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From Muse to Artist: Zelda, 'the other' Fitzgerald

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1. Introduction

“Zelda Fitzgerald’s life was made for story”, affirms Sally Cline (2002, 13); and it is true: née Zelda Sayre (1900-1940), she was a multifaceted artist (a writer, painter and dancer) whose talent remained in the shadow of her husband’s, the canonical author Francis Scott Fitzgerald, with whom she would embody the spirit of the Jazz Age – being in fact baptized ‘the first flapper’ by him. The fairytale starts in Montgomery, Alabama, with the birth of the Sayres’ sixth child, a “fair, golden, and blue-eyed” girl who came “like a rush of fresh air into [their] household, lively and irrepressibly gay and wayward” (Milford 2011, 7) and who would later describe herself as an “independent, courageous, [...] dreamy [and] especially imaginative” child (Milford 2011, 8). Zelda’s brightness and extrovert personality soon allowed her to have an active social life, which gave her – along with her rebelliousness and craving for attention – great popularity in the community, especially among young men. Besides, her condition of Southern Belle – i.e. the ideal archetype of the young and beautiful Southern woman – cannot go unnoticed: she was voted The Prettiest and The Most Attractive girl in her class her graduation year (Milford 2011, 22). That same year (1918), with the Roaring Twenties popping their head out, her Prince Charming appeared.

Zelda met Scott Fitzgerald at the country club of Montgomery, the city where he had just been sent as a lieutenant. Just as if a *there was once* preceded their first encounter, that summer night Zelda, who was also an excellent dancer, performed there the “Dance of the Hours”, making Scott claim that “the vivid girl with the long golden hair was the most beautiful girl he’d ever seen” (Milford 2011, 24). This love at first sight was mutual: Scott shared with Zelda an intellectual curiosity that she did not find in the boys of Montgomery, and he was strikingly handsome too. As Milford points out, “they shared a beauty and youth which seemed to ally them against the more sober world before them” (2011, 25). After a short breakup, with the turn of the century and the publication and great success of Scott’s first novel, *This Side of Paradise* (1920), came their wedding and the beginning of a marriage that would *drink* the decade in every possible way. They became the icons of the period for the American public, to later suffer the tumultuous effect of a hangover which would eventually destroy their lives.

Mary Gordon points out in the introduction to *The Collected Writings of Zelda Fitzgerald* that “the case of Zelda and Scott Fitzgerald, their symbiotic relationship as creator and object of creation, may be unique in the history of literature” (1991, xvii). Indeed, from the very beginning Zelda acted as a muse for Scott, who borrowed her beauty and personality to create his female characters. During their courtship and his writing of the rejected novel *The Romantic Egotist*, he sent a chapter to Zelda, telling her that the heroine resembled her “in more ways than four” (Milford 2011, 32); an idea to be found repeatedly in their correspondence. In fact, he would later confess in an interview that he had married the heroine of his stories (Ciges 2012, 6). However, although Zelda first seemed to happily accept this passive condition of the inspiring muse whose only duty was to give life to the picture of herself which Scott offered to his readers, “she was too spirited and original to be satisfied with the role of a butterfly” (Tavernier-Courbin 1979, 25). Zelda was starting to be tired of *being created*, she wanted to *create* herself instead. As she put in the mouth of the main character in her short story “The Original Follies Girl” (1929), “she wanted to get her hands on something tangible, to be able to say, ‘That is real, that is part of my experience, that goes into this or that category, this that happened to me is part of my memories’” (Z. Fitzgerald 1991a, 295). But Scott was not entirely satisfied with this decision: in her writing of *Save Me the Waltz* (1932), her only novel, she was using plenty of information about herself and her marriage, some of which Scott was also planning to include in his novel *Tender Is the Night*, published two years later. Facing that situation, he claimed that *he* was the professional writer and he was supporting her, and thus “the entire fabric of their life was his material, none of it was Zelda’s” (Milford 2011, 273).

In the light of all these facts, this essay focuses on Zelda Fitzgerald’s figure and on how she is represented in her own work in opposition to F. Scott Fitzgerald’s. My first and foremost aim will be to dismantle, by means of Zelda’s own writing, the idealized and superficial image of her that Scott offers to his readers through the female characters in his work. In order to do this, I will revise and analyze a selection of these characters in contrast to the image that Zelda depicts of herself in her literary work, considering it to be a response to this creation and a search of the self. Therefore, this essay will be divided into two main parts: a first, short section in which I will comment on Scott Fitzgerald’s literary depiction of Zelda, and a main second section devoted to

the discussion of Zelda's literary production, with the final aim of proving that her figure "has remained hidden within a glamorous and unfortunate legend which got rid of her literary talent" (Ciges 2012, 11; my translation).

2. F. Scott Fitzgerald's construction of Zelda through literary representation

As it has just been stated, this section will focus on the extent to which F. Scott Fitzgerald used Zelda's personality and physical appearance as direct sources for the creation of the female characters in his fiction. Hence, I will be analyzing and exemplifying with some of these literary figures in search of the influence that Zelda had in their creation and development. This first section will be deliberately shorter than the next one, since my main aim is to reflect on the image we get of Zelda from these characters after the reading of his fiction to then contrast it to the one she offers in her work, which is the major and actual focus of this paper.

To begin with, preeminent critic Matthew Bruccoli maintains a clear position when talking about women in Scott Fitzgerald's early fiction and life in general: "The girl is the writer's inspiration, but only when she is unattained. The satisfied artist is unproductive. Yet Fitzgerald was determined to pursue both love and literature because his idealized girl was an integral part of his ambitions" (1981, 76). Taking this into account, it is not surprising that Zelda became his muse almost instantly: she was the smart and spoiled girl who had a whole surge of admirers and who acknowledged that she could get away with almost anything (Bruccoli 1981, 87). She seemed to embody all the qualities that Scott required in a girl, as she shared his ambitions and was beautiful, independent and self-determined. Zelda personified "the modern and exciting kind of girl [...], central to Fitzgerald's writing" (Sanderson 2001, 148) to the point of making him affirm that he had married the heroine of his stories and that he would not be interested in any other sort of woman (Milford, as quoted in Sanderson 2001, 148).

2.1. Zelda as the unattainable Southern Belle

One of Zelda's greatest charms during the initial phase of her courtship with Scott was her condition as a Southern Belle. Simultaneously, we can observe in his early fiction – particularly in his first collection of short stories *Flappers and Philosophers* (1920) – that the heroine "is a young and beautiful girl from the South" that can be regarded as a

distinct type in his writing (Ruunaniemi 2001, 27). In addition, a number of these girls, like Zelda, are the most popular ones in their respective towns and also live “in a contradiction between the traditional values [they were] brought up with and [their] unconventional character” (Ruunaniemi 2001, 27). All in all, it is reasonable that critics consider that there is more direct influence of Zelda on these characters than on any other: although her connection to the South is clear and she would later in life miss her place, when she was young she only wished she could “go to some place shiny and new that’s not obsessed with the past”, as she says in the TV series *Z: The Beginning of Everything* (Prestwich and Yorkin 2015), a fictionalization of her life.

Ruunaniemi explains the figure of the Southern Belle by saying that her essence is that “she is somehow out of reach” (2001, 31). This is something that fits perfectly into Scott Fitzgerald’s prototype of the ideal woman and that he suffered during his courtship with Zelda, as he did not have the financial means to marry and maintain her and, at the same time, he felt threatened by the dates Zelda was starting to have with other men (Stolarek 2005, 53). At the same time, this pretty and unattainable southern woman became the protagonist of a number of Scott Fitzgerald’s short stories. A good first example is to be found in the heroine of “The Ice Palace”, included in *Flappers and Philosophers* (1920): Sally Carrol is a Georgian beauty who gets engaged to a man from the north moved by her desire “to go places and see people” and “to live where things happen on a big scale” (S. Fitzgerald 2019a, 44), words that remind us of young Zelda’s aspiration of leaving the south in search of modernization. Just like real-life Zelda, Sally Carroll sees two faces of herself: she has a “sleepy old side” against “a feeling that makes [her] do wild things”, which she considers to be “the part of [her] that may be useful somewhere, that’ll last when [she’s] not beautiful any more” (S. Fitzgerald 2019a, 45). The problem with southern heroines is that, as Ruunaniemi points out, although their dreams belong to the modern world, they live in tradition (2001, 29), and thus they need to be assured financial security. For this reason, despite the fact that Sally Carroll feels “to be acting a part for almost the first time in her life” when she says to her fiancé that he is home for her (S. Fitzgerald 2019a, 53), she acknowledges that she is “the sort of person who wants to be taken care of after a certain point” (S. Fitzgerald 2019a, 56), and hence considers marriage her best option.

Most of Zelda's unachievable quality was developed by a combination of her beauty and her outrageous and spoiled personality. In this sense, and though generally linked to Scott's first love Ginevra King, the heroine of the short story "Winter Dreams" (originally published in *Metropolitan Magazine* in 1922, included in *All the Sad Young Men* in 1926), Judy Jones, irrevocably resembles Zelda. Not only is well-to-do Judy Jones described as "arrestingly beautiful" (S. Fitzgerald 2007, 92), but also as having an "unprincipled personality" which makes her obtain whatever she wants thanks to her charm and physical loveliness (S. Fitzgerald 2007, 102-103). "Winter Dreams" is a story celebrated "for poignantly portraying the loss of youthful illusions" (Randell 2012, 108): the protagonist, Dexter Green, is deeply in love with narcissistic belle Judy, with whom he has a romance until she leaves him without any explanation. As a pattern in this kind of stories, we observe that "the heroine is always in the hero's reach for only a brief moment" (Ruunaniemi 2001, 31). As tragic as the end of the relationships might be, Scott Fitzgerald's heartless heroines normally continue to be the hero's inspiration and his final object of desire, which leads to the – sometimes obsessive – idealization of the beloved as almost a goddess. In this way, Dexter describes Judy as "a slender enamelled doll in cloth of gold: gold in a band at her head, gold in two slipper points at her dress's hem" (S. Fitzgerald 2007, 112); a description which inevitably leads us to talk about the *golden girl* par excellence: Daisy Buchanan.

"Winter Dreams" is, in fact, one of the five short stories normally contemplated to be in the "Gatsby cluster" – that is, the stories which introduced topics that would be further developed in the novel (Brucoli 1989, xvii). It is not surprising that the model of the unachievable and idealized heroine reached her highest point with Fitzgerald's finest work, *The Great Gatsby* (1925). It seems that "just as Judy in 'Winter Dreams' brings Dexter's dreams alive, so is Daisy more real to Gatsby in his dreams than she is as a person" (Ruunaniemi 2001, 32). Among the things that fascinate Jay Gatsby about his loved one are, on the one hand, Daisy's – the white-dressed, well courted and the most popular of all the young girls in Louisville – big fabulous house (S. Fitzgerald 2001, 48); and on the other hand, her "indiscreet voice", which he claims to be "full of money" (S. Fitzgerald 2001, 76). Indeed, it is precisely with this comment that Nick manages to understand Daisy's inexhaustible charm, concluding with his famous remark: "High in a white palace the king's daughter, the golden girl" (S. Fitzgerald

2001, 76). Hence, it can be affirmed that Daisy's magical attractiveness lies in her Southern Belle idealized image: she is, like Zelda, the well-off, young, beautiful, spoiled and unattainable girl who becomes the hero's muse. However, and because of the fascination behind these figures, who are more ideal dreams than real women, we find artificial girls who end up facing the problems of life: age in the case of Judy Jones, with Dexter declaring at the end of the story that he would lose something more "if he had married [her] and seen her fade away before his eyes. The dream was gone" (S. Fitzgerald 2007, 124); or marriage and motherhood in the case of Daisy, who is fully aware of her condition and hopes her newborn daughter will be "the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool" (S. Fitzgerald 2001, 13); a sentence uttered, in fact, by a disappointed Zelda referring to her own daughter upon her birth (Milford 2011, 84).

2.2. Zelda as a flapper icon

If there is, however, a female figure par excellence in Scott Fitzgerald's writing, that is without a shadow of a doubt the *flapper*. He is in truth, as Sanderson remarks, "best known as a chronicler of the 1920s and as the writer who, more than any other, identified, delineated, and popularized the female representative of the era, the flapper" (2001, 143). Although some parallels can be drawn between this Jazz Age figure and some of the characters just analyzed as representative Southern Belles, flappers match the "luxuriousness, [...] social extravagance and cultural madness of the twenties" (Stolarek 2005, 53), and therefore they present a number of outstanding characteristics on their own: the flapper can be described as "a modern young woman who was spoiled, sexually liberated, self-centered, fun-loving, and magnetic [who represented] a new philosophy of romantic individualism, rebellion, and liberation" (Sanderson 2001, 143), and who was also smoking, drinking, "flirting, kissing, viewing life lightly, saying damn without a blush, playing along the danger line in an immature way – a sort of mental baby vamp" (S. Fitzgerald, as quoted in Milford 2011, 77). It is almost unnecessary to say that Zelda, Scott's "beautiful and damned" muse as Stolarek refers to her (2005, 53), embodied this type better than anyone else, becoming an essential inspiration for him.

Zelda, “as his artistic model, [...] participated fully in various promotional strategies that established Fitzgerald as ‘creator’ of the flapper” (Sanderson 2001, 148-9), including interviews and the writing of two articles about this figure which “featured a realistic drawing of Zelda’s profile and a caption that stresses that Fitzgerald put Zelda in his first two novels” (Sanderson 2001, 149). In fact, Zelda told a newspaper reporter that she preferred those of her husband’s heroines who were like her: “That’s why I love Rosalind in *This Side of Paradise*, [her] courage, recklessness... Rosalind was the original American flapper” (Milford 2011, 100). In effect, the Zelda-like heroine of Scott’s first and successful novel *This Side of Paradise* (1920), Rosalind Connage, could be the absolute role model for flapperdom. “Rosalind is – utterly Rosalind”, an awfully spoiled girl who treats men terribly and who does not behave herself well at all: she smokes, drinks and kisses boys (S. Fitzgerald 2011a, 173). She is also “quite unprincipled” and “by no means a model character”, but interestingly to complete this flapper image, “all criticism of Rosalind ends in her beauty: [...] her glorious yellow hair, [...] the eternal kissable mouth” (S. Fitzgerald 2011a, 174). In the same interview where Zelda claimed to love Rosalind for being one of the heroines who resembled her, she mentioned for the same reason that her favorite short story by Scott was “The Offshore Pirate” (Milford 2011, 100), included in *Flappers and Philosophers* (1920). The heroine of the story, Ardita Farnam – openly referred to as a flapper by the hero – reinforces this image of the tremendously spoiled, beautiful and rebellious young girl that we have just seen in Rosalind. The reader is told that being a supreme egotist, Ardita only thought about herself (S. Fitzgerald 2019b, 16): fully aware of her beauty and her ability to “do any darn thing to any darn man [she] wants to” (S. Fitzgerald 2019b, 11), she “wanted things now – now – now!” (S. Fitzgerald 2019b, 28).

Scott Fitzgerald’s concern about the flapper’s moral would be emphasized in his next novel, *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922), for which he used plenty of his early married life as source (Sanderson 2001, 152). The female protagonist – young, beautiful, modern, and spoiled Gloria Gilbert – could perfectly be said to be Zelda’s counterpart, as Milford states by saying that she “[Gloria] was representative of something Zelda felt it necessary to stand up for” (2011, 90). Gloria is described as “damned attractive”, as having a very young soul and as being irresponsible “as much as anything else” (S. Fitzgerald 2011b, 293). She embodies the flapper’s patterns of

behavior, too: she smokes “so many cigarettes” and dates boys to the point of being nicknamed ‘Coast-to-Coast Gloria’ (S. Fitzgerald 2011b, 293). Zelda herself, in her article “Friend Husband’s Latest”, a humorous review of *The Beautiful and Damned*, confessed in an ironic tone: “Where could you get a better example of how not to behave than from the adventures of Gloria?” (1991b, 387).

Last but not least, it is important to notice that the charm of the heroines mentioned – the Southern Belles and the flappers – depends to a large extent on their beauty and youth, which obviously has an expiration date. On her 29th birthday, Gloria grieves: “Oh, my pretty face! Oh, I don’t want to live without my pretty face! Oh, what’s *happened?*” (S. Fitzgerald 2011b, 552). Equally, we read that what men fancy about Ardita and girls like her the most is that she’s “the spirit of youth and beauty” (S. Fitzgerald 2019b, 22). Taking this into consideration, the remark about the hero from *This Side of Paradise*’s feelings for Rosalind when he sees her again as an adult is not surprising at all: “Amory had wanted her youth, the fresh radiance of her mind and body, the stuff she was selling now once and for all [...] Young Rosalind was dead” (S. Fitzgerald 2011a, 238). All in all, Scott Fitzgerald’s heroines could be reduced to superficial, attractive young girls who seem to lose their value once they leave the prime of life. But what happens when these girls grow up if they do not want to see themselves simply as wives? What if the muse has the misfortune of being more than a beautiful little fool and wants to leave her passive role to become an artist? The answer seems to lie, again, in Zelda.

3. The muse gets a voice

After revising his texts and the clear resemblance that F. Scott Fitzgerald’s female characters bear to Zelda, we can understand how she was progressively caught up in the task of “living up to the picture of herself perpetrated in his stories and his novels” (Tavernier-Courbin 1979, 26), to the point of becoming an object of creation representing the ideal woman rather than an actual real person. This eventual confusion about her identity, along with her personal ambitions, may well be what lead Zelda to desire to become an artist in her own right after some time inhabiting “the identities which Scott had offered her as glamorous wife and flapper incarnate” (Cline 2002, 4).

While being married to a famous writer offered Zelda some artistic opportunities that, as a woman, she probably would not have achieved on her own, it also condemned her works to being *Fitzgerald's wife's* rather than Zelda's. This label, as Tavernier-Courbin points out, is highly illustrative of what Zelda wanted to fight (1979, 23). This section is devoted to Zelda Fitzgerald's literary work and everything around it: her increasing discomfort in playing the passive role of her husband's muse that moved her to pursue her own ambitions, the literary rivalry that her decision of becoming an artist triggered in her marriage, and the ultimate exercise of self-expression that her writing meant to her confused self.

3.1. Beyond the wife role

Zelda Fitzgerald's available literary production, as gathered in *The Collected Writings* (1991), comprises her only novel, *Save Me the Waltz* (1932), eleven short stories, a play (*Scandalabra*), eleven articles and a number of letters to Scott. This volume, along with the collection of their correspondence in *Dear Scott, Dearest Zelda* (2002), has been my way of access to Zelda's writing. In order to organize the analysis of these items, this first part will focus on the non-fictional elements of her writings, which will help us to sketch out the personal background that Zelda faced in her marriage during the years she was active as a writer.

3.1.1. Growing nonconformist

We had already commented on Zelda's initial enjoyment with the role of the beautiful flapper wife of Scott Fitzgerald, under whom he modelled his glamorous heroines; but even before they married, we can observe in Zelda's letters to Scott her vision of herself as an object or an accessory for him to own and boast, or, as Cline describes her attitude, her playing of "the Deep South baby doll" (2002, 60). For example, in 1919, she wrote to Scott: "I'd have no purpose in life – just a pretty decoration. Don't you think I was made for you? I feel like you had me ordered – and I was delivered to you – to be worn" (Bryer & Barks 2002, 16), an image she completes some months later by saying to him that everything seems much easier knowing that she will always be his, that he really owns her (Bryer & Barks 2002, 25). Despite her comment in another letter from May 1919 about being "so damned tired" of Scott telling her about princesses kept in towers (Bryer & Barks 2002, 29), her self-objectivization grows bigger when, soon before their marriage, she uses the same image to tell him: "we're going to marry and

live happily ever afterward just like the princess in her tower who worried you so much [...] I'm absolutely nothing without you – Just the doll that I should have been born” (Bryer & Barks 2002, 42-43). These early letters show the reader the extent to which Zelda was raised as an accommodating Southern Belle: as Lanahan mentions, “young women of the South, barely free of their Victorian chaperones, still cultivated an utter femininity, a ‘pink helplessness,’ as Zelda calls it” (2002, xxi). Nevertheless, the reason why Zelda becomes a 1920s myth has nothing to do with this perpetuation of the fairytale princess type that one could picture of her after reading these letters. Instead, she went down in history as the rebellious and independent flapper wife of Scott Fitzgerald and the model for his heroines famous for scandalizing previous the generations with their attitudes. While her desire of leaving the docility that she was condemned to in the South and fully become the New Woman that she wanted to be is something unquestionable (Z. Fitzgerald 1991c, 20), this quarrel between dependency and independence – between the kind of woman she was used to seeing and the one she yearned to be – is an interesting divided aspect of her personality (Lanahan 2002, 7) that she would later include in Alabama’s (the main character of her novel) too.

If we move to Zelda’s first years of marriage in New York, after the brilliant success of *This Side of Paradise*, we see a young and happy woman catching the spirit of the city, full of expectations about the opportunities that this new celebrity lifestyle could offer to her (Farthing 2018, 16). In fact, immersed in the role of the original American flapper that she attributed to Rosalind and that she was expected to be, when a reporter from the Baltimore *Sun* asked her if she was ambitious, she replied, “not especially, but I’ve plenty of hope [...] I’m not a ‘joiner’. Just want to be myself and enjoy living” (Milford 2011, 100-101). Her enjoyment of life would soon be affected by the increasingly difficult task of being herself. We already commented on the complicated process of self-definition that Zelda faced regarding the battle between the stagnant values of her Southern upbringing and her strong personality, but now, as Taviernier-Courbin says, with the flapper becoming Zelda’s alter ego, the obviously destructive role playing she was taking as part of herself eventually resulted in a growing uncertainty about her own identity (1979, 26). What Zelda liked about being like Scott’s flapper icons was their courage and their recklessness (Milford 2011, 100), but she soon realized the role’s downside, learning first-hand how, at the end, “the

successful flapper becomes the successfully bored young married woman” (Gordon 1991, xxii).

As the *famous-author’s-wife* socialite she had become, Zelda was asked, mostly by slick magazines, to write some articles regarded as celebrity pieces (Brucoli 1991, 385). Two of these papers, published respectively in 1922 and 1925, were focused on the figure of the flapper. In the first of them, “Eulogy on the Flapper” (1922), first published in the *Metropolitan Magazine*, Zelda gives a strong start by saying that the flapper is dead. With a melancholy tone, “she grieved the passing of so original a model, for she saw in the flapper a code for living well” (Milford 2011, 91). Zelda, through her writing, examines some of the flapper’s accomplishments, as awakening from “her lethargy of sub-deb-ism”, flirting just because it was fun and consciously doing the things she had always wanted to. Later, she makes a distinction between the former original flapper and the new one, stating that “flapperdom has become a game; it is no longer a philosophy” (Z. Fitzgerald 1991d, 392). Thus Zelda, “feeling she is being used as a pawn in that game” (Farthing 2018, 19), claims her right to experiment with herself as a transient figure which, she says, would be dead soon (Z. Fitzgerald 1991d, 392). That is, if she previously had to adapt her identity until fully fitting into the flapper mold, now that she had become one and flapperdom was changing, she felt that she could afford to look for new aspirations. It is interesting to note, on the other hand, the comment that both of her biographers, Nancy Milford and Sally Cline, make about a sketch of Zelda done by Gordon Bryant which accompanied the article: while Milford tells us how it emphasized the relation between the real and the fictional Zelda (2011, 91), Cline contrasts this image by saying that it caught marvelously the flicker of regret in Zelda’s eyes; a regret, she says, that was about to intensify (2002, 124). And she was right.

Three years later, Zelda published in *McCall’s* her article “What Became of the Flappers?” (1925) as part of a joint piece titled “What Becomes of Our Flappers and Our Sheiks?”, which contained her essay along with Scott’s “Our Young Rich Boys”. On the one hand, she starts by adopting a quite feminist perspective while presenting some positive attributes of the flappers, such as them being the first evidence of youth “asserting itself out of the cradle”, endowing old ideas and manners with their vitality, and learning, as women, to think their ideas for themselves (Z. Fitzgerald 1991e, 397).

As in the previous article, she talks about the flapper in a melancholy way, but in this one we can also perceive a distant tone through which she seems to try to get away from the denomination. This can be observed when, once she starts describing the distinctiveness of the things the flapper used to wear, she interrupts her writing abruptly to change the verb tense: “All this things are – or were – amusing externals...” (Z. Fitzgerald 1991e, 397); something that seems to reassert her former idea that the flapper is dead. More interestingly, Zelda offers a picture of the flapper as someone “reticent emotionally and courageous morally”, who allows others to “know what she thinks, but [who] does all her feeling alone” (Z. Fitzgerald 1991e, 1398). This, according to Farthing, may reveal that, as a flapper, she felt her true feelings and reality to be hidden (2018, 28). We can insist on this idea if look at Zelda’s comment about the art of these “pretty yet respectable young women”: “I believe in the flapper as an artist in her particular field, the art of being –being young, being lovely, being an object, [...] whose sole functions are to amuse and to make growing old a more enjoyable process for some men and staying young an easier one for others” (Z. Fitzgerald 1991e, 398). This description of the ultimate role of the flappers (hidden under the mask of the modern New Woman) goes entirely hand in hand with what we can see in Scott’s heroines: the flappers, pictured as independent and irresistible in their own art of being, lose their artistic gift once they are no longer pretty and young. This way, Zelda ends her article lamenting: “The flapper! She is growing old. She forgets her flapper creed and is conscious only of her flapper self” (Z. Fitzgerald 1991e, 398). Seeing herself poised to lose the traits that, up until then, everyone had thought to be her essence, it was the moment for searching her true self by pursuing her own ambitions and looking for a non-perishable talent – but it was not going to be easy for the muse to retain her own inspiration for herself.

3.1.2. Scott’s use of her material and artistic rivalry

Although we have revised two early pieces of writing from Zelda in the previous section, the first one she produced was “Friend Husband’s Latest” (1922), published in the *New York Tribune* in form of a review of Scott latest novel *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922). In it, Zelda humorously enumerates the reasons why everyone must buy the book: for example, her will to buy a gold dress and a platinum ring or the novel’s value as a manual of etiquette and behavior. Following in her well-constructed

ironic tone, Zelda says: “It seems to me that on one page I recognized a portion of an old diary of mine which mysteriously disappeared [...] and also scraps of letters which, though considerably edited, sound to me vaguely familiar. In fact, Mr. Fitzgerald [...] seems to believe that plagiarism begins at home” (1991b, 388). As we can see from this passage, Zelda’s beauty and personality was not the only thing that inspired Scott’s writing: he drew extensively from her letters and diaries. This would be, in fact, the first of many accusations of plagiarism in the Fitzgerald marriage, something that leads us to examine some of Zelda’s material in a different way: through the use that her husband made of it in his novels and short stories.

Zelda’s early interest in writing can be traced back to the period before Scott entered her life,¹ but if we are to look at their relationship, we already find in their courtship correspondence a young Zelda telling his fiancé about her efforts to write a book or story. Nonetheless, she did not complete it, as she despaired after not being able to actually “start” the heroine she was describing (Bryer & Barks 2002, 40). On the other hand, in these letters there are also clues to primary signs of Scott using Zelda’s materials: when, in the fall of 1919, she tells him about her confidence in his writing, Zelda states: “It’s so nice to know that you really *can* do things –*anything*– and I love to feel that maybe I can help just a little –I want to so much” (Bryer & Barks 2002, 38). Zelda’s letters were a gift to Scott in a number of ways, and even before Zelda mentioned it in regard to *The Beautiful and Damned*, Scott had used in *This Side of Paradise* a graveyard description she had previously made in a letter. But Zelda, probably glad of the attention that her words had received rather than angry about their appropriation, said nothing about this first act of plagiarism (Cline 2002, 66).

To continue with the elements that Zelda mentioned to have detected in Scott’s second novel, *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922), the first thing that we find is the reproduction of a passionate letter that she sent to Scott after a quarrel. The whole letter goes in the same vein as this fragment: “Without you, dearest I couldn’t see or hear or feel or think – or live – I love you so much and I’m never in all our lives going to let us be apart other night” (Bryer & Barks 2002, 51-52), with Zelda repeating how much she loved and needed him. The passion of this letter, Milford says, indicates both her

¹ Zelda won a prize for her short story “The Iceberg” (1918), recently discovered and published in *The New Yorker*. Further reference will be made to it.

intense love and need for Scott and her confusion about herself within the kind of life they were leading (2011, 76). However, not only does Zelda make reference to her letters, but also to that mysteriously missing old diary of hers: in fact, a note by Scott himself in the manuscript of the novel shows that he did take parts of Zelda's diary for Gloria's (Elias 1990, 248). What is interesting about the diary issue is not so much this particular incident as the offer that the editor George Jean Nathan made to Zelda for publishing her diaries after finding them of great literary quality: although the proposal thrilled Zelda and boosted her interest in a literary career, Scott made her turn it down because he needed her diaries as inspiration for future novels (Stolarek 2005, 55). Besides, it seems that Zelda's talent was so inspiring for Scott that he was no longer content with her writing only: he wanted her spoken words too. This way, when Zelda gave birth to their child in 1921, he collected a pencil and notebook to coldly record her first utterances, as, he said, he might use them some time: "Isn't she smart – she has the hiccups. I hope it's beautiful and a fool – a beautiful little fool" (Cline 2002, 116). Attributed to Scott's famous character Daisy Buchanan, this sentence was, indeed and again, Zelda's.

After having published some articles and short stories, and seeing in writing an opportunity to accomplish something professionally, Zelda decided to attempt her own largely autobiographical novel, *Save Me the Waltz* (1932), while she was hospitalized in a psychiatric clinic due to her reiterated bouts of schizophrenia, asthma and eczema. Even though her husband did not refute her decision at first, it ultimately caused a big problem of artistic rivalry when Scott, who was also planning to include the shared material of their lives in *Tender Is the Night*, read the manuscript of her novel. He wrote a letter full of anger to Zelda's doctor, Dr. Squires, showing his annoyance at the image that she portrayed of him in her text and accusing her of plagiarism, considering that their life was *his* material (Bryer & Barks 2002, 164-165). Zelda agreed to remove or change some parts, but she told Scott that her revision would be made "on an aesthetic basis", taking a firm stand about their shared material, which was "community literary property" (Brucoli 1981, 322) and thus legitimate events that she needed to include in order to write *the story of herself versus herself*: "That is the book I really want to write", she said (Bryer & Barks 2002, 166). The question of the ownership of experience, however, did not end with this dispute: a year later, Zelda and Scott sat

down with a doctor and a stenographer to discuss their problems. The transcription of their conversation shows Scott's point of view regarding his right to own their lives: "I am the professional novelist, and I am supporting you. That is all my material. None of it is [yours]" (Wagner-Martin 2013, 150). As the discussion went on, Scott accused Zelda of being "a third rate writer and a third rate ballet dancer", to which she replied that he had already told her that before and that he was attacking her rather violently for being so unskilled (Wagner-Martin 2013, 150). After all this, Zelda told Scott that she would prefer to be in an institution rather than living with him: "One reason I have to do things behind your back is because you are so absolutely unjust and abusive and unfair [...] I don't want to live with you, because I want to live some place that I can be my own self", she concluded (Wagner-Martin 2013, 151). In 1934, Scott's *Tender Is the Night* was published, including not only autobiographical parts of their shared experiences, but also details which belonged exclusively to Zelda: apart from the clear biographical resemblance between her and Nicole, the novel's heroine, Scott also used Zelda's symptoms of mental instability and language from her letters about it to create Nicole's (Wagner-Martin 2013, 151).

What I find particularly interesting about the well-discussed issue of artistic rivalry within the marriage of Zelda and Scott is the question of power under which this rivalry is developed, something that has made some critics, as Sally Cline, relabel the term *rivalry* into *silencing* as applied to their particular situation (2002, 6). The literary duel that Scott created was never a contest between equals, but a battle that had a winner from the moment it began. Scott clearly proved it to Zelda by establishing a number of binary oppositions, all of them in connection to traditional gender roles, through the documents I have revised: *he* was the professional and successful writer over against a third-rate amateur *Zelda*; *he* was the productive one in charge of supporting her while she was the unproductive mentally ill wife who needed to be supported; *he* was the authentic and canonical writer *subject*, the creator, and *Zelda* had to be his muse, the *object* of creation, and therefore not only their lives, but also her own ideas (letters, diaries, thoughts...) belonged to him. With this background, if we were to fictionalize their lives as Therese A. Fowler did, we could perfectly picture Scott saying: "*Cooperate*. Admit how damaging it is for you to compete with me [...]"

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" (2013, 323).

3.2. Zelda's fiction: A search and expression of the self

Although Zelda Fitzgerald's non-fictional material already gave us an insight into her writing, as well as into her particular perceptions of life, it is her fiction rather than her essays that is normally considered to be more personal (Brucoli 1991, 385). Still filled with her characteristic style and wit, her fiction "evokes not just the possibilities of life – but expectations. Promises kept and promises unfulfilled" (Brucoli 1991, xiii). Zelda's short stories and most of all, her novel, allow us to discover an artist in her own right with her own ambitions and fears, an artist who tells her readers – through the alter ego that now *she* created for herself, that "the only thing of any significance [for her] was to take what she wanted when she could" (Z. Fitzgerald 1991c, 32). All that she wanted was to exist and speak for herself: tired of playing the roles that her husband had constructed for her, she needed to look inside her true self to look for an identity that, until then, seemed to always be provisional.

The problem with this self was that it was *her* self, and therefore sentenced to confront the male authority that she had by her side. Besides, Zelda had been acting as Scott's literary critic for many years, understandably causing her writing to be, in her own words, "distinctly École Fitzgerald" (Milford 2011, 215). This issue irrevocably leads us to Harold Bloom's concept *anxiety of influence*, a fear an artist has that he is "not his own creator and that the works of his predecessors, existing before and beyond him, assume an essential priority over his own writings" (Gilbert and Gubar 1984, 39). The problem with this model was that it is entirely patriarchal: the female artist did not experience anxiety of influence because she confronted precursors who were almost exclusively male, and hence considerably different from her. For the woman writer to be able to fit in, a new paradigm by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar was laid out as an endemic alternative to their literary subculture: the *anxiety of authorship* or the "radical fear that she cannot create, that because she can never become a 'precursor' the act of writing will isolate or destroy her" (Gilbert and Gubar 1984, 40-42). It is indubitably interesting to take this theoretical background into account when considering the case of Zelda Fitzgerald because we find a woman facing both

problems: on the one hand, she is affected by the anxiety of authorship because, as a woman with few female precursors, she questions her ability and talent to become a writer; on the other, she faces a problem regarding male influence too for having to carry the weight of Scott's work on her shoulders. This way, what we generally find in Zelda's fiction are ambitious protagonists who need to look for their own ways to express themselves, who need to work professionally and to distinguish themselves: women who, in short, mirror Zelda's feelings, expectations and fears.

3.2.1. Short stories

As it has already been said, a recently found story by young Zelda has proved that she already wrote before meeting Scott. In 1918 she won a prize for a short story entitled "The Iceberg", first published in the Sidney Lanier High School literary journal. The text, which tackles the heroine's tensions "between independence and entanglement with a man; the twinned and, sometimes, conflicting desires to write and to be admired, and the pressures of a search for the right kind of self-expression" seems to have predicted the problems that Zelda was going to face in her own life (*The New Yorker*, 2015). In fact, in her first serious story, "Our Own Movie Queen" (1925) – published under Scott's name – we can read between the lines this pressure of looking for self-expression while she was stuck in the role of being admired. The story revolves around the ambitious Gracie Axelrod, who wins a popularity contest and, as a reward, is given the opportunity of starring in a movie. In spite of being initially delighted about it, the reader can realize how she increasingly feels just as the metaphorically "bright, insecure star" that balances behind her (Z. Fitzgerald 1991f, 279). This, along with Farthing's remark that once Gracie wins the contest, she is no longer called by her name in the dialogue, but "the queen", can be seen as an analogy to Zelda's feelings when she was baptized "the first flapper" – titles that they both know to be temporal (2018, 22): an ambivalence between excitement and insecurity for being in the spotlight, as well as an increasing sense of depersonalization. At the end, Gracie ends up crying and resigning from the moving pictures, telling the assistant director: "I wouldn't be in another movie if you gave me a million dollars! I hate movies, see?" (Z. Fitzgerald 1991f, 286).

The years between 1928 and 1930, marked by travel and married life, were essential to Zelda's evolution as an artist: not only had she been taking painting and dancing lessons for some years, but she was also eager to write again and to acquire two

crucial skills: effort and self-discipline (Cline 2002, 215). During this period Zelda wrote a series of short stories known as the six 'girl' pieces, published either in *College Humor* or in *The Saturday Evening Post* and each produced in "an astonishing but hazardous burst of energy" in order to be able to pay for her dancing lessons without being dependent on Scott (Milford 2011, 150-152). This change of attitude would shape her narration: no longer writing about the flappers of the articles we have analyzed, now most of Zelda's protagonists are lonely but ambitious girls who need to work to earn a living. The first of those stories, "The Original Follies Girl" (1929), seems to represent the transition between the muse that Zelda was during the first years of marriage and the artist that she was becoming. It is said to the readers that "the thing that made you first notice Gay was the manner she had, as though she was masquerading as herself" (Z. Fitzgerald 1991a, 293). This may well represent how Zelda was feeling at the beginning, when, as Farthing says, by wanting to be seen as the appealing muse of Scott's work, she was also hiding her true self under the flapper mask (2018, 43). To elaborate further into the impression of confusion, Zelda describes Gray as being very kaleidoscopic, an image that evokes perfectly the bewilderment that leads her to desire "to get her hands on something tangible" and to experience things by herself (Z. Fitzgerald 1991a, 295). We encounter something similar in the case of Helena, the heroine of "The Girl the Prince Liked" (1930), an attractive and captivating girl with a strong personality who eventually loses her former interest in being the center of attention. In a very *Fitzgerald* way, the narrator describes Helena's "smooth gold hair" and "yellow eyes full of the promise of sun" to then state that "she should have had a good ten years of organization ahead of her but then she met the most famous young man in England" (Z. Fitzgerald 1991g, 314). Interestingly, at the end of the story Helena is compared to her intimates saying that "their insides fit their outsides as they should" (Z. Fitzgerald 1991g, 316), thus implying that it is not her case and that she, like Zelda, feels that the person she is inside herself is not the same one she shows to others; an image that reminds the reader of the mask that Gray wore in the previous story.

Some of the stories from this series are much more focused on the protagonists' professional exercise and the perseverance, dedication and effort that it requires. The most similar case to Zelda's is, undoubtedly, that of Lou, the heroine of "The Girl with

Talent” (1930), who is also a ballerina. The story can be said to depict Zelda’s own attitude towards dancing, an activity of which she wanted to make a career and which constitutes, as we are later going to see, a major topic in her only full-length novel. Lou, willing as her creator to do anything to become a fine dancer, says: “I am going to work so hard that my spirit will be completely broken” (Z. Fitzgerald 1991h, 325). Despite the fact that she is able to boast about having a “magnificent contract” in a “magnificent casino” which allows her “to work and make money magnificently” (Z. Fitzgerald 1991h, 325), eventually, when she is about to achieve a great success, she runs off to China with a man. This rather unexpected ending actually blends reality and fiction, since Zelda herself had inexplicably rejected an offer to join the San Carlo Opera Ballet Company in Naples in 1929, so her guilt and confusion over doing so seem to be hinted at the story (Cline 2002, 236). To continue with some other examples, the short story “Southern Girl” (1929) is also worth mentioning: in this case, Harriet, the protagonist, does not have a paid job, but two. Although people generally “wondered why she didn’t go in for something more satisfactory and spectacular” than teaching school and supervising a boardinghouse – something that they considered to be a waste of her energy and ability – Harriet did not want to give up anything until she really felt that that phase of her life had been fully completed (Z. Fitzgerald 1991i, 300-301). This attitude of acting under one’s own desires appears to be constant in Zelda’s fiction, where a number of characters embrace Caroline’s – the heroine of “A Millionaire’s Girl” (1930) – attitude when saying “This is the way I am and I’m going to stick by it” (Z. Fitzgerald 1991j, 331).

A different stage in Zelda’s fiction can be dated between 1930 and 1932, when most of her production was written in the clinics where she was a patient (Brucoli 1991, 271). In June 1920, Zelda was diagnosed as schizophrenic by Dr. Forel and admitted into the Prangins sanitarium, from where she was released in September 1931 with her case summarized as a “reaction to her feelings of inferiority (primarily toward her husband)” (Milford 2011, 158-161 & 191). Shortly after that, the Fitzgeralds moved to Alabama, where Zelda’s father was gravely ill and where she began to work on her writing with a great degree of speed and self-discipline, while Scott went to Hollywood for a period of time to work on a film script (Milford 2011, 193-194). Although it is known that Zelda finished at least seven stories in this period, she was not very

successful, as only three survived, two of which were published in *Scribner's Magazine*: "Miss Ella" (1931), and "A Couple of Nuts" (1932). Brucoli, however, insists on Zelda's ability during this period to bring her material under control, a skill which made these stories remarkable and the latter, in fact, the best she ever wrote (1991, 271).

Unlike her earlier stories, which have virtually no plot and "a kind of unfinished charm and liveliness of description" (Gordon 1991, xxix), these two develop a technique often compared to Scott's style in *The Great Gatsby* and the themes of waste and destruction (Cline 2002, 299). "Miss Ella" tells the tragic story of this old woman, "which like all women's stories was a love story and like most love stories took place in the past" (Z. Fitzgerald 1991k, 345). With a well-constructed rising action, we get to know how on the day that she was going to marry another man, her former fiancé shot himself in her grounds, causing that, although "years passed, [...] Miss Ella had no more hope for love" (Z. Fitzgerald 1991k, 348). Next in order, "A Couple of Nuts" is again a nostalgic story, in this case about a young American couple (Lola and Larry) who, the narrator says, was charming to see together "in those days of going to pieces and general disintegration" (Z. Fitzgerald 1991, 354). However, this disintegration soon comes to their lives when Lola has an affair with their patron, Jeff, and Larry does the same with Jeff's former wife, with whom he ends up drowning on her yacht. At the end, a devastated Lola survives, and the melancholic narrator remembers, "I had promised to send them some songs from home –songs about love and success and beauty" (Z. Fitzgerald 1991, 363). These three words, Milford says, were the themes of Zelda's fiction as well as of her life before her breakdown. Of course, she missed the word *ruin* (Milford 2011, 195).

3.2.2. *Save Me the Waltz* (1932)

Zelda's first and only novel was written during January and February 1932 both in Montgomery and at the Phipps Clinic of Johns Hopkins Hospital (Brucoli 1991, 3). The story of its publication can be traced through the correspondence that we have already revised. Eager to succeed without Scott's interference, Zelda sent the first version to Perkins in March before it had been read by her husband, who, full of anger and concerned that the original version would injure him and his work, made her introduce some changes. By May 2, he was able to inform Perkins that "Zelda's novel is

now good, improved in every way. It is new. She has largely eliminated the speakeasy-nights-and-our-trip-to-Paris atmosphere” (Brucoli 1991, 4). The original manuscript and typescripts have not survived, but it is known that the first draft was much more personal (Brucoli 1991, 3).

Openly autobiographical, *Save Me the Waltz* has widely been reported to be Zelda’s quest for identity, as well as the expression and justification of it. But in total agreement to the way Tavernier-Courbin expresses it, the novel is not just a search but at the same time a response to her personal situation: the role of muse that she had to play. Both elements turn *Save Me the Waltz* into “the final *cri du coeur* of a woman who wants to exist on her own terms and who is claiming back her life as experience and her own material” (Tavernier-Courbin 1979, 24). Other critics, such as Linda Wagner-Martin, talk about the novel as a portrayal of the meaning of growing up as a woman in America, something that simply involved being inferior (1982, 201). This system, under which women feel left out of the dominant male discourse, is also explained by Cline, who regards Zelda’s novel as the story of both a particular woman and any woman (2002, 312). The quest for identity of Zelda’s alter ego and main character, Alabama Beggs, which we can observe in all these assessments, constitutes one of two big main topics of the novel, along with dancing. Both of them are already present in the metaphor of the title, inspired by the remark that a man makes to a woman at a ball and which embraces the respectively active and passive role that both of them play: Zelda/Alabama, in wanting to discover herself, will rebel against this role (Tavernier-Courbin 1979, 32), and she will do so through dancing, which becomes her artistic and professional vocation.

Regarding its structure, the novel is interestingly modernist, being divided into four sections which, although chronological, are also fragmented through ellipses, as Alabama’s point of view focuses on the emotionally crucial events (Wagner-Martin 1982, 204). The plot following the protagonist’s life has countless similarities to Zelda’s biography: her Southern upbringing within a family almost identical to Zelda’s – an authoritarian but yet influential judge father, a devoted mother who spoils her, two older sisters who also resemble Zelda’s; her marriage to a famous artist (in this case a painter, whom Zelda initially intended to call Amory Blaine, like the hero of *This Side of Paradise*), with whom she has a daughter; her infatuation for a French aviator and, of

course, her intense dedication and passion for dancing, which occupies the last two sections of the book. All of this is narrated, besides, with Zelda's distinctive style: a language full of complex metaphors, highly intellectual, evocative and ornamental, which provides her prose with a poetic and sensual quality, as well as with a pretentious aesthetics.

In the first section, Zelda captures Alabama's family background and her change of venue, as Wagner-Martin outspokenly describes it, "from her father's house to the proprietorship of David Knight" (1979, 204). As a child, Alabama is depicted as spoiled girl who, like her sisters, thought she could do anything thanks to the sense of security they felt in the father, described as a "living fortress" (Z. Fitzgerald 1991c, 9). Because of that, the narrator tells us that by that time, Alabama "does not know that what effort she makes will become herself" (Z. Fitzgerald 1991c, 11), already introducing the reader to the gist of the novel. Besides, we are presented with a heroine who, throughout her childhood and youth, is bright, independent and rebellious. For example, she tells her mother that she does not want to go to school since she seems to know everything (Z. Fitzgerald 1991c, 15), and when her older sister goes to work in New York City and sends a letter home, she says that she wants to go there too in order to be her own boss (Z. Fitzgerald 1991c, 20). This way, Zelda develops an Alabama who, by the time she meets David Knight, has already "convinced herself that the only thing of any significance was to take what she wanted when she could" (1991c, 32). It is precisely during her courtship to him that we can start to find a number of similarities between their relationship and that of Zelda and Scott, and, more importantly, to hear the voice of an Alabama who does not want her lover to make her feel inferior. When David takes out his knife and carves in a doorpost "David, David, Knight, Knight, Knight, and Miss Alabama Nobody," she calls him egotist and continues to be angry about the issue for a while (Z. Fitzgerald 1991c, 39). Even more interestingly, later on he writes to Alabama: "Oh, my dear, you are my princess and I'd like to keep you shut forever in an ivory tower for my private delectation," a comment that rings familiar and to which Alabama takes a stand similar to Zelda's, as "the third time he wrote about the princess, [she] asked him not to mention the tower again" (Z. Fitzgerald 1991c, 42). Not chosen in vain, his name reveals a lot: as Milford points out, a knight's job is to rescue a princess

from her imprisonment and, in this case, David promises Alabama to take her away with him to his artistic world of New York (2011, 234).

The second section, the longest one, follows their married life, David's success in New York, the birth of their daughter Bonnie, their trip to the Riviera and their parties in Paris, where David has a retaliatory fling with an actress after which Alabama decides to work on an art and become a ballet dancer in order to "bring order to her chaotic, lonely existence" (Cline 2002, 313). Following Zelda's path, Alabama becomes a muse for her husband, who tells her: "You've become nothing but an aesthetic theory – a chemistry formula for the decorative" (Z. Fitzgerald 1991c, 50) and later on states how important is that "his charming wife" accompanies him to the tea even though she does not want to, as it is "because of [her] face" that their friends are having it (Z. Fitzgerald 1991c, 58); something that shows us how Alabama has practically become an object to be shown. All these elements seem to create a feeling of displacement and confusion in Alabama, who increasingly hesitates about her own identity. In that way, she shows David a short poem she has composed, in which she asks herself: "Which is the reasonable, logical me? Which is the one who must will it to be?" and shortly after she confesses to a man she meets: "I am only really myself when I'm somebody else whom I have endowed with these wonderful qualities from my imagination [...] I am a book. Pure fiction" (Z. Fitzgerald 1991c, 68-70).

Another important aspect to comment on in this chapter is Alabama's (as it was Zelda's) ambivalence between dependence and independence: although she is self-confident enough to tell her daughter that she is so outrageously clever that she could be a whole world to herself if she did not like living in David's better (Z. Fitzgerald 1991c, 80), she admits she is "two simple people at once, one who wants to have a law to itself and the other who wants to keep all the nice old things and be loved and safe and protected" (Z. Fitzgerald 1991c, 56). As the plot goes on after Alabama's meetings with Jacques, the French aviator, David has a romance with an actress named Gabrielle Gibbs. During their flirting, Alabama observes how "David opened and closed his personality over Miss Gibbs like the tentacles of a carnivorous maritime plant" (Z. Fitzgerald 1991c, 105), a revelation after which she determines herself to do something on her own. "I can't stand this any longer," a totally exhausted Alabama ends the

chapter telling him, “I don’t want to sleep with the men or imitate the women, and I can’t stand it!” (Z. Fitzgerald 1991c, 111).

The third chapter focuses on Alabama’s increasing dedication to ballet, to the point of becoming possessed by it. Besides, her dancing also acts as a defense against the collapse of her marriage, which worsens as Alabama spends more time immersed in her career as a ballerina. From the beginning, Alabama admits ballet to “held all the things [she]’d always tried to find in everything else” and it soon becomes to her a liberation tool which allows her to command her emotions, to prove herself and to “drive the devils that had driven her” (Z. Fitzgerald 1991c,115-118). It is especially interesting how in the process of learning to dance, Alabama replaces her former life idols – first her father and then David – with Madame, the dancer who teaches her (Wagner-Martin 1982, 204), something that again lays on the table the importance for women artists of having female references.

Aware of the unhappiness that surrounds her family, her job becomes her drug and she wants to keep it apart from the rest of her life, as she fears that “otherwise one would soon become as unsatisfactory as the other, lost in an aimless, impenetrable drift” (Z. Fitzgerald 1991c, 128). Clearly upset with the great amount of time that Alabama spends working in the studio, David is constantly looking down on her ability to dance, making discouraging comments such as: “Are you under the illusion that you’ll ever be any good at that stuff?” (Z. Fitzgerald 1991c, 119) or “There’s no use killing yourself. I hope that you realize that the biggest difference in the world is between the amateur and the professional in the arts” (Z. Fitzgerald 1991c, 138). The issue of professionalization, of earning her own success and having something to give to the world without having the financial necessity of doing so, is something in which Alabama feels completely misunderstood. On one occasion, a girl in the studio asks her why she wants to be a dancer if she already has a husband. Bothered by the question, Alabama answers: “Can’t you understand that I am not trying to get anything [...] but to get rid of some of myself?” (Z. Fitzgerald 1991c, 133). The most important value that ballet has for Alabama is not entering into a competition with her husband, but rather getting to feel that she knows and owns herself and her life. Maybe because of that, at the end of the chapter *Zelda*, distancing her heroine from her own bad choice, makes her accept an offer to dance her solo debut in Naples in a sudden reversal of plans. In this way, in the

fairytale that Zelda has created for herself, when her husband insisted, “we have some obligations”, she no longer cared (Z. Fitzgerald 1991c, 149).

But as the fourth and last section of the novel shows, this fairytale does not have a *happily ever after* ending. This chapter is concerned with Alabama’s briefly-lived success in Naples, where she stays without her family while they are in Switzerland. However, soon she is forced to give up her career as a ballerina, as she suddenly gets ill with blood poisoning due to an infection in her foot, which has to be operated. All her dreams and expectations seem to fade away when, at the hospital, David tells her that she will never be able to dance again: “She lay there, thinking that she had always meant to take what she wanted from life. Well – she hadn’t wanted this. This was a stone that would need a good deal of salt and pepper,” ends the scene (Z. Fitzgerald 1991c, 181). But Alabama’s misfortune does not end here, as immediately after she is discharged from the hospital, she has to return to her hometown with David to give one last goodbye to her dying father. What is especially interesting about this particular episode is the extent to which Zelda shows her ability to blend language with emotions: in contrast to the fresh and ornamental style that she used at the beginning to imitate the flippancy of a young Alabama, now her tone becomes somber, reminiscent and mature (Wagner-Martin 1982, 201). In trying to get some life guidance from her rigid, yet protective father, she wants to ask him the things she had always wanted to, starting with metaphysical issues about the body and the soul. But she fails to reach him: weak and far away, he requests her to ask her something easy (Z. Fitzgerald 1991c, 184-185).

After the Judge’s death and before leaving the South, the Knights give a farewell party in which their acquaintances compliment them by observing how lucky and happy they are – at least, compared to the rest. Alabama reflects on this by saying: “We trained ourselves to deduce logic from experience [...] We grew up founding our dreams on the infinite promise of American advertising. I *still* believe that one can learn to play the piano by mail and that mud will give you a perfect complexion” (Z. Fitzgerald 1991c, 195). As Milford observes, once the guests start leaving the party, Alabama says goodbye to them through a word-play with the terms *death*, and *dead*: “until it becomes death in the first place” (2011, 246); “We’ve talked you to death”; “You must be dead with packing”; “It’s death to a party to stay till digestion sets in”; “I’m dead, my dear. It’s been wonderful!” (Z. Fitzgerald 1991c, 196). The party was over.

4. Conclusions

“If you want to choose, you must be a goddess”, Alabama remembered her father telling her when she was a young girl who used to want her own way about things. From some time then, she was starting to realize that “it wasn’t easy to be a goddess away from Olympus” (Z. Fitzgerald 1991c, 189). But despite making her heroine have this epiphany, Zelda learnt first-hand that not even being a goddess could guarantee her real freedom of choice. With her case, we have been shown that even if the deified muse decides to become an artist, she will only be remembered for being the muse, whose only value is the man she inspires. This way, as Tavernier-Courbin points out, we find that Zelda has always been read for the wrong reason: being Scott’s wife and object of inspiration, which was paradoxically what she was trying to fight with her decision of becoming an artist on her own right (1979, 22-23).

The question of having a voice and being heard as a female artist – both for women writers in general and for our particular case of Zelda Fitzgerald – leads us to one of Bloom’s formulas in the process of canon-formation: “you are or become what you read” (1975, 96). The importance of looking at this model from a gender perspective grows stronger when we consider that in effect, until very recently, the artistic quality of Zelda’s work was left behind her status of wife and muse. Even when the woman artist has the opportunity to write the other side of the story, it is only read when it is co-signed by her husband, as Zelda’s articles and stories were, or when it complements the portrayal of a marriage about which he was also writing, as happened with *Save Me the Waltz* and *Tender Is the Night*. In her novel, Alabama acknowledges that “people always believe the best story” (1991c, 55), and both Zelda and her fictional counterpart seem to acknowledge too that the story that people want to *be* or *become* is always male. Under this situation, the influential theory postulated by Gilbert and Gubar can be applied again to Zelda’s case, since, as we have seen, “not only can she not fight a male precursor on ‘his’ terms and win, she cannot ‘beget’ art upon the female body of the muse” (1984, 40). The Zelda Fitzgerald that interested the reader, as the failure of *Save Me the Waltz* proved, was not the *real* Alabama Beggs, but rather the *ideal* Rosalind Connage, Gloria Gilbert, Daisy Buchanan or Nicole Diver – and all the stereotypes that came with them and which created the myth around a consumed Zelda.

It was not until 1970, with Nancy Milford's publication of the first focused research about her, *Zelda: A Biography*, that her figure began to be understood and her image as an artist progressively started to be celebrated. This way, the second wave of the feminist movement claimed her as an unacknowledged artist who had always lived in the shadow of her husband and who, as her biographer claims, was not the "competitive, spoiled woman that Hemingway thought she was", but a complex and gifted artist who, apart from being rebellious and vibrant, had serious mental health problems which conditioned her writing and life (Milford 2011, 5). From then on, some other biographies of Zelda were published, complementing Milford's and offering new approaches to her life story and work, such as Sara Mayfield's *Exiles from Paradise* (1971), Kendall Taylor's *Sometimes Madness is Wisdom* (2001), Sally Cline's *Zelda Fitzgerald. Her Voice in Paradise* (2002) and Linda Wagner-Martin's *Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald: An American Woman's Life* (2004), the last two being the most focused on Zelda – rather than on the Fitzgerald marriage – of the four. Once Zelda's biographers placed on the table the story behind her, some scholars tried to introduce her work to the world of literary discussion, publishing academic articles about her as the ones I have applied in this essay. In this sense, Tavernier-Courbin's and Wagner-Martin's have been distinctly helpful for focusing on Zelda's vital and personal point of view and link it to her literary production.

On the other hand, it is well known that art imitates life and I started this paper agreeing with Cline when she said that Zelda's life was made for story: effectively, thanks to the publications which put the spotlight in a figure that, up to then, had remained voiceless, her life has recently started to be fictionalized, too. Both published in 2013, Erika Robuck's *Call Me Zelda* and Therese Anne Fowler's *Z: A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald* turned Zelda's life into a work of fiction in an attempt to, as Fowler wrote, "imagine what it was like to be Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald" (2013, 373). The latter was in fact a best-seller, as well as the source for Amazon TV series *Z: The Beginning of Everything*, starring Christina Ricci. Besides, two movies about her are in progress, in which Jennifer Lawrence and Scarlett Johansson respectively will play her part. But Zelda started to be a source for popular culture long before these past five years, inspiring a video game character (*The Legend of Zelda*) and a song (The Eagles'

“Witchy Woman”) or appearing in movies such as Woody Allen’s *Midnight in Paris* (Ryan 2007).

All in all, one cannot help but wonder why the true Zelda Fitzgerald seems to be more alive now than a century ago. Maybe we have learnt to look at her beyond the labels of wife, Southern Belle, Golden Girl, or America’s original flapper and we are starting to consider the possibility for muses to be artists by themselves. Maybe it is now that we are where she prematurely was, in a time when a woman like her could be able to “overcome the overwhelming odds of womanhood, marriage, social pressure, education and motherhood in the pursuit of art” (Tavernier-Courbin 1979, 42). But under the circumstances of Zelda’s life and career, it is her writing that reveals it all about herself: “I suppose I will spend the rest of my life torn between the desire to master life and a feeling that it is, au fond, a contemptuous enemy” (Z. Fitzgerald, as cited in Milford 2011, 215).

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