1976: 125]

It is noteworthy that not only Paris, but also the entire “French Riviera” was always considered by Scott Fitzgerald as his last shelter. [Gaysmar M., 1976: 161]

Maxwell Gaismar writes: “The economic crisis has turned the Left Bank of Paris into a ghost town. The fun is over. In its elegiac tone, the story “Return to Babylon” reminds us of Hemingway’s “Snowy Mount Kilimanjaro.” [Gaismar M., 1976: 168]

When talking about Paris in the 1920s, we are bound to recall Ernest Hemingway’s famous words: «If you are lucky enough to have lived in Paris at least once in your youth, then wherever you go, it will follow you for the rest of your life, because Paris is an indissoluble holiday» [Hemingway E., 1965: 41].

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