



UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI
DI PADOVA

Università degli Studi di Padova

Dipartimento di Studi Linguistici e Letterari

Corso di Laurea Triennale Interclasse in
Lingue, Letterature e Mediazione culturale (LTLLM)

Classe LT-12

Tesina di Laurea

Beyond the Myth: Re-evaluating Zelda Fitzgerald's Life and Work

Relatore

Prof.ssa Anna Scacchi

Laureanda

Irene Dalla Rosa

n° matr.1169228 / LTLLM

Anno Accademico 2022 / 2023

*A Zelda, e a tutte le donne che ogni giorno
vengono private della loro voce.*

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the life and artistic works of Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald with the purpose of re-evaluating the myth surrounding her persona.

Zelda Fitzgerald is one of the most iconic figures of the Jazz Age who started to fall from grace due to her eccentric personality and her mental problems.

During the 1950s, the figures of the Fitzgeralds began to experience a sort of revival. While Scott was finally recognised as an outstanding writer, though, Zelda was depicted as an unscrupulous, schizophrenic woman, who did nothing but wasting time at parties, as well as spending all her husband's money to maintain a luxury lifestyle. In short, she was a failure and also responsible for her husband's problems and decline as a writer.

My study incorporates evidence from articles, biographies, personal correspondence and scholars' studies in the attempt to revisit this myth, only based on a small part of Zelda's life. In doing so, I wanted to focus on her incredible talent as a writer, painter and ballerina. In addition to highlighting her artistic work, I also aimed to highlight her personality and her voice, which has been suppressed for far too long by voices considered more significant than hers.

Since Zelda and Scott are regarded as the Golden Couple of the Jazz Age, her marriage to F.S. Fitzgerald plays a significant part in the myth. I attempted to look into their relationship through the letters they wrote to one another, while they were apart, in order to better comprehend their love story.

What I have been particularly interested in studying, is how Zelda first shares her account of her life with the public through her first novel.

It is crucial that Zelda Sayre gets finally recognised for her multiple talents and for the paintings and writings she produced, rather than just as the wife of a well-known American author.

INTRODUCTION

Zelda Fitzgerald was an enigmatic and influential icon of the Jazz Age who still continues to captivate the attention of scholars and readers. As F. Scott Fitzgerald's wife she has frequently been overshadowed by her husband's fame and success as a novelist. Over the years, a myth has grown around her persona in which Zelda is portrayed as a schizophrenic woman, a party girl who jumps into fountains and rides on taxi roofs.

Zelda and Scott formed the Golden Couple of the Jazz Age and their tragic love story is known by everyone, thanks to the press and publicity of their time, which continuously supported and enriched the myth around them. In the Jazz Age, she and Scott established themselves as legitimate celebrities: they were young, famous, and eager to take over the world.

My thesis aims to go beneath these glittering images in order to discover what was actually hidden behind them. I attempt to dive into the life and works of Zelda Fitzgerald in order to challenge the myth surrounding her and highlight her own artistic achievements.

In the first chapter I focus on Zelda herself starting with an examination of the myth that has shaped the public perception of her in order to uncover a more truthful version. The starting point of my research is represented by Sally Cline's book, *Zelda: Her voice in Paradise*, the latest biography about the Jazz Age Icon. Sally Cline attempted to revise the myth that had been built up around Zelda in order to show to the public her identity as an artist. Two alternative schools of thought have emerged throughout the years as a result of people's long-standing curiosity over who Zelda truly was. Those critics belonging to female revisionism used her as a symbol for their fight for female rights, followed by those who had known her and wrote passionate and engaging memories about her. On the other side, Fitzgerald's scholars just saw her as a crazy woman envious of her husband's success. Through their points of view, each of them interpreted the most important and crucial events of Zelda's life in their own unique way.

I decided to dedicate a full section of the first chapter to the artistic and literary works of Zelda because I thought that we can better comprehend her artistic vision and the themes

that run through her works by investigating all of her creative sources. I examine Zelda Fitzgerald's individual achievements that have been overshadowed by her husband's fame for a very long time. Despite this, Zelda carved her own path and made a significant contribution to our culture. As we will see, she was a woman of extraordinary talent who not only dedicated herself to writing but also excelled as a painter and a dancer. This chapter provides an extensive overview about Zelda Fitzgerald's literary works, including her first novel *Save Me the Waltz* which is her most important work. Her career as a painter is also examined, in order to provide a thorough overview of her artistic development. In the last section I explore her passion for dance and the significant influence that it had on her life. She used dance as a means of emotional expression and as a way to explore her deepest desires. The chapter highlights Zelda's perseverance and commitment to perfecting her technique and the major impact that dance had on her mental health.

Additionally, I attempt to address the significant impact of mental illness on Zelda's life and also how this has influenced her artistic expression. I summarize and describe Zelda's journey throughout the many clinics she had been recovered into by examining her diagnoses and the various treatments she had received during her numerous hospitalizations. I want to clarify what her true mental state was in order to refute all of the misleading stories that still circulates about it nowadays. Since 1930, the majority of Zelda's life was spent in psychiatric facilities, with small intervals of time when she was discharged and her doctors allowed her to live with Scott, following apparent improvements in her mental health.

In order to reach a more objective view of Zelda, we must examine her relationship with her husband. For many years, their love story was portrayed as a tragic yet incredibly romantic love story. I attempt to disprove and resize the Golden Couple's Myth in the second chapter by analysing their connection through the several letters they exchanged with each other over their lives. Through their epistolary interactions, it is possible to reconstruct all of the major phases of their relationship, which had been quite unstable since the first time they met. Their relationship was complicated; they had clearly loved each other once, but this feeling had been washed away by resentments and jealousy. A deep affection remained between them, though, and they never ceased supporting each

other until the very last day. Their marriage became for both Zelda and Scott a source of inspiration for their works.

Furthermore, I also investigate Zelda's role as Scott's muse. The author frequently referenced his wife as an inspiration for several of the female main characters in his novels. I thought it would be fascinating to provide some examples of this, even if we do not know what Zelda really thought about this role. Throughout their relationship, Scott frequently appropriated Zelda's identity. When they first met, she was a Southern Belle, a local celebrity in Montgomery, then she was transformed into a Flapper through her husband's novels, becoming the role model woman of the Jazz Age. Ultimately, she was portrayed as an unstable woman who frequently checked in and out of psychiatric hospitals due to her numerous mental breakdowns.

Scott Fitzgerald not only used his wife's physical and psychological characteristics as a source of inspiration, but he also appropriated many other things that belonged to her. According to Cline, and other critics, Zelda was a victim of plagiarism by her husband. In fact, it has recently been revealed that Scott employed entire excerpts from his wife's diaries, letters, and other materials in his novels. I therefore decided to discuss this issue at the end of the second chapter providing some evidences in support of this thesis.

I decided to conclude this thesis by devoting the final chapter to Zelda's literary works. This chapter acknowledges Zelda's less famous works such as short stories, articles and plays. I have decided to focus in particular on *Save Me the Waltz*, her first novel, analysing its themes and style. This novel draws heavily on her personal experiences and through it the author finally reveals her version of events to the public for the first time. Zelda wrote this story while she was hospitalized in a psychiatric clinic and a part of her therapy there consisted on reflecting upon some crucial episodes of her life. In order to detach herself from her life and better comprehend it Zelda wrote this novel, including also many of the reasons that had led to her mental breakdowns.

This novel introduces the reader to Alabama, the protagonist, who is continuously searching for her own identity, driven by a sense of independence and an ongoing struggle with finding a purpose in life, just like Zelda. Moreover, it reveals Zelda's perspective on her relationship with her husband. Her description of her marriage with Scott serves as an evidence of her effort to establish her identity and assert her individuality.

Despite frequently being overshadowed by her husband's literary fame, Zelda's artistic accomplishments should not be disregarded. She challenged conventional standards through her writing, gave voice to her personal experiences, and produced a body of work that still engages readers today. The chapter also explores Zelda's writing style, which is noted for its poetic sensibility and vivid imagery. Her writing enables readers to become fully immersed in the complexities of her story and elicits a wide range of emotions from them. Readers are drawn into Zelda's intensely intimate and introspective exploration as she creates a realistic image of the world through her writing.

We get to appreciate Zelda more as a versatile artist who defied classification and left an everlasting mark on the literary scene by throwing light on her literary endeavors and exploring her distinctive artistic style.

CHAPTER I

ZELDA

1.1 *The Myth of Zelda*

Zelda Fitzgerald's name has always been preceded by her husband's, American bestseller author F. Scott Fitzgerald, symbol and true essence of the Jazz Age. It is in fact through his works and the image of her he depicted in them that most people have learned and acquired details about Zelda's life and personality, promoted by Scott himself as the ideal model of woman.

Zelda and Scott became popular culture icons in the frenetic New York of the Roaring Twenties. Their extraordinary attractiveness and charm, supported by the development of the mass media during those years helped them become the legendary couple of the Jazz Age. Journalists turned their bizarre behaviour into myths encouraging the Fitzgeralds to keep fictionalizing their lives. Their over-the-top lifestyles and personalities were simply irresistible for the press, and Zelda quickly appeared on the newly born tabloids. Fitzgerald and his wife seemed not only to enjoy glamour, style and parties, but also the kind of attention the press would especially reserve to them. Zelda in particular loved to shock: in the public eye she was the beautiful, stylish and unscrupulous woman who always attended all the most exclusive parties beside her famous husband.

At a certain point Zelda's image started to shift from the Golden Girl of the roaring Twenties into the "eccentric", "mentally disordered", "schizophrenic" and "crazy wife" of F. Scott Fitzgerald. This image changeover was mainly due to her various hospitalizations but also evidence of her mental instability started to appear here and there through the testimonies of people who came in contact with her. Hemingway above all was one of the main contributors in the creation of this image. He blamed Zelda not only for being jealous of her husband's success, but also for being responsible for Fitzgerald's low productivity after their marriage. We can notice a congruence between Fitzgerald's breakdown and America's breakdown, the Great Depression. It was like they had been punished for flying too close to the sun.

During the 1950s, began a revival of Scott's Fitzgerald' image and reputation which gained him a spot amongst the greatest authors in the world. In conjunction with the rediscovery of his works, Zelda and Scott became two heroes of American culture. Few years apart from one another, his highly-detailed biographies began being published. The first worth mentioning is a scholarly biography by Arthur Mizener¹, published in 1951, that actually provoked the revival of the author. Like the following biographies, Mizener's simply follows stereotypes familiar to everyone, the majority of which reflected badly on Zelda. This is how the legend of the Roaring Twenties' Golden Couple and their tragic love story was initially brought to life.

The second biography worth mentioning is *Some sort of Epic Grandeur*, published in 1981 by Matthew J. Bruccoli², a great scholar of F. Scott Fitzgerald. This work differentiates itself from the rest for the large amount of trustworthy information provided. For this reason it is still considered nowadays a complete and definitive work. Bruccoli examines all the aspects of Fitzgerald's life focusing especially on his waste of creativity, his love/hate relationship with rich people, his addiction to alcohol and his marriage issues. It is necessary to mention, however, that the very first biographers of the couple were Scott and Zelda themselves, as most of their memories together can be found in their novels, diaries and also paintings.

In 1970 Zelda's first biography was finally published with the title *Zelda: A Biography* by Nancy Milford³. In her book, Nancy Milford tries to depict the golden couple's world through Zelda's very own eyes. Zelda, like her husband, was considered an icon of the Jazz Age, but that myth was based on a short period of her life: the first weeks after their marriage in New York. Those weeks steeped in bold and unscrupulous gestures labelled Zelda as the first American Flapper, as Scott would later define her, a label that stuck to her for all her life. Nancy Milford was the first one to show Zelda's artistic talents, though in a pretty superficial way, as her main focus was the tragic love story with Scott. Milford's book was published in a crucial period, characterized by the rise of the first movements for women's rights. These movements needed heroines and Zelda happened to perfectly impersonate one of those: she was a woman who fought all her life to find

¹ Arthur Mizener, *The Far Side of Paradise* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1951).

² Matthew J. Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur* (London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981).

³ Nancy Milford, *Zelda: A Biography* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970).

her own place, her identity, oppressed by a husband who not only plagiarized (more will be said on the matter) her writing but also, according to Nancy Milford, strongly contributed to her psychological breakdown.

The following year Sara Mayfield⁴ published her autobiographical memoirs, which included those with Zelda due to their friendship lasting since childhood. In her memoirs, Mayfield describes Zelda as a proper Southern Belle who unfortunately lost all southern traditions and values due to Scott, who took her away to New York. This work adds important and very specific anecdotes about Zelda's childhood, narrating their adventures together through very detailed descriptions of their life in Montgomery.

This work differs from the previous one mainly for two reasons: first, all the narration takes place in the South, where Sara and Zelda spent their childhood together, and second, Sara's memoirs are full of affection and love towards the main character, which is very different from a scholar's admiration.

It was Sally Cline⁵ that caused a turning point with her biography of Zelda, published thirty years later from the previous two. Cline aims to distinguish fiction from reality, the myth from Zelda's real-life. It is not easy to discern between those elements because it was not only the mass media, journalists and critics that helped feeding the Fitzgeralds' mythmaking enterprise but Scott and Zelda themselves made a proper show of their lives, they were formidable actors focused on controlling their public image. They invented and re-invented their lives however, as we will see, their public image was very different from the private one.

⁴ Sara Mayfield, *Exiles from Paradise: Zelda and Scott Fitzgerald* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1971).

⁵ Sally Cline, *Zelda Fitzgerald: Her Voice in Paradise* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2003).

1.2 *A More Truthful Version of Zelda's Life: Sally Cline's Her Voice in Paradise*

Sally Cline released *Her Voice in Paradise* in 2002 - the first biography of Zelda to be published in thirty years.

During her five years researching for the book, Cline was supported continuously by Zelda's family. In particular, she relied on Zelda Fitzgerald's granddaughter, Eleonor Lanahan, who gave her access to exclusive sources and got her in touch with the wide network of the Fitzgeralds' friends. Zelda's voice, too often in the past reduced to silence, is brought back to the wide audience through autobiographical writings, letters, diaries, articles and stories. Cline not only narrates Zelda's life but she also enables her readers to fully immerse themselves in that specific historic period evoking visions, sounds, intoxicating and intoxicated obsession of the Jazz Age.

Her narration includes reports of some friends of the Fitzgeralds, such as Edmund Wilson, Ernest Hemingway, John Dos Passos, Gertude Stein and Alice B. Toklas, Dorothy Parker, H.L. Mencken, Sinclair Lewis, Lillian Hellman and many others.

This full-length biography, unlike the previous ones, finally presents to the audience Zelda in all her artistic roles, re-evaluating the importance of art in her life and focusing on her talents as writer, painter and dancer.

The main purpose of Cline's book is to give importance to Zelda's life, to her voice and, above all, to separate Zelda from her husband and from their image as the Golden Couple. In other words Cline wanted to detach Zelda from the myth that has been created around her figure.

Cline presents a complex and controversial portrait of Zelda's life and marriage, adding further details to the popular love story known by everyone. The legend about the romantic and intense relationship between Zelda and Scott is debunked for the first time, exposing the truth about their marriage, full of furious quarrels, resentment and jealousy.

She narrates a new story about Zelda by returning a voice to her, which had been suffocated for too many years. Cline also proves how the creation of a myth, as in the

case of the Fitzgeralds' marriage and the Roaring Twenties, represents a danger for the culture itself that is relegated to the imaginary and imagined glories of the past.

1.2.1 *Zelda's voices*

Sally Cline structures her book around the different "voices" that shaped Zelda's life, with the aim to give a voice back to her. Zelda experienced a life without proper roots, she in fact travelled a lot: Zelda was born in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1900 and in 1920 after marrying Scott they moved to New York, where the atmosphere was definitely different from the one of the warm South, and then the couple travelled together around Europe.

The book opens with "Southern Voice", which includes the years from 1900 to April 1920. In this section the author narrates Zelda's childhood and adolescence in Montgomery, the dusty and warm South where the Civil War was still a vivid memory in people's mind. Unfortunately, the racial persecution did not end with the conflict, black people were still victims of segregation and Judge Sayre, Zelda's father, actually created the "Sayre Election Law" which prevented black people from voting until the Civil Rights Act in 1964.

The South where Zelda grew up was a land full of traditions and values, and where there was a cult of white women as the "Soul of the South". She was raised in a culture where women were expected to be charming, funny, and in charge of the home, but to abstain from men's intellectual and professional interests. Zelda apparently seemed to perfectly embody the Southern Belle, as she came from an ancient and respected family of the South, she was beautiful and attractive, she was admired by all the girls and desired by all boys, she was a proper celebrity in Montgomery and she was perfectly aware of it. Since young age, Zelda proved to be a strong woman, she did not like rules, she was the neighbourhood tomboy, passionate and exuberant, she even had a dominant role within her group of friends, as they later confessed. Cline writes in her book that the lack of shyness, doubt and moral principles "allowed her to run counter to the repressive

Southern ideology about women at the turn of the century”⁶. Her desire for freedom was quenched by Scott, as Zelda saw their marriage as the opportunity to escape from the claustrophobic reality of Montgomery.

The second chapter is entitled “Northern Voice”, which covers the time span from April 1920 to April 1924. It revolves around the first years of marriage, including all the episodes that led to the creation of the Golden Couple’s myth. Their marriage overlapped with the beginning of the Roaring Twenties, that Scott himself named the Jazz Age. The term was meant to convey a specific atmosphere characterized by a specific mood of music, dance and reckless stimulation: it was the age of excess. The Golden Couple spent those first weeks of marriage in hotel lobbies, partying for days, diving into fountains and both of them drank heavily. Life in New York was very different from what Zelda had envisioned, her southern education caused her a lot of problems while trying to fit in that society especially due to her strong accent, which many New Yorkers thought made her sound vulgar and ridiculous. It was a city in perpetual motion and she constantly felt out of place and homesick.

While Scott had a lot of friends in New York, Zelda was completely alone. Soon enough, she became a mere accessory to her husband, known to all as “the wife of Scott Fitzgerald”. At parties, Zelda flirted with Scott’s friends as she used to do in Montgomery. Her provocative attitudes were only in part caused by her rebellious temperament, and eccentric personality; it was her personal way to handle a completely new feeling that she had never experienced before: being in a new world that she could not control and that did not belong to her.

The Fitzgeralds were idealized as the perfect happy couple, deeply in love with each other, but behind the image that they decided to show in public there were two people who were constantly struggling to save their marriage.

The initial desire to escape from the South was just as big as the wave of nostalgia that hit Zelda when she returned to Montgomery with Scott during summer 1920s. Nonetheless their visit was short, as they soon went back to New York.

⁶ Cline, *Her Voice in Paradise*, 23.

In October 1921 their first daughter was born in St. Paul, Minnesota, Scott's hometown, as he had decided. Zelda again found herself alone in a new city which gave her a sense of insecurity, impermanence and alienation. It was a world too distant from Alabama, not only geographically, but also psychologically and she was never able to fit in.

The third chapter, "Foreign Voices", concerns the years the couple spent in Europe, especially in France, from May 1924 to December 1926. When the Fitzgeralds arrived in Paris, they found themselves in the middle of an artistic revolution, the Ville Lumière was full of intellectuals and new forms of art began to circulate.

In Europe they met some important friends, such as Ernest Hemingway and his wife Hadley, Gerald and Sara Murphy, Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas, Picasso, Léger and others. Gerald and Sara Murphy were particularly important in Zelda's life: Gerald was Zelda's first artistic influence and mentor, and Sara, due to their mystic and symbolic relationship, was one of the first people to take seriously Zelda's creative potential. Once again Zelda was unable to fit in that society, but at least she tried to. As Sally Cline wrote "The Fitzgerald, lacking French, lived like tourists who neither took part in the community nor visited churches or museums" and then added "but during summer Zelda bought a French dictionary and a copy of Raymond Radiguet's *Le Bal du Comte d'Orgel* to learn the language by painstakingly reading the novel"⁷.

Scott and Zelda were unable to integrate into the community because they did not speak French when they moved to France, so they lived there as tourists.

When they moved to the South of France Scott was focused on writing his new novel, *The Great Gatsby*, so he used to disappear for days leaving Zelda completely alone. In the French Riviera Zelda, tired of that boring and monotonous life, met the French aviator Jozan. Their relationship was probably just platonic, a mere summer romance, but it provoked a major split in her marriage with Scott. However, the truth about that relationship is still unknown. The Fitzgeralds indeed created, as usual, numerous fictional versions of that affair, often contrasting their versions with one another as well as those of their friends. For the first time in their marriage Zelda turned her attention away from Scott and his work, and for him this was something much more serious than physical

⁷ Cline, *Her Voice in Paradise*, 147.

betrayal. In fact, he later wrote: “that September 1924 I knew something had happened that could never be repaired”⁸.

In Zelda began to arise again the will to publicly realize herself and to gain her independence. In 1925 in Capri she took her first painting lessons, her artworks were deeply influenced by the constant and persistent memory of her South.

In the meantime the couple’s problems intensified: Zelda was frequently ill and Scott was always drunk, so they decided to return to the United States in order to escape from their dissolute and reckless life in Europe. Contrary to what they hoped, nothing could fix that damage.

The next chapter is “Creative Voices”, it narrates the years that Zelda dedicated to writing, dancing, painting and her attempts to win prestige as an artist. Zelda’s immersion in her art probably led Scott to take domestic and parental responsibility but it is equally likely that Scott’s control was a cause, not a consequence of her working so hard on her art.

During those years Zelda began to write again, nevertheless her articles and stories were all credited to both Scott and her or to Scott only. Discouraged by her poor writing achievements, Zelda rediscovered an old passion: ballet. She was determined to make dancing her career, confident of her talent she would have done anything to achieve her goal. Zelda’s self-discipline got stronger and Scott’s got weaker: he started to drink heavily to stimulate his writing, we can say that he actually drank to write. Zelda had no influence on him anymore and he completely lost control over himself. He was jealous of her productivity because it constantly reminded him of his minimal progresses in writing. Scott, firmly opposed to her dedication to dance, smothered her and terrified her: he became aggressive and violent. Zelda’s only relief was dance, so she practiced it ferociously, and when she wasn’t dancing, she painted: she needed to divert her mind from her troubled relationship with her husband.

They tried to escape again from their desperate life. They decided to move back to Paris where Zelda started to study dance at Madame Lubov Egorova’s studio. Her training was very strict and many people around her thought that she was exaggerating, ballet had

⁸ Cline, *Her Voice in Paradise*, 154.

become her main focus. She believed that through dance she could achieve her independence from Scott so she was obsessed with perfecting this art.

This period of great productivity in all three arts coincided with the beginning of her mental issues; it was as if Zelda herself was living only through her creative works, ignoring the world that surrounded her, including her husband and daughter.

The fifth chapter, "Other Voices", describes the years of her first mental breakdown and her rapid physical deterioration, during which Zelda's voice was choked and overwhelmed by those of Scott and the doctors that prevented her to express herself artistically. They insisted that art was dangerous for her mental health and her efforts to have a career as a writer and as a dancer were motivated by an obsession. Despite this opposition, in 1932 her first novel, *Save me the Waltz*, was published. This novel was written during hospitalization when painting and writing were part of her therapy.

Zelda kept fighting to find her own identity and independence even from inside mental hospitals. She wanted to detach her figure from Scott's one but again her voice was silenced by her husband.

The opinion of her doctors was that Zelda must be re-educated to be a good wife. Her first letters to Scott from the mental hospital were full of resentment and anger, and were considered by the doctors clear signs of mental instability. Then, Zelda understood that if she wanted to go back home she had to appear mentally stable. The following letters to Scott therefore suddenly became affectionate and conciliatory. There was still an ambivalence between a real resentment of Zelda against Scott and the remembrance of the great passion and the deep bond that both had had and that they could never find in anyone else.

Scott's health was deeply damaged by alcohol, and when he died in 1940 Zelda lost both her best friend and worst enemy at the same time. His voice would always resonate in her head, but now she was finally free to use her own artistic voice to write and paint.

The book concludes with "In Her Voice", the pure expression of Zelda's voice as an artist. During the last years of her life, after Scott's death, Zelda dedicated herself to painting, began her second novel *Caesar's Things*, which remained unfinished, and collaborated on the publishing of Scott's works. Zelda's voice during her last eight years of life is the

voice of aspiration, her most creative voice. A voice that despite everything, despite the passing of years, is still the voice of the South, the one that accompanied her through all her life.

1.3 *Zelda's Artistic And Literary Production.*

Zelda has gone down in history as the wife of F. Scott Fitzgerald, the original flapper, half of the famous Golden Couple from the Jazz Age, the inspiring muse behind all the female protagonists in her husband's novels. Very little is known about Zelda as an independent artist, as a writer, a ballerina and a painter. Zelda's creativity, in fact, has frequently been interpreted as a sign of jealousy, a foolish attempt to compete or outshine Scott. In support of this thesis is often cited Hemingway's prejudiced but nonetheless iconic judgment that appears in *A Moveable Feast*: "Zelda was jealous of Scott's work and as we got to know them, this fell into a regular pattern. (. . .) He would start to work and as soon as he was working well Zelda would begin complaining about how bored she was and get him off on another drunken party. (. . .) when he was drunk he would usually come to find me and, drunk, he took almost as much pleasure interfering with my work as Zelda did interfering with his"⁹. Hemingway is obviously not the most impartial person to judge the marriage because he and Zelda had a very strained relationship yet, his assertion that Zelda was jealous is frequently accepted as fact. Even Matthew J. Bruccoli has asserted: "That she competed with her husband for attention and even tried to rival him through her painting, writing, and dancing is clear"¹⁰. Her creative and artistic skills had always been put in the background compared to her role as wife of a famous writer.

1.3.1 *Writing*

Zelda's first official work as a writer was a review of her husband's latest novel, *Beautiful and Damned*, published in the *New York Time Tribune*. Her work was a discrete success, in fact the *Metropolitan Magazine* asked her to contribute in writing four articles about

⁹ Victoria Sullivan, "An American Dream Destroyed: Zelda Fitzgerald" (1979) *CEA Critic*, 41 (2), Retching the Classics: Fiction, I, 33-35, 37-39. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44376877>, 33.

¹⁰ Sullivan, "An American Dream Destroyed: Zelda Fitzgerald", 33.

the figure of the Flapper. Three of them were published under Zelda's name alongside an explanation that she was F. S. Fitzgerald's wife.

These were the first and slow steps in her professional writing life, but neither Zelda and Scott considered them in this way.

Her first short story was entitled *Our own movie queen*, Scott meticulously revised it and it was published under his name in 1925. After a two years hiatus, Zelda began to write again around 1927 when she produced four more articles always under Scott's supervision. The first article appeared in *Harper's Bazaar* in January 1928 and it was credited to both Scott and Zelda, the same thing occurred for the other two while the fourth one was published under Scott's name only.

Many of Scott's biographers tried to diminish these episodes of appropriation by justifying it as a feature of marketing, claiming that it was the magazines' editors that insisted on using Scott's name. Fitzgerald himself, according to Cline, said that the editors insisted on putting his name next to hers in her stories and articles¹¹. Probably it was just his attempt to hide his poor literary productivity during those years.

In the winter 1928-29 Zelda was commissioned a series of six stories by *College Humor*. The stories were about the lives of six young American women. According to Cline this was Zelda's public statement about women's need to work professionally if they are to survive¹².

Furthermore analysing these stories we can see some of Zelda's trademarks such as visual metaphors, fragmentation, descriptive non sequiturs, caustic observation and bubbling nonlinear ideas¹³. Zelda declared that she wrote those stories with the purpose to use the earnings to pay her dance lessons, this is a clear example of her constant search for independence.

Zelda wrote her first novel, *Save Me the Waltz*, while she was recovering at Phipps Clinic. Initially she did not mail her manuscript to Scott, who constantly asked her to read it and when he was finally able to do so he became furious, he saw it as a betrayal. It was an

¹¹ Cline, *Her Voice in Paradise*, 211.

¹² Cline, *Her Voice in Paradise*, 228.

¹³ Cline, *Her Voice in Paradise*, 230.

autobiographical novel so she not only used episodes from her own life but, obviously, she drew experiences from their marital life. Scott reacted violently, he accused Zelda of appropriating without authorization his material and copying the novel he had been working on for several years. Scott was probably jealous about the fact that Zelda completed her novel very quickly while his was still unfinished. He was also enraged due to the way she depicted him in the novel: a drunkard and a nullity. In his view, she simply had handed over their private deeds to their enemies. According to Scott, Zelda could not tell personal facts from their lives or badmouth him in her novel, but he could because he was a professional. In *Tender is the Night*, published in 1934, he used personal episodes from Zelda's life, especially regarding her mental illness, depicting her as crazy and egotist. Not much is known about the revisions that Scott made to the novel, but we know that they were wide: Scott cut out all the parts regarding money, debt, and alcohol.

Save me the Waltz was finally published in 1932 and it was an overall financial failure. After the publication Scott began to act rudely to Zelda, in his opinion a wife should only care and act in her husband's interests, for this reason he wanted her to stop writing because he could not tolerate another usurpation, writing had to be his territory only. He however allowed her to write a comedy, as long as it was not set in the French Riviera or in Switzerland and every idea should be approved by him.

After being discharged from Phipps, Zelda began her second novel, *Caesar's Things*, which remained unfinished. The main theme of this novel was insanity, Zelda's troubled state of mind pierces the novel's pages, reflecting the detachment and contradiction in her writing and thoughts.

Scott punished Zelda all her life for crossing the line he set for her, she should stick to her natural role as a woman: submissive and completely devoted to the figure of her husband and her family. Scott feared competitiveness with Zelda but all that really mattered to her was only writing, writing to gain independence, writing to express her artistic talent. Zelda never intended to compete with him.

As she was prevented from writing, Zelda focused on another passion: ballet.

1.3.2 *Ballet*

Zelda began to cultivate her passion for ballet in the summer of 1925 when she started studying ballet at Madame Lubov Egorova's studio in Paris. However, as Pietro Citati wrote in his book, Zelda always loved to dance and for all her life she reproached herself for starting so late ruining for ever her own destiny¹⁴.

Ballet has always been a complicated environment, so it was not easy for Zelda, a newcomer, to fit in. Nevertheless, the studio soon became her sanctuary, she interacted daily with stars of the ballet world and this, combined with her obsessive training, led her to an extraordinary improvement in just five years. She became friends in particular with the ballerina Lucienne Lamballe, there was an undeniable connection between them that lasted only a few years. In *Save me the Waltz* Zelda depicted her as Arienne, she also cites a mutual jealousy and admiration between Alabama, who represented Zelda, and Arienne.

The ballet studio was a place where she had control over her own identity and where she could fully express herself. Zelda wanted ballet to belong only to her, when she danced she could find peace and safety. Dance evoked to her that happiness and love that she had long lost.

However, the energy and time that she put into ballet strongly challenged her marriage and made Zelda absent in her role as a mother to Scottie. Turbulence and quarrels at home increased so she even more welcomed a distraction.

Scott did not want to understand his wife's passion for ballet, in those dance movements he saw a sort of revenge against him: ballet had become a real job for Zelda and it had made her independent from him.

Her passion for ballet rapidly led her to fixation, as a matter of fact we can say that she danced herself into an obsession. Behind those gentle dance steps lurked the delirium, the same delirium that rapidly invaded and possessed her. Zelda began to lose touch with her life at home and her dedication to ballet technique became consuming not only for her mind but especially for her physical state. Through written testimonies and photographs

¹⁴ Pietro Citati, *La morte della farfalla. Zelda e Francis Scott Fitzgerald*, 1st ed. (Milano: Adelphi Edizioni 2016), 40.

we can notice that her body underwent some terrifying changes, her friends were almost frightened by her aspect and her commitment to ballet. People surrounding her did not support her passion and continued to consider her training just a mere pastime, not a proper job.

It almost seemed like Zelda wanted to torture herself with ballet: she had bruises over her knees and all over her legs, she even tied her feet to the bars of the bed sleeping with her toes bent outwards.

Her determination and ambition allowed her to achieve the respect of Madame Egorova. Zelda unexpectedly declined Julia Sedova's offer to perform in the opera "Aida" at Teatro San Carlo for a full season in September 1929, Julia was a former dancer with the Russian Imperial Ballet. The reasons behind her decision are unknown but in her book Sally Cline linked this refusal with the subsequent steering wheel accident, when Zelda tried to run her and Scott off the road while driving on the French Riviera¹⁵.

Due to her mental collapse in spring 1930 Zelda was admitted to clinic Malmaison, near Paris, but she left shortly after in order to attend her dance lessons. At the beginning of summer she was admitted to Clinique Valmont, in Switzerland and then moved to Prangins Clinic. Her idolization of Egorova was used against her by Scott and the doctors, they suspected she had lesbian tendencies and accused her of being in love with her ballet teacher, Zelda herself was convinced of that too.

Her efforts in ballet were considered by others as desperate and frantic. Zelda later admitted that ballet had been consuming for her body, but, as she explained to her husband in a letter in 1930, ballet would always be “good and kind and clean and hardworking”.¹⁶

1.3.3. *Painting*

Zelda was not only an accomplished writer and ballerina but also a very talented painter. She had a lifelong passion for painting, she began early in her life to make sketches and she improved her skills after Scottie was born. In 1925 in Capri she attended her first formal painting class, there she also began her formal flower painting which represents

¹⁵ Cline, *Her Voice in Paradise*, 237.

¹⁶ Jackson R. Bryer and Cathy W. Barks. *Dear Scott, Dearest Zelda: The love letters of F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2002), letter 56, 85.

one of the recurrent themes in her artworks. Unfortunately, none of Capri's works survived but other paintings were deeply inspired by that experience. Her creative insights and her main inspiration however was always the South with its fiery light, warm colours and exotic flowers.

At that time her informal painting mentor was Gerald Murphy but, according to Cline, she probably had more than one tutor throughout her painting career. Zelda started to create paper dolls for Scottie, it was their special way to communicate and in doing so, as Cline states, she was also "subverting the controversial childhood approach by using dolls to transgress male/female boundaries"¹⁷ in fact she used to draw men paper dolls with dresses and gowns.

When they returned to the United States, she attended regular art classes in Philadelphia and during that period she even started to view art as a profession. However, her eyestrain intensified, this led her away for a while from her painting career.

During the several years she spent in mental hospitals, painting became a central element not only in her life but also in her therapies. It was the only thing that was left to her, the only way to express herself considering that Scott and her doctors had forbidden her to write and dance.

Through art Zelda conveyed her deepest emotions, her paintings were guided by her feelings. Watching them we can experience a portion of her internal and complex world. Her early works are emotionally expressive, her emotions are represented through colours and there is a constant influence of the deep South in all that she produced: her plants and flowers explode with warm emotions and colours. After 1932 her paintings and artworks started to change, becoming more linear and minimalist, sometimes even solitary. It offers us an introspective view on the places she visited with Scott but, above all, on herself.

Zelda's art progressed and changed with her situation, providing strong evidence of her growth as an artist and as a human being. Art had a central role in her therapy during the hospitalisation years, she explored colour properties and she wrote reviews of the art she saw. Scott encouraged her to paint buying her all the tools she needed in order to distract her from writing, in 1934 he even helped her organise the first exhibition of her artworks

¹⁷ Cline, *Her Voice in Paradise*, 206.

in New York. While she was hospitalised at La Paix, she had her professional painting studio where she could practice, study and develop her skills and unique style. Art was the only way through which she could achieve artistic freedom, actually it was a proper work which allowed her to be more independent.

After Scott's death in 1940, contrary to what many claimed, her artistic production increased. From 1940 to 1948 Zelda produced a cycle of romantic watercolours representing New York and Paris in order to commemorate the places where she and Scott lived; she wanted certain episodes to be fixed forever. She also produced some biblical tableaux, during the years she spent in mental hospitals she came very close to religion and found relief through it. During the last eight years of her life four exhibitions of her artworks were held in Montgomery, proving that she did not need Scott's help to make her art known to the public.

Sally Cline in her book has given Zelda's almost invisible art a considerable attention. It is difficult to date Zelda's art because it lacks the artistic progression or linear development i.by which paintings are often dated, Zelda herself dated only few of it. Many have been lost or destroyed by Zelda herself, however her legacy is today composed of more than one hundred paintings. Initially people started to look at her paintings as the works of a famous writer's wife and then as the works of a person who suffered from mental illness.

We have now the possibility to look at her art on its own terms, with a different point of view.

1.4 Mental Illness

On 23 April 1930 Zelda Fitzgerald was admitted to Malmaison Clinic, near Paris, in a state of psychic breakdown. The doctors who visited her did not recognise her symptoms, they described her as an anxious and exhausted woman with some obsessive ideas, the main one was the fear of being homosexual. Just nine days after the hospitalization she left the Clinic and went back to Paris in order to resume her ballet lessons but her anxiety persisted and worsened through hallucinations and suicide attempts.

In May 1930 when she entered Valmont Clinic in Switzerland Zelda was not able to eat or sleep, her illness was really serious. Valmont Clinic was specialized in treating gastrointestinal problems but she needed psychological treatments. For this reason she was transferred to Prangins Clinic shortly after, where her situation dramatically worsened.

Prangins Clinic was a dangerous place for Zelda, patients were controlled with force, their wrists and ankles were often tied to bed: for Zelda it was a real imprisonment. As we can evince from her correspondence with Scott she was constantly invoking for help, in a state of total terror. Zelda wrote to Scott: “Every day it seems to me that things are more barren and sterile and hopeless”, “There’s nothing left but disorder and vacuum” and “Please help me. Every day more of me dies (...)”¹⁸. She made several attempts to escape but they all failed and then she was regularly placed in isolation, she was hopeless and lonely “I’m lonely and do not seem to be able to exist in the world on any terms at all”¹⁹. Back then mental hospitals maintained control over patients using sedatives, restraints and force.

During those years of hospitalization Zelda learnt how she had to behave towards members of the hospital personnel or what she had to write in her letters in order to be judged sufficiently sane to be released. She was in fact perfectly aware that all the letters were opened and often censored so she learnt how she should behave to achieve freedom.

Her therapy at Prangins consisted in a re-education towards femininity and neutralization of her aspirations to become a professional dancer and writer. It was her doctors’, and Scott’s, opinion that all her efforts to become a celebrated dancer and writer were motivated by an obsessive illness so they should be neutralized with rest therapies, sedatives and re-education.

Zelda’s psychological re-education towards femininity, good mothering, marital life and domesticity had the aim to shift her in a range of what contemporary society considered acceptable behaviour. At that time women by nature had to be weak, beautiful, seductive, stupid, maternal, submissive and sweet. Therefore all those women, like Zelda, who

¹⁸ Bryer and Barks, *Dear Scott, Dearest Zelda*, letter 53, 80.

¹⁹ Bryer and Barks, *Dear Scott, Dearest Zelda*, letter 54, 83.

didn't stick to these standards were considered unnatural phenomena, abnormal and must be retrained.

Furthermore Dr.Forel considered Zelda's inclination towards homosexuality as a symptom of a disease and not as an expression of desire probably linked to her unsatisfying marital life. Forel, as many other doctors contemporary to him, considered homosexuality and lesbianism as a pathological condition.

At first Zelda was not diagnosed with schizophrenia because she didn't show any symptoms and also did not seem that there had ever been cases of schizophrenia in her ancestry, although they would later discover that mental illness was very common among members of her family. Doctor Forel considered her as extremely irritable and hysterical with some lesbian inclinations, actually she just was a hypersensitive, original, undisciplined, proud, ambitious and egocentric woman. Doctor Forel also suggested that Scott's addiction to alcohol was one of the main contributors to Zelda's illness but Scott, who was directly involved in her treatments, did not accept this theory at all. Her doctor could not decide whether her hysterical symptoms indicated a neurosis or a psychosis so he asked Doctor Bleur for a consultation.

Dr. Bleur spent three hours with Zelda and then he diagnosed her with schizophrenia, condemning her to spend half of her life in asylums. That diagnosis followed her everywhere and she became a prisoner of it.

During the 30s very little was known about schizophrenia. However, at that time its inheritance had already been established. Although in Zelda's family there had been several cases of mental illness, she was unaware of it because her family members were reluctant to disclose such information. The refusal of the Sayres to define the disease for what it was led them to never speak to anyone about the mental problems that affected their family: Judge Sayre had several mental breakdowns, Zelda's sister Marjorie had a nervous breakdown and her beloved brother Anthony, as well as her grandmother, committed suicide.

In September 1931 Zelda was discharged from Prangins Clinic and her case was summarized as a reaction to feelings of inferiority: she had ambitions that were self-

illusions and caused difficulties in the couple. The prognosis was favourable as long as conflicts were avoided.

At the end of 1931 Zelda, following another violent conflict with Scott, insisted on being hospitalized again. She entered Phipps Clinic in January 1932 with a serious spot of eczema. Doctor Meyer, who was in charge of Zelda's treatments during those years at Phipps, initially refused to involve Scott as a consultant. Doctors urged Zelda's creativity, as long as she did not get tired. Art was not seen as a danger anymore and indeed it played a central role in her therapy. Zelda had an intense period of creativity at Phipps Clinic, her anxiety decreased and there she completed her first novel. Unfortunately, in 1933 Zelda's brother Anthony committed suicide after being desperately ill with depression, which was not cured in the right way, therefore Zelda's health worsened. Scott decided to take Zelda on a trip to Bermuda but when they came back Zelda read the drafts of *Tender is the Night* and was particularly shocked by it. In his novel Scott used parts of Zelda's reports from Malmaison, Valmont and Prangins and also very private episodes of her life increasing even more her mental instability.

On 12 February 1933 she was readmitted to Phipps Clinic for her third mental breakdown, which was probably caused by what she had read. She was kept under constant observation for fear of suicide: her conditions were very serious and she was given sedatives daily. Zelda closed herself in silence, she lost many pounds, kept distance from everyone: she was almost invisible.

As soon as her mental and physical health improved, she began to ask to be discharged from Phipps Clinic. Nevertheless, Scott was not prepared to live with an ill wife so, for this reason, he got Zelda transferred to Craig House, where she stayed from 8 March to 19 May. On Scott's advice her psychiatrist prevented her from writing so she started an occupational therapy focused only on art and produced a substantial body of paintings. Zelda kept pressing Scott because she wanted to resume working on her second novel but he and her psychiatrist discouraged such a project.

In May 1933 Zelda entered the Enoch and Sheppard Pratt Hospital where she spent two years. From the first day she understood that it was a very different place from Craig, Phipps or Prangins, she was completely horrified. Here her conditions became very critical, she was not allowed to communicate with her family and friends, she felt lonely,

disoriented and broken. Doctors had worsened her condition by using very strong and harmful therapies: she received morphine for sedation, tranquillisers and sedatives. Zelda began to have hallucinations, especially about Scott: she heard his voice inside her head and she was terrified by him, thus the doctors forbade his visits. In Sheppard and Pratt Zelda attempted to commit suicide several times, she was confined to a restricted area and the therapies drastically worsened her state. Zelda was hopeless, although she was able to find solace in religion which became her only means of survival inside that horrible place. As Cline wrote, Zelda focused all her attention on God and on Scriptures defining them as “my only strength...And I have to pray to-to live”²⁰.

At the insistence of her sister Rosalind, Scott transferred Zelda to Highland Hospital, in Ashville, where she stayed until 1940. Doctor Carroll’s therapies reduced some of Zelda’s symptoms, the majority of which were a result of the previous therapies. Patients at Highland had to follow a strict diet and rigorous exercise routines but Zelda learnt quickly how to survive to their arbitrary rules. They also followed occupational therapies which for Zelda consisted in painting and also writing: she was finally able to work on her second novel.

When Zelda arrived at Highland Hospital Dr, Carroll was experimenting with insulin and electro-convulsive therapies. The treatments were controversial and, in a way, also terrifying. He submitted Zelda to electro-shock and insulin-shock treatments that caused her some memory loss effects and convulsions.

After four years Zelda began to feel well enough to leave, therefore she and her family started to pressure Scott to let her live in Montgomery with her mother. Scott was reluctant and wrote to Dr. Carroll asking his professional opinion: he firmly opposed. In his letter Carroll wrote that Zelda’s psyche was wrecked and she was mentally injured so she was not prepared to live outside because she was susceptible to a collapse. Zelda and her family kept pressuring Scott to release her, but the more pressure they put on him, the more he became furious and aggressive.

Unexpectedly Doctor Carroll changed his mind and in March 1940 he wrote to Scott suggesting that Zelda should be finally released. According to Cline this sudden change

²⁰ Cline, *Her Voice in Paradise*, 352.

of his opinion was due to a sexual assault scandal involving himself and a patient of Highland Hospital. The patient in question was not the only one the doctor abused, Zelda was most likely another of his victims.

On 15 April 1940 Zelda left the Hospital and went back to Montgomery with her family, unfortunately the effects of the therapies carried her to a definitive personality change. Zelda remained a very nervous person and occasionally she had to return to Highland for some checks but there were also times when she looked after her own interests and lived an almost normal life. After Scott's death in December 1940 Zelda entered Highland Hospital three more times but only for short periods, as Cline emphasized in the last chapter of her books contesting what other biographers had written. Zelda died at Highland Hospital on 10 March 1948 in a fire, after having spent the last two decades of her life in and out of mental hospitals.

Many years later Doctor Forel changed his diagnosis by claiming that there were not enough symptoms and evidence to define Zelda as "schizophrenic". Dr. Irvin Pine, Zelda's last psychiatrist, in an interview with Cline confessed that the various diagnoses seemed wrong to him. Many other bizarre artists, such as Virginia Woolf, Ezra Pound, Edgar Allan Poe, Vincent Van Gogh, Robert Schuman, were considered schizophrenic in the past, while today the same symptoms are recognized as common components of the artist craze. Zelda's psychiatrists did not take her artistic talents seriously. The main cause of her depression probably was her family situation, her relationship with Scott and the impossibility to fully express her talents. The treatments which Zelda was submitted to can cause side effects which are also symptoms of schizophrenia, Zelda thus became a victim of treatments for her own illness.

Some doctors have argued that if she had been treated twenty years later her diagnosis would have been "manic-depressive" which, unlike schizophrenia, does not result in dementia. It may occasionally give rise to episodes of acute psychosis or flagrant irrationality, but these periods of madness are often only temporary and rarely evolve into dementia.

The only true therapy is today considered psychotherapy, which must face basic conflicts and the patient's altered sense of self. The manic-depressive affections, from which Zelda seems today to have been affected are treated with lithium salts, antidepressants and

anticonvulsants. This type of treatment has proven to be very effective and allows the majority of patients to live a reasonably normal life. Psychotherapy also, when combined with medical treatment, is essential for healing and prevention of relapse.

The prospects of healing from mental illness nowadays are much greater than during the thirties, however there are still cases where the treatment is more difficult.

CHAPTER II

ZELDA AND SCOTT: A TROUBLED RELATIONSHIP

“To mention F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald is to invoke the twenties, the Jazz Age, romance, and outrageous early success, with all its attendant perils. The names Scott and Zelda can summon taxis at dusk, conjure gleaming hotel lobbies and smoky speakeasies, flappers, yellow phaetons white suits, large tips, expatriates, and nostalgia for the Lost Generation”²¹.

2.1 *Zelda and Scott in their own words*

Zelda and Scott met in 1918 during a ball at Montgomery’s Country Club. The 22-year-old F. Scott Fitzgerald was stationed in the nearby Camp Sheridan as a second lieutenant doing his preparation for the war, in which to his great regret he never participated. The most popular Belle in Montgomery, Zelda Sayre, turned 18 during that summer: she was an attractive, vivacious young lady known by everyone for her wit, charm and flirtatious abilities. Scott was immediately charmed by Zelda’s beauty and charisma, “Later, he would say that when he looked at her for the first time everything inside him melted”²². Even if Scott has always described their first meeting as love at first sight they both continued dating other people, as we will later see through Zelda’s letters. Despite Zelda’s early resistance, he pursued her tirelessly: Scott's perseverance and charm had Zelda visibly impressed.

In Zelda’s biography Sally Cline also stresses the many defects and qualities that Scott and Zelda had in common. They were both egotists and self-centred but, on the other side, they both shared the same desires and ambitions. She points out how this dark side they

²¹ Bryer and Barks, *Dear Scott, Dearest Zelda*, Introduction.

²² Bate Jonathan, *Bright star, green light. The beautiful works and damned lives of John Keats and F. Scott Fitzgerald*, (London: Collins, 2021), 54.

had in common sparked their mutual love during courtship but through the years ended up damaging their relationship.

Before leaving for the French front in October 1918, Scott proposed to Zelda but she declined. The rejection of this commitment was largely motivated by Zelda's realization that Scott was a highly insecure guy rather than by the uncertain political situation brought on by World War I.

According to Cline, "She was cautious of throwing in her lot with an insecure unpublished writer [...] Zelda despised weakness. She needed Scott to feel realistically self-confident before she could feel secure about leaving her safe Southern world"²³. This theory has also been confirmed by Zelda's sister Rosalind who wrote to Sara Mayfield "I do not believe that Zelda's hesitancy about marrying Scott was prompted by any mercenary motive [...] it was rather her uncertainty about the wisdom of leaving her known world for a strange new one that restrained her".²⁴

Scott was discharged from the army in February 1919 and moved to New York City in the hopes of establishing a career as a writer: he wanted to become one of the world's greatest authors, a top-man, so he needed a top-girl on his side, and Zelda was ideal for that. Scott convinced himself that Zelda would not marry him because he had so little money. Despite the fact that in her letters Zelda kept reassuring him that all that mattered to her was love and not money, Scott was depressed and started losing confidence in himself: he felt a constant sense of failure and anxiety.

They maintained their long-distance connection by writing each other letters, which they did for the rest of their lives while they were apart.

Dear Scott, Dearest Zelda. The love letters of F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald is a collection of the correspondence between Scott Fitzgerald and Zelda Sayre during their tumultuous and tragic relationship. Jackson R. Bryer and Cathy W. Barks edited the book, which was first published in 2002. They organized their book in accordance with the key stages of the Fitzgeralds' marriage and attempted to rebuild what was the primary means of communication between the pair.

²³ Cline, *Her Voice in Paradise*, 61.

²⁴ Cline, *Her Voice in Paradise*, 61.

The letters they exchanged during their courtship and early years of marriage are thought to be one of the most romantic and literary pieces of writing in American history. Playfulness and adventure were the main characteristics of their courtship. By examining her letters from 1918 to 1920, we have a fresh portrayal of Zelda created by her own words and eyes. Zelda was a charismatic 18-year-old who captured many people's attention with her wit, beauty, and free-spirited nature. Her letters to Scott were passionate and perceptive, displaying her humour, intelligence, and vivacity. She frequently wrote about her quest for independence, exploration, and her own dreams for artistic expression. Zelda was an independent young lady who had no desire to be the girl imprisoned in the tower that Scott frequently mentioned in his letters, and she made it immediately clear to him.²⁵ She acknowledged the difficulties in their relationship while expressing her love and dedication to Scott.

Even after the engagement, she continued to flirt with other boys and wrote to Scott about her many suitors, however he was both jealous and attracted to Zelda's popularity with other men. When he sent the engagement ring who belonged to his mother to Zelda, she was overjoyed. She wrote to Scott that she always wore the ring, even when she attended her several balls at the Country Club. According to Zelda everyone needed to know that she was Scott's girl and they were engaged.²⁶ However many critics, including Cline and Mayfield, speculated that Zelda did not always wear the ring in public to avoid discouraging her suitors: "she relegated it to her trophy box and wrote to him about flirtations with other men, even as she professed her love for him".²⁷

In June 1919 occurred what Scott considered Zelda's first major betrayal. Scott received a letter from Zelda that she had written for another man; this infuriated Scott, who cut off all contacts with her. After Zelda sent him a letter where she tried to explain the incident²⁸ Scott forgave her and proposed once again but she called off the wedding. Scott was overcome by sadness and felt like a failure both as a writer and lover.

Once Scribner agreed to publish *This Side of Paradise*, Scott immediately wrote to Zelda about it and they renewed their engagement in September 1920. Zelda's choice to finally

²⁵ Bryer and Barks, *Dear Scott, Dearest Zelda*, 51.

²⁶ Bryer and Barks, *Dear Scott, Dearest Zelda*, letter 14, 22.

²⁷ Bate, *Bright star, green light*, 58

²⁸ Bryer and Barks, *Dear Scott, Dearest Zelda*, letter 32, 37.

marry Scott can certainly be linked to the love that the two, despite everything that happened, surely felt for each other. Scott's rising writing career most likely facilitated Zelda in making this decision: it represented an opportunity for her to leave her hometown while still remaining the young, free, and happy girl that she was.

Scott and Zelda married on April 3, 1920, in New York's St. Patrick's Cathedral. Zelda had no say in the wedding's organization. Moreover, her parents made the decision not to attend the ceremony, only her sisters and a small number of additional guests—all Scott friends—were there. Fitzgerald and Zelda's marriage, which received extensive media coverage, solidified their status as the quintessential celebrities of the Jazz Age: “What New York wanted was an attractive couple who drank and partied endlessly and whose escapades became staples of the gossip Columns” and that was exactly what the spouses did.²⁹

F. Scott Fitzgerald and Zelda Sayre's first years of marriage were characterized by glamour, success, and instability. In addition to Fitzgerald's intense writing labour and Zelda's own artistic endeavours, the couple's lives were marked by an ongoing cycle of drinking and socializing. They spent lot of money to keep up their glamorous and extravagant lifestyle, but they were always broke, so Scott began borrowing money from his editor, his agent and friends. As Pietro Citati wrote “Non riuscivano a fare economia perché avevano bisogno di sciupare, dissipare, distruggere. Quando non c'era più denaro, bastava chiedere anticipagli editori e ai giornali con un semplice schiocco di dita, ed eccoli piovere nelle loro mani con velocità vertiginosa, come se non corrispondessero a nulla di reale”³⁰. Scott and Zelda were never satisfied with their lifestyle; Scott, in particular, was constantly comparing himself to his friends and enemies, which led to his and Zelda's decline.

After a brief stay in Montgomery, they made the decision to move to Scott's hometown of St. Paul, Minnesota. The main reason of this choice was that Scott did not feel welcome by the Sayres. Zelda and Scott's first daughter Scottie was born in October 1921 in St. Paul and, as she was at her own wedding, Zelda was once again left out from any decisions. She was unable to attend her daughter's baptism because Scott's parents were

²⁹ Bryer and Barks, *Dear Scott, Dearest Zelda*, 51.

³⁰ Citati, *La morte della farfalla*, 27.

concerned about her erratic behaviour, and her family was completely uninvolved. The quarrels between Scott and Zelda increased, Scott became more abusive and was drunk all the time.

The Fitzgerald myth as the Golden Couple of Jazz Age began officially to decay in Summer 1924. Many problems began to arise after they moved to France: they continued to spend money in order to live a glamorous life. On the marital side the first affairs and flirts began. During that period Scott and Zelda were spending the summer in the French Riviera where Zelda met the French aviator Edouard Jozan and what we can define as “The great crisis” began, from which they never recovered.

The relationship between Zelda and the aviator represents one of the most dramatic episodes in the Fitzgeralds’ tumultuous marriage. Jozan was a fearless and captivating guy who was well-known for his love for adventures and his brilliant ability as a pilot. His adventurous energy attracted Zelda, and they soon became inseparable. Over the years there has been a lot of speculation and discussion around the romance of Zelda and Jozan. While some have argued that their connection was only platonic, others have claimed that it was a public affair. The critics’ interpretations of Zelda and Jozan’s relationship are diverse, owing to the fact that even the protagonists’ versions differ. Scott and Zelda both had the desire to make their lives appear interesting to other people, so they created various versions of Zelda’ summer affair, and each time they told it, they added new things and the story became more and more detailed.

Scott’s version appears in *Tender Is the Night*, while Zelda’s is depicted in *Save Me The Waltz*. Scott reported some episodes about that summer even in his Ledger, these, however, are not to be considered fully reliable due to his tendency to fictionalize his life. Scott didn’t realize how significant her relationship with Jozan had been for Zelda; he didn’t even try to understand what had pushed her into the arms of another man, he was refusing to understand her discomfort and unhappiness. There were several factors that led Zelda to begin this relationship, but the one that stands out as the most likely is that she was trying to regain her freedom outside the marriage. She decided to marry Scott but we can hardly expect that a woman whose personality was the emblem of the Flapper would perfectly fit in the role of the model wife. Another quoted option is that it was a mere attempt to reclaim those attentions that Scott gave her during their courtship and

first years of marriage and that he was now negating her. The infidelity does not seem to be a major issue as long as it is just Scott having brief flings, but when it is Zelda who betrays him here, something in their relationship irreparably breaks down. Maybe she tolerate better his attentions for other women while Scott, with a very masculinist optic, could not stand the fact that someone that was not him could have possessed her. What is certain about this situation is that “Fitzgerald wishes to erase the affair, as Gatsby wishes to erase Daisy’s years with Tom”³¹ unfortunately, exactly as in the case of his character, this turns out to be impossible.

From there, in fact, things started to fall into pieces: they moved to Paris, where Zelda began ballet lessons, Scott continued to work on his novel and became closer to Ernest Hemingway.

Zelda was unsatisfied with her life: her marriage was falling apart, she couldn't achieve her own independence, and she was constantly anxious and embarrassed by her husband's drunken behaviour. Cline describes the gradual breakdown of the Fitzgerald marriage as a result of Scott's alcoholism, recriminations, jealousy, and mutual accusations of homosexuality and cheating.

Zelda’s first psychological breakdown in 1930 in Paris worsened their crisis and put a full stop on their fairy-tale. Bryer and Barks managed to retrieve some of Zelda’s letters from this first hospitalization. In two letters³² in particular we can see how the couple kept accusing each other. Scott in his letter accused Zelda of indifference: she was too absorbed in her ballet lessons to take care of her family. He even accused her to be the cause of his alcoholism stating that he drank to bear the fact that she was always sick and absent and he had to take care of everything and everyone. While Zelda in hers went from accusing Scott of having humiliated and destroyed her, to regretting the past and the good times spent together: she was torn between affection and resentment towards Scott. “The confusion is poignant, especially when Zelda begged forgiveness for whatever mysterious part of it was her own fault”³³.

³¹ Bate, *Bright star, green light*, 214.

³² Bryer and Barks, *Dear Scott, Dearest Zelda*, letters 50 and 51, 62-73.

³³ Bryer and Barks, *Dearest Scott, Dearest Zelda*, xxix.

Zelda finally began to show little improvements therefore she was allowed to go out and take some brief vacation with Scott. Her letters' tone changed significantly between the spring and summer of 1931, becoming light-hearted and filled with the greatest love for Scott and their daughter.

The Fitzgerald family returned to the United States and settled in Montgomery after Zelda was finally released from Prangins. This period near her family was beneficial for Zelda and her mental health. Since finances were limited Scott decided to accept to work as a screenwriter for Hollywood and consequently had to move there. Zelda's father passed away after Scott left, which led to resurgence of her health issues, although she handled her loss reasonably well.

Zelda was finally able to spend a lot of time with Scottie while Scott was in Hollywood, and in an effort to make up for the time that had been wasted, she composed stories, children's plays, and made paper dolls for her. This allowed Zelda and Scottie to develop a unique bond. Scott was very busy in Hollywood so he did not write very often, in *Dear Scott, Dearest Zelda* we can find instead a large number of letters from Zelda dating from that period of time. She wrote him daily describing how empty and hopeless her life was without him, how patiently she was awaiting his return, counting the days that separated them. These letters are a pure expression of her love for Scott and Scottie.

Zelda was admitted to Phipps Clinic in February 1932 after her mental state drastically deteriorated after Christmas. Zelda was required to follow a strict and balanced routine during her stay in this clinic. This allowed her to increase her productivity, so within few months she completed her first autobiographical novel *Save Me the Waltz*. Scott was furious, as in her novel Zelda treated the same themes that he was treating in his next work. He was also extremely envious of her ability to write so quickly, whereas he had been working on his novel for nearly ten years. There is an excerpt³⁴ of a letter that Scott wrote to Dr. Squires, who was in charge of Zelda's therapies at Phipps, which enables us to examine his response to Zelda's novel in detail. He was quite enraged and asserted that Zelda had largely plagiarized his novel. Furthermore, he acknowledged that he had revised it and urged Zelda to remove some passage, particularly those that portrayed the male protagonist -inspired by Scott- in a negative light. We can see in letter 126 how

³⁴ Bryer and Barks, *Dear Scott, Dearest Zelda*, 164.

devoted Zelda was to him; she would have done anything he asked, even edit her book, to make Scott appear respectable.

In May 1932 Scott rented a house called La Paix in Towson, Maryland. Zelda began a long and steady shift from Phipps Clinic to her new home since her health was clearly improving, and she moved in there permanently in June 1932. Unfortunately, their relationship began to deteriorate again: Scott drank heavily, was always tired, and contracted tuberculosis, while Zelda couldn't stand his drinking and hypervigilance. Scott indeed scheduled her days in a very strict manner. Three letters from Scott written during this period have survived, it is not known if he actually sent them to Zelda, but we can suppose that he wrote them in response to her request for more freedom and independence. He attempted to explain to Zelda that he was afraid she would repeat her pattern of manic work, so he created this strict routine for her safety. In one of those letters he wrote "The best protection is the schedule and then the schedule and again the schedule, and you'll get strong without knowing it".³⁵

On May 28, 1933, Zelda and Scott decided to hold a discussion at La Paix, with a stenographer and Dr. Rennie, who was in charge with Zelda's therapies at Phipps, serving as moderator. Sally Cline summarized the 114 page transcription in her book. They began by accusing each other: Scott blamed Zelda for the delay in publishing his novel, claiming that her illness distracted him from working. Zelda, on the other side, accused him of being constantly drunk and limiting her mothering role. The topic of their discussion then soon shifted to Zelda's book. Throughout the entire meeting, Scott spoke in an arrogant tone and repeatedly discounted Zelda's writing by referring to her novel as "the thing" or "that thing". Since their novels covered similar topics and episodes of their lives together, Scott mostly accused Zelda of plagiarism saying that she was not allowed to use that material because, as he affirmed, "That is all my material, None of it is your material"³⁶. Scott believed that because he was a professional novelist and she was only a third-rate writer, Zelda's entire life belonged to him for literary purposes: He felt he had the right to control her because of his income. One of Zelda's key traits continues to stand out throughout this lengthy discussion: her desire for independence. She was determined not

³⁵ Bryer and Barks, *Dear Scott, Dearest Zelda*, letter 130, 176.

³⁶ Cline, *Her Voice in Paradise*, 327.

to quit writing because she needed to get money to support herself and be financially independent from Scott. She even recommended they seek a divorce so that she could finally leave him. In fact, when he asked her why she did not want to stop writing, she responded “Because I don’t want to live with you. Because I want to live some place where I can be my own self”³⁷. Scott's opposition to any possibility that Zelda might forge her own identity is yet another example of his controlling tendencies. Zelda's mental state rapidly deteriorated from that point on, and a few days after this talk, she started systematically burning her clothes³⁸.

In February 1934 Zelda was readmitted to Phipps due to her third breakdown. She showed no signs of improvement this time, so her doctors advised Scott to move her to Craig House. Between March 1934 and May 1934 both Scott and Zelda accomplished significant professional successes: Scott published *Tender is the Night* while Zelda held the first exhibition of her artworks in New York with Scott’s help. Zelda, although she was deeply upset that Scott had based the book entirely on her mental health issues, constantly comforted and motivate Scott about his book, which had gotten some unfavourable reviews. She also frequently wrote about her own writing ambitions; but she was unable to complete another work without Scott's and her doctors’ approval. The fact that she felt guilty about all the money Scott was spending on her lodging and therapies was another recurrent theme in her letter from Craig House.

Zelda was moved to the Sheppard and Enoch Pratt Hospital in May 1934. She was in a terrible condition; she was extremely unhappy, apathetic, and confused. Scott made an unsuccessful attempt to persuade her to organize her work in an effort to restore her sanity.

Zelda experienced acute depression and a religious obsession between April 1936 and April 1939 while she was a patient at Highland Hospital. While religion deeply comforted Zelda, it also kept her apart from her family and friends. Scott discussed this in a letter³⁹ to Sarah and Gerald Murphy, who were close friends of him and Zelda, outlining his

³⁷ Cline, *Her Voice in Paradise*, 330.

³⁸ Cline, *Her Voice in Paradise*, 334.

³⁹ Bryer and Barks, *Dear Scott, Dearest Zelda*, 217.

thoughts on the matter defining himself as “the only liaison agent who could make the world tangible for her”.

Scott's health worsened throughout those years as well. He worried constantly about Zelda's condition and his finances, so he poured all of his stress on alcohol as usual. He had a severe case of tuberculosis, which caused his physical condition to rapidly deteriorate. From 1935 to 1937, Scott experienced a protracted depressive episode during which his sense of self collapsed. This phase also coincided with a brief period of low productivity. As Scott and Zelda couldn't care for their daughter since they were both sick, the Ober family decided to look after Scottie. In fact, while Scottie wasn't in school, she stayed with them. Zelda started a new treatment plan and made only very modest improvement; her letters from Highland are filled with descriptions of the surrounding landscape, flashbacks to the past, and huge gratitude for Scott.

Scott relocated a second time to Hollywood in July 1937 to work as a screenwriter again where he met Sheilah Graham. There, he made a commitment to working his way out of debt while still making payments to keep Zelda in the hospital and Scottie in school. Because of his ongoing health issues, Scott was unable to maintain his sobriety. Many people attribute Scott's last three years of relative happiness and success to Sheilah's unwavering support and loyalty to him.

He remained committed, though, to doing everything in his power to give Zelda something to look forward to. Scott tried to arrange visits from Scottie and trips to Montgomery, took Zelda on vacations, and visited her anytime he could. Scott also persuaded Dr. Carol to continue allowing Zelda to take vacations because he was concerned that she would become hopeless if she had nothing to look forward to. Zelda wanted to leave Highland⁴⁰ and kept expressing her dissatisfaction with the situation there despite sharing the enthusiasm for Scott's new job and wishing Scott success and happiness. This frustration was primarily caused by the several trips she took during that year, which disrupted her hospital schedule and made her dissatisfied with it. The fact that Zelda was successful on these trips seemed to her and her family to be evidence that she was prepared to leave. They pressed Scott and Zelda's doctors to let her go, but they

⁴⁰ Bryer and Barks, *Scott, Dearest Zelda*, letters 193-201, 247-256.

refused. Scott worked on three movies in 1938, and Zelda promptly congratulated him and offered her unwavering support⁴¹.

Scott accompanied Zelda to Cuba in April 1939, but the trip was a failure since Scott was always drunk. Zelda had to bring Scott back to New York City and arrange for his hospitalization; Scott received two letters from Zelda before she left New York City for Highland Hospital, in which she assured him that he was safe and expressed concern for his health⁴².

This was the last time they saw one another. They continued to communicate through letters from April 1939 until December 1940, during which time they shared many aspirations and ambitions for their future.

Their letters' angry tones were fully replaced with ones of concern. Zelda wrote him frequently because she was anxious about his health but she never again brought up drinking or old conflicts in her letters. In an effort to reassure Zelda as much as possible, Scott occasionally minimized his health issues⁴³ whereas other times he over-dramatized them.

Scott began to come under pressure from Zelda and her family to let her leave the hospital in the fall of 1939. The continuous interruptions irritated Scott, who was ill and facing severe financial difficulties, and his letters gradually took on a very hostile tone⁴⁴. As winter drew near, Zelda's letters once more shifted from the summer's positive tone to one of loneliness. She was also deeply affected by Scott's letters, and they once more launched accusations against one another⁴⁵.

Zelda finally returned to Montgomery and moved in with her mother after leaving Highland Hospital in April 1940. She was finally free, for the first time after almost ten years she was able to organize her life. The final years of the Fitzgerald marriage revealed the couple at their best in fact they settled in a sort of routine and wrote regularly to each other. Zelda's letters began to serve as a record of her numerous activities and the times she spent with Scottie. Also, she reassured Scott that she enjoyed her mother's home, its

⁴¹ Bryer and Barks, *Dear Scott, Dearest Zelda*, letter 196, 251.

⁴² Bryer and Barks, *Dear Scott, Dearest Zelda*, letters 218-219-220, 279.

⁴³ Bryer and Barks, *Dear Scott, Dearest Zelda*, letters 225-226-228, 286-287- 289.

⁴⁴ Bryer and Barks, *Dear Scott, Dearest Zelda*, letter 251, 312.

⁴⁵ Bryer and Barks, *Dear Scott, Dearest Zelda*, letters 252-253, 315-316.

gardens, and the little southern town where she was born, but she also expressed concern about Scott's health problems. Especially in the last year of Scott's life while he was working on a new novel, she never once hesitated in her unwavering support for Scott and his work.

The letters they wrote to one other from late 1939 to December 1940 show us two responsible adults who cared about the future of their daughter. In fact, their letters' emphasis switched from their personal relationship to their responsibility as absent parents to Scottie's well-being and education. Despite the Fitzgeralds were de facto separated, but still legally married, nevertheless they continued to share a strong bond. Scott wrote in September 1935 ““anche oggi mi sento più vicino a lei che a qualsiasi essere umano.. Non mi dispiacerebbe se, tra qualche anno, Zelda ed io potessimo rannicciarci insieme sotto una pietra in qualche vecchio cimitero di queste parti.”⁴⁶. The tragic end of their relationship was caused by the fact that “erano troppo vicini: vicini come furono raramente esseri umani; e l'eccesso della vicinanza tra gli dei e gli uomini, come tra gli uomini e le donne, brucia i cuori e le vite”⁴⁷

Scott Fitzgerald died of a heart attack on Saturday, December 21, 1940. Since he was no longer a practicing Catholic, church authorities denied him the permission to rest in St. Mary's cemetery near his father as he wished. Scott was buried in Rockville Union Cemetery, only thirty people attended his funeral, Zelda was too ill to be present. After Scott's death Zelda lived intermittently between her mother's home and Highland to which she returned one last time in November 1947. On the night of 10 March 1948 the building where she lived caught fire, and Zelda and eight other patients perished in the flames. Zelda was buried with Scott in Rockville. Over the years an untold number of flowers had been placed on the grave, Zelda always loved flowers since “quei simboli colorati le davano un piacere grandissimo e quasi la consolavano della sventura”⁴⁸.

This is the tragic epilogue of an equally tragic and tumultuous relationship. Eleonor Lanhan, Scott and Zelda's granddaughter, perfectly summarized their love:

⁴⁶ Citati, *La morte della farfalla*, 92-93.

⁴⁷ Citati, *La morte della farfalla*, 23.

⁴⁸ Citati, *La morte della farfalla*, 112-113.

“I believe, as my mother, that Scott and Zelda stayed in love until the day they died. Perhaps it became an impossible and impractical love—part nostalgia and part hope. Perhaps it was a longing for a reunion of all the best qualities in each other that they had once celebrated, and the happy times they shared, but it was a bond that united them forever”.⁴⁹

2.2. *Zelda: The Muse behind Fitzgerald’s literary production*

When Zelda Sayre agreed to marry Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald at the age of twenty, she unwittingly secured her future as the quintessential muse, artist's wife, and eventually condemned woman. It is impossible to deny Zelda Fitzgerald's impact on her husband and his work, whether in the capacity of muse, assistant, or collaborator. From the very beginning of their relationship the Fitzgeralds assumed a sort of mythical aura at the public image, so much that “the two of them might have stepped, sophisticated and charming, from the pages of any of the Fitzgerald books.”⁵⁰ They themselves felt “come bambini penetrati ‘in una grande e luminosa rimessa inesplorata’. Non sapevano se erano reali, o personaggi di un romanzo.”⁵¹ In fact Zelda will be the inspiration for many characters in the works of Fitzgerald.

Fitzgerald, with considerable assistance from his wife, did offer through his novels an image of a “modern young woman who was spoiled, sexually liberated, self-centred, fun-loving and magnetic”⁵² which he called the “flapper”. Zelda Fitzgerald perfectly embodied the figure of the flapper which is regarded as one of the great authentic characters in American history. Her opinion on woman’s role was typical of the flapper: “Pensava che il compito delle donne non fosse di assicurare la quiete, come le avevano insegnato in famiglia, ma quello di offendere, disturbare, provocare disastri. Così Zelda suscitava sorpresa, ammirazione e terrore tra i suoi corteggiatori: in primo luogo per Fitzgerald, per il quale rappresentò sempre il più divertente e tremendo degli spettacoli.

⁴⁹ Bryer and Barks, *Dear Scott, Dearest Zelda*, xxxi.

⁵⁰ Prigozy Ruth, 1st ed., “Introduction: Scott, Zelda and the culture of celebrity”, *The Cambridge Companion to F. Scott Fitzgerald*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 17.

⁵¹ Citati, *La morte della Farfalla*, 27.

⁵² Sanderson R., “Women in Fitzgerald’s fiction”, *The Cambridge Companion to F. Scott Fitzgerald*, 143.

[...] Era la regina delle farfalle. Sembrava conoscere soltanto la superficie della vita bevendo gioiosamente 'la spuma in cima alla bottiglia'.⁵³

The flapper was a virtual emblem of American modernity that was emulated throughout much of the Western World during the Jazz Age. Scott Fitzgerald openly acknowledged his dependence on his wife as a source of creative inspiration for his female characters throughout their marriage, refusing to downplay the significance of her to his writing; in 1921 Scott said in an interview: "Indeed, I married the heroine of my stories. I would not be interested in any other woman".⁵⁴

As his aesthetic inspiration or prototype, Zelda actively participated in a number of publicity strategies, including photographs, articles, and interviews, which helped to promote Scott Fitzgerald as the flapper's inventor. In these interviews, it was frequently emphasized that her husband's novels included the fictional counterpart of Zelda. Supporting this Zelda admitted, during an interview in 1923, that among all her husband's heroines her favourites were the ones who were like her. Moreover, Zelda added: "that's why I love Rosalind in *This Side of Paradise*...Rosalind was the original flapper".⁵⁵

Rosalind Connage, the main female character of *This Side of Paradise*, actually was a combination of features from several women that Fitzgerald knew, therefore it is incorrect to claim that she was inspired exclusively by Zelda. Rosalind is depicted as a flirtatious young woman, pursued by many suitors, with a rebellious and vivacious personality. Moreover, "Scott uses both Zelda's peaches-and-cream complexion and her 'eternal kissable mouth, small, slightly sensual, and utterly disturbing' for his heroine Rosalind"⁵⁶.

One can see the similarity between Zelda and Rosalind especially in the relationship with men: "only two types of men can resist Rosalind's allure: 'dull men usually afraid of her cleverness and intellectual men are usually afraid of her beauty'. This was also true of Zelda."⁵⁷

Both women battled to find a sense of meaning and identity in the fast-paced Jazz Age world and they had as well a difficult relationship with their respective lovers. There are

⁵³ Citati, *La morte della Farfalla*, 13.

⁵⁴ Sanderson, "Women in Fitzgerald's fiction", 148.

⁵⁵ Sanderson, "Women in Fitzgerald's fiction", 149.

⁵⁶ Cline, *Her Voice in Paradise*, 31.

⁵⁷ Bate, *Bright star, green light*, 65.

also some key differences between the two women, for example Zelda was more interested in pursuing creative interests, whilst Rosalind was more concerned with obtaining social and financial success. Rosalind Connage exemplifies Fitzgerald's female characters' propensity to be more realistic than their idealistic admirers.

Although Rosalind and other female characters were depicted in Fitzgerald's early novels with considerable compassion, he would later “gradually de-romanticized the girl and de-emphasized the glory of the quest”.⁵⁸

Considering that Scott's next novel, *The Beautiful and Damned*, was written during the early years of his marriage with Zelda, some readers may have hoped that it would provide unique insights into the Fitzgerald's house life. The media supported that expectation by publishing images of the young couple with their new-born daughter Scottie and interviewing them about their private lives.

Instead, the book illustrated how Fitzgerald's fictional characters Anthony Patch and “his beautiful young wife [Gloria] are wrecked on the shoals of dissipation”⁵⁹. He also said to Scottie that “he and Zelda enjoyed their life together much more than Gloria and Anthony had”⁶⁰ as an evidence that the fictional couple was not completely based on the Fitzgerald marriage.

Gloria Gilbert genuinely embodied many flapper traits as she refused the conventional position of the motherly self-effacement, which makes her even more like Zelda, whom, as Sally Cline points out in her book, knew so little about domestic life and lacked housekeeping skills⁶¹. According to Cline, “Fitzgerald told Scottie that Gloria had a more frivolous and certainly more vulgar nature than Zelda. Though Scott admitted he had drawn on events in their married life he denied any real resemblance between Gloria and Zelda except in facial beauty and style of speech”⁶². Anthony acknowledged that he needed Gloria as his inspiration, just as Scott had done with Zelda.

⁵⁸ Sanderson, “Women in Fitzgerald's fiction”, 150.

⁵⁹ Sanderson, “Women in Fitzgerald's fiction”, 152.

⁶⁰ Cline, *Her Voice in Paradise*, 121.

⁶¹ Cline, *Her Voice in Paradise*, 106.

⁶² Cline, *Her Voice in Paradise*, 121.

It is possible to view *The Beautiful and Damned* as a preparatory work for *The Great Gatsby*. Daisy Buchanan, the main character of this book, holds a key position within the American literary tradition that favours morally dubious female characters.

Many academics agreed that Daisy Buchanan was modelled on Zelda Fitzgerald together with Ginevra King, who was romantically involved with Scott from 1915 and 1917. Daisy and Zelda were both Southern belles who were renowned for their beauty and impulsiveness and, above all, for leading dazzling but ultimately unfulfilling lives. Zelda wrote in a letter to Scott a sentence that partly recalls Daisy's attitude, who tries in every way to maintain her youth, "All I want is to be very young always and very irresponsible and to feel that my life is my own – to be happy and die in my own way to please myself"⁶³. Zelda and *The Great Gatsby* are linked since its very beginning, "with a dedication 'Once again to Zelda'"⁶⁴.

Zelda had pronounced a sentence immediately after she gave birth to Scottie: "I hope it's beautiful and fool-a beautiful little fool". Scott, who was in the delivery room with her, unscrupulously recorded this comment in his Ledger and recycled it for his novel. In one passage, while talking about the birth of her daughter, Daisy says 'I'm glad it's a girl. And I hope she'll be a fool-that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool'⁶⁵ : this makes the indissoluble link between these two women even more clear to the readers. Moreover, while writing Daisy's two betrayals of Gatsby, Scott was definitely inspired by Zelda's broken engagement to him in 1919 and her summer romance with the French aviator Joze which he never forgave her for. Furthermore, the fictional character Gatsby, as Scott, was intrigued by the fact that Daisy was loved by many men, exactly like Zelda was when she and Scott met in the summer of 1918.⁶⁶

While Daisy Buchanan is often seen as a reflection of Zelda Fitzgerald, there are also notable differences between the two women. Daisy is portrayed as being more passive and submissive than Zelda, who was known for her assertiveness and quest for independence. Additionally, Daisy is described as flighty and superficial, whereas Zelda was known for her intelligence and wit. Real life has struck Zelda with a force that Daisy

⁶³ Bate, *Bright star, green light*, 76.

⁶⁴ Bate, *Bright star, green light*, 235.

⁶⁵ Cline, *Her Voice in Paradise*, 116.

⁶⁶ Cline, *Her Voice in Paradise*, 50.

will never know, as she will always be crystallized in the pages of a book. Beauty and youth for Zelda are gone ““l'angelo con le ali un po' bruciacchiate”, come uno dei suoi psichiatri chiamava affettuosamente Zelda, era tornato a Montgomery, nella vecchia casa della madre. Non guarì mai del tutto, e spesso ritornava nel carcere protettivo del Highland Hospital nella Carolina del Nord, dove era già stata curata per anni. Era cambiata. Non aveva più nulla del fuoco, dei colori e della luce che l'avevano segnata nella giovinezza.[...]. Sembrava vecchia”.⁶⁷

It's worth remembering that Scott spent nearly ten years writing *Tender Is the Night*, in which he explored the themes of adultery, homosexuality and mental health. Scott and Zelda experienced a serious marital crisis during those ten years, and as his wife's mental health problems worsened, he was forced to finance for her treatments at the best health facilities in the world.

This private situation inspired Scott while writing his novel, Fitzgerald in fact explored this emotional and artistic crisis as a writer. In many ways, *Tender is the Night* can be seen as F. Scott Fitzgerald's attempt to make sense of the complex and often turbulent nature of his relationship with Zelda. Tom Coleman has summarized the plot of *Tender* in the following way: “In addition to being the narrative of the gradual deterioration of a brilliant but schizophrenic young doctor under the harmful cumulative impact of marriage to a beautiful and extremely wealthy and neurotic young woman, it is the story of Nicole Warren's long journey from insanity to sanity, from mental illness to mental health. Indeed, *Tender Is the Night* is the story of Dick's loss and Nicole's rediscovery of identity”.⁶⁸

Nicole Diver in *Tender Is the Night* is a complex and enigmatic character who is often seen as a reflection of Zelda Fitzgerald. This fictional character indeed reflects Zelda's own struggles with mental illness and the pressures of living under the public eye. Like Zelda, Nicole is a talented and beautiful woman who suffers from various emotional and psychological issues, including depression and anxiety.

⁶⁷ Citati, *La morte della farfalla*, 111.

⁶⁸ Tom C. Coleman III. “Nicole Warren Diver and Scott Fitzgerald: the girl and the egotist.” *Studies in the novel*, vol 3, no. 1 (1971): 34–43, 36.

Many of Nicole's illness's symptoms derived from Zelda's mental breakdowns. However, there is one crucial distinction between Zelda's and Nicole's mental disorders: While Nicole's was the surface manifestation of a surface trauma, Zelda's was the external embodiment of an inside psychosis.

It is evident that Zelda Fitzgerald had a substantial influence on the female characters in F. Scott Fitzgerald's writing. Nevertheless, there are many letters and anecdotes demonstrating that Zelda was both pleased and annoyed by her husband's use of private episodes of her life as material for his writing.

2.3. *Scott Fitzgerald's plagiarism of Zelda's writing*

Many people are unaware that Zelda Fitzgerald played a major role in her husband's career as a writer. She was not only his main inspiration but Scott also took her writings and ideas for his novels.

This plagiarism roots early in their relationship, we can already find quotes from Zelda's letters to Scott in his first novel *This Side of Paradise*. Sally Cline provided a striking example of this in her book by pointing out that Zelda wrote to Scott, in the spring of 1919, that women should "awake to the fact that their excuse and explanation is the necessity for a disturbing element among men – [if they did] they'd be much happier, and the men much more miserable – which is exactly what they need for the improvement of things in general"⁶⁹.

This phrase was appropriated by Scott and employed in the description of his female protagonist Rosalind in *This Side of Paradise*: "She once told a roomful of her mother's friends that the only excuses for women was the necessity for a disturbing element among men"⁷⁰. Scott included material from another letter from Zelda in which she described one of her frequent visits to the Oakwood Cemetery, a location that fascinated her so much. *This Side of Paradise's* penultimate page has Scott's addition of Zelda's graveyard description⁷¹.

⁶⁹ Cline, *Her Voice in Paradise*, 49.

⁷⁰ Cline, *Her Voice in Paradise*, 49.

⁷¹ Cline, *Her Voice in Paradise*, 65.

It is unknown how Zelda responded to Scott's obvious plagiarism, although given her youth and lack of professional experience, it is likely that she was more charmed by his interest in her words than angered by their usage. She trusted Scott enough over those years to provide him access to her personal journals, which he found so remarkable that he borrowed from them for months. Zelda may not have been aware at the time that, as a result of her tacit consent, Scott acquired and retained ownership of her literary works. According to Cline Scott even “proposed to turn Zelda’s journal into a novelette called *The Diary of a Popular Girl*, asked Nathan to read it” but he changed his mind about the publication of it after Zelda broke their engagement in June 1919.

Even in his short story *The Jelly Bean* and his novel *The Beautiful and Damned* published in 1922, Scott used Zelda’s journal excerpts. Scott reportedly incorporated passages from novels and unfinished projects from 1919 while composing this book. One of these was *The Diary of a Literary Failure*, this featured the well-known *Diary of a Popular Girl* which was meant to be based on Zelda’s diary.

When she published her first signed article, "Friend Husband's Latest", which was a review of her husband latest novel, Zelda denounced for the first time Scott's plagiarism: “On one page I recognize a portion of an old diary of mine which mysteriously disappeared shortly after my marriage, and also scraps of letters, which, though considerably edited, sound to me very familiar”⁷². She even observed that “Mr. Fitzgerald – I believe that is how he spells his name – seems to believe that plagiarism begins at home”⁷³. Zelda’s journals were lost, but Scott's appropriation proof was preserved. It was no longer a matter of inspiration, but rather a straightforward appropriation of Zelda's words, which he then merely modified.

Zelda was very slow to catch on to this unrecognized borrowing, but once she did, she began to feel bitter that her contribution to Scott's success had not been acknowledged or rewarded. While Scott did acknowledge his literary aid to Zelda in his Ledger, he did not maintain a similar record of Zelda's support to him. This was because they were professional and amateur, respectively. “He used Zelda as a model, trusted her editorial skills, leaned on her literary judgements and confessed he should stop ‘referring

⁷² Matthew J. Bruccoli, *The Collected Writings of Zelda Fitzgerald*. (New York: Scribners, 1991), 388.

⁷³ Bruccoli, *Collected Writings*, 388.

everything to Zelda – a terrible habit ought to be referred to anybody until it’s finished”⁷⁴. Scott's name appeared on the majority of Zelda's published articles and short pieces, which was yet another way he appropriated her work. He justified this by claiming that because he was a professional author, such works would generate more profits and money.

Scott's plagiarism culminated while working on *Tender is the Night*. Scott shamelessly appropriated Zelda's letters, her anxieties, and her punishments for his novel, taking advantage of every piece of information he had discovered concerning her mental breakdowns: “her madness became his new material”⁷⁵. We are unaware of Zelda's response to discovering the chapters of her husband's book that exposed her mental state to the world, but according to Cline, they started quarrelling as soon as they got to Florida in 1932, and as a result, Zelda's eczema spots started to reappear on her body, showing that she was in real pain. Zelda had witnessed her husband's uncaring usage of her most hopeless and private hospital letters for the first time: everyone could now read her deeply personal thoughts in that novel.

When she arrived at Prangins Clinique, in Switzerland, she wrote to Scott that she was “thoroughly humiliated and broken if that was what you wanted”. Scott used this sentence full of melancholy in *Tender Is the Night* where Nicola, the female heroine, writes to Dick River: “I am completely broken and humiliated, if that was what they wanted”⁷⁶.

Another example of Scott’s appropriation in *Tender* is: “It seems to me if this farcicle situation is apparent to one as sick as me it should be apparent to you”⁷⁷. He took this sentence from a letter that Zelda wrote to him where she said “The farcicle element of this situation is too apparent for even a person as hopeless and debilitated as I am”⁷⁸. After living months without any kind of improvement, and consequently losing any hope, Zelda wrote to him in a letter: “I will more than gladly welcome any alienist you may suggest”. Scott copied this into his novel almost without making any changes: “I would gladly welcome any alienist you may suggest”. Zelda admitted in one letter that she was

⁷⁴ Cline, *Her Voice in Paradise* 138.

⁷⁵ Cline, *Her Voice in Paradise*, 303.

⁷⁶ Cline, *Her Voice in Paradise*, 263.

⁷⁷ Cline, *Her Voice in Paradise*, 338.

⁷⁸ Cline, *Her Voice in Paradise*, 338.

“completely humiliated and broken”, Scott’s character Nicole was “completely broken and humiliated” too. A further evidence could be when Zelda criticized Scott for not guiding her before getting sick: “the obligation is, after all, with the people who understand, and the blind, the necessity, must be led”. As one of the blind, she felt “it is not astonishing that I should look on you with unfriendly eyes”. This letter was recycled by Scott to appear in *Tender* as a letter from Nicole: “I kept waiting for some one to tell me. It was the duty of some one who understood. The blind must be led”⁷⁹.

Scott "validated" his book by providing accounts from Malmaison, Valmont, and Prangins, as well as specific quotes from Bleuler's diagnosis of Zelda. Zelda acknowledged that she was rather upset by the novel while she was at the Phipps Clinic remarking that “What made me mad was he made the girl so awful and kept on reiterating how she had ruined his life and I couldn’t help identifying myself with her because she had so many of my experiences”. Although she never specifically mentioned how the father-daughter rape in the fictional story affected her, she firmly insisted that any author has the right to interpret. Even though it was likely to make Zelda's mental instability worse, Scott took a chance while knowing the great suffering this novel would cause her. During all their years together, he always felt the right to use that material because it was his property as a professional writer and as a husband who provided for her health care.

⁷⁹ Cline, *Her Voice in Paradise*, 275.

CHAPTER III

ZELDA'S LITERARY WORK

3.1. Overview

Zelda Fitzgerald had a twelve-year publishing career: from 1922 to 1934. She published 10 short stories, one novel, one play and several articles. Her own marriage, as we have already seen in the previous chapters, put a strain on her writing career. Being the wife of a famous novelist made it easier for Zelda to have her works published but, at the same time, it also prevented her from becoming a professional author. It is important to mention that Zelda's most productive period, in all her three disciplines, coincided with the beginning of her mental breakdown and her hospitalizations.

In 1925 her first serious short story appeared in the *Chicago Sunday Tribune* but she received not credit at all for it. The story was in fact published under Scott's name and he shared just the 10% of its earnings with Zelda.

During 1927 Zelda wrote several articles, all of them were revised by Scott. The first article, "The Changing Beauty of Park Avenue", was published in *Harper Bazaar* in January 1928 and it was credited to both Scott and Zelda. The same happened for other two articles, "Looking Back Eight Years" and "Who Can Fall in Love after Thirty?", which were published in 1928 as well. The fourth article, "Paint and Powder", was also written entirely by Zelda but it was published under Scott's name alone. This editorial choice was justified by both Scott and his editor as a sort of marketing strategy, but actually it was most likely an attempt to hide Scott's poor literary production during those years. Zelda's most famous articles were "Friend husband's latest", a review of her husband's novel *The Beautiful and Damned*, and "Eulogy of the Flapper".

During the winter between 1928 and 1929 Zelda was commissioned by *College Humor* with a series of short stories about the lives of six American women. The six stories have a common theme, "Women's failure to achieve a balance between work and marriage"⁸⁰.

⁸⁰ Cline, *Her Voice in Paradise*, 228.

The majority of Zelda's short stories were published either under Scott's name or under both Scott and Zelda's names. Specifically, "The Original Follies Girl", "Poor Working girl", "Southern Girl", "The Girl the Prince Liked" and "The Girl with Talent" were all printed under both Fitzgeralds' names. Instead the last short story, entitled "A Millionaire's Girl", was sold to *Saturday Evening Post* in 1930 and it was credited only to Scott.

The last four short stories that Zelda wrote are "A Couple of Nuts", "The Continental Angle" "Other Names for Roses" and "Miss Ella", which was her most accomplished short story. These three short stories were all published under Zelda's name.

After she published her first novel, *Save Me the Waltz*, in 1932 Scott was enraged because she entered his writing territory and accused her of plagiarism so he forbade her to write a novel again. Scott gave Zelda some restrictions about writing, for example she could not produce anything around the psychiatry theme and all that she wrote should be revised and approved by him. During the summer of 1932 Zelda wrote her first play, entitled *Scandalabra*, which was produced in 1933. There are two versions of the script, the first one from 1932 has ninety-one pages while the second one, undated, has sixty-one pages. As Matthew J. Bruccoli states in his introduction to the play, Zelda was determinate to hide her work from Scott so he first saw the play at the dress rehearsal and revised the acting script the night before the performance.

After Scott's death Zelda began a second novel, *Caesar's Things*, which remained unfinished. It is an autobiographical novel that covers more or less the same ground as *Save Me the Waltz*, and according to Bruccoli "combines hallucinations or fantasy with narrative; there is also a strain of religiosity"⁸¹.

3.2. *Save Me the Waltz*

In her article "Art as woman's Response and Search: Zelda Fitzgerald's *Save Me the Waltz*" Jacqueline Tavernier-Courbin claims that "Zelda Fitzgerald's novel, *Save Me the*

⁸¹ Bruccoli, Matthew J. *The Collected Writings of Zelda Fitzgerald*, xii.

Waltz, published in October 1932, is still read nowadays, as it was then, for the wrong reason—that is because Zelda was the wife of F. Scott Fitzgerald”⁸².

Zelda Fitzgerald wrote her first novel, *Save Me the Waltz*, while she was hospitalized at Phipps Clinic. Her therapy included introspection and self-analysis which helped her to critically analyse some details of her life. The work heavily draws on autobiographical episodes, covering in general terms many of the private issues that led to Zelda's first mental breakdown in 1930: a dysfunctional marriage, Scott's alcoholism and her obsessive dance practice.

Zelda Fitzgerald wrote her novel in just six weeks, in a furious fit of inspiration, and sent the manuscript directly to Scott's publisher who was so enthusiastic about it that he wanted to publish it immediately, even without Scott's approval. *Save Me the Waltz* was printed in 1932 but it was not the original manuscript, as in fact Scott Fitzgerald had insisted to revise it and had asked Zelda to censor many parts, especially those that might damage his public image. The novel had a negative response from both the public and reviewers, in fact it did not sell many copies and this greatly discouraged Zelda.

The novel's plot can be divided into four sections and it follows the life of Alabama Beggs, a young lady from a wealthy Southern family. Throughout the novel we can notice many similarities between Alabama's and Zelda's lives.

In the first part the plot describes Alabama's rebellious girlhood and her relationship with her family. Her father, Judge Beggs, is an authoritarian and old-fashioned man, her mother Millie is a loyal woman. Also the loving relationship between Alabama and her older sisters, Dixie and Joan, is described. Moreover, the novel includes the description of the first meeting between Alabama and the painter David Knight, who stands for Scott Fitzgerald. David's big dream is to move to New York and become a famous painter, and Alabama sees in her engagement with him her big opportunity to escape from the suffocating calm of the South.

In the second part we see the newly married couple in New York. Due to David's early celebrity they become a famous couple within the New York society. Shortly after their

⁸² Jacqueline Tavernier-Courbin, “Art as woman's Response and Search: Zelda Fitzgerald's *Save Me the Waltz*”, *Southern Literary Journal* 11:2 (1979), 23.

daughter's birth, they take a trip to the French Riviera. Here David works all day and often leaves Alabama alone and bored. She soon becomes infatuated with the French aviator Jacques Chevre-Feuille, but he does not want her to leave David for him so they soon breakup. When the couple moves to Paris, David starts a romance with a beautiful movie actress and this deeply disturbs Alabama. In an effort to bring order to her life and avoid her marital problems Alabama begins to take ballet lessons in order to become a professional ballerina.

In the third part there is a peculiar description of Alabama's commitment to her ballet classes and her brutal trainings. Madame, her ballet teacher, has become the centre of her life and David accuses her of ignoring her responsibilities as a wife and mother. Alabama's efforts and determination soon pay off as she is offered a solo role with the San Carlo Opera Ballet Company in Naples, on a monthly salary.

In the fourth and final part Alabama accepts the offer and moves to Naples where she lives alone, without David and Bonnie, completely independent. After a brief success as a ballerina she is forced to give up on her career due to a foot infection. The couple returns to the deep south to visit Alabama's father who is dying. Even though things in the South are still the same and haven't changed since Alabama departed, yet they seem very different to her because she looks at them from another perspective. The novel concludes with the protagonist realizing her unbreakable bond with her roots.

3.2.1. An Autobiographical Novel?

Alabama Beggs and David Knight clearly are the literary alter egos of Zelda and Scott Fitzgerald. Zelda and Alabama are both Southern Belles who struggle to stick to that role. At a certain point both of them do not feel comfortable in the southern society anymore and a desire to escape begins to arise in them. When Zelda and Alabama meet their respective lovers they are immediately attracted to them: Scott and David come from more dynamic and exciting societies, they are both ambitious men who promise to their ladies to take them away from the old traditions of the South and take them into a more modern reality, in New York.

Alabama, when she first meets David, is a young girl trying to find her true identity. David instead immediately asserts his dominance and identity as a recognizable artist by taking

the romantic gesture of carving two lovers' names into a tree and using it to establish his superiority over Alabama: "'David,' the legend read, 'David, David, Knight, Knight, Knight, and Miss Alabama Nobody'"⁸³. The exact same thing happened to Zelda: Scott had always belittled her since their first meeting. During their first dates Scott wrote their two names on a wooden beam so that it remained a sign of their passage and their love, but "his name was in bigger letters than hers because, he said, he would one day be very famous and she was Miss Zelda Nobody."⁸⁴

The story of Alabama, who tries to establish her identity through professional ballet dancing, does highlight the author's desire for a creative outlet of her own. Moreover, it reminds us of Zelda's continuous quest for independence from her husband, who had turned her outgoing personality into a literary type, occasionally even using her words by stealing from her letters and diaries.

The last section of the book, in which Alabama accepts an offer to dance a solo debut in *Faust* and starts a professional career as a ballerina in Naples, is a clear evidence of this desire for creative freedom that Zelda had never abandoned. Actually, in real life Zelda declined this offer, maybe because she was afraid to fail or maybe because she was influenced by Scott in making this decision, a choice that she would regret for all her life.

Alabama's decision to take up ballet is a desire for self-definition. Taking up an activity that is essentially feminine allows her to escape from a male-dominated environment. Working on her body and giving it a definite shape also helps Alabama in her longing for completeness, a completeness she is unable to find in herself. In order to establish an identity, Alabama must reappropriate her own body as both a work of art and a subject of it. In the text there are a few passages that testify her progresses, such as "By springtime, she was gladly, savagely proud of the strength of her Negroid hips, convex as boats in a wood carving. The complete control of her body freed her from all fetid consciousness of it"⁸⁵. Under the guidance of Madame she manages to "control [her] muscles"⁸⁶, and in her opinion, this control alone can protect a person's identity and stop an emotional outburst that could lead to the person's dissolution.

⁸³ Tavernier Courbin, "Art as woman's Response and Search", 34.

⁸⁴ Bate, *Bright star, green light*, 55.

⁸⁵ Brucoli, *The Collected Writings, Save Me the Waltz*, 158.

⁸⁶ Brucoli, *The Collected Writings, Save Me the Waltz*, 143.

The worst part is the subsequent betrayal by her own body, which despite Alabama's efforts to make it resilient and resistant to pain, turns out to be vulnerable. After she has danced a solo part in *Faust*, while she is training to perform in *Le Lac des Cygnes* the glue in the box of her pointe shoes cause her blood poisoning which almost cost Alabama her foot.

We can easily draw parallels between the episode of Alabama's diseased foot and Zelda Fitzgerald's dreadful eczema crises, a skin condition that frequently flared up when her husband was around or was due to visit her. During these crises skin becomes overly sensitive and fails to serve as defence against both external and internal emotional assault, converting the body into an agonizing sore.

Dancing provides an outlet for both Zelda and Alabama during their marital crisis. They create their own world through dance; it is the only thing that completely belongs to them, so they invest all of their energies and efforts in it. Unfortunately, as a result of their strict practice, dance becomes an obsession and exhausts their bodies.

What Zelda was trying to fight in her marriage is the focal point of her novel: the fact that she was merely expected to be, to use Scott's own words, "a complementary intelligence", a wife concerned exclusively with the interests of her husband and whose life experience belonged to him.⁸⁷

3.3.3. *Themes and Style*

The title of the novel, *Save Me the Waltz*, already conveys two of its central themes: the woman's urge to detach from her subordinate role in a man's world as well as her need to learn more about herself and reach her limits through the artistic expression of emotions.

"Save me the Waltz" is in fact a casual remark a man might make to a woman at a dance. This short phrase clearly encompasses the respective roles played by the two opposite sexes: the man does the choosing and the asking, while the woman waits to be chosen and

⁸⁷ Tavernier, "Art as woman's Response and Search", 23.

asked⁸⁸. It highlights the active role of men and the passive role of women in the society, against which both Alabama and Zelda fought during their lives. The title also refers to dancing, a theme that is also explored in the second part of the novel. However, while the title refers to a social dance which has to be performed by two people, the dancing in Zelda's novel is that of a woman alone who is trying to artistically express her personal vision of life through performance. Dancing is not only seen as creative of beauty but also as life-giving, as Jacqueline Tavernier-Courbin pointed out in her article: "The dancer, then, is not simply the individual, but the individual performing her life, giving that life a form"⁸⁹.

Since the very first pages Alabama is presented to the readers as a child in search of herself and the medium she primarily uses to find her true identity is the mirror. Alabama looks in mirrors at herself as a young child and as an adolescent. She also spends a lot of time in front of mirrors getting ready to go out as a young adult. The most arduous and painful training to become a professional ballerina is done in front of her ballet studio's large mirrors or the mirrors installed in her Paris apartment. As a child she spent a lot of time in front of the mirror but the reflection she saw was that of a girl whose existence was denied by both her parents. In the first section of the book Alabama asks her mother if as a child she was wild and rebellious, her mother promptly responds "All my children were sweet children"⁹⁰. Alabama obviously knows that her mother is lying, she knows she was incorrigible and wild and was proud of it, but she wants her mother's confirmation. Instead, her mother dismisses what Alabama knows to be true about herself, teaching her daughter to reject what she sees in the mirror and embrace the illusion her mother fabricates.

Judge Beggs, Alabama's father, also comments about the time Alabama spends in front of the mirror saying "She's always looking in the glass at herself"⁹¹, implying the fact that she has a narcissistic attitude. Throughout the novel Alabama also experiences negative episodes with her reflection. She starts to focus on her blemishes and pimples and damages her face by picking it. Moreover Alabama does not recognize parts of herself

⁸⁸ Tavernier, "Art as woman's Response and Search", 32.

⁸⁹ Tavernier, "Art as woman's Response and Search", 32.

⁹⁰ Brucoli, *The Collected writings, Save Me the Waltz*, 2.

⁹¹ Brucoli, *The Collected writings, Save Me the Waltz*, 28.

anymore: “She ran her fingers tentatively inside the breast pocket, staring pessimistically at her reflection. ‘The feet look as if they were somebody else’s’ she said.”⁹². Alabama perceives the image in the mirror as someone who needs to be disciplined and sometimes as someone she does not even recognize. Mirrors are helpful in establishing identity, but spending excessive time in front of one might have negative effects.

This search of her true identity is directly related to her father’s image, who appears in the novel’s opening and closing pages. His power, infallibility, and reputation as the keeper of truth provide the basis for the novel. The book opens with the image of the father being a “living fortress”⁹³, while in the last chapter Judge Beggs is dying therefore his body is described as small and fragile. Alabama has constantly questioned her parents about herself since she was a child, seeking to figure out her true identity. Even when she visits her gravely ill father, she yearns to learn the truth from him but he lacks any answers, leaving only a legacy of numerous uncertainties to her.

Judge Beggs’ affection towards his children is detached and this lack of emotional involvement in Alabama’s early childhood impacts her life greatly. He is not an ideal father, he is an old-fashioned man who still believes in the values of a patriarchal culture. However, his family is not an ideal patriarchal family because it does not include sons.

Tavernier-Courbin makes the following claim about the judge: “The judge is the very embodiment of a society which crippled women by turning them into the object of men’s pleasure or the servants of their household while, at the same time, it protected them”⁹⁴. When Alabama first meets David Knight, he immediately gives her the impression of a brave knight that would rescue the princess from her strict father taking her to the enchanted city of New York. Actually, all that he accomplishes is to confine her in a glass tower, and he even fails to give her the protection that Judge Beggs gave to her: She cannot count on him. David and Alabama’s father are both products of a patriarchal society and they share all the stereotypical male prejudices towards women. David wants to own and control his wife, he cannot accept the thought that she could become independent through dancing, and continues to denigrate her efforts in an attempt to

⁹² Bruccoli, *The Collected writings, Save Me the Waltz*, 21.

⁹³ Bruccoli, *The Collected Writings, Save Me the Waltz*, 9.

⁹⁴ Tavernier, “Art as woman’s Response and Search”, 33.

demoralize her. He takes his friends to watch Alabama practice, treating her as one of his works of art to display to his friends, "He exhibited her to his friends as if she were one of his pictures"⁹⁵. David transforms her body into one of his artworks and this inspires Alabama to produce something on her own rather than be painted by David. "This is a feminist epiphany when she literally is violated by the ownership of the gaze; she responds by rejecting it and by striving to create her own art"⁹⁶. Alabama deliberately and consciously uses her body as an artistic work in which she is both the subject and the object as the story proceeds.

She seeks to use dancing as a way to rebel against David, but her practice quickly turns into an obsession. She finally experiences the dignity of employment through dance, and she also builds up her own world. "Women themselves, having absorbed men's standards completely, have no real sympathy for a woman who wants to break away from these standards"⁹⁷, as Courbin states, so Alabama once again finds herself isolated in the society which she belongs to. Moreover, she is also marginalized in the ballet world, where the other girls are poor and unmarried and admire her wealthy husband: during those years marriage was seen as a way to avoid having to work, they cannot understand why Alabama wants so badly to work.

According to Tavernier-Courbin, this novel is both a search and an answer: it is a complicated, in-depth, and touching depiction of a woman's soul that aims to acknowledge a woman's talent in a world where men have traditionally held the majority of power. The story is actually filtered through the eyes and conscience of a woman in every detail, idea, and emotion in *Save Me the Waltz*, giving the impression that it is set in a female-dominated universe. The story depicts Alabama's development from Southern Belle to Flapper to an artist confident about her talent willing to demonstrate it in a society that prefers she submits to her husband.

The novel is not easy to read as it is not particularly homogeneous: the order of events is not consistent and many significant moments in the main character's life are frequently left out of the narration. For example, there is a passage in which the author narrates about

⁹⁵ Bruccoli, *The Collected Writings, Save Me the Waltz*, 128.

⁹⁶ Tavernier, "Art as woman's Response and Search", 32.

⁹⁷ Tavernier, "Art as woman's Response and Search", 35.

Alabama leaving her hometown and then, all of a sudden, we find her and David spending their honeymoon at the Biltmore Hotel, without even mentioning or describing their wedding.

Her writing is certainly unique, in fact we can spot overlapping imagery, strange word choices, poetic descriptions, as well as spelling and grammar mistakes. Zelda has a true talent in describing the details, her style is marked by a combination of the visual and psychological experience. Zelda is able to communicate through her descriptions all the things that are otherwise difficult to understand.

In the book, she exhibits all the qualities that make her unique, including her ability to make connections between seemingly unrelated ideas and her sensual metaphorical descriptions that highlight minute details.

As we can see in the passage that follows, inanimate objects occasionally come to life even with threatening or otherwise disturbing attitude: “Ancient moats slept bound in tangled honeysuckle; fragile poppies bled the causeways; vineyards caught on the jagged rocks like bits of worn carpet. The baritone of tired medieval bells proclaimed disinterestedly a holiday for time. Lavender bloomed silently over the rocks”⁹⁸.

We may also notice the use of flower imaginary to describe the inner lives and emotions of the characters or to describe the atmosphere. For example, when Alabama and David fall in love “Spring came and shattered its opalescent orioles in wreaths of daffodils. Kissme-at-the-gate clung to its angular branches and the old yards were covered with a child’s version of flowers: snowdrops and *Primula veris*, pussywillow and calendula”, while in Provence there are “fragile poppies bled the causeways; vineyards caught on the jagged rocks like bits of worn carpet”. When the couple moves to Paris flowers are described as fake and artificial exactly like all the people Alabama and Davide meet there: “They made nasturtiums of leather and rubber and wax gardenias and ragged robins out of threads and wires. They manufactured hardy perennials to grow on the meagre soil of shoulder straps and bouquets with long stems for piercing the loamy shadows under the belt”. The flowers Alabama brings to Madame are elegant, sumptuous with an intoxicating perfume: “Yellow roses she bought with her money like Empire satin

⁹⁸ Brucoli, *The Collected Writings, Save Me the Waltz*, 71-72.

brocade, and white lilacs and pink tulips like molded confectioner's frosting, and deep-red roses like a Villon poem, black and velvety as an insect wing, cold blue hydrangeas clean as a newly calcimined wall, the crystalline drops of lily of the valley, a bowl of nasturtiums like beaten brass, anemones pieced out of wash material, and malignant parrot tulips scratching the air with their jagged barbs, and the voluptuous scrambled convolutions of Parma violets. She bought lemon-yellow carnations perfumed with the taste of hard candy, and garden roses purple as raspberry puddings". Moreover "She gave Madame gardenias like white kid gloves and forget-me-nots from the Madeleine stalls, threatening sprays of gladioli, and the soft, even purr of black tulips". Flowers of all kinds had frequently been a part of Zelda's life, not only those that Scott had gifted her but also those that she frequently painted or those that her mother lovingly cultivated in Montgomery.

Where Zelda's work falls short is where she fails to stick to her own agenda and overwrites the writing that veers off course. The reader can become distracted and lose understanding when there are too many visuals.

The novel's most successful stylistic strategy used by Zelda is the utilization of recurrent imagery and metaphors that create a consistent atmosphere. These images are illogic but nevertheless they make sense and develop a few key themes: first, the domestic environment as a depressing, alienating, and occasionally dangerous milieu; second, the need to flee through transcendence, flight, dance, and unreality; and third, the understanding that suffering and dissociation may be the price of following one's dreams.

According to Victoria Sullivan, "Zelda Fitzgerald has captured her schizophrenic vision in the language of metaphor, following her heroine from promising girlhood to adult disillusionment. She leaves David and Alabama both alive and wounded"⁹⁹. The novel provides us with a key to comprehending her life through her special use of images. She tells one side of a double-edged tale, Scott Fitzgerald tells the other in *Tender Is the Night*.

Zelda's novel gives us a privileged, if deeply troubled, perspective on her deepest and most intimate thoughts, her anxieties and insecurities. It is interesting that the novel's main theme is the search for one's own identity. Zelda's husband had appropriated her

⁹⁹ Sullivan, *An American Dream destroyed*, 79.

personality and made her a fictional character in his novels since the first day they met. With Scott, the press and the public opinion having created the myth of the Roaring Twenties' Flapper around her, it is not surprising that she no longer knew who she truly was at that point. Zelda Fitzgerald fully expressed her brilliant and multifaceted personality through her art, her writings and her dancing, and it is through it that the general public should be connected with her.

CONCLUSION

Through my research I wanted to explore the myth around Zelda Fitzgerald and downsize it in order to create the right space for her truest and most authentic voice. Her voice was that of a woman full of dreams and hopes, she went through hard times fighting all her life against her mental problems. Zelda was undoubtedly an extravagant, unscrupulous and brilliant woman whose greatest suffering was that of not being able to be heard. There were too many voices that talked about her and spoke for her, in particular those of Scott and her doctors that ended up overpowering her.

It was not easy to look critically at the myth of the Golden Couple from the Roaring Twenties, partly because it is a strong and rooted myth but mainly because it is often difficult to distinguish the reality from representation. As we have already seen, both Fitzgeralds tended to fictionalize their lives in order to make it more interesting to their public and friends. Starting with critics' writings and moving through Fitzgerald's clichés and stereotypes, I observed how they have been gradually discarded. The legend of Zelda and Scott's great love had already begun to waver after reading Nancy Milford's biography, but Cline's work virtually eradicates it. I focused in particular on Sally Cline's work as I believe that she has been able to provide the most accurate and exhaustive account of Zelda as in her research she was also supported by Zelda's granddaughter, Eleanor Lahan. Zelda Fitzgerald has always been perceived in relation to her husband and what she symbolized for him: at first, she was his role model for a woman and his source of inspiration; subsequently, she became the source of all of his problems, both professional and personal. However, Cline's most recent research has highlighted many of Zelda's abilities that were never acknowledged and that for a very long time had also been overlooked by critics.

In recent years, a different woman has emerged who sheds light on the myth and is now truly acknowledged as an exceptionally talented artist. In my journey to revise the myth, I began with critics' works before moving through Zelda's most significant moments in life in order to finally reach her art, which stands as the best evidence of her most private sphere: paintings, stories, letters, and novels. The works she created now hold an emerging significance and are receiving new attention from critics who appreciate their

creative merit. They are significant because Zelda shows her true personality in her artwork, maybe for the first time. I have emphasized over and over how important it was for Zelda to express and affirm herself, thus it seemed crucial to analyze *Save Me the Waltz* to conclude my research. It represents a genuine turning point in one's lifetime toward self-affirmation. The novel's frank autobiography immerses us in Zelda Fitzgerald's most private and vulnerable moments and informs us about her using only her voice this time around rather than other people's remarks. Obviously, it is impossible to discuss Zelda without mentioning Scott, but it does not mean we should not acknowledge her uniqueness and creativity. Therefore, in the rewriting of the myth, Zelda Fitzgerald is revealed as a ballerina who achieved high levels despite starting late, a creative artist, and a brilliant writer.

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RIASSUNTO

Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald è conosciuta da tutti in quanto moglie di Francis Scott Fitzgerald, uno dei più celebri autori Statunitensi. Zelda e Scott si conobbero all'inizio degli Anni Venti, erano giovani, belli e spregiudicati. La stampa, attraverso numerose interviste ed articoli, li aveva resi delle vere e proprie celebrità e tra il pubblico erano conosciuti come la "Golden Couple" della Jazz Age.

Parallelamente alla nascita del mito della "Golden Couple" nacque anche un mito attorno alla figura di Zelda. Fu proprio Scott, attraverso le eroine dei suoi romanzi, a dare vita a questo mito e alla figura della Flapper. La Flapper divenne la donna simbolo della Jazz Age che lui stesso ammise di aver creato proprio ispirandosi alla moglie. Mentre Scott nel corso degli anni iniziò ad ottenere sempre più riconoscimenti per la sua carriera da scrittore, la popolarità di Zelda iniziò a svanire. Il pubblico cominciò a speculare sullo stato della sua salute mentale, spesso basate su notizie non vere e contrastanti tra di loro che la stampa aveva messo in circolazione. Questo portò le persone ad avere una percezione negativa di lei trasformandola ben presto dalla ragazza d'oro della Jazz Age alla moglie pazza, schizofrenica e gelosa di F. Scott Fitzgerald.

L'obiettivo di questo studio è quello analizzare non solo la vita di Zelda ma soprattutto la sua produzione artistica e letteraria, con lo scopo di revisionare e ridimensionare il Mito che si è creato attorno alla sua figura. La domanda principale che mi sono posta nel corso della mia ricerca è chi fosse veramente Zelda, era una Southern-Belle? Una Flapper? La moglie schizofrenica di uno dei più famosi scrittori Statunitensi? Era tutte queste cose o c'era anche qualcosa di più?

Nel primo capitolo del mio elaborato ho voluto presentare la figura di Zelda iniziando proprio dal Mito. La prima persona a pubblicare una biografia su Zelda Fitzgerald fu Nancy Milford con il suo libro intitolato *Zelda*. L'autrice racconta la storia dei Fitzgerald dal punto di vista di Zelda, una cosa che nessun aveva mai fatto prima. L'obiettivo principale era quello di smascherare il mito della coppia perfetta che si era creato attorno

alle figure dei Fitzgerald e ha affrontato solo in modo superficiale le numerose doti artistiche di Zelda.

Il vero punto di svolta arriva nel 2003 quando Sally Cline pubblica *Zelda: Her Voice in Paradise*. Questa biografia su Zelda ha come obiettivo quello di ridarle la sua vera voce che in molti avevano messo tacere per anni. Durante la sua ricerca Sally Cline analizza passo per passo quella che è stata la vita di Zelda con l'appoggio costante di Eleanor Lahan, nipote di Zelda. Il libro di Cline presenta per la prima volta al pubblico la Zelda artista, cercando di narrare la sua vita distaccandola dai pregiudizi.

Il punto di partenza della mia ricerca è proprio la biografia scritta da Sally Cline che l'autrice suddivide in base alle numerose "Voci" che accompagnarono Zelda nel corso della sua vita. Fondamentali, a mio avviso, sono il quarto e il quinto capitolo che l'autrice dedica rispettivamente alla "Creative Voices" e alle "Other voices". Nel capitolo "Creative Voices" il pubblico entra in contatto per la prima volta con i numerosi talenti di Zelda e l'autrice descrive la carriera artistica e letteraria di Zelda. All'interno di questo capitolo vediamo emergere la passione e la determinazione di Zelda nel raggiungere il suo obiettivo: ottenere un' indipendenza economica per potersi finalmente allontanare da Scott. Uno dei motivi che fece precipitare il loro matrimonio era proprio la gelosia che Scott provava verso la produttività artistica della moglie, mentre lei pubblicava articoli e storie brevi lui stava ancora lavorando sullo stesso romanzo ormai da dieci anni. Questo periodo di grande produttività coincide però con l'inizio dei problemi psicologici di Zelda che vengono analizzati nel quinto capitolo, "Other Voices". Qui l'autrice descrive in modo dettagliato tutto il percorso psichiatrico di Zelda all'interno numerose cliniche in cui venne ricoverata.

Le Voci Creative di Zelda sono analizzate nel dettaglio all'interno del primo capitolo del mio elaborato, *Zelda's Artistic and Literary production*, dedicato alla produzione artistica e letteraria di Zelda. La figura e il nome di Scott hanno sempre sovrastato quella di Zelda, soprattutto nel campo della scrittura, per questo motivo prima che Sally Cline pubblicasse il suo libro si conosceva molto poco in merito a queste doti di Zelda. Nel paragrafo dedicato alla scrittura mi sono limitata ad elencare i principali articoli e storie brevi che sono state scritte da Zelda, la maggior parte dei quali sono stati pubblicati sotto il nome sia di Zelda che di Scott o addirittura solo a nome di Scott. Questo evidenzia ancora di

più il fatto che Scott fosse incredibilmente geloso delle abilità della moglie e, per mascherare la sua scarsa produttività letteraria, si appropriava di ciò che scriveva lei. Ho inoltre introdotto quello che sarà il tema del terzo capitolo del mio elaborato ovvero il primo romanzo di Zelda, *Save Me the Waltz*, pubblicato nel 1932. Zelda iniziò la sua opera mentre era ricoverata nella Clinica Phipps e la portò a compimento in sole sei settimane, scatenando l'ira e la gelosia di Scott.

Il paragrafo successivo si occupa di quella che fu allo stesso tempo la più grande passione e rovina di Zelda: la danza. Iniziò a prendere lezioni di danza nel 1925 a Parigi presso lo studio di Madame Lubov Egorova. La sala prove era l'unico posto in cui lei aveva il pieno controllo di sé stessa e dove poteva esprimersi liberamente, il ballo era una cosa che apparteneva solamente a lei e a nessun altro. In poco tempo però la passione per la danza si trasformò in ossessione, il suo aspetto fisico cambiò drasticamente e la sua salute mentale iniziò a peggiorare.

Un'altra delle passioni che Zelda aveva fin da piccola era la pittura. Aveva iniziato facendo dei piccoli bozzetti e durante il suo soggiorno a Capri nel 1925 prese le sue prime lezioni di pittura. Scott supportò la moglie in questa passione, fece in modo che non le mancasse mai l'attrezzatura per dipingere anche quando era ricoverata nelle varie cliniche. Attraverso la pittura Zelda esprimeva a pieno le sue emozioni e i suoi sentimenti fornendoci in questo modo un punto di vista privilegiato sul suo mondo interiore. I dipinti di Zelda cambiarono e progredirono in base alla sua situazione, l'arte era diventata un elemento centrale della sua terapia nelle cliniche. La produzione artistica di Zelda a nostra disposizione è molto vasta, tuttavia alcuni pezzi sono andati perduti o sono stati distrutti da Zelda stessa.

Basandomi sempre sulle ricerche di Sally Cline ho voluto dedicare una parte del mio elaborato alla salute mentale di Zelda e al tempo che ha trascorso all'interno delle numerose cliniche in giro per il mondo. Il primo crollo mentale avvenne attorno al 1930 e da quel momento in poi Zelda passò la sua intera vita entrando e uscendo dagli ospedali psichiatrici. Attraverso l'analisi delle varie esperienze vissute da Zelda in questi luoghi si arriva alla conclusione che molto probabilmente la diagnosi iniziale di schizofrenia era sbagliata in quanto, secondo gli esperti, non c'erano abbastanza sintomi per giudicarla come tale. L'etichetta di donna schizofrenica perseguì Zelda per tutta la sua esistenza

tanto da cambiare la percezione della sua figura agli occhi del pubblico. Zelda venne additata come una pazza quando in realtà era semplicemente una donna fortemente depressa che non aveva ricevuto le cure adeguate.

Ho voluto dedicare il secondo capitolo della mia tesi alla relazione turbolenta di Zelda e Scott in quanto il loro matrimonio e la loro immagine di “Golden Couple” ebbe un ruolo significativo nella creazione del mito.

Ho cercato di analizzare il loro rapporto attraverso le lunghe lettere che i due si sono scambiati durante gli anni aiutandomi con la raccolta di Bryer and Barks *Dear Scott, Dearest Zelda: The Love letters of F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald*. Grazie al lavoro di questi due autori abbiamo una raccolta epistolare che contiene la maggior parte della corrispondenza della coppia. Il primo capitolo è stato dedicato al periodo del corteggiamento e ci fornisce il ritratto di una giovane e spregiudicata Zelda, piena di sogni e speranze per il futuro. Attraverso l'analisi di queste lettere possiamo vedere come il rapporto tra i coniugi Fitzgerald muta numerose volte nel corso del tempo: dalle lettere piene d'amore e sogni dei primi anni si passa alle lettere colme di rabbia e risentimenti degli anni in cui Zelda era rinchiusa negli ospedali intermezzate da alcuni momenti di passione ritrovata. Durante i loro ultimi anni di vita troviamo invece due persone mature, che si erano lasciate i vecchi rancori alle spalle per concentrarsi entrambi sull'unica cosa veramente importante: il benessere della loro figlia Scottie.

Ho ritenuto importante approfondire l'influenza che Zelda ebbe all'interno della produzione letteraria del marito. Scott attraverso i suoi romanzi fornì al pubblico una nuova immagine della donna, la Flapper, che divenne presto il simbolo dell'Età del Jazz, era una donna viziata, libertina, concentrata su se stessa, determinata e libera. Sia Zelda che Scott cavalcarono quest'attenzione mediatica che si era concentrata attorno alla loro coppia concedendo interviste esclusive alle maggiori testate giornalistiche dell'epoca. Oltre alla figura della Flapper vedremo come molti altri personaggi femminili all'interno delle opere Scott Fitzgerald furono ispirati da Zelda. Non è ben chiaro cosa Zelda pensasse in merito al suo ruolo di Musa, dalle sue lettere emergono infatti opinioni spesso contrastanti.

Scott Fitzgerald non si limitò ad ispirarsi alla figura fisica di Zelda per costruire i suoi personaggi femminili ma addirittura, secondo alcune recenti ricerche, lui utilizzò molti

degli scritti di Zelda all'interno delle sue opere senza che la moglie ne fosse a conoscenza. Ancora una volta Sally Cline gioca un ruolo centrale nel smascherare Scott, nella sua biografia possiamo infatti trovare molti esempi di plagio nei confronti della moglie. Secondo quello che sostengono Cline e altri critici, Fitzgerald si appropriò di alcuni vecchi diari della moglie dai quali trasse ispirazione per alcune trame delle sue opere. Lo scrittore inoltre inserì all'interno dei suoi romanzi estratti provenienti da alcune lettere, diari e diagnosi cliniche di Zelda, all'insaputa di quest'ultima.

Nel terzo ed ultimo capitolo della mia Tesi ho deciso di concentrarmi sulla produzione letteraria di Zelda. L'attività di Zelda come scrittrice va dal 1922 al 1934 circa ed è composta da numerosi articoli, dieci storie brevi, una commedia e due romanzi di cui il secondo rimasto incompiuto.

Ho deciso di soffermarmi sul primo romanzo di Zelda, *Save Me the Waltz*, pubblicato nell'Ottobre del 1932. L'opera è fortemente autobiografica segue le vicende di Alabama Beggs, una giovane ragazza del Sud alla ricerca della propria identità. Sia Alabama che Zelda trovano nella danza il mezzo per potersi esprimere liberamente costruendo una loro identità, indipendente da quella dei rispettivi mariti. Oltre ad esporre brevemente la trama del romanzo, nell'ultimo paragrafo ho deciso di soffermarmi anche sui suoi temi principali e sullo stile di Zelda attraverso il quale l'autrice riesce ad esprimere i suoi sentimenti, le sue paure e le sue insicurezze in un modo unico. Attraverso questo romanzo il pubblico riesce ad entrare in contatto per la prima volta con il mondo dell'autrice e a leggere finalmente la sua parte della storia.

Nello scrivere questo elaborato era fondamentale per me che emergesse a pieno la personalità unica ed eccentrica di Zelda Fitzgerald che in molti hanno cercato di reprimere e modificare semplicemente perché non riuscivano a comprenderla o a gestirla. Era cruciale che venissero esaltate le doti artistiche di Zelda e la sua carriera come pittrice, scrittrice e ballerina in modo tale che finalmente possa apparire agli occhi del pubblico come un'artista indipendente con una propria identità.