Jacob Timm

timmx173

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Babylon, Regretted

F. Scott Fitzgerald was the living representation of the Roaring Twenties and its successor, the Great Depression. Funded by his enormous success as a writer, Fitzgerald frequently partied and drank into the wee hours of the morning throughout the course of the 1920’s. However, Fitzgerald soon became a symbol of the Great Depression as well, and his massive amount of debt soon took its toll as he became a poor alcoholic, while his wife Zelda was admitted to a mental hospital where she spent most of the rest of her life. Fitzgerald’s success and subsequent struggles were the inspiration for his 1931 short story *Babylon Revisited*, which details the quest of a man named Charlie Wales to regain custody of his daughter Honoria from his in-laws Marion and Lincoln Peters. In the short story, Charlie is revealed to be a man who has had an experience much like Fitzgerald: he took full advantage of his wealth for a short period of time in the Roaring Twenties, but it all came to a crashing halt when the stock market crashed and he lost everything. *Babylon Revisited* is not just a short story about a man who regrets his past and wants back custody of his child, it is the embodiment of an era where Charlie, and Fitzgerald himself, put on a mask and became a person that they did not intend to be.

While Charlie was living out his party days, he frequently went out with a couple named Lorraine Quarrles and Duncan Shaeffer. The couple suffered as a result of the crash as well, but have not changed and are still attempting to recreate their glory days. They are even offended when they bump into Charlie and realize he is sober, with Lorraine stating “I honestly believe he’s sober, Dunc. Pinch him and see if he’s sober.” (Fitzgerald 985). Lorraine and Duncan both represent the nightmare that Charlie is trying to escape, and instead of feeling elated when he runs into his old friends, he is annoyed and refuses to give him his address so that they can visit. This annoyance is evidence that Charlie does not only regret his past decisions, he put on a mask and became someone that he is not, and he does not want to recreate those days. Fitzgerald appears to have also put on a mask, because when he first met Zelda, she refused to be with him. It was only until he became rich that she finally showed interest, which began the party lifestyle that ultimately ruined their lives. Fitzgerald became someone he was not in order to be loved by someone who did not love him for his character, as evident in his other writing, namely *The Great Gatsby*.

Charlie could easily go back to his partying days, but refuses to do so. He has gotten back into business successfully, telling Lincoln that “… we’re doing even better than ever. In fact, damn well.” (Fitzgerald 982). With the money he makes in business, Charlie could easily go back to partying with Lorraine and Duncan. However, after the sudden death of his wife Helen and the desire to live with and have custody of his daughter, he realized that he was not himself during that period, and he embarked on the journey to become who he wants to be. Lorraine and Duncan are a representation of not only his past, but the fact that his past will never leave him. In the end, throughout all of the conversations and attempts to get his daughter back, Marion refuses to give up custody, with Lincoln being the messenger and telling Charlie that he should try again in six months.

Charlie’s daughter Honoria is the one thing he desires most in the world. While Charlie was lying on his back in a mental hospital, he regrettably gave up custody to the Peters. Honoria and Charlie still have a great relationship, with Honoria telling Charlie that she wants to live with him, but the decision ultimately is not up to her. Honoria is not fond of material possessions, and does not want Charlie to buy her anything when he offers. She would much rather enjoy an actual experience with her father, and when Charlie wants to take her to the vaudeville and the toy store, she says “I like it about the vaudeville, but not the toy store.” When Charlie asks why, she explains “Well, you brought me this doll … and I’ve got lots of things.” (Fitzgerald 984). Honoria is the symbol of the man who Charlie wants to be. However, Marion and his past actions prevent him from having custody and becoming that man. Like Charlie, Fitzgerald also could not escape his past. He cleaned up his act and quit drinking, but despite his efforts, he died from a heart attack at age 44, primarily due to his past alcohol abuse.

Charlie Wales is a representation of F. Scott Fitzgerald, and how past actions can affect you for the rest of your life. Charlie partied excessively in his past, and when he changed his ways, his past was never changed. He wants to become the man he truly wants to be by ending the party lifestyle and take custody of his daughter, but his past never stayed in the past, and even though his party lifestyle did, he was not able to take custody of his daughter. Along with Charlie, Fitzgerald also never left his past behind, and despite the fact he quit drinking, the damage was irreversible.