

# Character analysis of charlie wales in babylon revisited essay



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In literature, a tragic hero can be described as a character of great stature whose moral defect ultimately leads to tragedy but also some self-awareness. In the short story *Babylon Revisited*, F. Scott Fitzgerald places the setting in Paris after the stock market crash of 1929.

He refers to this time as the “Jazz Age”. I chose to write about this topic because I believe the main character Charlie Wales is in fact the definition of a tragic figure. To my surprise, this short story is based on true incidents regarding F. Scott Fitzgerald’s life.

Each character throughout this story is from his own life experiences, and Charlie being Fitzgerald himself. Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald is presently known as one of the greatest American writers of the twentieth century. Not only does his character Charlie turn out to be a tragic hero at the conclusion of the short story, but also in his own life by becoming such a valued author. In *Babylon Revisited*, Charlie is portrayed as a wealthy man before the stock market crash. With his fortune and high living lifestyle, he creates a persona for himself. In Paris people know him as a wealthy drunk, always wanting to party, and for the most part not knowing when to stop.

His lifestyle choices lead his wife into an emotional spiral, which tragically leads to her downfall, and ultimately Charlie’s as well. Throughout the short book, there are numerous statements made that refer to him being a tragic figure in literature. Within the first couple pages of *Babylon Revisited*, Fitzgerald says “I spoiled this city for myself. I didn’t realize it, but the days came along one after another, and then two years were gone, and everything was one, and I was gone. (982).

You begin to realize Charlie's level of stature on the next page where Fitzgerald states " We were a sort of royalty, almost infallible, with a magic around us. " (983). " He remembered thousand-franc notes given to an orchestra for playing a single number, hundred-franc notes tossed to a doorman for calling a cab. " (984).

He sets the scene from the beginning making you realize the magnitude of his fortune during the " Jazz Age". As well known as he was in Paris, it makes it difficult for him not to boast about it. He describes the massive tips he gave people s " An offering to destiny that he might not remember the things most worth remembering, the things that now he would always remember-his child taken from his control, his wife escaped to a grave in Vermont. "(984). Charlie demonstrates in many ways that he is the epitome of a tragic figure.

During dinner Fitzgerald makes the comment " He believed in character; he wanted to jump back a whole generation and trust in character again as the eternally valuable element. Everything else wore out. " (983) Figuratively speaking, this is the definition of a tragic figure. He has such a high level of stature, which led him down a destructive path for himself and his family.

Yet, many years later, he can now look back and say he believes in character and that this is an important trait to focus on in your life. He realizes now that the fortune will wear out. He makes the statement that he wishes to jump back an entire generation viewing " character" as an eternally valuable element. This makes me believe that he will eternally lead a more positive

life not only for him, but his daughter Honoria as well. It was the first time in the story that I really felt his self-wareness of the situation he had created.

When Charlie bumps into two ghosts of his past, Duncan and Lorraine, it brings a whole new element to the story. While I was reading it, I viewed Duncan and Lorraine as a large display of peer pressure. In the first scene where they are presented, I disliked them. Duncan and Lorraine try to persuade Charlie to come out to dinner with them. They noticeably have not changed since his past, and I could not help but to feel proud of his character when he denies to join them.

Once being his close-drinking companions, it says a lot that he does not give in to their prodding. My main concern with Duncan and Lorraine from the first scene was the fact that Lorraine was bringing up his being sober in front of his daughter. She was not respectful and should have never portrayed him in that light in front of his daughter. Especially since Honoria is the main reason he has come back to Paris. Fitzgerald displays powerful insight when he explains “ They liked him because he was functioning, because he was serious; they wanted to see him, because he was stronger than they were now, because they wanted to draw a certain sustenance from his strength.

” (986). Duncan and Lorraine’s reaction to his being sober and serious shows how drastically he has changed over the years. In a way I feel that running into Charlie gives them hope for their own lives. Once you get to the part in the story when he finally gets the courage to tell Marion of his full intentions of returning to Paris, it makes you nervous. I wasn’t sure what her answer would be, or how she would handle the question.

Charlie has displayed how much he cares for his daughter and how desperately he wants to be a part of her life while she is still young and impressionable. Speaking of Honoria he says “ She was already an individual with a code of her own, and Charlie was more and more absorbed by the desire of putting a little of himself into her before she crystallized utterly. ” (Fitzgerald 986). He realizes it is hopeless to get to know her in such a short period of time and he longs to have his own home to be her full time guardian. It is apparent this far into the story that Marion is not fond of Charlie.

Marion was Helen’s sister who took Honoria in after her death. As Charlie let his lifestyle get out of control, it took a toll on his wife Helen and emotionally drained her. Helen’s family blames him for her heart condition and entirely for her death. Marion holds Charlie accountable because she has no one else to blame for her sisters’ death. This thought is clearly displayed in the statement “ She had built up all her fear of life into one wall and faced it towards him. (988).

This is understandable, but I believe Helen was just as much part of this tragic lifestyle as Charlie was. In this chapter Marion brings up Charlie locking Helen out of the house when she was soaking wet and freezing. Holding Charlie to blame, she will not let him stick up for himself as she gives him a verbal beating about his former life choices. As Charlie continues with his reasoning for wanting guardianship, he begins to realize the magnitude of her hostility towards him. With this comes the alarming thought in his mind of his daughter growing up in their household that holds such hostility

against him. He desperately hopes for the consent in taking Honoria so that the hostility towards him does not transfer to her.

Marion acts so angry during their conversation about his request because she holds him responsible, but more importantly because she recognizes his stability. She has viewed him as a villain for the past three years now, that instead of accepting he has changed, she storms out of the conversation without a direct answer. Now that the story is coming closer to the end, the past with Helen keeps haunting Charlie. After Marion expresses her strong belief to him about his actions and how she perceived her sisters death, it resonates with him. He plays over the night that she was locked out, and his sincere regret of how their marriage turned out.

“ But suddenly he grew sad, remembering all the plans he and Helen made. She had not planned to die. ” (Fitzgerald 990) To Charlie, it is important that he does not make the same mistake again with the only person he has left that he loves as much as he loved Helen. When Charlie arrives back at Marion's home to again discuss when he can take Honoria, things seem to be moving along until they have the unexpected visitors. Duncan and Lorraine spontaneously arrive at the house, being rude and intruding, which extremely angers Marion.

She assumes he still has ties with them and with the partying, and calls off the idea of him taking guardianship of his daughter. The ending of *Babylon Revisited* is Charlie making the statement, “ He was absolutely sure Helen wouldn't have wanted him to be so lone. ” (994). Even though he realizes he

has to wait another six months to try again for custody of his daughter, he still denies Alix to refill his last whiskey.

In that decision alone you realize Charlie is the definition of a tragic hero whose downfall led to his self-awareness. He makes these sober choices to better his daughter's life, like he failed to do with his widow Helen.