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## The Lost Artist: Biographical Fiction and the Identity of Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald

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**The Lost Artist:**  
**Biographical Fiction and the Identity of Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald**

A culminating thesis submitted to the faculty of Dominican University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Master of Arts in Humanities

by

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May 2018

This thesis, written under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor and approved by the Chair of the Master's program, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the Department of Humanities in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

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## ABSTRACT

Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald (1900-1948) is widely regarded as the first flapper of the Roaring 20s and is often recognized for her tumultuous marriage to acclaimed American writer F. Scott Fitzgerald. As a female icon whose life was filled with salacious incidences and mental struggles, the image of Zelda continues to be reinterpreted in various movies, television series, and novels. However, very few center on her artistic pursuits of writing, painting, or dancing and how her desires to contribute to the art world were overshadowed and disrupted by her successful husband. Therese Anne Fowler's *Z: A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald* (2013), a novel of biographical fiction, revisits the image of Zelda and gives agency to her image as an artist. This thesis explores the intersection of biography and fiction in Fowler's novel in an attempt to call attention to Zelda's identity as an artist rather than solely her historical position as wife and mother. Building upon biographies written by Nancy Milford and Sally Cline, this thesis argues for Fowler's depiction of Zelda, one that is embedded in the New Woman identity of the 1920s. The resulting novel gives autonomy to Zelda and aids in reshaping her image for a modern 21<sup>st</sup> century audience.

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I am grateful for my parents and their constant love and support of my education.

Lastly, this thesis is dedicated to Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald. It is my hope that this vivacious, brave, and creative woman, who I have grown to admire, continues to live on for future generations.

## Introduction: Defining a Life

Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald (1900-1948) is arguably one of the most iconic females within 20<sup>th</sup> century American culture. Largely known for her marriage to F. Scott Fitzgerald, renowned author of various novels, such as *This Side of Paradise*, *Tender is the Night*, and *The Great Gatsby*, Zelda is considered the first flapper, a term developed by her husband that represents an idealized yet carefree woman of the Roaring 20s. Despite growing up in a strict Southern family, Zelda's proclivity to rebel became a defining characteristic of her identity. Especially during her marriage to Scott, public opinion of Zelda centered on her drunken antics, arguments with her husband, and frequent lapses in mental health. However, very few regard Zelda as an artist or are even cognizant of her pursuits in writing, painting, and ballet. While her public antics largely overshadowed her art during her lifetime, recent attempts to reclaim Zelda as an artist have permeated popular culture.

A *New York Times* bestselling novel, *Z: A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald* by Therese Anne Fowler aims to reconsider Zelda's role in the Roaring 20s, and subsequently, American culture. Labeled as a novel, Fowler's narrative relies on the genre of biographical fiction, a literary form which integrates both fictional and actual events, to recapture Zelda's identity as a separate entity from her husband. A combination of historical fact and fiction, biographical fiction is a burgeoning field in life writing. Acting as both biographer and fiction writer, an author of biographical fiction researches the life of a well-known individual and creates a cohesive narrative surrounding the life of her or his subject. While conversations and characters can often be fictionalized for the novel's plot, major biographical events within the subject's life are always included and central to the narrative. Although not meant to replace biographies and often discredited for its fictionalization of factual events, biographical fiction holds significant



merit within the literary world. In particular, the genre often aids in giving new meaning to an individual's identity, as is in the case of Fowler's *Z*. Ultimately, despite its integration of factual elements for the sake of plot, biographical fiction centers on universal themes essential to life writing and literature as a whole.

Fowler's *Z* aims to recreate the life of Zelda Fitzgerald in order to reclaim her identity. The author states her novel is an "attempt to imagine what it was like to be Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald" (374). Thus, the following study explores the intersection of biography and fiction in Fowler's novel in an effort to rewrite Zelda's identity foremost as an artist. While her relationship with Scott is integral to the narrative, Fowler explores the different facets of Zelda's life, especially centering on her independence from her husband. Building upon previously written biographies on Zelda, this thesis argues for Fowler's depiction of Zelda, one that is embedded in the New Woman identity of the 1920s. *Z: A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald* reconsiders Zelda's role within American history and society, thus cementing a new legacy for the female icon.

## Fact and Fiction:

### Life Writing, Biographical Fiction, and Zelda Fitzgerald

Biographical fiction was born out of an intensified desire for narratives centered on celebrated subjects. The intersection between life writing and fiction in Western literature became most prominent during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, especially as many narratives centered on a female figure. In 1740, Samuel Richardson's publication of his epistolary novel *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* led to a trend in which fictional narratives were written as a series of letters or in diary form. Due to its epistolary form, Richardson's novel, which centers on the young title character's immoral relationship with an older man, was viewed as a series of actual and genuine letters written between the two main characters. The popularity of *Pamela*, as well as other epistolary novels, marked a transition in which American and British fiction began to reflect the lives of the hoi polloi rather than those of aristocracy. As a result, fiction throughout much of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries was marketed as being adapted from reality with the narrative itself seemingly borrowed from actual societal figures.

The drastic number of historical events that permeated the 20<sup>th</sup> century greatly altered the form of life writing. Sigmund Freud's emergence within the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century led to an interest in the psychological makeup of societal leaders and figures. The blossoming of autobiographies and biographies not only provided vivid interpretations of the subjects but also stood as individual depictions of history. The autobiography *The Diary of Anne Frank*, published in 1947 following the end of World War II, contrasted the horrific events of the war in Europe with the young writer's experiences of love, maturity, and mortality. The first biography on Anne Frank, written by Melissa Muller and published in 1998, shed more insights regarding her life, especially in contrast with the Holocaust. Overall, both autobiographical and

biographical perspectives helped readers to better understand the tumultuous events that constructed the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Throughout their writings, both Zelda and Scott Fitzgerald integrated autobiographical elements within their fictional narratives. In *Zelda's Save Me the Waltz* and within Scott's four completed novels, both private and publically known events of their lives were told through their narratives. Each of the Fitzgeralds' novels span specific years regarding their blooming relationship, career triumphs, and decay of their marriage. The blending of actual events within a fictional format presents public figures, such as Zelda and Scott, with the agency to disclose intimate details yet mask their lives through fiction. *Roman à clef* (a novel with a key) was the main literary form employed by the Fitzgeralds as the narratives contained both autobiographical and fictional accounts of their lives and relationships. *Roman à clef* novels allow authors to infuse real people into the events of the narrative through fictional names, permitting them to not explicitly state the true influencers behind the story. It is left to audiences to discern fact from fiction throughout the narrative. Since the Fitzgeralds were a public and well-known couple, the *roman à clef* form further contributed to the public's assumptions regarding their lives and personal identities. Because neither Zelda nor Scott wrote any official autobiographies, their novels, in addition to *Zelda's* diary and the letters written to one another, represent the closest written form detailing their love, successes, and struggles. While it is not imperative to read their novels in order to better understand their relationship, *Zelda and Scott's roman à clef* narratives provide greater analysis regarding the intersection between their private lives and public personas.

In addition to their autobiographically charged novels, numerous biographies detailed the turbulent marriage between Zelda and Scott. Nancy Milford's *Zelda: A Biography* and Sally

Cline's *Zelda Fitzgerald: Her Voice in Paradise* are two of the most praised writings centering on Zelda's life while *Scott Fitzgerald* by Jeffery Meyers and Edward J. Rielly's *F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Biography* present much information detailing Scott's own background. In the case of all these works, neither Zelda nor Scott were consulted, and descendants of the couple through their daughter Frances were not major contributors to the events detailed in the biographies. Rather, all of the authors mentioned above uncovered written documents, such as letters sent between the Fitzgeralds, and conducted interviews with the couple's close friends. The immense publication of biographies centering on the Fitzgeralds was due in large part to the public's interest in their lives after both Zelda and Scott died in their forties. Ultimately, the biographies shed light on both Zelda and Scott against the context of their marriage, the flapper era, and the Lost Generation of artists. Despite the mass output of biographies centering on the infamous couple and their individual pursuits, Scott's literary genius drastically overshadows Zelda's artistic pursuits as she is most often defined as Mr. Fitzgerald's unhinged wife and muse.

Therese Anne Fowler's 2013 *New York Times* Bestseller *Z: A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald* attempts to reclaim Zelda's image as separate from Scott's image as a successful author. While labeled as a novel, Fowler's text is indicative of biographical fiction for its foundation in weaving both real and elaborated events centered on Zelda's life. Biographical fiction was previously labeled as biofiction, but once science became a prominent topic within fictional writings, the genre emerged with its current name in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although not meant to replace biographies, biographical fiction, including Fowler's text, enhance the subject's image by recreating interactions and inventing conversations based on known events that occurred in her or his life. Similarly to biographies, Fowler's novel and other forms of biographical fiction aim to fill in gaps surrounding the subject's identity but also embed fictitious elements in order to

enhance plot. In particular, many works of biographical fiction center on a well-known female subject in an attempt to illuminate her private identity. Joyce Carol Oates's 2000 critically acclaimed novel *Blonde* functions as a work of biographical fiction in that it reenacts the life of Marilyn Monroe by weaving fictional conversations and some invented characters into the narrative of the actress's life. Moreover, Paula McLain's 2011 novel *The Paris Wife* represents the most parallels to Fowler's *Z*. The *New York Times* bestseller centers on Hadley Richardson Hemingway, Ernest Hemingway's first wife, and follows her experiences living in 1920s Paris. Similarly to Fowler's novel, *The Paris Wife* explores Hadley's identity as wife and mother in contrast with her highly masculine writer husband. In all examples of biographical fiction, the writer acts as both a fictional writer and biographer. As a result, the author can be as imaginative as he pleases, so long as he does not imagine his facts (Schabert 1). In the case of Fowler, she consulted official documents of the Fitzgeralds, such as letters and their novels themselves, as well as detailed biographies in order to accurately capture the main events in their lives.

Although the format of biographical fiction presents authors with some leeway in drafting their works, major factors contribute to the literary form. In order for a work to be considered biographical fiction, the narrative must center on a well-known societal figure. Biographical fiction is often confused for historical fiction, although the two genres are closely related. Historical fiction centers on a series of historically accurate events with authors embedding fictional characters that represent the era discussed in the narrative. Conversely, biographical fiction focuses solely on the events and relationships that shaped the life of the subject. Additionally, the subjects of biographical fiction novels typically are deceased in order to avoid ethical complications surrounding their identities. While works of biographical fiction are

typically labeled as novels, they simultaneously integrate actual events which occurred in the subject's life. As a result, writers of biographical fiction work to explain and elaborate on the circumstances behind the identity of their subjects. While it is crucial of the author to rely on biography to tell the story of her or his subject, the inclusion of imagined and fictitious conversations, characters, or events to create plot in the narrative allow the subject's identity to be further illuminated. Ultimately, the dual purpose in containing both actual and invented elements within biographical fiction allows the author to reinvent and repurpose the image of the subject for modern audiences.

The blending of fact and fiction is the basis for *Z* in which Fowler presents an intimate portrayal of Zelda Fitzgerald's personal identity that was largely overshadowed by Scott's quest for literary immortality. The copyright page at the start of the novel reads, "This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, organizations, and events portrayed in this novel are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously." The emphasis placed on the work as fiction exonerates Fowler from adhering to the absolute truth regarding Zelda's life. This preface echoes the biographical fiction author's right in using imagination to enhance the image of the subject without facing repercussions from family members or accredited biographers. While the elements of the novel, including "the characters, organizations, and events" are dramatized by Fowler, her intent in writing about Zelda's life far exceeds the presence of fiction within the narrative, as she explains:

Like so many people, I thought I knew who Zelda was, and, like so many people, I was wrong. When I realized this was true and recognized how she'd been misunderstood, misrepresented, and maligned, the prospect

that I might be able to give her a say in her own defense became a mission.

Ultimately, Fowler's purpose in writing *Z* is to give agency back to Zelda herself. In portraying Zelda's troubles as well as her experiences as a struggling artist, Fowler seeks to explain why she never became a premier writer like her husband or an appreciated painter or dancer of her generation. Through her work of biographical fiction, Fowler not only reinvents the identity of Zelda for modern audiences but also portrays her as an artist rather than solely Scott's wife and muse. It is the biographical fiction format that grants Fowler the ability to expose Zelda's true identity and voice as a writer, painter, and dancer.

## **The Making of an Icon:**

### **A Biography of Zelda Fitzgerald**

#### **Childhood and Early Relationship with F. Scott Fitzgerald**

Zelda's identity in becoming an artist was cemented prior to her birth on July 24, 1900. Before delivering her sixth child at the age of forty, Zelda's mother, Minerva, read two contemporary novels that featured beautiful heroines: Jane Howard's *Zelda: A Tale of the Massachusetts Colony* (1866) and Robert Edward Francillon's *Zelda's Fortune* (1874). While it is unclear if Zelda herself actually read these novels that contained her name, the youngest female Sayre, like Francillon describes of his title character, "could have been placed in no imaginable situation without drawing upon herself a hundred stares" (Cline 13). Following in the footsteps of her older sisters and mother, Zelda was strictly raised as a Southern belle and had deep ancestral roots within Alabamian society. Minerva's family were leaders of the Confederate party, and Zelda's father, lawyer Anthony Sayre, was raised in the South and eventually became a Supreme Court judge for Alabama. Largely due to her ingrained Southern roots and stern Protestant upbringing, the free-spirited Zelda felt constricted by the protocols and public persona she was instructed to maintain as a young girl. Zelda's early education in art, literature, and music, as well as lessons in keeping a proper home, were used to groom her into eventually becoming a wife and mother. Zelda, however, grew reluctant in following Southern tradition but was met with support by her mother. While she held aspirations to become an opera singer, Minerva's marriage to Anthony positioned herself as a Southern wife and overseer of the domestic workings of the Sayre household. By recognizing Zelda's rebellious spirit, Minerva emphasized her personal values in following one's own goals rather than traditions. It was her



mother's own failed ambitions for herself that undoubtedly influenced Zelda's desire for independence as an individual and artist.

Zelda's proclivity for opposing traditional feminine values started in her early childhood. Regarded as "mischievous, vivacious and impulsive," the rambunctious Zelda became a talented swimmer and ballerina (Cline 37). However, as she grew into a teenager, Zelda's rebellious spirit intensified, much to the chagrin of her father and Montgomery society. She was often caught sneaking out of her house past curfew and styled her hair in an unconventional bob. Because she vastly differentiated herself from others in her small town, Zelda quickly gained notoriety from both her male and female peers. Virginia Durr, one of Zelda's childhood friends, described her as "a vision of beauty dancing by. She was funny, amusing, the most popular girl; envied by all others, worshipped and adored, besieged by all the boys" (Allitt 579). Zelda's unabashed personality and willingness to forgo ingrained Southern customs made her the most admired young woman in Montgomery.

While Zelda easily found recognition among her peers, her home life proved to be unstable. Although she was supported by Minerva, Anthony detested Zelda's public image as a flirt, placing the two parents at odds with one another. Reflecting on her childhood and her parents' relationship, Zelda wrote:

When I was a child, their relationship was not apparent to me. Now I see them as two unhappy people; my mother was dominated and oppressed by my father and often hurt by him; he forced her to work for a large family in which he found neither satisfaction nor a spiritual link (Cline 20).

Despite her parents' fractured relationship, one that appeared to be based on fulfilling familial expectations rather than genuine love, Zelda looked to marriage as her salvation.

Wanting to ðbe swept off her feet by a glamorous, ambitious man who would take her far from provincial Alabama,ö she prioritized socializing over continuing any individual or educational pursuits upon her required completion of high school (Teachout 59). Despite her seemingly carefree and uncommitted attitude towards men, Zelda quickly became enamored by the young army officer Scott Fitzgerald. Shortly following her graduation, the 18-year-old Zelda met her future husband at a local dance. The 22-year-old Scott was stationed in Montgomery after leaving Princeton University where he excelled in writing but failed to graduate with a degree. Scott was initially drawn to Zelda's independent nature and remarked how she ðwas completely different from any girl he had knownö totally fearless, shamelessly confident, and absolutely free from the Victorian prudery of most of her female contemporaries (Shurbutt 56). Most importantly, however, Zelda and Scott quickly bonded over their mutual interest in literature. Throughout her early life, Zelda often immersed herself in a wide variety of books:

Though she read a great deal, not surprisingly she preferred books with action. ðThe fairy tales were my favorite,öshe said, because their creatures twisted, contorted, and rushed through the pages. The three little pigs, Hansel and Gretel, and Alice in Wonderland, which she copied out as a child, she later formally painted. In Judge Sayre's extensive library she dipped into his encyclopedias, Shakespeare, Thackeray, Dickens, Scott, Wilde, Galsworthy, Kipling, Plutarch, Aristotle, Aeschylus, and Gibbon. She read Victorian children's books, gobbled up fiction slightly too old for her: ðpopular tales for boys, novels that my sisters had left on the tableí all I found about the civil war.ö(Cline 25).

It was the combination of Zelda's irresistible charm, beauty, and literary knowledge that captivated Scott. While he eventually traveled overseas and along the East Coast for military training, the two often wrote to each other and quickly fell in love. However, tensions between Zelda's family and Scott quickly formed and progressed over time. Upon first hearing about her new love, Zelda's traditionalist father criticized Scott's dreams in becoming a full time writer and condemned his Irish Catholic heritage. Concurrently, Scott failed to accept Zelda's family, especially the strong bond between her and her mother: "Scott Fitzgerald believed that Minnie's indulgence had spoiled Zelda's character and encouraged what he saw as her selfish recklessness" (Cline 37). Nevertheless, despite their differences, Zelda fell in love with Scott because of their many similarities, most notably their "privileged upbringings, high spirits, love of drink and fun, and similar blond good looks" (Allitt 581). Ultimately, these similarities outweighed their differences, and in the spring of 1919, about one year after their initial meeting, Zelda accepted Scott's proposal of marriage.

Similarly to their courtship, Zelda and Scott's initial engagement period was met with numerous trials. Upon hearing about their engagement, Zelda's father continued to express his reluctance to their union, especially as he began to view Scott's excessive drinking and floundering writing career as liabilities to his daughter's well-being and future. Despite her estranged relationship with her father, Zelda seemed to listen to his advice and quickly broke off her engagement with Scott. Devastated by her rejection, Scott wanted to prove to the Sayre family that he was worthy of Zelda. In order to illustrate his ability to financially support Zelda, Scott returned to his hometown of St. Paul, Minnesota in 1920 and wrote his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*, which mirrored the young couple's turbulent relationship. The process of working on his story and his striving to win the approval of the Sayre family caused Scott to

label Zelda as his literary muse. In fact, as they communicated through letters while apart, Scott became somewhat obsessed with Zelda's writings and asked that her personal diary be mailed to him:

Scott had always intended to use Zelda's letters and diary in his first novel *This Side of Paradise* to ensure his hero Amory Elaine's affair with Rosalind Connage resembled his own affair with Zelda. When Scott later sent his editor, Maxwell Perkins, a segment of his manuscript containing parts of Zelda's diary, he confessed that much of the dialogue was Zelda's (Cline 66).

Scott became so enthralled with his young love's writings that he even contemplated publishing Zelda's diary without her knowledge. Although her entries were published later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Zelda not only influenced Scott's first novel but subsequently his future major writings. Due to the instant and massive popularity of *This Side of Paradise*, Zelda became confident Scott's writings could support her and their potential children. In fact, when Zelda believed she was pregnant in late 1919, she was eager to begin a family with Scott, despite her family's obvious disapproval of having children out of wedlock. Despite discovering that she was in fact not pregnant, the two argued as to whether they should keep the child. Scott added further strain to the relationship by questioning Zelda's potential as a writer's benevolent housewife. He wrote to a friend claiming that if a young woman "smokes and drinks in public, tells hair-raising stories to shock people and admits that she has kissed thousands of male admirers" that girl is hardly a lady (Cline 68). In spite of their initial conflicts, Zelda Sayre became Zelda Fitzgerald by marrying Scott at the St. Patrick's Catholic Cathedral in New York in April 1920.

Following their marriage, the newlyweds became enveloped in the glamorous upper class lifestyle of New York City. *This Side of Paradise* was mass distributed and produced, causing Zelda to become financially dependent on Scott rather than her disapproving family. Immersing herself in a metropolitan lifestyle, Zelda often attended parties at elite New York City locales and became an overnight celebrity. Similarly to the reputation she garnered in Montgomery, Zelda became known for her antics, famously jumping into a Union Square fountain in the early morning after a party. Despite her continual rebellious nature, the new Mrs. Fitzgerald expressed interest in writing fiction like her husband. While their incessant drinking and socializing did not diminish his writing productivity, Scott made Zelda aware of the strict dynamics in their relationship. She was schooled in an age that lent full acceptance to her functioning only as a muse, as a decoration, but not having a separate identity and artistic life apart from her husband (Shurbutt 56). As a further extension to her patriarchal Southern upbringing, Zelda now found herself firmly confined to the role of Scott's wife.

### **Artistic Emergence: The Paris Years**

The Roaring 20s was largely marked by the Fitzgerald's presence within the era, especially as Zelda became the one of the period's most notable female icons for her willingness to ignore gender roles. After the end of World War I, the strong, independent, and accomplished "new woman" emerged within American society, and while Zelda was certainly unconventional, her accomplishments largely failed in comparison to her female peers (The 1920s). Female emancipation marked the 1920s as more women attended higher education and financially supported themselves. However, by living off royalties from *This Side of Paradise* and Scott's published short stories, Zelda's dependence on her husband drastically altered her character. Many of her friends noted that Zelda sulked if she did not enjoy a steady stream of

costly gifts, pampering attention, and opportunities to act outrageously (Allitt 581). Due to Scott's intense drive to become a renowned writer and Zelda's desire for his attention, the Fitzgeralds' once passionate and copasetic marriage became filled with alcohol induced fights and turmoil. Both heavily relied on alcohol for daily activities: Zelda drank to become more acclimated within upper class New York society and catch the eye of other men in order to make her husband jealous, and Scott often abused alcohol during writing sessions. However, because of their growingly toxic relationship, Scott's work began to suffer as he "quickly reached the point of being unable to write if she was in their apartment (because she would not leave him alone) and unable to write if she was *not* there (because of anxiety at what she might be doing, and with whom)" (Allitt 581). Ultimately, Zelda's mere physical presence dramatically impacted Scott's literary output, further confining her to the role of his muse.

Despite their apparent troubles, Zelda gained a newfound image as Scott's literary successes continued and was labeled by her husband as America's first flapper girl. Named after "a neophyte waiting to flap her wings as she embarks upon her maiden flight of discovery," flapper women revolutionized themselves from rigid societal norms (Mencken 357). Flappers wore shorter dresses compared to previous generations of women and took pride in being unconventional. Given the rebellious nature she developed from her childhood, Zelda accurately fit the mold of this New Woman but maintained little control over her public persona and character. Continuing to read her diary for inspiration for his own works, Scott portrayed his literary heroines as whimsical young women who were always posed to fall in love with the male protagonist by the narrative's end:

She provided him with all of his copy for his women characters. And this "heroine" with whom he had fallen in love was ever persuaded by Scott to

perform, to play the role that he was scripting for her. For Zelda's part, while she frankly enjoyed "starring" in his stories, the limitations of such a role "soon" began to weigh heavily (Shurbutt 57).

While she initially prided herself in being her husband's literary muse, Scott's constructed image of Zelda negatively influenced her. Because he used her personal writings to construct his female protagonists, the line between fiction and reality became blurred for Zelda, causing her to question her sense of self in relation to her marriage. Promising to be a devout and supportive wife to the aspiring author, Zelda assumed to forgo any pursuits outside of their marriage, telling him, "I'll never get ambitious enough to try anything" (Cline 67). She claimed she did not want to become "famous and feted," but Zelda wrote her desire in her marriage and life was to be "every young always and very irresponsible and to feel that my life is my own" to live and be happy" (Cline 67). Ultimately, however, Scott's drastic influence on her public image caused Zelda to disenfranchise herself from her true identity.

The start of 1921 brought unexpected news to the Fitzgeralds. Despite their chaotic relationship, Zelda discovered she was pregnant just short of their one year anniversary. The 20-year-old was faced with greater responsibilities but nonetheless did little in changing her social lifestyle. After traveling between Europe and America for much of the year, Zelda gave birth to the couple's only child, daughter Francis "Scottie" Fitzgerald, on October 26, 1921 in Scott's hometown of St. Paul. The birth of Scottie drastically changed Zelda's identity and perception of herself. As she hired nannies and housekeepers to maintain her family and home, Zelda felt empty and yearned to find a sense of meaning in her life. While she was not officially diagnosed with a medical condition immediately after the birth of Scottie, Zelda may have suffered from postpartum depression, a condition that was relatively unknown in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Along

with her continued arguments with Scott, Zelda's life had become less fulfilling as she took no particular pleasure in raising Scottie (Teachout 60). Despite her postpartum struggles, Zelda cultivated a passion for art, giving her a genuine voice that she believed would not be marred by her husband or her society's perception of her. Zelda began writing short stories and light essays, most of them about her life with Scott, making no attempt to produce anything ambitious (Teachout 60). However, her spurt of literary output was derailed following the success of Scott's second novel *The Beautiful and the Damned* in 1922. The narrative again mirrored the lives of Zelda and Scott and presented the struggles of young individuals maturing in the Roaring 20s era. During the same year, Zelda found out she was pregnant for a second time, but rather than having another child, she took medication that aborted the baby. As a result of the abortion and heightening tension between her and Scott, Zelda developed a number of gynecological issues as well as colitis, an inflammation of the colon that was thought to be induced by stress. Despite trying to conceive later in 1926, Zelda's health issues caused her to become infertile, a condition that impacted her sense of worth and femininity. In order to revive her energy and to continue his writing success, Scott suggested the family move to Paris, the European epicenter for art during the 1920s. It was in Europe, and Paris in particular, that Zelda faced the darkest yet most transformative years of her life.

The emergence of the Fitzgeralds in Paris mimicked their opulent life within New York City. Due to Scott's continued success as a writer and newfound popularity as a playwright, Zelda was introduced to premier authors, poets, painters, and singers of the Lost Generation in 1925. Artists fled to Paris because they were disenfranchised from their post war society and could not find themselves, could not adjust to the life around them, and therefore did not become lost in the mass of those who were "adjusted" (Perry 35). While she was only



considered part of the group because of her husband, Zelda became inspired by other artists of the Lost Generation. Feeling disconnected in her marriage, Zelda began to long for something more meaningful to do with her life and to see herself, if only tentatively, as an artist (Shurbutt 57). She once again wrote short fictional accounts and began to paint colorful depictions of New York City. However, her newfound interest in becoming an artist placed a strain on her marriage with Scott, especially as his literary output began to waver. After months of struggling to finish his novel, Scott published *The Great Gatsby* in April 1925. While the novel would eventually become his *tour de force*, *The Great Gatsby* initially received mixed reviews from critics and failed to sell among the general population. Due to the novel's lackluster sales, Scott not only developed an inadequacy in his image as a writer but also began to be threatened by Zelda's creative transformation (Shurbutt 57). Nevertheless, jealousy would manifest in other ways throughout the Fitzgerald's marriage. After she caught Scott flirting with dancer Isadora Duncan, Zelda proceeded to throw herself down a staircase in an apparent suicide attempt and shortly afterwards began an affair with French naval officer Edouard Joze. When she revealed her plan to leave Scott for him, Edouard rejected Zelda, causing her to overdose on sleeping pills. Despite her attempts in finding happiness and liberation through art, Zelda fell further into chaos, an initial indication of the mental health issues she would eventually face throughout the remainder of her life.

Zelda's quickly dissolving marriage was also marred in part to Scott's relationship with fellow Lost Generation writer Ernest Hemingway. Upon moving to Paris, Scott became close a confidant to Ernest, and the two would often tour France without Zelda knowing of her husband's whereabouts. Scott's continual absences not only fueled Zelda's jealousy but she also suspected her husband was involved in a homosexual relationship with Ernest. While their

closest friends adamantly denied this rumor, it was evident that both Ernest and Zelda disliked each other and placed Scott as a type of prize whose approval they desperately needed to win. When Zelda began to form relationships with openly lesbian artists, Ernest accused her of starting an affair in order to salaciously ruin her husband's writing career. Furthermore, Zelda disliked Ernest's dependence on alcohol and believed he ruthlessly encouraged Scott's drinking in order to derail his writing and eventually take Scott's place as the premier writer of the Lost Generation (Cline 174). Ultimately, Ernest allegedly disliked Zelda as she chose to pursue her individual artistic desires rather than assume a role as doting housewife and mother. In a possible attempt to defy her sole position as Scott's life, in 1927, the 27-year-old Zelda revived her childhood interest in ballet. Hoping to pursue a career in the craft, she often practiced seven to eight hours a day despite her colitis diagnosis and continued her writing and painting sessions. As she was nearing thirty, Zelda felt a need to revive her artistic spirit as she looked back on her life from the vantage point of her late twenties, [and] she saw only wasted time, spent effort, and few tangible accomplishments for herself. (Shurbutt 58). With the New Woman identity continuing to emancipate women in both Europe and America, Zelda most likely felt inferior to her independent and career-driven female peers. Although she tried to escape the mistakes she made in her early twenties, Zelda's eventual unhinged emotions and the ultimate deterioration of her carefree spirit marred her artistic output.

### **Psychological Struggles and Remaining Years**

The remaining seventeen years of Zelda's life were filled with heartbreak and mental health struggles, but ironically, they were the most productive in terms of her artistic output. Beginning in 1930, Zelda faced a series of nervous breakdowns when she uncovered Scott's affair with a young actress named Lois Moran. While still living in France, Zelda's doctors

discovered mental disorders ran in her family lineage, a revelation that preceded her brother's own suicide in 1933. Because of her bouts of intense anger, sadness, and depression, Zelda was soon diagnosed with schizophrenia and was admitted into a hospital for psychiatric evaluation. Based on current medical standards, however, Zelda most likely suffered from bipolar disorder, or manic depression, which explained her wide, sometimes incapacitating mood swings (Teachout 59). Additionally, her interest and immense dedication to writing, painting, and ballet were thought to be related to her mental disorder. Doctors noted that Zelda's serial plunges into art appear to have been manifestations of the onset of mania, and she most likely used art in an attempt to confront and overcome her negative thoughts (Teachout 60). While her doctors encouraged her passions for writing and painting, they simultaneously forced Zelda to suspend her intensive ballet practices due to the physical stress it placed on her body. Required to forgo one of her passions, Zelda was left with more despair and became even more invisible within her marriage and society:

It half killed me to give up all the work I had done. I was completely insane and had made a decision: to abandon the ballet and live quietly with my husband. If I couldn't be great, it wasn't worth going on with though I loved my work to the point of obsession. It was all I had in the world at the time (Shurbutt 59).

Due in large part to her forced resignation from ballet practices, Zelda was admitted to a clinic in Switzerland and treated for schizophrenia, insomnia, and hallucinations. Despite their turbulent marriage, Scott deeply cared for Zelda, often visiting and writing to her. Zelda detailed many of her struggles in her messages to Scott, telling him, "I have been living in vaporous places peopled with one-dimensional figures and tremulous buildings until I can no longer tell an

optical illusion from a realityö (Allitt 583). Her clear distortion of reality caused Zelda to rely on writing and painting not only as a way to express her emotions but also to maintain a connection to the real world. It was during this time of intense personal struggle that Zelda began to draft her novel *Save Me the Waltz*, a work that would define her writing career and cement her legacy within Roaring 20s folklore.

Following a short period of mental stability, Zelda again soon became severely depressed, causing her to be admitted to the Phipps Clinic at Johns Hopkins Hospital in 1932. During a six week period, she produced her only major work *Save Me the Waltz*, a semi-autobiographical narrative that detailed much of her physical breakdown and disillusionment with Scott. The book was eventually produced by the same publishing house of Scott's novels, but Scott firmly bashed the novel and grew enraged as he envisioned Zelda's potential fame in the literary world. Scott was floored that Zelda used their personal relationship as content for her writings when she knew that he was drafting *Tender is the Night*, his final novel which predominately centered on the troubles within their marriage. While Zelda repeatedly apologized to Scott, he saw the novel as a way to undercut his successes, as he told her doctor, "My books made her a legend and her single intention in this somewhat thin portrait is to make me a nonentityö (Shurbutt 60). Wanting to prove she was more than Scott's wife and muse, Zelda became highly devoted to her art and was encouraged by her doctors to paint. In 1934, she held a showing of her surrealist paintings in Manhattan that corresponded to Scott's publication of *Tender is the Night*. Although both were met with mixed reviews, Scott blamed Zelda for his declining literary accomplishments and condemned her talent, telling her in a therapy session, "It is a perfectly lonely struggle that I am making against other writers who are finely gifted and talented. í You are a third-rate writer and a third-rate ballet dancer. í I am the professional

novelist, and I am supporting you" (Teachout 60). Once the most iconic couples of the Roaring 20s, Zelda and Scott fell from their elite society, and their public personas were inevitably tarnished for the remainder of their lives.

Zelda's mental health quickly deteriorated during the late 1930s. In 1936, after an argument with Scott, he narrowly saved Zelda after he pulled her away from an oncoming train. The incident left Scott with no other choice than to readmit Zelda to a sanatorium, and she became a patient at Highland Hospital in Asheville, North Carolina. During her time at Highland, Zelda received electroshock therapy due to her increased manic episodes and claims that she was communicating with a supernatural and religious power. Coincidentally, not long after Zelda's suicide attempt, Scott's health became worse as his years of excessive drinking caused debilitating breathing issues. Ultimately, he died in 1940 at age of 44, leaving Zelda with a small inheritance due to Scott's failed literary projects and poor financial planning. Despite their toxic relationship filled with successes, jealousy, and chaos, Zelda loved and admired Scott for his impact on American literature, as she wrote while still consumed with depression, "His poignancy was the perishing of lovely things and people on the jagged edges truncate spiritual purpose" . [His work] presented in poetic harmonies the tragically gallant stoicism so indispensable to traversing that troubled and turbulent epoch between world wars" (Shurbutt 64). Although she was undervalued and overshadowed by his genius, Zelda saw Scott as her one true partner in life.

Despite the mass number of writings and paintings she produced and her talent as a ballerina, Zelda never reached the level of artistic fame that is attributed to her husband. After Scott's death, Zelda's mental health briefly improved, and she began to write a second novel entitled *Caesar's Things* that was set to be a companion novel and response to Scott's *The Last*

*Tycoon*. Zelda produced a number of paintings in the early 1940s, including a rigid yet haunting self portrait that followed postmodern style. She also sought to rebuild relationships with her family members, including her daughter Scottie who often witnessed Zelda's mental breakdowns and her parents' volatile outbursts. However, her moments of mental clarity soon faded, and Zelda once again became a patient Highland Hospital after outpatient treatments failed to fully control her health. While still progressing on her novel and well-being, Zelda's life was cut short at the age of 47 when a fire broke out at the hospital's kitchen and consumed much of the building on March 10, 1948, including corridors where she and other patients were sleeping. Zelda was eventually buried next to Scott in Maryland along with a quote from *The Great Gatsby* on the couple's tombstone: "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past." The couple that initially defined a generation of wealth and glamour was overshadowed by dependence on alcohol, public antics, and incessant conflict. While Scott's image was renewed after his death and is still widely considered one of the most talented American authors in history, Zelda's rebellious nature and mental struggles continuously overshadow her artistic talent and identity. Many are quick to label Zelda as a failed and fallen woman, claiming, "She was the American girl living the American dream, and she became mad within it" (Milford). Although her marriage and madness play key roles in understanding the majority of her works, Zelda's writings stand alone as conveying universal themes of personal struggles and redemption.

Throughout the nearly 70 years following her death, artists have attempted to revive Zelda's image as new audiences become fascinated with her influence within the Roaring 20s era. Most notably, Woody Allen's 2011 comedy *Midnight in Paris* on the Lost Generation stereotypes Zelda in a predictable fashion. Allison Pill's brief portrayal in the film heightens Zelda's

proclivity for maintaining her status as a Parisian socialite. Depicted in her famous flapper garb, Pillø's Zelda seeks adventure and complains about the lack of entertainment available in Paris. However, the film fails to elaborate on her artistic career, instead briefly centering on Zeldaø's disjointed relationship with Scott, played by Tom Hiddleston, and her clear animosity towards Corey Stollø's Ernest Hemingway. Additionally, the short lived series *Z: The Beginning of Everything* produced by Amazon Prime yet based on Fowlerø's *Z: A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald* fails to fully capture the full and complex life of its title. While the series centers on the artistic pursuits of Zelda, played by Christina Ricci, the sudden cancelation of the drama prevents audiences from better understanding the entirety of her complexity. Nevertheless, two production studios are working with actresses Jennifer Lawrence and Scarlett Johansson to create separate films centered on the famous flapper. While production on these projects has yet to begin, each movie is planned to contrast Zeldaø's artistic desires with her imposed role as wife, muse, and mother. Ultimately, these current depictions attempt to revitalize Zeldaø's identity for modern audiences and illustrate her merit within the art world.

## What Is Her Story:

### The Reimagining of Zelda's Life in "Z"

Therese Anne Fowler's fourth published novel *Z: A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald* quickly rose to critical and public acclaim upon its initial release in 2013. Prior to the publishing her breakout book, Fowler obtained an MFA in creative writing from North Carolina State University and remains as a visiting professor at the college. As a single mother, she struggled in selling copies of her first three novels and contemplated changing her career trajectory but eventually decided to research the life of Zelda Fitzgerald and rewrite the flapper's public persona, one that was strictly intertwined with her husband:

Initially, I had quite a few misperceptions about who Zelda was, and I knew nothing about her talents as writer, artist, and dancer, so these aspects of her life all came as surprises. Her life with Scott is simply a tremendously interesting story. I was intrigued by their relationship, the era, the people they knew, and of course the tragedies they both endured.

Fowler eventually published *Z* through New York's St. Martin's Griffin and was met with positive reception from both critics and the general public. *The Boston Globe* called the novel "enchanting" and noted that "Fowler's sympathy for Zelda is passionate" while *The Wall Street Journal* praised the narrative for dutifully and definitively capturing "Zelda's moment" 65 years after her death. The critical appraisal helped the novel to be part of *The New York Times* Bestseller list for weeks after its release and was translated into more than twenty languages. As of 2018, copies of *Z* continue to be produced and released worldwide.

Despite its considerable praise, Fowler's decision in fictionally recreating Zelda's life was met with some criticism. Biographer Sarah Churchwell in the *New Statesman* argued the



novel "is less a fiction than a series of falsities" (42). Churchwell cites Fowler's incorrect names for the Fitzgerald's friends as "paying little attention to facts" and overall questions the author's intentions in adapting Zelda's life into a largely fictional format:

Where there is so little fidelity to the known facts, there can be no meaningful notion of history, no imaginative supplementing of incomplete stories, and the "minutiae" about which Fowler is so dismissive cannot be transcended. Certainly no sense of truth, history or fiction can flourish in a space that has no sense of fact. (43)

While Fowler in fact took many liberties in reconstructing Zelda's life, the themes of the female identity and struggle for autonomy portrayed throughout *Z* speak to the foundation of literature. Churchwell's statements regarding the distinction between truth and fact seem inconsequential to Fowler's text. Because *Z* is labeled as a fictional novel with biographical elements, facts are used when illustrating the salient aspects of Zelda's life. Various conversations, letters, and even characters are fictionalized for the sake of plot, but the major biographical events that occurred in Zelda's life are addressed in Fowler's novel. Despite the fictionalized elaboration of "fact," the notion of truth remains clear and consistent throughout the novel. *Z* tells the story of a woman seeking independence from her husband, family, and society, a theme that resonates throughout literature and history itself. Ultimately, Fowler's narrative juxtaposes Zelda as both a female icon and woman struggling to claim autonomy within her personal life.

Due to Fowler's intense research and dedication to her subject, *Z* mimics Zelda's own intimate diary entries and letters. The entirety of the novel is told from Zelda's point of view through first person chapters and fictional letters constructed to mirror actual correspondence between her and loved ones. Fowler's decision to construct the novel in this fashion works in

illuminating the essence of Zelda herself. To the unknowing reader who opens the text without giving much thought to the cover, Fowler becomes secondary to Zelda's supposed words on the page. The pages of the novel itself are crafted so that Fowler's name does not appear on either a header or footer. Instead, her name and the demarcation of the narrative's novel label are only visible from the book's front cover. Along with St. Martin Griffin's decision to have the pages of the novel look worn and aged, the book itself appears as though it was Zelda's personal diary, shared among readers for decades. The weathered appearance of the book's pages symbolize the passing of time, a manifestation of Zelda's legacy and image as the Roaring 20s defining flapper. Fowler's nearly nonexistent presence throughout the novel alludes to the idea that she is not only merely recreating Zelda's story. Rather, she uses her writing to revive and imagine Zelda's voice through the format of biographical fiction. Ultimately, *Z* calls attention to Zelda's unknown artistic pursuits while simultaneously validating her unappreciated presence within the Lost Generation of artists.

**“We’re celebrities...Scott and me”**

Fowler's novel begins *in medias res* with a 1940 letter correspondence from Zelda to Scott. Based on Zelda's biography, Fowler illustrates the flapper wife has returned to the South and once again becomes a resident at Highland Hospital. The letter Fowler constructs is marked with the date December 20, 1940, making it the final correspondence between wife and husband before Scott's death. Although Zelda's actual final letter to Scott is currently undiscovered, Fowler recreates this correspondence to replicate the written exchanges that often occurred between the two. Speaking about their future plans and the imminent publication of *The Last Tycoon*, Zelda looks to rebuild her life and marriage to Scott after their tumultuous years, telling him, “Won't we be quite the pair?— you with your bad heart, me with my bad head” (1). For

readers cognizant of Zelda's biography, the passage signals an allusion to their respective health issues, namely Scott's weakening heart and Zelda's mental struggles. Fowler's decision to begin her novel with the impending death of Scott symbolically represents Zelda's identity within the narrative. With previous depictions of Zelda centered on her marriage to Scott, Fowler instead illustrates how their relationship was only one minor component to her life and legacy. The author's choice in quickly sidelining Scott's character largely focuses her biographical fiction on Zelda's autonomy both within her marriage and in the art world.

Fowler's initial descriptions of Zelda are largely based on her identity as a Roaring 20s icon. Highlighting the couple's iconic presence within American culture, Fowler describes Zelda as being enthralled by her public status:

We're celebrities! Scott and me. Folks here have followed our doings all along, clipping articles about us, claiming events and friendships that are as invented as any fiction Scott or I ever wrote. You can't stop the gossip or even combat it, hardly, so you learn to play along (3).

Zelda's self-proclaimed celebrity status not only harkens to the couple's eventual fall from status but also echoes her own salacious identity. The 1940s found Zelda and Scott no longer relevant in New York or Paris, yet the headline seeking flapper desperately clings to her and her husband's past identities as a reminder of their reputations. While she feeds off the public's former perception of them, Fowler simultaneously presents Zelda as being trapped in scandalous gossip. Unable to control the public's opinion of her, Zelda has no other choice than to submit to the stories and rumors surrounding her character. Despite her previously established identity as the chaotic and unhinged wife of Scott Fitzgerald, Fowler invites readers to examine a new perspective to Zelda, as her title character states, "Look closer and you'll see something

extraordinary, mystifying, something real and true. We have never been what we seemed (5). As the storyteller behind Zelda's image, Fowler's voice interjects in the flapper's narrative, explaining to readers the 1920s icon was mischaracterized. Although her biographical fiction is not fully "real and true," Fowler's narrative is constructed to alter previously made assumptions about Zelda. Ultimately, through the voice of Zelda herself, Fowler comments on her work while arguing the flapper's true identity, one that is unrelated to her marriage and the public perception of her. This commentary provided by Fowler presents her as the catalyst for unveiling Zelda's hidden yet authentic identity as an artist.

*Z* opens with Zelda's rambunctious teenage years and illustrates the young woman's efforts in defying her strict Southern family's expectations. She describes her "one true love" of ballet as containing "joy and drama and passion and romance, all the things I desired from life" (12). Despite attempts from Anthony Sayre in molding his daughter to become an adequate Southern woman and eventual wife, Zelda wears provocative clothes and defies his curfew rules. While the depiction of Anthony draws parallels to his image as described in biographies of her life, Fowler describes Minerva Sayre as less willing to abide by her young daughter's rebellious ways. Instead, the author depicts the mother as a typical Southern woman, one who would want her daughter to follow traditional feminine protocols. As a result, Zelda stands in greater contrast to both her mother and her Alabamian society:

*She worries about the oddest things, I thought. All the women do. There were so many rules we girls were supposed to adhere to, so much emphasis on propriety. Straight backs. Gloved hands. Unpainted (and unknissed) lips. Pressed skirts, modest words, downturned eyes, chaste thoughts. A lot of nonsense in my view* (13).

This artistic liberty taken by Fowler illustrates the unique nature of Zelda and her place within Southern culture. While Minerva is documented by biographers as being more liberal in terms of accepting her daughter's appearance and public identity, it is very likely that she also experienced pressure from others, including her husband, to culture a positive and respectable image for Zelda. Moreover, Fowler's decision to construct Minerva as a strict mother echoes the greater society in which Zelda found herself. Unlike her peers and elders, Fowler portrays Zelda as wanting to pursue a career as a ballerina rather than assume a traditional homemaker role. The backdrop of Southern culture in relation to her parents' opinions juxtaposes Zelda as an outsider among her family and larger society, a role the eventual Mrs. Fitzgerald actually inhabited.

The introduction of Scott Fitzgerald within Fowler's narrative illustrates Zelda's initial willingness to abide by female Southern protocols. Rather than pursue her aspirations as a dancer, the presence of Scott calls Zelda to the role of wife rather than ballerina. Upon meeting the army clad Fitzgerald at a military ball, Fowler writes that Zelda became attracted to her future husband's expressive eyes yet "possessive and tentative" body language (24). Fowler captures their initial, mutual interest in literature with Scott admiring her mother's choice in naming her *Zelda* after the novel *Zelda's Fortune*. Unlike other men in her Montgomery town, Scott represents a new type of masculine figure, just as Zelda embodies a more modern image of a Southern woman. She notes that she felt "off-balance" when dancing with Scott, adding, "None of the boys I knew had much interest in books. I looked at Scott there in the rosy light, his hair and skin and eyes aglow with joy and ambition and enthusiasm, and was dazzled (24-25). However, Zelda faces opposition from her father who disapproved of Scott's aspirations in being a writer:

“You do not,” he continued, “want to ever have to work for your support.” And he was right, I didn’t. No respectable married woman held a job if she had any choice about it, not in Alabama. We girls were trained up knowing there was only one goal to worry ourselves about, and that was marriage to the best sort of fella who would have us. As many rules as I was willing to break, I never gave that one a minute’s thought (35).

Despite her intrinsic rebellious nature and flirtatious interactions with her male counterparts, Fowler highlights the embedded complexity of Zelda’s nature in striving for both independence and security as a wife. While she largely ignored protocols regarding her feminine identity, Scott represented “a prince [who] was sure to happen along shortly,” one who could whisk Zelda away from her confining family and society (13). Ultimately, Fowler presents Zelda as a New Woman, one whose desire for independence also integrates her family’s traditional values. Although she maintains her rebellious spirit by choosing to marry the financially struggling Scott, Zelda simultaneously reinforces the expectations placed upon her due to her gender. As a result, Fowler’s interpretation of Zelda places the Roaring 20s icon within the framework of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, especially with regards to the element of choice within the lives of modern women.

The tumultuous relationship between Zelda and Scott quickly becomes a centralized theme of Fowler’s text. Echoing the writer’s actual obsession with the young Southern woman, Fowler highlights Scott’s need for Zelda in order to be a successful writer:

I was terrible in the army. Worst aide-de-camp ever. I can’t run an office I can’t lead men. í But it doesn’t matter. None of that matters. With you there to come home to í You’d *inspire* me. You *do* inspire me (53).

Similarly to Zelda, Scott was displaced but between the military and an educated society. Unlike his Princeton classmates and peers, Scott has no foreseeable future in business, politics, or leadership. Instead, he is compelled by writing, an occupation that was met with disapproval by Zelda's father and others from Scott's upper-middle class society. Knowing her impact on his life, Zelda uses her identity as Scott's muse in order to ignite his drive in transforming into a published and famous author. Fowler's decision to integrate the couple's momentary break-up with the narrative only emphasizes Zelda's power within her relationship with Scott. He eventually publishes *This Side of Paradise*, a triumph which not only unites the couple once again but also places Zelda in control of their collective destiny. Through Fowler's representation, Zelda proves to be more than a muse for Scott but rather represents the major contributing factor to the writer's successes.

Despite the evident influence Zelda held within Scott's life, her pregnancy scare prior to their marriage illustrates the strict dominance exhibited by the rising author. Upon hearing about her supposed pregnancy, Scott urges Zelda to "take care" of her condition, adding, "If I can't write, I don't make more money, and if I don't make more money, none of our plans will work out" and any money I've made already would go to the baby. "This isn't what we want right now" (59). Knowing success would only follow his published works, Fowler uses the pronoun "we" to illustrate how Scott maintained the superior position within their traditional, patriarchal relationship. However, Zelda encounters a moral dilemma when deciding whether or not to terminate her pregnancy, stating, "If I had this possible baby and our life afterward proved to be nothing but misery, he'd be resentful forever, and what kind of life would that be?" (60). As she bases her happiness on Scott's contentment, Zelda also relies on her future husband's growing financial success as a reason to abide by his requests. In fact, she takes pride in Scott's growing

popularity, stating, "Next thing you know, I'll be adding *rich* to my list of adjectives and everyone will say, 'Finally he's good enough for our Zelda'" (65). While she wants to prove to her family and Montgomery community that her choice to rebel against their ways did in fact contribute to her wealth and fame, Zelda simultaneously wants to add to her reputation and image. Her relationship with Scott would not only grant her independence from her family's wealth but would also position her as the wife of a successful American author. Fowler's choice in juxtaposing Zelda's pregnancy scare with her desire for wealth makes her privy to the decisions of Scott. Zelda's pursuit of wealth is solely dependent on Scott's successes, placing her in an inferior position within their relationship. Although she held some control within Scott's life, namely as his needed muse, Fowler's portrayal of the near voiceless Zelda within the Fitzgerald's relationship has largely been undiscovered in previous literary depictions. As a result, Fowler attempts to reclaim Zelda's narrative, illustrating the actual price she endured for her wealth and fame.

### **The Troubles in Being Rosalind**

The marriage between Zelda and Scott allows Fowler to examine how the young wife transforms from defiant Southern belle to scandalous flapper wife, a position imposed upon her by her writer husband. A new member of upper class society in New York, Zelda compares herself to the title character of *Alice in Wonderland*, an illusion to the fairy tales she once read as a young girl, as she finds her adventures in the city both "magnificent and dizzying" (72). With the success of Scott's recently published novel *This Side of Paradise*, Zelda is thrust into the role of not only being her husband's muse but also fulfilling an identity set upon her due to her gender and social status. While trying on an expensive suit and hat ensemble, Zelda calls herself a "proper lady" and "the best costume I've worn so far in my life" (76). In using her costume as



a type of mask, Zelda conceals her true identity to the upper class New York society. Finding herself in similar parameters compared to her young life in Montgomery, Fowler illustrates that Zelda has no agency in her appearance or character. Rather, she must conform to her society once again. By writing that Zelda's New York outfit is the best she has worn so far in her life, Fowler insinuates the flapper wife is constantly changing to fit the needs of her society and particularly finds herself in a more restricted environment in New York. Simultaneously trying to please Scott and adapt to her new city, Zelda's authentic character is masked by her responsibilities as an upper class woman and wife to an aspiring author. Although she finds herself enraptured by the glamour of New York, Zelda assumes a role dictated to her because of her marriage. This confinement not only eventually leads to Zelda's dissolution within her marriage and identity but also prompts her to turn to art as a way to recapture her true voice.

Fowler's first indication of Zelda breaking her mold as Scott's muse comes in the wake of his book's release. Centering on the *roman à clef* aspect of Scott's novels, Fowler examines how Zelda's role as both wife and main female protagonist negatively intersected with her own identity. Upon Scott telling a reporter that Zelda is reflected in *This Side of Paradise* as Rosalind Connage, the main character's love interest, she becomes frustrated that her image is viewed as a ploy to increase book sales. "In the future," he tells her, "if anyone should bring up the subject of Rosalind being like you, don't split hairs; play it up. *Be* Rosalind. That's what they're hoping for" (85). Knowing his writing successes are beneficial to both of their lives, Zelda agrees to his requests and continues to live lavishly because of Scott's income. However, as the lines between fiction and reality begin to coincide, Zelda is left as a pawn without any control over her public identity. Zelda begins to live a dual identity by being both Scott's inspiration and actively living out a character constructed by him. Later, when he releases a new short story entitled "Bernice

Bobs Her Hair,ö Scott instructs Zelda to cut her hair, transforming her into a ðnew bob-haired, bead-draped, Parisian version of his wifeö (123). While he claims they are writing their own parts in his novels, Zelda has no choice but to mold herself into a flapper wife within both Scott's life and text. In an actual letter written to Scott prior to their marriage, Zelda claims to use an ointment to style it ðlike you wanted itö (Lanahan 15). Fowler ultimately illustrates the struggles of Zelda in forfeiting her personal identity to the agency of Scott who succeeds in constantly remolding his wife into the personas of his female characters.

As a result of Scott's power within their marriage, Zelda's reputation within high New York society begins to drastically waver. After Scott causes a drunken public display, he advises Zelda to disregard typical feminine images of the time, instead stating, ðThey want to depict us a certain way because readers respond to that, so why not give them some material to work with?ö (100). Similarly to constructing her overall appearance, Scott now encourages the once unruly Southern belle to become disorderly, this time in their new town. However, with Scott growing as one of America's most valued writers, tensions between the Fitzgeralds exponentially increased. Fowler centers on Zelda's infamous Union Square fountain incident as a moment in which she attempts to hide the discontent and infidelities surrounding their marriage through her carefree ways:

Scott was smiling up at Gene in a way that was supposed to be reserved for *me*. I watched them a moment longerö too long, long enough to see Gene lean over and kiss Scott. *Kiss him! Full on.*

So I crouched down and put my hands on the stone, beside my feet. A moment later I was slicing through the cold water, my knees grazing the

bottom on the pool. í The group was cheering, and Scott was peeling off his jacket and laughing and motioning me to come to him.

Yes, I thought, looking for Gene. Yes, me (104-105).

Fowler's artistic liberties in blending two separate incidences highlight the very accurate troubles facing Zelda. The female Gene mentioned in the passage most likely alludes to Chicago socialite Ginevra King, Scott's first love and the inspiration for Isabelle Borge, a main love interest for the male protagonist in *This Side of Paradise*. While it is unknown if Zelda and Ginevra actually met, Scott periodically kept in contact with the debutante, and it is most likely plausible Mrs. Fitzgerald grew jealous over her husband's relationships with past romantic interests. Fowler ultimately includes Scott's lover to illustrate Zelda's unconventional attitude as another mask to her identity. Visibly distraught from uncovering her husband's extramarital relationships, Zelda attempts to gain Scott's attention through recapturing her attention-seeking identity. In order to help her husband sell novels and maintain her role as Scott's flapper wife, Zelda's outrageous antics aid in causing the public to remain interested in their personal and public lives. Simultaneously, however, Zelda's notorious incident at Union Square signifies a change in her marriage. Following the incident, Fowler begins to depict Scott as a routine drinker who dismisses negative critiques of his writing and often physically and emotionally abuses Zelda, who states, "He was so sure he was right and everyone else was wrong" (120). Not only is Zelda sequestered by Scott's actions but she also begins to gain a negative reputation based on her association to him and their subsequent marriage. While it is well documented that both Scott and Zelda abused alcohol and often became engaged in brutal public fights, Fowler portrays the aspiring author as the more toxic entity within the relationship. Since the novel is told from Zelda's point of view, it is evident Fowler would portray Scott in a more negative light.

Nonetheless, Fowler's narrative effectively presents Zelda's struggles in not only maintaining her identity but also obtaining any sense of power within her marriage to Scott.

### **The Aspiring Artist**

Zelda's emergence as an artist within Fowler's narrative highlights an often unexplored and underscored aspect of her biography. Fowler marks a shift in Zelda's morphing identity as her transition from flapper wife to aspiring artist contrasts Scott's dwindling presence within the elite 1920s era of writers. For instance, due to her beauty and popularity within society, Zelda is approached to become an actress. While she begins to envision her life as a movie star, Scott is quick to remind her of her eventual duty in becoming the mother to his children. Rather than choosing not to pursue a career in acting, Zelda is bombarded by Scott's expectations of her, stating, "I didn't actually want an acting career, and I did actually want to have a baby. I just resented Scott manipulating my life" (138). Although it is unclear if Zelda were actually contemplating a career in show business, Fowler demonstrates Scott's unyielding control over his wife. Continuing to both mold her into his characters and ideal flapper image, Scott rejects any potential liberties Zelda seeks to pursue and maintains the power within their relationship. Their uneven power dynamics cause Zelda to fear their tumultuous lifestyle, especially upon discovering her pregnancy:

Trouble has lots of forms. There's financial trouble and martial trouble í and trouble with liquor and trouble with the law. Every sort of trouble I can think of, we've tried it out - become expert at some of it, even, so much so that I've come to wonder whether artists in particular seek out hard times the way flowers turn their faces towards the sun (142).

Although their marital troubles are the core known discontent that plagued Zelda and Scott's relationship, Fowler reveals the drastic extent of the Fitzgerald's chaotic lives. Despite being a premier couple of the 1920s, the couple's well known difficulties drastically overshadowed, rather than complemented, Scott's work. While his identity as a writer suffered because of their collective drinking and disorderly ways, Zelda's eventual artistic pursuits are shattered due in part to her troubled past. As depicted by Fowler, Zelda's identity as being irrevocably intertwined with her and Scott's negative reputations.

The introduction of Zelda into motherhood further places her without a voice in her marriage, causing the young wife and mother to begin writing in order to gain power over her own agency. According to Fowler and based on findings by Fitzgerald biographer Sally Cline, Zelda planned to name her daughter Patricia, but Scott chose to name the baby after himself in order to preserve the Fitzgerald legacy. Eventually relinquishing her power in naming her daughter, Zelda soon becomes pregnant again, this time choosing to abort the baby. It is unclear, however, if Zelda actually had an abortion after the birth of Scottie. Based on a now lost diary entry of Scott's, the Fitzgeralds allegedly agreed to seek an abortion sometime after the birth of their daughter in 1921. Whether the abortion was indeed factual, Fowler portrays Zelda in making the decision singlehandedly. Despite this moment of agency over both her body and future, she is soon silenced by Scott once again. Fowler describes how Zelda grows restless as a mother and soon receives an offer to write a review of *The Beautiful and the Damned* which was actually published upon the book's release in 1922. Upon writing the review, she states, "The words seemed to flow directly from my brain through my neck and arm and fingers, right through the pencil and onto the page. 'Who wouldn't want to be a writer?' (149). Her writing as an extension of her body illustrates the power she holds as an artistic creator in addition to her

role as a mother. When she shows her work to Scott, she notes the "mixture of emotions playing across his face," but he eventually states that her writing is "quite remarkable" and ends their conversation by telling her, "I guess you've found yourself a new hobby" (150). During a time in which Scott's financial insecurities overshadowed his writing successes, the birth of Zelda's authorship simultaneously brought him both pride and jealousy. While impressed by her talent, Scott merely replies that Zelda's writing can become "a new hobby," not a passion to follow in a serious manner. Zelda's New Woman role is ultimately limited as Scott severs her potential income, thus reinstating his power within their relationship. Fowler illustrates how the publishing of her essay gave birth to a new Zelda who is removed from the flapper wife she once was and assumes agency over her own artistic identity.

The Fitzgeralds' move to France marks a more independent and self-governing Zelda, especially as she begins an affair with aviator Edouard Jozan. Fowler notes how the move prompted Zelda in "becoming Zelda Sayre again" as she "released from all constructions" "more daring and oblivious to danger" (178). Realizing her unhappiness within her marriage, Zelda asks Scott for a divorce, telling him, "With you, it's always the next story, play, novel, movie, the unending pursuit of some *stupid* critic's approval, an obsession over some magical number of copies sold, a terrible need for assurance that you're the finest living writer on the planet" "I have nothing in my life" (180-181). "I try so hard," Scott retorted, "I want to give you and Scottie the best of everything" (182). In reality, both Zelda and Scott contemplated divorce. Friends of the couple maintain that Zelda asked Scott to separate, but he refused, fearing his writing would decline without his muse as his wife. However, Scott continuously grew restless over her burgeoning art pursuits and "outlined a divorce strategy should Zelda continue to write" (Cline 107). Ultimately, Fowler portrays both Zelda and Scott as being simultaneously trapped

in their tumultuous relationship. As Zelda attempts to regain her identity as the carefree Zelda Sayre, Scott falls privy to patriarchal norms in endlessly providing for his wife. While Zelda chooses not to divorce Scott and flee with Edouard, she instead chooses art as her next passionate relationship in an attempt to reclaim agency within her life.

Zelda finds herself immersed in Paris society and culture in 1925, intent on becoming an artist like her husband and others from the Lost Generation. Fowler depicts Scott and Ernest Hemingway's relationship through Zelda's perspective, insinuating that Ernest's extreme masculinity and his forceful attempts to woo Zelda played a vital role in the mutual animosity between them. According to biographer Sally Cline, Ernest, while married to his first wife Hadley, viewed Zelda as "intensely physically attractive" and told her that he often had erotic dreams of her (169). This moment is often viewed as the beginning of Zelda's hatred towards Ernest, even though neither spoke publically regarding each other. Ultimately, Fowler's interpretation of Zelda and Ernest's relationship plays to her marriage with Scott and her overall identity. As Scott and Ernest grow close, Zelda accuses the two of being in a romantic relationship, a suspicion she actually harbored and shared with others in the couple's close circle of friends. Despite his adamant denial, Fowler pinpoints Scott's daily and intense drinking sessions with Ernest as cause for the decline in his literary output and his diminishing health, as Zelda notes he appeared "ten years older than the almost twenty-nine he was" (234). However, her health also begins to falter when she develops colitis, but Zelda assumes painting as a way to escape her physical ailments, her husband's irrational behavior, and Ernest's presence within their marriage. Given their public and known animosity towards one another, Fowler not only attempts to answer why Zelda and Ernest were at odds with one another but also illustrates how their hostile relationship, as well as her health issues, fueled her artistic drive.

As Scott's literary production begins to decline, Zelda becomes more disenfranchised from her marriage. Upon selling one of her essays to a publication, Scott buys Zelda a custom designed brooch. Rather than directly controlling her payment for the writing she produced, Zelda is usurped by her husband's power over her finances:

We'd gotten a thousand dollars, but where had that thousand dollars gone? What did I have to show for it— except this brooch that, pretty and thoughtful as it was, announced nothing of my talent, my imagination, my skill (226).

Similarly to her earlier days in New York when she manipulated clothes as a way to symbolize her luxurious lifestyle, Zelda views the brooch as a symbol of Scott's incessant control over her. Rather than being regarded for her artistic talent, Zelda is once again relegated as Scott's wife, a role that strips her of her power and ability to shape her destiny. For Fowler, the brooch symbolizes a turn in Zelda's character as a flapper wife. She is no longer infatuated by the gifts and upper class lifestyle that she once admired in her early years with Scott. Instead, Fowler illustrates a new development in Zelda's journey as she begins to actively control her artistic identity.

### **Reestablishing Zelda's Narrative**

The final chapters of *Z* highlight the emergence of Zelda's artistic output with her declining mental health. Preceding her psychological break, Zelda becomes torn between pursuing her own interests and being a reliable wife and mother. Fowler highlights Scott's initial support of Zelda's renewed interest in ballet but describes how he soon attempts to dissuade her from turning her hobby into a career. "I'm glad you like dancing," he explains to her, adding, "It's taking over, though" (284). Biographers cite that Zelda's rediscovered interest in ballet



was a direct result of Scott's affair with the young actress Lois Moran during the late 1920s. Fowler depicts Lois as replacing Zelda as Scott's muse, creating greater resentment between the Fitzgeralds. "I admired her spirit," Scott tells Zelda about Lois. "I *wanted* to admire yours, but you were always criticizing me. I She looked up to me, just like you used to" (285). Just as Zelda initially fell in love with Scott's charm and elaborate dreams in becoming America's most prized author, the seventeen-year-old Lois was documented as being enamored with the author, who was twenty-three years her senior. Consequentially, Scott was attracted to her "innocence, intelligence, beauty and self-discipline," which differed from Zelda's young rebellious and reckless identity (Cline 201). Fowler's comparisons between Zelda and Lois illustrate Scott's need for a youthful muse who he can manipulate to his liking, thus depicting the further disillusionment between the married couple.

The greater emergence of Zelda as an artist is ironically contrasted to Scott's downward spiral and literary output as Fowler illustrates the shifting power play between wife and husband. For instance, Zelda produces a piece that is published in a national magazine, but in an attempt to control her writing, Scott claims credit for her work, telling her, "You and I are a team. I You're using our joint experiences, and what are essentially my ideas" or my themes, at least" (294). Because of the decline in his published works, Scott takes credit for Zelda's writing while discrediting her ability to write and reflect critically on their lives, stating, "I'm a writer, it's my profession, how I earn my living. Whereas you dabble in it, the same way you dabble in painting and dance" (294). As a result, Zelda is left without a voice in the literary and artistic community, as Fowler writes:

He was so convinced of his view that there was nothing more I could say.  
And there was no one I could go to on my own; what agent would be

willing to cross a woman's husband— especially when her husband was *F. Scott Fitzgerald*? Like it or not, if I wanted to see my stories in the world, I had to dress them in Scott's clothes (294).

The image of clothes is once again developed by Fowler to illustrate another "mask" Zelda must inhabit in order to be the wife of Scott Fitzgerald. Zelda's voice is silenced by Scott who maintains control over her image as a writer and role as a wife. Due to his immense power within the literary world, Zelda is privy to his power over her writing as well as her image as dictated within his novels. As a result, Zelda must comply with "Scott's clothes," a reference to the physical appearance she has to uphold in order to embody his female characters. Whereas Zelda previously gave up her individual appearance in order to appease Scott, she must now relinquish her own writings for her husband. Ultimately, Fowler insinuates that Zelda's constant battle with Scott over her individuality and agency played a contributing role to her mental breakdown.

As a result of Scott's incessant control, Zelda begins to experience self-doubt, which leads to her mental descent. Continuing her ballet classes despite Scott's blatant disapproval, Zelda begins to question her artistic purpose and personal identity:

I couldn't ignore the little voice in my head that said maybe I was supposed to shed *halfway* and do something significant. Contribute something. Accomplish something. Choose. Be.

I was a Sayre, after all; a woman, yes, but still a *Sayre*; my life was intended to mean something beyond daughter-wife-mother. Wasn't it? *Oh, just let it go*, a different voice urged me. *What difference could your puny achievements possibly make?*

*All the difference*, the other voice answered.

Which of my many possible lives did I want to define me? Which one could I have?

And the question that troubled me most: Was it even really up to me?

(308).

The question of her identity not only relates to Scott's presence in her life but also signals her impending mental instability. While she recognizes her strength in being part of the esteemed Sayre family, Zelda simultaneously wishes to break from the traditional female roles of her ancestors and inhabit the New Woman role of fellow female contemporaries. Paired with the identity imposed on her by Scott, Zelda is no longer an active participant in her life. Fowler presents the two conflicting voices within Zelda's head as signaling to both her identity struggle and her eventual schizophrenia diagnosis, a condition which leads the artist to greater internal conflict. Thus, with Zelda was under the control of Scott, she also falls prey to the instability of her own mind.

Fowler continues to contrast the deterioration of Zelda's mental state with Scott's further disapproval of her ballet career. Zelda is invited to professionally perform with a ballet company in Naples and believes that a captivating performance will rebuild the couple's tarnishing reputation, stating, "We'll be relevant, modern, we'll set the trends again" (311). Despite her desire in wanting to actively repair their public images, Scott becomes angered that his role as the family's sole artist is threatened, claiming his "determination" in writing led Zelda to inhabit a privileged life, telling her, "It's *my* life that made yours worthwhile!" (312). When she retorts that she wants to "become the kind of person every thinking woman these days would expect F. Scott Fitzgerald's 'First Flapper' to be," Scott discredits Zelda's imagined image, telling her,

“All that flapper business was just to sell books. When are you going to understand that what I want is for you to get your priorities straight?” (313). Ultimately, Zelda’s “priorities” are solely based on being Scott’s wife, muse, and mother to his daughter, causing her to further deny herself of her artistic pursuits. As a result, Zelda continues to remain torn between Scott’s image of her and her own independent ideals. Once unable to maintain agency over her flapper wife appearance and identity, Zelda’s life and artistic pursuits are utterly based on Scott and his unrelenting control. By choosing not to join the performance, an event which actually occurred in her life, Fowler illustrates how the voice Zelda hoped to gain through her art is now rapidly diminishing.

Due to her loss of agency within her life, Fowler demonstrates that Zelda’s suspended ballet practices heightened her negative mental state. She is diagnosed with schizophrenia and is admitted to a French sanitarium, and despite her incessant pleas and requests to leave the hospital, Scott forces Zelda to admit to her wrongdoings, especially as she pursued her art rather than submit to him as his devoted wife. “Admit how damaging it is for you to compete with me,” he tells her. “Agree to give up dancing. There’s no need for you to be a professional dancer, writer, anything. Be a *mother*. Be a *wife*. I’ve made a good life for you, Zelda; stop rejecting it” (323). As he continues his attempts in molding her to fit his ideals, Scott also tries to ignite a sense of shame within Zelda because she chose her art over caring for her family. Scott claims Zelda tried to usurp him and assume a New Woman role by competing with him and his literary successes. Because she does not submit to Scott’s expectations in being a mother and wife, Zelda and her condition are ultimately to blame. “Schizophrenia divides the mind,” her doctor tells Zelda. “I am persuaded that you now see the effects of your failure to create and maintain a secure hearth, which, had you done so, would have tethered your husband in ways

that would have prevented his difficulties (332). Both Zelda and Scott's declining health is the result of the flapper wife herself. Based on her doctor's diagnosis, her selfishness in pursuing her art rather than being a compliant housewife led the Fitzgeralds to despair. During a time in which wives were responsible for the well-being of their family and households, Zelda was certainly blamed for Scott's declining health and literary output. Her biggest opponent, Ernest Hemingway, was especially critical that Zelda's lapses in mental health contributed to Scott's literary decline in the late 1920s and 30s. Nevertheless, forced to suspend one of her passions, Zelda is further stripped of her artistic identity as she continues to be under the agency of Scott.

Based on their financial and mental instabilities, Zelda attempts to save both her and Scott's reputations through her writing. Zelda follows Scott's *roman à clef* writing genre and produces *Save Me the Waltz*, an account of their marriage and struggles within it. Despite his own previous writings about their relationship, Scott becomes angered when reviewing the draft of Zelda's novel and the obvious correlations between their marriage and the narrative, telling her, "if your intent is to ruin me, you've made good headway here" (338). While the novel is nevertheless published, Zelda faces harsh and unexpected criticism due to her own writing:

*The Saturday Review of Literature* used words like *implausible*, *unconvincing*, *strained*, and full of *obfuscations*. Oh, and also *disharmonious*. *The New York Times* was slightly kinder; the reviewer there seemed more puzzled than antagonistic; he found the story a *curious muddle* and was unable to get past the author's *atrocious* writing style (339).

Fowler's adoption of real critiques against Zelda's work echo the rejection the author faced upon publication of her novel. In fact, the original *New York Times* article called the 1932 novel "an

almost ludicrous lushness of writingö (Milford 263). Because *Save Me the Waltz* was published at the height of her mental breakdown, critics particularly noted Zelda's underdeveloped characters and plot. Citing that only a thousand copies of her novel sold, Fowler juxtaposes Zelda's failures with the criticism Scott endured in being a writer, as he tells her, "Now you know how I feel. Now you know what it's like" (339). Although she wanted her writing to be her "salvation" from Scott's control, Zelda is rejected both by her husband and the greater literary community (339). Falling deeper into depression due to her lagging book sales, Zelda reaches the conclusion that much of her life was based on a fabrication and façade. "He wanted his adoring flapper, his Jazz Age muse," she stated. "He wanted to recapture a past that had never existed in the first place" (346). Fowler ultimately reveals the crux of Zelda and Scott's relationship was largely based on a fantasy that both tried to turn into reality. Zelda longed for a man that would sweep her off her feet while Scott desperately sought to become America's most famous writer. While their aspirations became reality, Zelda and Scott's continuous attempts in living the American Dream interfered with their own desires and expectations for each other. The dichotomy between fantasy and reality for the Fitzgeralds is highlighted by Fowler as one of the most intriguing aspects of their characters, especially with regards to Zelda's own identity and artistic pursuits.

Fowler ultimately concludes *Z* with Zelda's final attempts in being recognized as an artist by the artistic community. Facing defeat from writing and in an effort to become a success after the failures of *Save Me the Waltz*, Zelda hosts an art exhibit, this time with the support of Scott. While showing her art, Zelda and Scott become the powerful couple they once were, with Scott stating, "I miss us, *this* us" where do these two people live? Why is it so difficult to find them?" (356). Fowler implies that in spite of their tumultuous marriage, filled with jealousies and an

insatiable need for control, Zelda and Scott's relationship was based on a mutual and romantic admiration. However, Zelda is once again faced with condescending criticism of her exhibit

*Work of a Wife:*

Why was it that every time I finally *chose*, every time I *did*, my efforts failedô *I failed*ô so miserably? Why was I so completely unable to take control of my own life? Was there any point to it, for me? I'd thought it was Scott I'd been fighting against, but now I wondered if it was Fate (357).

Zelda's lack of success was not only correlated to her identity as wife but also in being a woman whose mental lapses overshadowed her talent and passion for art. While trying to embody the image of the New Woman, Zelda seemed firmly delegated to the role of Mrs. Fitzgerald rather than artist. However, despite her rejection from the artistic community and general public, Fowler gives credit to Zelda's desire in being an artist. Furthermore, Zelda is portrayed as being misunderstood by her critics and carelessly diminished by Scott. Thus, Fowler reexamines Zelda's artistic identity in response to the works she produced throughout her lifetime.

Fowler's decision in ending *Z* with Scott's death in 1940 ultimately allows Zelda's identity to transcend her commonly held image as a flapper wife. She returns to her hometown of Montgomery and reminisces on the life she previously had with Scott, as she explains, "Anything that didn't happenô for us, for himô turned out that way despite his best efforts" (366). While their chaotic and unstable relationship defined their identity as a couple, Fowler illustrates the loving aspects of the Fitzgerald's marriage. Because the novel is told from Zelda's point of view, many of her faults are lessened while Scott's are heightened. Nonetheless, Fowler highlights the couple's accomplishments and impact on American society, especially granting

Zelda's much deserved moment of autonomy. She chooses not to attend her husband's funeral because she is truly "not saying good-bye" (367) to the man who both positively and negatively shaped her life. While this statement applies to the relationship between Zelda and Scott, it simultaneously relates to Zelda's own public image and her permanent presence among American artists. Despite her rebellious ways, jealousies, and mental issues that previously shaped her identity, Fowler liberates Zelda as a New Woman, one whose dedication in writing, painting, and ballet take precedence within public persona. Although her faults and relationship with Scott play roles in her identity, Fowler proves they no longer solely define Zelda. Instead, nearly seventy years after her death, Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald is finally the artist she sought to become.



## Conclusion: A Legacy Cemented

The intersection of biographical fiction and Zelda Fitzgerald's life in Therese Anne Fowler's *Z* argues for the reinterpretation of the Roaring 20s icon. Based on previous portrayals of her character, Zelda was mainly viewed as the troublesome wife of Scott, who many claim negatively impacted his writing career. By centering on her efforts in writing, painting, and ballet, Fowler's narrative explores the depth of Zelda's character. Despite its reliance on fiction for its plot, *Z* presents a new type of biography, one that effectively highlights the often overshadowed aspects of a public figure's persona. Rather than center on the "factual minutiae" that is often present in nonfictional accounts, Fowler stated that she instead chose to focus "on the emotional journey of the characters" and strived "to create the most plausible story possible" (374). Ultimately, it is her work of biographical fiction that prompts readers to examine Zelda's identity in a previously unexplored fashion.

The genre of biographical fiction remains a promising field of study as life writing continues to be expanded by authors. Fowler's upcoming novel entitled *A Well-Behaved Woman: A Novel of the Vanderbilts* is scheduled to be released in October 2018 and will center on Alva Smith Vanderbilt, a socialite and leader of the women's suffrage movement. Similarly to *Z*, Fowler's next work of biographical fiction will explore Alva's unconventional lifestyle, drawing parallels to modern themes of feminism and gender equality. With both works, Fowler proves to be a major contributor to the biographical fiction genre and its development within 21<sup>st</sup> century literature.

The true merit of Fowler's *Z* resides in the narrative's ability to recapture the voice of its female protagonist. In highlighting her journey as an artist, Zelda is finally considered the writer, painter, and ballerina she strove to become throughout her life. Through Fowler's work,

Zelda's legacy is cemented and no longer dependent on her relationship with Scott or her mental issues. Instead, Zelda is a reflection of the New Woman image as she sought to forge her own path rather than assume a traditional female role. Through giving agency back to Zelda herself, Fowler examines the contributions the artist made during her lifetime and the effects she continues to have on audiences. With the continual reinvention of Zelda's character through movies, television shows, and other books, Fowler's presence within her legacy aims to reinterpret the flapper wife into a New Woman artist. Thus, it is hoped the story and triumph of Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald's identity remains within the public's consciousness and continues to inspire future generations.

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