

Fitzgerald and the past literature review examples

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In the writings of F. Scott Fitzgerald, there are few ghosts as large and imposing as that of the Past. In *The Great Gatsby*, the tragic truth for James Gatz is that there is no way for him to overcome his history in time to salvage his dreams. As a poor youth, Gatz dreams about affluence, but he does not have the discipline to do the hard work required to rise legitimately: when he is given a work-study position at the university, the janitorial tasks he must perform in order to earn his tuition are, he feels, beneath him. When he goes off to war, he puts on a uniform that hides his socioeconomic distance from the Tom Buchanans of the world, as rich and poor alike put on the khaki utilities, since the Great War came during one of those rare times in American history when the rich did not want to buy themselves out of harm's way. Then he meets Daisy Buchanan, but again his lack of means comes into play. He devotes himself to a life of wealth, earned as quickly as possible. His plan, of course, is no different than the one that the original Kennedy patriarch carried out, but when the freshly renamed Jay Gatsby wants to turn his profits from bond schemes and bootleg liquor sales into a majestic home for himself and Daisy, he runs into the weapons that Old Money can provide, when Tom Buchanan unearths Gatsby's past and disgraces him in front of Daisy. Tom's own past, of course - his affair with Myrtle - is what ends up shooting Gatsby right in the back. The last line of this book details the futility of leaving our own history behind: " Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us[s]o we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past"(Fitzgerald, Web).

So it is in “ Babylon Revisited,” another of Fitzgerald’s stories. The use of the name Babylon in the title, of course, is an allusion to the prophetic references in the Bible to a city that would be destroyed in the days of judgment at the end of time. Charlie Wales, the story’s protagonist, lived front and center in that Babylon, as did Fitzgerald himself, and so many expatriates who left the United States in the years after the Great War, enjoying the cheap prices in Europe and moving from party to party. Those who were wealthy enough had nannies to smooth over the cracks with their children, but the end result was a seemingly infinite adolescence for what Gertrude Stein would term a “ lost generation,” more concerned with finding the next martini than with anything close to resembling productivity or ethics.

Now, of course, Charlie Wales’ life is different. His wife, Helen, has passed away – apparently the victim of the consequences of being thrown out into the cold after yet another intoxicated tilt with her husband. Their daughter, Honoria, now lives with Helen’s sister and her husband, and Charlie is all alone. The echoing peals of that ruinous past echo in the vast silence that Charlie hears in the bars now. Returning to his old city, trying to get his daughter back, Charlie begins the story sitting in a bar, hearing about how all of his old contemporaries in partying have scattered across the continent, gone back to the United States to have to find work, or succumbed to poor health. The city of Paris, once his stomping grounds, is now empty; when he walks down a corridor, he hears “ only a single, bored voice in the once-clamorous women’s room” (Fitzgerald 226).

There are plenty of clues in this story about Charlie's scandalous past, though. When he talks to Alix, the bartender, about his current job, he says that he is "in Prague, representing a couple of concerns there. They don't know about [him] down there" (Fitzgerald 226). Clearly, Charlie has cut a large swath behind himself, in terms of leading a dissolute lifestyle. That lifestyle appears in this story in all of its dreariness, though, as bar after bar has shut down with the Americans having left. Charlie remembers "thousand-franc notes given to an orchestra for playing a single number" (Fitzgerald 229). He also remembers that all of this money had been given "as an offering to destiny that he might not remember the things most worth rememberinghis child taken from his control, his wife escaped to a grave in Vermont" (Fitzgerald 229). It is just these things, of course, that he now remembers, which is why he has come back to Paris for his daughter.

The past, of course, keeps Charlie from his daughter, at least this visit. Two of his friends who have not learned from their past, Lorraine and Duncan, show up while Charlie and Honoria are out at lunch. Unfortunately, they finagle his hotel's name out of him, and then they show up at Marion and Lincoln's, just as Charlie is discussing Honoria's future with them. The return of two loud, drunken people – the very cause of Marion's sister's death – throws the discussion into disarray, and now Charlie will have to wait several more months to reclaim Honoria – who wants to live with him more than anything. Charlie is "absolutely sure Helen wouldn't have wanted him to be so alone" (Fitzgerald 239), but the past has foiled him once again.

Works Cited

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