

Fitzgerald/Hemingway Seminar Dr. Mangum

Description of Critical Reception Report:

Seminar Report no longer than five or ten minutes long in which you summarize the contemporary critical reception of the novel or stories being considered on the day scheduled for discussion of the work(s). In your oral presentation you will probably want to also give the class samples of selected reviews. But remember, the oral report is short: approximately five to ten minutes long. I would like you to lead off your critical reception report by telling what is contained in the volume (if it is a collection) and placing it in the context of the writer's other works (e.g., it is the first collection, etc.). Anything that you can do to give brief background information in the oral presentation will be helpful. You will find virtually everything you need to put together these reports by going to the reference shelf I've set up in the library. For Fitzgerald the two books are these: *The Critical Reputation of F. Scott Fitzgerald* and *F. Scott Fitzgerald: The Critical Reception*, both by Jackson R. Bryer. For Hemingway the book is *Ernest Hemingway: The Critical Reception*. I'll grade your oral reports based on the thoroughness with which you have examined and characterized the reviews and on the clarity of your presentation of the overall contemporary critical reception (which is to say on the clarity with which you present the shadings of the reviews from favorable to unfavorable to mixed). You will turn in a paper in which you present your findings. This paper should have a main claim that you support with summaries of the favorable, unfavorable, and mixed reviews (a paper of 2-3 pages). 10%

Sample: *This Side of Paradise* Critical Reception Report

Fitzgerald completed a manuscript he called *The Romantic Egoist* in early 1918 while still in the army after having become engaged to Zelda Sayre. This was the first version of *This Side of Paradise*. It was decided that his best hope of having it published was to have it submitted to Charles Scribner's Sons by his friend and mentor, Shane Leslie, who had already been published by Scribner's. Maxwell Perkins, then a junior editor at Scribner's, wanted to publish it, but he was over-ruled by the senior editors. Fitzgerald worked in advertising in New York in 1919, but resigned in the spring. Zelda then broke off the engagement in June, and Fitzgerald went on a drunken bender for an entire month. On July 1st, he returned home to St. Paul, and worked incessantly on a revised draft throughout the summer. He completed it in September, and re-titled *This Side of Paradise*, he sent it back to Scribner's. This time Maxwell Perkins threatened to resign if they didn't publish the book. He said at that time, "If we're going to turn down the likes of Fitzgerald, I will lose all interest in publishing books." This time he prevailed and Scribner's accepted it on September 16th, 1919 when Fitzgerald was 23. It was published in early 1920.

The critical reception was mainly enthusiastic, and in many cases even gushing. The *New York Times* Book Review said that the book was "as nearly perfect as such a work could be." The *New York Evening Post* said, "There are clever things, keen and searching things, amusingly young and mistaken things, beautiful things and pretty things...and truly inspired and elevated things, an astonishing abundance of each in *This Side of Paradise*." The *Chicago Evening Post* said, "This book is amazingly well done." The *Baltimore Evening Sun* said that the book "may be a first book, but it is also a first-rate novel." The *Philadelphia Public Ledger* said, "One may hope great things from Mr. Fitzgerald." David Bailey of the *Harvard Crimson* said, "The story is a little slice carved out of a real life, running over with youth and jazz and sentiment and romance and virile American humor." Burton Roscoe of the *Chicago Daily Tribune* said, "it bears the impress...of genius." The *Sun and New York Herald* said that it was "the most exciting first novel in many a weary day."

But even those who loved it were cognizant of its faults. Many critics commented on the lack of a coherent plot, and the disparity between the first part and the last. The *New York Times* Book Review lauded the book "despite the fact that it is disconnected." William Huse of the *Chicago Evening Post* gave it a highly favorable review but then said that the second half of the book "has not the satirical cleverness of the first." Strafford P. Riggs of the *Hamilton Literary Magazine* said that Amory Blaine was "a picture

so true to life, so amusing, and so pathetic that...we feel that we have looked into the heart of American youth," but then said that the novel "peters out deplorably in the last quarter."

The mixed and unfavorable reviews seemed to cluster around the themes of "immaturity" and "mere cleverness." The *San Francisco Chronicle* said something about "the murky adolescence of its author." *The Nation* said that Fitzgerald was "still largely absorbed by mere form and mere mood." The *Philadelphia Public Ledger* said, "the author has written a clever book." The *Philadelphia Evening Public Ledger* said the book was "flagrantly immature," but then turned it into a compliment as they went on, it "could not be true to the life with which it deals if it had not been running over with immaturity." Margaret Emerson Bailey in *The Bookman* said the book was valuable despite its affectations and cleverness. Francis Edgett of the *Boston Evening Transcript* said that Fitzgerald "adopts a method of narration that tricks us constantly into believing that he has something original to say.."

The British Press was particularly negative about the book, in some cases viewing it largely as proof of the deterioration of American morality. The *Melbourne Age* said, "The special claim of the book is the fidelity to certain phases of American Society. So far as the author has succeeded, America is discredited." On the other hand the *Saturday Review of London* recommended the book "as a rather important study of one side of American life." The other British publications appeared to apply a higher standard of excellence than the American press, especially since they were not burdened with any sense of national pride in the discovery of a brilliant new American novelist.

American Press Only

Good Reviews: 27

Unfavorable Reviews: 9

Mixed Reviews: 8