

Under Her Husband's Shadow: Zelda Fitzgerald's Lifelong Quest for Artistic Independence

A la sombra de su marido: la búsqueda de Zelda Fitzgerald
a lo largo de su vida por la independencia artística

Senarraren itzalpean: Zelda Fitzgeralden bizitza osoko borroka
independentzia artistikoa lortzeko

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Abstract

Zelda Fitzgerald has remained under Scott Fitzgerald's shadow for too long. It was not until the seventies that scholars such as Nancy Milford started to focus on her life and works. Since then, interest in Zelda has done nothing but increase. Recent biographies, articles, and novels about Zelda represent the need to place her in the spotlight by focusing not only on her life and her tumultuous marriage to Scott Fitzgerald, but also on her artistic career as a writer, dancer, and painter. During her short life, Zelda tried to find her own voice, despite her husband's opposition and her frequent hospitalizations in different mental institutions. This article seeks to explore Zelda's growth from flapper to writer in order to highlight her self-determination to become a renowned and independent artist.

Keywords

Zelda Fitzgerald, flapper, writer, mental illness, artistic independence.

Sumario

1. INTRODUCTION. 2. «BOOKCASES FILLED WITH SETS OF SHAKESPEARE»: ZELDA'S EARLY INTEREST IN LITERATURE. 3. STRUGGLING TO FIND A VOICE OF HER OWN: ZELDA'S ATTEMPTS TO BECOME «AN AUTHOR IN HER OWN RIGHT». 4. FIGHTING HER DEMONS: ZELDA'S BALLET OBSESSION LEADING TO MENTAL INSTABILITY. 5. CONCLUSION. 6. REFERENCE LIST.

* This article has been adapted from the author's BA thesis titled *Zelda Fitzgerald: Flapper and Writer*.

Resumen. Zelda Fitzgerald ha permanecido bajo la sombra de Scott Fitzgerald durante demasiado tiempo. No fue hasta los años setenta que investigadoras como Nancy Milford empezaron a centrarse en su vida y trabajos. Desde entonces, el interés en Zelda no ha hecho más que aumentar. Biografías, artículos y novelas recientes sobre Zelda representan la necesidad de posicionarla en primer plano centrándose no solo en su vida y su tumultuoso matrimonio con Scott Fitzgerald, pero también en su carrera artística como escritora, bailarina y pintora. Durante su corta vida, Zelda intentó encontrar su propia voz, a pesar de la oposición de su marido y sus hospitalizaciones frecuentes en diferentes instituciones mentales. Este artículo busca explorar el crecimiento de Zelda de flapper a escritora para resaltar su autodeterminación de convertirse en una artista reconocida e independiente.

Palabras clave. Zelda Fitzgerald, flapper, escritora, enfermedad mental, independencia artística.

Laburpena. Zelda Fitzgerald denbora gehiegi egon da Scott Fitzgeralden itzalpean. Duela hirurogeita hamar urte, ikertzaile batzuk, Nancy Milford tarteko, beren bizitzan eta lanetan hasi ziren arreta jartzen. Orduz geroztik, Zeldari buruzko interesa handitu eta handitu egin da. Zeldari buruzko biografiek, artikuluek eta eleberriek bera lehenengo lerrora ekartzeko beharra iradokitzen dute, eta horretarako, lehenengo lerroan jartzeko eskatzen dute, ez bakarrik haren bizitza eta Scott Fitzgeraldekin izan zuen harreman iskanbilatsua, baita haren ibilbide profesional artistikoa ere, idazle, dantzari eta margolari gisa. Izan zuen bizitza laburrean, Zelda bere ahots propioa bilatzen saiatu zen, nahiz eta senarra kontra zuen eta osasun mentaleko hainbat erakundetan ospitaleratua egon izan den. Artikulu honen helburua Zeldak *flapper* izatetik idazle izatera izan zuen hazkuntza aztertu nahi du, artista independente ezagun bilakatzeko izan zuen autodeterminazioa azpimarratzeko helburuz.

Gako hitzak. Zelda Fitzgerald, flapper, idazlea, gaixotasun mentala, independentzia artistikoa.

1. Introduction

Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald (1900-1948) not only embodies the features of the so-called flapper but she is also known as the first American flapper. Her husband, Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940), used her as his muse to recreate the character of the flapper in his first novel, *This Side of Paradise* (1920). Fitzgerald was no doubt inspired by Zelda Sayre to create the female characters of his novels as he once stated in an interview in 1921: «I married the heroine of my novels» (Stromberg, 2001, p. 9). The term ‘flapper’ refers to the women of the Roaring Twenties who decided to live life to the fullest. Among their revolutionary attitudes we find the following: flappers cut their hair short, wore revealing clothes, drove cars, smoked, and drank. The most shocking feature about these women is that they were willing to be independent from men. Nevertheless, as Scott Fitzgerald’s works show, the freedom the flapper lifestyle promotes is an illusion.¹ In a world still dominated by men, gender roles are very difficult to change and women like Zelda are under the yoke of their husbands.

¹ In Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* (1925), it is clear how female characters fail when they strive for independence. Female character Daisy Buchanan, for instance, is ultimately doomed to stay with her husband Tom Buchanan.

Bearing this historical and biographical context in mind, this article seeks to explore Zelda Fitzgerald's dichotomy as flapper and writer, as well as her determination to become a writer of her own. In order to do so, I will scrutinize Zelda's life from adolescence to adulthood, along with her literary career. Regarding Zelda's life, I will particularly draw my attention to the following facts: her popularity as a teenager, her early interest in literature, her behavior as a flapper, and her tumultuous marriage to Scott Fitzgerald.² With regards to Zelda's literary career, I will provide an overview of her articles, short stories, and novel *Save Me the Waltz* (1932). In addition, Zelda's mental struggles and hospitalizations have been referred to for they are quite relevant to understand the challenges she faced as a woman writer trying to find a path of her own. All in all, this article attempts to unearth the life and works of a woman writer who deserves to be known for her own artistic skills.

2. «Bookcases Filled with Sets of Shakespeare»: Zelda's Early Interest in Literature

As a teenager, Zelda Sayre was rebellious and remarkably popular among her classmates, especially among boys. She would not hang out just with girls or go to their parties. Quite the contrary: Zelda would spend her time going out and flirting with young men. Born the sixth and the youngest child of an upper-middle class family, she would do anything possible to receive everybody's attention. Judge Sayre, her father, exerted all his authority at home, and set strict rules, but Zelda could always find her way around with the help of her more understanding and protective mother, Minnie Sayre. Due to the age difference, Zelda grew up as her sisters and brother's pet, but, as a little kid, she was already quite self-sufficient and independent. She did not like school, and never worked hard to pass her exams. However, all her teachers agreed that wild and cute Zelda Sayre was particularly good at writing, dancing, and painting. In fact, it has been recently discovered that a 17-year-old Zelda wrote a short story entitled «The Iceberg».³

² I have particularly taken into account Nancy Milford's *Zelda* (1970) as it is the first biography about Zelda that contains accurate data about her life and literary works. Likewise, Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald's correspondence (Bryer & Barks, 2002) has been extremely valuable for the purpose of this article. Finally, material from the Princeton Archives has also been revised and utilized in order to provide a faithful analysis of Zelda Fitzgerald's quest for artistic independence.

³ «The Iceberg» was published in *The New Yorker* in December 2013. Zelda's granddaughter, Eleanor Lanahan, told the journalists: «Who knew Zelda wrote stories before Scott entered her life? Who knew she'd give a working girl the happiest of destinies? This is a charming morality tale of sorts. Ironically, Cornelia's ending up with a rich husband is her ultimate success. This is truly a fascinating story – about Zelda, the South, and women's expectations in 1917 or so.»

The story was published in the Sidney Lanier High School Literary Journal, and Zelda was awarded a prize for it. This recent finding proves that by the time Zelda met Scott Fitzgerald, she was already interested in literature. As a matter of fact, Judge Sayre had an impressive library at home and Zelda became an avid reader. Referring to the well-equipped library at the Sayre's as well as Zelda's eagerness to read, Linda Wagner (2004) claims that:

The bookcases throughout 6 Pleasant Street were filled with matching sets of Henry Fielding, Shakespeare, Thackeray, Dickens, Sir Walter Scott, Mark Twain, Ouida, and the Greek and Latin classics. Throughout her life, Zelda read. She read popular novels and later in life she admired William Faulkner's *Sanctuary*. (p. 11)

Nevertheless, Zelda's intellectual curiosity contrasts with her frivolous attitude. During her high school years, she frequently skipped lessons and her friends were jealous of her because «she had much more freedom» than them. After class she would go sometimes for a drink and have fun before heading back home. Obviously, her classmates envied Zelda because, unlike most proper Southern girls like them, she did not have «to call home first to report where she was going» (Milford, 1970/2011, p. 12). Whether others agree or not, an adolescent Zelda shows some clear symptoms of the real flapper. Firstly, contrary to other girls from equally respected families, she already enjoys some unheard-of freedom. As a rule, her teenage girlfriends need their parents to grant permission for any given activity. Zelda, instead, does not seem to obey anybody's rules or follow the always restrictive Southern social conventions. Secondly, she acts as a grown-up young lady who wears make-up before her friends do, and she also dresses in a very peculiar way. Finally, the original outfits she wears are hand-made by her own respectable mother, a fact that simply astonishes her girlfriends. All the above features make Zelda stand out from a crowd of girls her age. In her biography *Zelda*, Nancy Milford (1970/2011) comments on Zelda's uniqueness and Zelda's mother devotion: «Zelda was on the verge of becoming the most spectacular belle Montgomery would ever know; Mrs. Sayre's party dresses were the first tributes paid to her daughter's beauty» (p. 13).

It goes without saying that the cultural, social, and geographical context where Zelda grew up heavily contrasted with her behavior. According to Milford (1970/2011), in the early twenties, «women were expected to be submissive, if not passive»; Zelda, instead, «did what she pleased when she pleased» (p. 21). Zelda's routine throughout her last high school years did not change much. She kept going out, attending dances most nights, and dating brave American soldiers who were about to join the Allied forces. Basically, Milford adds, a seventeen-year-old Zelda spent her days «thinking of today, and not worrying about

tomorrow» (p. 21). It was only one month after graduation when wild Zelda met Scott Fitzgerald, a 22-year-old war volunteer born in St. Paul, Minnesota. He was a lieutenant and one of the hundred soldiers who had been moved to Camp Sheridan in preparation for their contribution to *the War that would end all wars*.⁴ They first met at a dance at the Montgomery Country Club. Apparently, Scott was immediately impressed by Zelda's beauty. From then on, he would visit and telephone as often as he could (Milford, 1970/2011, p. 33). Although Zelda openly flirted with other men, Scott was nevertheless fascinated by her, and kept trying despite all the obstacles. Once the war Armistice was signed, Scott returned to Montgomery to spend more time with her lover. Scott and Zelda went out, drank gin, and, no doubt, had much fun together. They were both dreamers, and Zelda was really excited with the idea of not only going away from her monotonous southern life but also with the promise of moving to New York. In February 1919, Scott had to move to New York. By then, he had decided to make money as a famous writer and offer Zelda a luxurious life.

During the months they were separated, Zelda and Scott wrote each other numerous letters that speak for their personal relationship. In March 1919, Zelda wrote a letter to Scott where she labels herself as Scott's possession: «Don't you think I was made for you? I feel like you had me ordered – and I was delivered to you – to be worn. I want you to wear me, like a watch-charm or a button hole boquet – to the world» (Bryer & Barks, 2002, p. 16). Zelda's words already show her dependence on Scott when she refers to herself as a material object that can be possessed, worn, and showed off. Later on that month, they get engaged and Scott sends a fabulous ring to Zelda. In a letter, Zelda shows her gratitude but also the impact the present has made on her friends: «You can't imagine what havoc the ring wrought – a whole dance was completely upset last night – Everybody thinks its lovely – and I am so proud to be your girl – to have everybody know we are in love» (Bryer & Barks, 2002, p. 22). Definitely, this statement demonstrates Zelda's behavior as a flapper due to her recurrent materialistic and frivolous comments.

By September 1919, Scott sent a new draft to Scribner's, and by October he wrote Zelda again to tell her he had a contract for his first novel *This Side of Paradise*.⁵ To regain Zelda's heart, Scott thought, the book needed to be published as soon as possible. Thus, in a letter to his editor Max Perkins he stated: «I have so many things dependent on its success – including of course a girl – not that I

⁴ President of the United States Woodrow Wilson (1912-1920) claimed that the Great War (1914-1918) would end all wars (Lathbury & Linehan, 2010, p. 9).

⁵ He had already sent a first draft, *The Romantic Egoist*, to Max Perkins in 1918. Although they did not accept the sketch, Perkins encouraged him to keep writing.

expect a fortune but it will have a psychological effect on me and all my surroundings and besides open up new fields» (Brucoli, 1994, p. 32). Zelda and Scott's personal correspondence starts once again, but Zelda's attitude is pretty much the same as in the first letters. In the fall of 1919, Zelda writes: «And you see, Scott, I'll never be able to do anything because I'm much too lazy to care whether it's done or not... all I want is to be very young always and very irresponsible and to feel that my life is my own» (Bryer & Barks, 2002, p. 40). These words prophesy the sort of life that Zelda and Scott were about to start. At this point, though, Zelda is not aware of the damaging effects of the flapper lifestyle. Surprisingly enough, Zelda's frivolous demeanor contradicts her eagerness to be a writer, as we find in the following letter: «Yesterday I almost wrote a book or story, I hadn't decided which, but after two pages on my heroine I discovered that I hadn't even started her, and, since I couldn't just write forever about a charmingly impossible creature, I began to despair» (Bryer & Barks, 2002, p. 40). No doubt, Zelda's contradictory personality – that of being an intellectual woman and a frivolous flapper – would be a life-long pattern.

Despite the many obstacles (their youth, a short-term engagement, Scott's uncertain financial future, and Zelda's parents' opposition), Zelda Sayre and Scott Fitzgerald got married on April 3, 1920. Months before the wedding, Zelda shows her absolute dependence on Scott: «I do want to marry you... Besides, I know you can take much better care of me than I can, and I'll always be very, very happy with you» (Bryer & Barks, 2002, p. 43). Their first months of marriage are characterized by all-night-parties, drinking, craziness, and in general, lack of concern. In view of their restlessness, and constant mundane distractions, the newly-married couple thought that by moving to the countryside the situation would change and Scott would concentrate on the new novel. However, the plan did not work out. Despite the fact that they rented a house in green, quiet, and isolated Connecticut, their refuge became one of the first nightmares in their marriage – friends visiting unexpectedly at all hours; Scott's escapades to New York; Zelda's relatives visiting and meeting uninvited noisy and drunk guests; worst, still, Scott's clear symptoms of an increasing alcohol addiction, and Zelda's and Scott's often furious fights. Throughout the years, the couple would keep moving somewhere else. Zelda and Scott ignored that they needed to change their life attitude, not the place they inhabited.

The Fitzgeralds were not happy with their life in Connecticut. Thus, they returned to New York in the fall, and, later in 1921, they made their first trip to Europe with the promise of a cheaper but nevertheless glamorous life. Following the American Expatriates route, they visited England, France, and Italy, but they stayed in Paris until they traveled back to the United States and temporarily moved to Scott's hometown. Zelda was already pregnant with their first and only child, Scottie, who was born on October 26, 1921. According to Milford

(1970/2011), once she recovered from the anesthesia, Zelda whispered: «I hope its beautiful and a fool – a beautiful little fool» (p. 84). In *The Great Gatsby* (1925), Scott Fitzgerald uses these exact words when Daisy's baby girl is born:

Well, she was less than an hour old and Tom was God knows where. I woke up out of the ether with an utterly abandoned feeling, and asked the nurse right away if it was a boy or a girl. She told me it was a girl, and so I turned my head away and wept. «All right,» I said, «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.» (p. 18)

As in many other instances, Daisy's words prove Scott's habit to illustrate his and his wife's personal life in fiction. Definitely, Zelda was not happy with her baby girl because as soon as she got better, she told a friend she was «quite disappointed over the sex» of her child (Milford, 1970/2011, p. 85). Whether at home or abroad, it seems parenthood did not suit the Fitzgeralds. The hustle and bustle of their lifestyle did not allow them to take care of their only child, and, consequently, Scottie had different professional and strict nurses and baby-sitters who would take care of her until she became older enough to take care of herself. When Scottie was almost three years old, her parents decided to leave the United States and return to Paris where Scott could write his new novel, *The Great Gatsby* (1925). As with their first stay in Paris, this change made not much difference on Scott's writing habits. Besides, more often than not, the Fitzgeralds would continue getting drunk and quarreling. Theirs was a tumultuous and, at times, insane life. For friends and relatives, it was no secret.

By 1923, Zelda had already been struggling to become a well-known writer. She wrote some articles during her first years of marriage but, according to Wagner (2004), her writing career began when she was asked to review Scott's *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922) (p. 66). In the article, she frankly criticizes Scott's novel *The Beautiful and Damned* and expresses her dislikes: «The other things that I didn't like in the book – I mean the unimportant things – were the literary references and the attempt to convey a profound air of erudition» (Brucoli, 1991, p. 389). Besides, she also includes rather trivial comments that, once again, label her as a flapper. Note, for instance, Zelda's way to recommend her husband's novel: «everyone must buy this book for the following aesthetic reasons: first, because I know where there is the cutest cloth-of-gold dress for only three hundred dollars... and also, if enough people buy it, where there is a platinum ring with a complete circlet» (Brucoli, 1991, p. 387). In like manner, her essay «Eulogy on the Flapper» appears in June of the same year in the *Metropolitan Magazine*. Here, Zelda makes the distinction «between the true flapper rebel and the superficial copy» (Mackrell, 2013, p. 169), and traces the real flapper's birth: «the Flap-

per awoke from her lethargy of sub-deb-ism, bobbed her hair, put on her choicest pair of earrings and a great deal of audacity and rouge, and went into the battle. She flirted because it was fun to flirt and wore a one-piece bathing suit because she had a good figure» (Bruccoli, 1991, p. 391).

3. Struggling to Find a Voice of Her Own: Zelda's Attempts to Become «An Author in Her Own Right»

Despite the apparent frivolous touch, Zelda tries hard and learns quickly. As Mackrell (2013) claims, Zelda's first articles «represented her first attempts to create a public voice that was independent of Scott's» (p. 169). Her reputation slowly improves and, by 1923, when Zelda is interviewed by the *Courier-Journal*, she elaborates on the advantages of writing but, here again, the flapper shows up: «Writing has its advantages, just think: I buy ever so many of Scott's presents that way» (Bruccoli & Baughman, 2004, p. 47). Furthermore, when she is asked about Scott's novels, she shows a preference for the female characters who resemble her: «I love Scott's books and heroines. I like the ones that are like me! That's why I love Rosalind in *This Side of Paradise*» (Bruccoli & Baughman, 2004, p. 47). Zelda's candid words confirm her husband's recurrent use of intimate material, a fact that will be later used to devaluate Zelda's use of the same personal details. Finally, the journalist asks her to explain what she would do had she to earn her own living. Zelda does not hesitate for a minute and her subconscious speaks for her: «I've studied ballet. I'd try to get a place in the Follies. Or the movies. If I wasn't successful, I'd try to write» (Bruccoli & Baughman, 2004, p. 49). Reading the interview one gets the impression that Zelda is a complex human being (serious, funny, audacious, informed), and with the soul of an artist. She is not free to create, though. At times, when she finally comes up with an interesting piece of writing, her much respected husband shares the spotlight instead. This is the case with «What Became of the Flappers?» an article published in 1925 under both Scott and Zelda's names. Although her husband had consistently written on the Jazz Age and flappers, in her new article, Zelda offers her own definition: «The flapper springs full-grown, like Minerva, from the head of her once-déclassé father, Jazz, upon whom she lavishes affection and reverence... She is a direct result of the greater appreciation of beauty, youth, gaiety, and grace» (Bruccoli, 1991, pp. 397-98). Apart from offering her own definition of the flapper, it is essential to highlight her abstract description with a wide use of adjectives since this is a recurrent literary feature in all her writings – articles, short stories, and novel. Thus, at this point, Zelda is ready to create her own style, a style that needs to be independent and different from that of her husband's.

Once settled down in Paris again (1924-1925), the Fitzgeralds meet the Murphys who would help them during the following years. When they heard that Scott was looking for a peaceful place to write, they recommended the French Riviera. Scott and Zelda spent their summer there. At first, everything went well. Zelda swam every day and tanned in the sun while Scott worked on his novel. However, Zelda spent most of her time alone and ended up having an affair with a French aviator. Zelda would confirm this love affair years later when she suffered a nervous breakdown, was sent to one mental institution after another, and doctors asked her to write for therapeutic reasons. While on therapy with Dr. Forel, at the Prangins clinic, Zelda writes she had «a love affair with a French aviator in St Raphael» and «was locked in [her] villa for one month to prevent [her] seeing him» (Milford, 1970/2011, p. 174).⁶ Not surprisingly, Scott takes control of the situation and does his best to cool down Zelda's affair with the French aviator.

At the end of 1926 Scott was offered a job to write a screenplay in Hollywood. The job did not go very well but the couple decided to settle in America. They resumed their old habits. They both drank and smoked too much, and, although Scott was unable to concentrate, Zelda wrote really good articles during this period. Among others, we can mention «The Change Beauty of Park Avenue,» «Looking Back Eight Years,» and «Who Can Fall in Love after Thirty?» all released in 1928. Unfortunately, they were all published under her husband's («by Scott Fitzgerald») or under both names («by Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald»), but we know that Zelda is the only author because that information appears in Scott's *Ledger*.⁷

Apart from the articles, Zelda also wrote short stories. The first one to be sold was «Our Own Movie Queen.» Written in 1923, it was published two years later in the *Chicago Sunday Tribune* under Scott's name. Nevertheless, Wagner (2004) believes that «judging from the consistency of the dialogue and the coherence of the plot, however, it seems plausible that it was Zelda's story entirely» (p. 80). It is after the Fitzgeralds settled down back in the States in 1928 when Zelda writes regularly and has her work published by *College Humor*. Zelda's intriguing stories

⁶ Prangins was a most luxurious clinic in Nyon (Geneva-Switzerland) where Zelda stayed from 1930 to 1931.

⁷ The *Ledger* is a notebook where Scott Fitzgerald recorded the yearly incomes and expenses. He also wrote some observations about the short stories he had published or about how the year had gone so far. Scott Fitzgerald divided this notebook into five sections: 1) Record of Published Fiction; Novels, Plays, Stories; 2) Record of Other Published Work, Paid for; 3) Earnings by years; 4) Zelda; 5) Autobiographical Chart. Regarding the articles and short stories which were released under his name or under both the Fitzgeralds', Scott wrote: «[t]wo thirds by Zelda. Only my climax and revision» (p. 7), or he directly credited the whole writing to Zelda (pp. 54, 65, 66, 68, 143).

deal with «different kinds of American girls» (Wagner, 2004, p. 108). With the stories as with the essays, Scott exerts his power and claims authorship. Thus, the first two appeared in 1929 under Scott's and Zelda's names. Scott's *Ledger* proves the contrary. Other titles published in 1930 include: «The Girl the Prince Liked,» «The Girl with Talent,» and «A Millionaire's Girl.» The latter was so good that Scott sold it to the *Saturday Evening Post* for \$4000 (Wagner, 2004, p. 120). Moreover, it is important to mention here two short stories that Zelda's biographers and literary critics rate as the best ones Zelda Fitzgerald ever wrote: «Miss Ella» (1931) and «A Couple of Nuts» (1932), both published in *Scribner's Magazine*. It is crystal clear that, at 32, Zelda has become a more mature writer and she does not need the benevolent company or approval of her controlling husband writer. As Bruccoli (1991) claims, «when Zelda Fitzgerald was able to bring her material under control, the results were remarkable – as in 'Miss Ella' and 'A Couple of Nuts'» (p. 271).

4. Fighting Her Demons: Zelda's Ballet Obsession Leading to Mental Instability

Unfortunately, as Zelda's writing skills improved, her marriage and health worsened. The Fitzgeralds would go back to Europe several times but their problems would never disappear. While in Paris, Zelda developed an infatuation with ballet lessons and, this time, she became dependent on her teacher, the famous Russian ballet dancer Egorova. She spent hours dancing, and she did not care about going to «sophisticated places» (Milford, 1970/2011, p. 156) because she was too tired after working for hours on her plies and demi-plies. By this time, Zelda and Scott did not spend much time together. In 1930, Scott thought that a trip to Africa would take care of Zelda's poor health and overworking, and they would try to forget all their problems. The apparently idyllic and exotic setting did not help the Fitzgeralds much. From 1930 to her death in 1948, Zelda would spend most of her time in and out different mental health clinics. On April 23, 1930, Zelda entered her first clinic, Malmaison, on the outskirts of Paris. She decided to leave the hospital on May 2, 1930, against her physicians' advices to stay. Later, she resumed her ballet lessons, but she started to hear voices and had nightmares that would not allow her to rest well. Scott took her to Valmont, Switzerland, on the 22nd of May, and later to Prangins on the 5th of June. At Prangins, Doctor Forel, who was in charge of Zelda's case, asked her to write about her experiences with her family and about her married life. Interestingly enough, these pages are quite complex and coherent; we see the real Zelda, and her thoughts about her family. For instance, sick and all, Zelda can dissect her parents' life and come up with moving comments: «When I was a child their re-

lationship was not apparent to me. Now I see them as two unhappy people: my mother dominated and oppressed by my father, and often hurt by him... Neither of them complained» (Milford, 1970/2011, p. 174). Although Zelda is sick at the time she writes these lines, she seems to be perfectly aware of women's oppression during the twenties and thirties. In this case, she refers to her own mother being under the shadow of her husband, a very-well known Judge. However, her mother's situation could be compared to hers: Zelda is a talented artist who is controlled and oppressed by her famous husband. Thus, the fact that Zelda writes about this controversial topic can be related to her own frustrations and aspirations.

Between the summer and fall of 1930, the Fitzgeralds interchanged two long and hard letters full of reproaches. This correspondence is absolutely moving and shows the reality of their lives for the past ten years; for instance, Scott blames Zelda for closing into herself and being sick all the time. His letter finishes with a sad tone: «I wish the Beautiful and Damned had been a maturely written book because it was all true. We ruined ourselves – I have never honestly thought that we ruined each other» (Bryer & Barks, 2002, p. 65). In turn, Zelda's response is also harsh and, among other things, she asserts: «It was wrong to love my teacher when I should have loved you. But I didn't have you to love – not since long before I loved her» (Brucoli, 1991, p. 451). Zelda's assertion proves her obsession with her teacher Egorova and her need to be loved. As a matter of fact, biographers and researchers have paid attention to Zelda's same-sex relations. Zelda's growing apart from her family and her obsession with ballet lessons provokes her fixation with her teacher Egorova. Although she falls in love with her and admits it to Scott, there is no proof of Zelda having a sexual relationship with Egorova or any other women. However, biographer Kendall Taylor (2001/2003) thinks it possible: «I think it's entirely possible she was intimate with some of the lesbian women she met in Paris during the late twenties. As far as it being a symptom of her mental illness, it seems more an indication of her loneliness in the marriage and aversion to becoming involved with another man» (p. 452). Besides, we should bear in mind that, as Mackrell (2013) points out, lesbianism was a common practice among flappers in the 1920s: «A survey conducted among 2,200 middle-class American women in the late 1920s revealed that many had experienced lesbian impulses: half of those interviewed said they'd experienced a close emotional relationship with another woman, while a quarter admitted to those relationships being sexual» (p. 338). She also adds that one of the causes for women's emotional interest in other women was caused by World War I and «the loss of millions of young men» (p. 338).

Despite the obstacles and Scott's harsh criticism, in September 1929, Zelda is offered a solo debut in Naples: «Madame Sedova's letter invited Zelda to come to Naples and dance a solo in *Aida*, to be part of the San Carlo Opera Ballet Com-

pany. Given that Sedova had been a ranking Russian ballerina, a classmate of Egorova's, her invitation was legitimate – it was a compliment to Zelda's ability» (Wagner, 2004, p. 125). Zelda could not have wished for a better opportunity to show her true vocation. However, surprisingly too, she does not accept the offer. Probably, as most of her biographers and critics agree, Zelda rejects the invitation because she does not have Scott's permission; for instance, biographer Taylor (2001/2003), in a conversation with American novelist Marion Meade, points out that heavy-handed Scott was one of the main reasons for Zelda to stay:

Either [Scott] forbade her, or made life so miserable she gave up on the idea. Zelda felt very conflicted. Influencing her decision was the fact that she disliked Italians and viewed Naples as a step down from London and Paris. At twenty-nine, she had never been anywhere alone, and without Fitzgerald's support was afraid of failing. (p. 450)

Under these circumstances, Zelda could do nothing but accept her husband's decisions. Indeed, her struggles to become an independent artist might have triggered her mental breakdowns and her stay in different clinics. Interestingly enough, Zelda's behavior changes during her hospitalizations; for instance, there is a strong difference between her first months at Prangins and the last months before she was released from the clinic. At the beginning, we find a Zelda who is very discontented with the situation and who insists on being independent, having a job, and getting a divorce: «You might as well start whatever you start for a divorce immediately» (Bryer & Barks, 2002, p. 87). Likewise, she realizes how unhappy Scott and she have been for the duration of their marriage: «I wonder why we have never been very happy and why all this has happened – It was much nicer a long time ago when we had each other and the space about the world was warm – Can't we get it back someday – even by imagining?» (Bryer & Barks, 2002, p. 91). Nevertheless, with the passing of time, Zelda's letters to Scott turn more affectionate, her mental health improves, and she is released on September 15, 1931.

Back in the United States, the Fitzgeralds set their residence in Montgomery (Alabama) to be close to Zelda's family. Soon after, Scott is offered a job in Hollywood and Zelda stays at her parents'. She gets sick again in 1932. This time, she had asthma and eczema and was hospitalized at the Phipps Psychiatric Clinic in Baltimore where, as the ad goes, «a mind could find itself again.» She enters the clinic February 12, 1932, and by the 9th of March, she has already completed her first novel *Save Me the Waltz*. She wrote compulsively for two months, and when she finished, she decided to send it to Scott's editor, Max Perkins, without Scott's approval. It goes without saying that Scott had a hard time with Zelda's novel. He got mad at his wife when he read the manuscript and found many

parts of the book similar to the material he was using for his work in progress *Tender is the Night* (1934). Zelda's fictional use of her own personal experience should not have surprised Scott since he had always used Zelda for his female characters. During the summer of 1932, Zelda went back to Scott once again. For the Fitzgeralds, to start it all over and share the same roof turned out to be such a complex and painful task that by May 28, 1933, they agreed to discuss their problems in the presence of a doctor, Dr. Rennie, accompanied by a stenographer. Both Zelda and Scott took turns to talk, they quarreled, and hurt each other. The outcome of a full-day session was a one hundred fourteen-page transcription – located at the Princeton Archives – which reflects how they felt for each other. Scott's furious reaction could not be bitter: he prohibited her to write anymore, so their material would not get overlapped, he blamed his wife for his unproductive periods, and he called her a «third rate writer» and a «third rate ballet dancer» (*Stenographic Report*, 1933).⁸ Scott's remarks hit Zelda to the core: she would rather stay at an institution than living with him. She was sick of Scott, she needed to find her peace of mind, and was eager to find the independence she claimed for.

One month after Zelda's second admission at Phipps, she left. She was taken then to the exclusive Craig House (Beacon, New York) where she would stay for two months. Although Scott had many debts, he did not want Zelda to go to a public sanatorium or Scottie to attend a public school. During her days at Craig House they wrote each other interesting letters which are sometimes contradictory and difficult to understand. Firstly, there is a letter where Zelda clearly explains their own confusion between reality and fiction: «You don't love me... Besides, anything personal was never the objective of our generation – we were to have thought of ourselves heroically» (Bryer & Barks, 2002, p. 183). Secondly, Scott sends her a letter where he strongly asserts that nothing is wrong: «You and I have been happy; we haven't been happy just once, we've been happy a thousand times» (Bryer & Barks, 2002, p. 193). Thus, on the one hand, Zelda's statement proves that both Scott and Zelda had troubles to separate their real lives from their fictional writings. On the other hand, Scott's assertion shows that although the Fitzgeralds went through hard times, they also had fun, especially in their first years together.

From May 1934 to April 1936, Zelda was hospitalized at Sheppard-Pratt where residential mental health treatment was provided to help her recover for her recurrent psychological unbalance. While at Sheppard Pratt Hospital, Zelda became fanatically religious to the extent that «she believed she was under the

⁸ See Nancy Milford's *Zelda* (1970/2011, pp. 273-275) for further information on this unpublished report.

control of God» (Milford, 1970/2011, p. 307). After this long hospitalization, Scott took her to Highland Hospital (Asheville) in 1936 where Zelda stayed under the care of Dr. Robert S. Carroll until 1940. Dr. Carroll's treatment of mental illness alternated the traditional therapies with more modern additions such as the importance of a balanced diet as well as the regular practice of sports (walking, hiking or – one of Zelda's favorite sports – playing tennis). Zelda's family did not approve of Scott's decision to leave Zelda in a mental institution. Her mother, for instance, thought Zelda was well enough to stay with her in Montgomery. Not surprisingly, Minnie Sayre was convinced that Scott had ruined Zelda's life (Milford, 1970/2011, p. 321). As for Zelda, she missed her family and wanted to be free from the mental institution. As late as 1938, Zelda was allowed to meet her daughter Scottie, her mother, and her sisters Clothilde and Rosalind in New York. She had such a very nice family reunion that she asked Scott for permission to go home: «May I go home for Thanksgiving, and Christmas, and soon for ever?» (Bryer & Barks, 2002, p. 257).

She did spend her Christmas break in Montgomery but she had a nurse who would take care of her for some hours every day. In February 1939, the Fitzgeralds started on what would be their last trip. Their vacation in Cuba «was a disaster from beginning to end» (Milford, 1970/2011, p. 327). When they returned to the United States, Scott had to be hospitalized in New York due to his alcoholism and fatigue while Zelda went back to Asheville by herself. Little did she know then that this would be the last time she would see Scott. In April 1940, Zelda was released from Highland Hospital. The doctor's assumption was that she could manage with the help of her mother in Montgomery. On December 21, 1940, Scott Fitzgerald died. Although the Fitzgeralds had not seen each other for a year, their mutual dependence lasted until the very end. In February 1943, Scottie married Lieutenant Samuel Jackson Lanahan in New York. Quickly after their wedding, he had to return overseas. The beginning of Scottie's story is very much like her mother's. Zelda got married after World War I, and Scottie did so before World War II ended. In Scott's words, «it is strange too that she is repeating the phase of your life – all her friends about to go off to war and the world again on fire» (Bryer & Barks, 2002, p. 361). After Scott Fitzgerald's death, Zelda Fitzgerald returned to Highland Hospital on several occasions until she died in a fire in 1948. In a *Montgomery Advertiser's* article, published a few days after Zelda's death, the editor refers to Zelda as «an author in her own right»: «Mrs. Fitzgerald had collaborated with her husband on some of his books and was an author in her own right. She wrote 'Save Me the Waltz' and many short stories for magazines» (para. 3). Although in this article she is firstly introduced as Scott Fitzgerald's collaborator, Zelda Fitzgerald is ultimately given the recognition she deserves as a writer who published her own works.

5. Conclusion

In this article, I have focused on Zelda's contradictory personality as flapper and writer, as well as on her willingness to become an artist of her own. In order to explore the intersections between Zelda's life and her artistic career, I have closely read and analyzed a selection of biographical, epistolary, and archival material, which has proved quite relevant for the purpose of this essay. There is no doubt that in the case of Zelda Fitzgerald biographical facts and personal correspondence ought not to be overlooked since it is through these documents that we better understand her constant struggles to become a writer. After providing an overview of her life, letters, and main works, it is plausible to affirm that Zelda's unsupportive and insecure husband did not allow her to pursue her artistic aspirations. Scott Fitzgerald felt threatened by his wife after she published *Save Me the Waltz* (1932) to the point that he prohibited Zelda to write anything else until he finished his novel *Tender Is the Night* (1934). While it is true that both Scott and Zelda relied on autobiographical material to create their fictional works, Zelda was deprived of doing so for she had always been considered an amateur writer by her controlling and famous husband. Not only was Zelda underestimated during her unstable life, but also in the years following her death. Zelda's life and works – just like the life and works of many other women seeking to find her much-deserved place within a traditionally patriarchal canon – were neglected for years until the last decades of the twentieth century. Today, almost eighty years after her death, the time has come to delve into Zelda Fitzgerald's life, mental struggles, and artistic career in order to provide an analysis of a talented writer who strove for success until the very end, and who deserves recognition as «an author in her own right.»

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