F. Scott Fitzgerald Essay, Research Paper

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F. Scott Fitzgerald is in many ways one of the most important American writers of the twentieth century. In his first novel, This Side of Paradise, Fitzgerald epitomized the mindset of an era with the statement that his generation had, ?grown up to find all Gods dead, all wars fought, and all faiths in man shaken??(Fitzgerald 307). Aside from being a major literary voice of the twenties and thirties, Fitzgerald was also among ?The Lost Generation?s? harshest and most insightful social critics. In his classic novel The Great Gatsby, Fitzgerald blatantly criticized the immorality, materialism, and hedonism which characterized the lifestyles of America?s bourgeois during the nineteen-twenties. Collectively, Fitzgerald?s novels and short stories provide some of the best insight into the lifestyles of the rich during America?s most prosperous era, while simultaneously examining major literary themes such as disillusionment, coming of age, and the corruption of the American Dream.

The life of F. Scott Fitzgerald is marked by as much, if not more, romanticism and tragedy than his novels. Throughout Fitzgerald?s life, he unsuccessfully battled alcoholism, depression, and himself, in a quest for both personal and literary identity.

At the age of twenty-three, Fitzgerald published his first novel, This Side of Paradise, to critical raves and unimaginable economic success. Shortly after the publishing of this novel, Fitzgerald was able to coerce Zelda Sayre into marriage. This marriage is manifestly the most significant event of his life?eventually, Zelda would not only expedite, but essentially, cause the personal and literary downfall of Fitzgerald. Upon marriage, and also coinciding with the pinnacle of Fitzgerald?s fame, Scott and Zelda began living a life of wasteful extravagance that was often characterized by recklessly drunken behavior. In order to maintain this lifestyle, Fitzgerald was forced to put aside working on novels, and focus his creative efforts on penning lucrative, but by no means extraordinary, short stories.

Throughout their marriage, Zelda put constant economic, as well as, emotional strains on Fitzgerald. She encouraged his short story writing, as well as his drinking, and was continually swaying his focus from writing to socializing. Also, Zelda?s eventual mental breakdown triggered Scott?s own series of nervous breakdowns. Because of these factors, Zelda is often considered the prime instigator of Fitzgerald?s literary and personal declines. Yet in spite of Zelda?s overtly negative influence on Fitzgerald, he continued to love his wife to the day he died. Later in life, after Zelda became mentally ill, Fitzgerald clearly illustrated his unconditional love for his wife by compromising his artistic integrity in order to write short stories to support her medical expenses.

Aside from Zelda, two major American literary figures played a substantial role in Fitzgerald?s life, and his personal decline as well. On an extended trip to Europe, and at the pinnacle of his fame, Fitzgerald met and became acquainted with a then obscure fellow expatriate named Ernest Hemmingway. Throughout the course of their friendship, Hemmingway would become Fitzgerald?s harshest critic, and in the eyes of Fitzgerald, his, ?artistic conscience?(Meyers 263). The second major American literary figure who influenced Fitzgerald?s life was Edgar Allen Poe. Fitzgerald?s intrigue with both the tragic and romantic elements of Poe?s life, as well as the many similarities these two men shared, may have very well facilitated his plunge into the unforgiving abysses of alcoholism and depression.

Jeffrey Meyers? biography Scott Fitzgerald provides a complete and seemingly unbiased account of the life of one of the most complex men in American literary history. Whereas previous biographies tended to over-exaggerate either the romantic or tragic elements of Fitzgerald?s life, Scott Fitzgerald does not in any way attempt to emphasize these aspects. Rather, this biography offers a strait-forward interpretation of both the life and works of Fitzgerald. It illustrates the importance of his relationships with Zelda Sayre and Ernest Hemmingway; the mentally and physically destructive influence of his alcoholism; and the parallels between his life and his writings. Through these facets, and many others, Meyers provides insight into Fitzgerald?s life, without forcing his own opinion of the subject upon the reader.

Personally, I found Scott Fitzgerald to be both insightful and interesting. Compared to other Fitzgerald biographies that I have read, Meyers? biography was clearly the least biased and the most strait-forward. In terms of literary style, I found this biography very pleasing to read. Meyers? deftly wove primary quotes, his own prose, and excerpts of Fitzgerald?s writing into a coherent and thought provoking portrayal of a very complex man. To all fans of F. Scott Fitzgerald, I recommend this biography strongly, but to those who don?t know the difference between Scott and Ella Fitzgerald, I recommend this biography with reservation.