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Zelda Fitzgerald: An Unromantic Revision

"It has been suggested that . . . the high development of romantic love would tend ultimately toward the extinction of the race."

Robert Briffault

Over the last three decades numerous portraits, biographies, and other accounts of Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald have been published.¹ From them we can derive a reasonably well-rounded picture of Scott: his life, his art, his engaging but difficult personality, and his conflicts. Thus far, however, a biography has yet to be written that gives us a full enough account of Zelda. Nancy Milford's *Zelda* did much to make up for the lack of specific information about Zelda, but it too failed to deal satisfactorily with some of the major issues that dominated her life.

It is virtually impossible to examine the life of one Fitzgerald without including the other, for it was their life together that made the headlines, created the legend, and fueled the inspiration for so much of the literature that was created by them. The biographer of any individual so whole-heartedly engaged in such a symbiotic relationship will undoubtedly have difficulty at times in determining just where one life leaves off and the other begins. So far, none of Zelda Fitzgerald's biographers have totally succeeded in surmounting this difficulty. The better biographies do portray Zelda as an outstanding character in her own right, yet on the whole she still remains slightly obscured to us by Scott's shadow. The most obvious reason for the general emphasis on Scott is that his work received widespread contemporary recognition, while Zelda's artistic efforts did not. But there are other reasons which may be less obvious.

It has been said that "It is by the failures and misfits of a civilization that one can best judge its weaknesses."² In many ways Zelda could be considered a failure, a casualty of her time. But the works of her biographers could also be viewed as symptomatic of the weaknesses of that time. By succumbing to biases and limitations similar to those of

the society in which she lived, they failed (to a greater or lesser degree) to perceive the actual nature of the obstacles encountered and the issues involved in her life. I propose to examine four biographies of Scott and/or Zelda, and by focussing on the way in which their emphasis and interpretations differ with respect to Zelda, and the values and assumptions they may have employed in their evaluations, to suggest some new lines of enquiry that a future biographer of Zelda Fitzgerald might follow.

The Far Side of Paradise by Arthur Mizener was the first biography of Scott Fitzgerald to be published, in 1951. This was about ten years after Fitzgerald's death (and three years after Zelda's), when there was a general revival of interest in his work. The favorable reviews reflected the standards that predominated in American society at the time. The *Yale Review* congratulated Mizener on his "discretion and sobriety,"³ the *New York Times* on his "tact. . . discretion . . . and scholarly reserve."⁴ The *San Francisco Chronicle*, however, criticized him for being "a little too ready. . . to accept the legend, if it makes a good story."⁵ Mizener acknowledged this "fault" in his preface to the revised edition published in 1965. As well as including information on Fitzgerald's life with Sheilah Graham, which he had previously omitted, he admitted that he had at times "unwarily accepted Fitzgerald's somewhat romanticized recollections"⁶ in his earlier version, and tried to correct this defect. In the light of subsequent biographies it is clear that he did not succeed particularly well in this attempt.

In his Introduction Mizener makes the claim that Fitzgerald's work must be at the heart of any study of the man because it was Fitzgerald's "major interest," and because it was "more valuable" than anything else in his life (p. 17). Although Mizener acknowledges the great degree to which Fitzgerald's art and life were intertwined, he nevertheless makes it clear that for him Scott's relationship with Zelda is of secondary interest. As a result, not only is the picture he creates of Zelda woefully incomplete and at times distorted, but his portrait of Scott is seriously limited as well.

Mizener's first reference to Zelda in the Introduction takes the form of a quotation from James Thurber, who observed that "there were four or five Zeldas and at least eight Scotts" (p. 17), somehow inferring that Zelda was a less complex (and therefore less interesting?) personality than Scott. His second reference occurs in a quotation from Ernest Hemingway, who asserted that Zelda took pleasure in interfering with Scott's work. Mizener does not trouble to qualify this statement by pointing out the well-known animosity between Zelda and Hemingway. Even allowing that the purpose of the quotation was to describe Scott rather than Zelda, and that Mizener often disparages

Hemingway's credibility, the effect of such a statement in that context is to give the reader a rather negative first impression of Zelda.

In describing Scott and Zelda's early courtship Mizener makes use of Zelda's anecdote in *Save Me the Waltz* (in which David Knight carves on the doorpost of the country club "David, David, David, Knight, Knight, Knight, and Miss Alabama Nobody") to illustrate how "fascinated" Zelda was by Scott's "extravagant gestures." Mizener neglects, however, to include or comment upon Alabama's reaction: "She was a little angry about the names. David had told her how famous he was going to be many times before" (*SMTW*, p. 37). Instead he goes on to assert that Zelda was "determined to dominate the relation" and describes some incidents which he feels typify the "calculated maneuvers" Zelda was capable of employing in her attempts to arouse Scott's jealousy (pp. 101, 107).

Considering Mizener's emphasis on a critical/literary approach, it is remarkable that he pays such scant attention to the question of how great Zelda's literary contribution was to Scott's work. In the midst of a description of their early romance he makes the brief parenthetical comment that Scott "eventually used parts of Zelda's diary in *This Side of Paradise* and *The Beautiful and Damned*; like all she wrote it was brilliant, amateur work" (p. 103). Later, after quoting Zelda's comment in her review of *The Beautiful and Damned* that "plagiarism begins at home" (p. 146), Mizener completely bypasses the issue of plagiarism and interprets the statement simply as a suggestion that the book was "biographical."

Mizener's treatment of Zelda's breakdown is similarly cursory, simplistic, and tends to favor the "romanticized" interpretation of events. He fails to examine in any depth the complex connections between Zelda's mental/emotional stability, her relationship with Scott, and her desperate attempts to become more creative and independent in her life. For example, he makes no mention of the disappointing sales of Zelda's book, a factor that undoubtedly contributed to her third collapse. Although he allows that "Fitzgerald's mental state contributed to making Zelda's recovery more difficult," he also states: "Under the strain of trying to carry through his program of building up Zelda's ego by encouraging her writing and painting, Fitzgerald often grew angry at the sacrifice of his own work it entailed. . . 'my writing was more important than hers' . . . Perhaps this assertion was partly justified; it is remarkable how often people felt, against their better judgements, that Zelda's view of things was more trustworthy than Scott's and let themselves be persuaded to accept it" (p. 250).

Mizener makes mention of an occasion during the summer of 1933 when Scott and Zelda "sat down, in the presence of a psychiatrist and a

secretary, to thrash out their difficulties." The time period coincides with the one in which Nancy Milford reports that for about six months the two were making weekly visits to Phipps Clinic. Her detailed description of one session conducted by Dr. Rennie gives a completely different picture from Mizener's. Without citing any sources, Mizener writes: "The strongest impression the psychiatrist retained from the discussion was the intimacy of their two natures" (p. 249). In contrast, Milford's information reveals far more about the real nature of the issues that were driving them apart, leaving them at best with an emotional stand-off. For example, Scott constantly insulted and belittled Zelda's talent as a writer, while Zelda repeatedly and emphatically stated that she would rather live in an institution than go on living with Scott the way things were. It is interesting to speculate about what Mizener would have done with these facts if he had stumbled on them—and probably safe to assume that it is not the kind of information he would have actively pursued.

Andrew Turnbull's biography *Scott Fitzgerald* appeared eleven years later, in 1962. It too was well received by critics and generally acclaimed for its superiority to Mizener's presentation. One reviewer felt that *The Far Side of Paradise* "failed to come alive" and that "as a portrait of a man it was distorted by a good deal of theory-riding," whereas Turnbull's book "presents a hero who lives on every page."⁸ *Time* magazine lauded Turnbull for demonstrating "the industry of a researcher and the dedication of a disciple."⁹ The words "hero" and "disciple" provide some insight into the attitude Turnbull brought to his subject.

Turnbull makes it clear in his "Note on Method and Sources" (which includes a solid five and one-half page list of names) that his focus is on the personality, the man, and not the work. To do justice to this approach he gives a much fuller presentation of Zelda and her influence on Scott, as well as Scott's influence on Zelda, than did Mizener.

Andrew Turnbull was eleven years old when he first met the Fitzgeralds at La Paix in 1932. Scott clearly made a lasting and profound impression on the child: "[T]here was always something of the magician in Fitzgerald. He was the inventor, the creator, the timeless impresario who brightened our days and made other adult company seem dull and profitless. It wasn't so much any particular skill of his as a quality of caring, of believing, of pouring his whole soul and imagination into whatever he did with us."¹⁰

Despite his obvious awe of the man, Turnbull seems able to see through some of Fitzgerald's pretensions, as when he humorously describes Scott's melodramatic, self-indulgent reactions to his early

frustrations in his courtship of Zelda and first attempts to be published.

Zelda was a more elusive creature to Turnbull during the Fitzgeralds' stay at La Paix. He does, however, create one very poignant, vivid picture of her playing over and over on the Victrola a popular song of the twenties, "Valencia", and sometimes dancing to it, "increasing her inexplicable air of something lost and left behind" (p. 230).

Throughout his book Turnbull treats Zelda with considerable respect. His descriptions of her "Southern Belle" period indicate frank admiration of her audacity and exuberance. He takes care to note how Zelda "criticized with tangible results" the proofs of *The Beautiful and Damned*" (p. 129), and acknowledges that Scott was to some degree indebted to her in his work. Scott "used to say he knew nothing about human nature and had to learn it all from Zelda, and there was a measure of truth in his gallantry. Zelda was the realist of the two, the cooler in her approach, seeing through people whom Scott in his boyish way had already begun to idealize" (p. 177).

Turnbull is also more fair to Zelda than Mizener is in discussing her possible motives for sending the manuscript of *Save Me the Waltz* to Max Perkins without Scott's knowledge. Where Mizener accuses her of trying to outdo Scott, Turnbull attributes the move to a justifiable desire to succeed on her own. He also notes that the poor reception of her book probably had a detrimental effect on her emotional balance, and even goes so far as to draw a connection with Scott and Zelda when he describes how "Anthony breaks Gloria's spirit [in *The Beautiful and Damned*] . . . Gloria recovers from the fight, but what if her spirit were permanently submerged in mental illness?" (p. 131).

Turnbull's first real criticism of Zelda is an interesting one: "Zelda wanted [Scott] to work too much for her and not enough for his dream" (p. 115), a remark reminiscent of Hemingway's complaint about her draining influence on Scott's output. Turnbull also accepts Scott's version of Zelda's "affair" with Edouard Jozan, which, as later revealed in Milford's account, may never have been consummated sexually. He blames the bitterness that developed between Scott and Zelda primarily on this affair and later cites it as a reason for Scott's occasional cruel behaviour towards Zelda while they were at La Paix. From this point on Turnbull's attitude to Zelda seems to become less sympathetic, which is perhaps not surprising, considering the Victorian upbringing to which he alludes (pp. 209, 220).

There are instances involving Zelda in Turnbull's biography where there seems to be a blurring of the author's and subject's (Scott's) point of view. This could be due to careless writing, but could also be due to an unconscious identification. For example, in describing how Scott

had explored his relations with Zelda in *Tender is the Night*, Turnbull states: "He felt she had swallowed him up, or more precisely, that he had allowed himself to be swallowed. Zelda, like Nicole, was ill-fated when he met her, but Diver-Fitzgerald had 'chosen Ophelia, chosen the sweet poison and drunk it' " (p. 241). The question arises: who believes that Zelda was "ill-fated"? Scott, or Andrew Turnbull?

Turnbull's selection of material from the transcript of the interview with Dr. Rennie in May 1933 (which he referred to as a "key document") is also revealing. The bulk is devoted to Scott's disparaging comments about Zelda's talent, although most of that is rewritten in Turnbull's words, and Scott's more brutal statements are omitted. Very little of Zelda's argument is presented other than that she needed to fill her life with something because of Scott's drinking, and was determined to go on writing. As in Mizener's book this version gives a completely different impression of the encounter from Milford's more comprehensive account.

Nancy Milford's *Zelda* was published in 1970, eight years after *Scott Fitzgerald*. It was the first biography to claim Zelda as the focus rather than Scott. It has also been the most popular of the Fitzgerald biographies in terms of sales. Its critical reception was generally positive; reviewers praised it as a "first-rate piece of work. . . solidly researched, emotionally moving, and intellectually satisfying."¹¹ H. T. Moore felt it possessed an "unusual clinical . . . authority" which offered "striking revelations."¹² Others, however, criticized it for offering facts without "judgments or explanations", with little "comment or assessment."¹³

Milford began her biography as a master's thesis at Columbia University but it grew into a project that took six years of research and writing to complete. She was twenty-five when she began and about thirty-one when the book was published. Her prologue begins with the statement: "When I was young in the midwest and had dreams of my own . . ."¹⁴ As with Mizener's and Turnbull's biographies a sense of identification with the subject is established, but in this case the awareness of it seems to be more conscious. It is interesting, however, that despite the title (note it is *Zelda*, not *Zelda Fitzgerald*) the first reference in the prologue is not to Zelda but to the Fitzgeralds. Perhaps it is a characteristically female tendency (historically speaking) to describe a personality more in terms of relationship than in terms of accomplishment, and perhaps this tendency is emphasized even more when the subject is a woman, but it is worth noting that proportionally Milford does devote a great deal more space in her book to Scott than either Turnbull or Mizener do to Zelda. This dual focus is apparent from the outset when she shifts back and forth in her prologue between "Zelda" and "the Fitzgeralds" as the object(s) of her

fascination. To some degree this is inevitable, considering the symbiotic nature of their relationship. Nevertheless it does raise the question of whether she has to some degree belied the title of her book. It is worth noting in this respect that the publisher printed "The Real Love Story of the Century" above Milford's title in the first paperback edition of *Zelda*.

In her prologue Milford indicates that she views the Fitzgeralds' significance in both a personal and a socio-cultural framework. After admiringly describing Zelda's audacious style, she states that the Fitzgeralds had "made an impact on the American imagination that reverberated into my own generation, and I wanted to know why" (p. xi). She closes with the statement: "something savage lurks in the extravagantly green gardens" of our past (p. xiv), and we are left with the impression that one of her tasks is to uncover and identify this "something savage."

Milford also writes: "Certainly we knew more about Gloria and Sally Carrol and Nicole Diver than we did about Zelda Fitzgerald" (p. xii). Milford evidently viewed the problem primarily as one of lack of information, and she has done an admirable job of trying to correct this deficiency. As has already been mentioned she was the first biographer to seek out Edouard Jozan to obtain his account of the affair, and she has given the fullest account to date of the kinds of issues and conflicts that were raised between Scott and Zelda in their meetings with Dr. Rennie. She also introduces new anecdotes about Zelda's childhood. She is the first Fitzgerald biographer to make some use of current psychological theories in an effort better to understand the nature of Zelda's mental illness. Most important, she has done the most thorough job to date of investigating the records of the institutions where Zelda spent time, seeking out psychiatrists, nurses, assistants, and others who knew her.

The book creates an initial impression of thoroughness in both investigation and documentation. On careful examination, however, curious gaps become evident. For example, there is no indication that Milford ever communicated directly with the Fitzgeralds' daughter, Scottie. Also, despite her usual scrupulous care about recording person, place, and date of personal interviews, she does not document information she may have received from Zelda's sisters, even when making direct quotations. She makes several important references to Zelda's family history (Anthony Sayre had a reputation for being "dissolute"; Mrs. Sayre's mother died a suicide; Anthony committed suicide) without documenting sources of information. She makes many references to information apparently received from Dr. Rennie about Zelda but provides no record of any direct contact with him,

either personal or by correspondence; if it was through a secondary source she makes no mention of it. Nor does she offer any documentation for the transcript of Dr. Rennie to which she devotes about four pages of her book. This does seem somewhat remiss, considering the profound implications of the dialogue that occurred that day between Scott and Zelda. (This transcript has since disappeared, according to another biographer, Sara Mayfield.) These omissions may possibly be due to ethical considerations or other difficulties. Milford does refer to "rare privileges of research" and the fact that "for various reasons I am not able to directly express my gratitude to others who were . . . helpful" (p. 18). Nevertheless, altogether they do constitute a flaw in the image of authoritative thoroughness and also raise the possibility of bias arising from acceptance of information not adequately verified.

Throughout her biography Milford is scrupulous about not taking sides or laying blame in what was clearly at times a war for survival. Her style frequently reflects a journalistic objectivity although she manages to combine this with a sense of compassion and empathy for both Zelda and Scott. She seems to view them as two destructive, passionate souls doomed to a common fate. Like Mizener and Turnbull she closes her narrative with the image of the common grave.

Although Milford has certainly succeeded in conveying what Virginia Woolf once described as "that riot and confusion of the passions and emotions that every good biographer detests,"¹⁵ it is apparent from various reviews that her own view of the subject has not been made sufficiently clear to readers. Margot Peters felt that Milford was of the opinion that literature cannot and should not be the business of a woman's life¹⁶ (an assertion that Milford would undoubtedly reject). At the other extreme, R. Sklar of *The Nation* believed that Scott's claim to exclusive use of the Fitzgeralds' common memories for his material was perfectly justified and not adequately appreciated by Milford. Sklar seemed to think that if Milford had only recognized Scott's stature as an artist she would have understood that Zelda was indeed trespassing by using this same material in *Save Me the Waltz*.¹⁷

There are dangers other than the likelihood of misinterpretation that arise from such a fair-minded, noncommittal approach. For example, Milford comments on the transcribed session with Dr. Rennie by emphasizing Scott's dilemma of being placed in a position where he was being asked to "give what he did not have" (p. 330), with only brief examination of the way in which his vehement denunciations may have affected Zelda and hampered her chances for recovery. As usual, she carefully refrains from passing judgement. It is this trait that makes *Zelda* the most unbiased and objective of the Fitzgerald biographies. Yet it is possible that this deliberate avoidance of a conscious

bias may simply have introduced a different type of unconscious bias into the work, a tendency to back away from conclusions that might not coincide with a vision of the two lovers equally and fatefully entangled in a grand and passionate attachment that was equally destructive to both. Scott's erratic behaviour and belittlement of Zelda's talent clearly upset her precarious inner balance and undermined what little confidence she had in herself and her abilities. There were certainly reasons for this behaviour other than that he could not give what he did not have. Had she been willing to explore this kind of question in greater depth, Milford might have better fulfilled the promise of her prologue and come closer to revealing that "something savage" she originally set out to uncover.

Sara Mayfield's *Exiles in Paradise* was published one year after *Zelda*. Reviews were mixed. It was accused of being "bitter, poorly written"¹⁸ as well as "guilty of numerous omissions and distortions"¹⁹ and was compared unfavorably with Milford's biography. Some reviewers praised Mayfield's "unselfconscious judgement-passing [which] gives the book a welcome asperity"²⁰ and her "revisionism, which contradicts much of what has been published about Scott and Zelda, [and] makes for interesting, sometimes downright fascinating reading."²¹ Critics unanimously rejected Mayfield's contention that Zelda possessed a greater "natural talent" as a writer than did Scott.

Mayfield was sixty-six when her book was published. She grew up in Montgomery, Alabama, and knew Zelda throughout childhood. As an adult she moved in similar circles to the Fitzgeralds and encountered them periodically in such diverse places as Paris, Antibes, Baltimore and Hollywood. She recounts that her first encounter with Zelda occurred when she was five, and ten-year-old Zelda boldly and dramatically rescued her from a hair-raising downhill roller skate ride. This incident sets the tone for a quality of heroine worship that slants Mayfield's viewpoint throughout the biography and is reminiscent of the adulation with which Turnbull regarded Scott. Mayfield's feelings toward Scott could probably best be described as "acidic". Although she takes care to acknowledge his finer qualities as evidenced by his kindness to aspiring writers and his solicitude for his daughter, she clearly regards him as a weak, unstable lush who was solely responsible for Zelda's downfall. Mayfield discloses that she divorced her own husband "when I came of age. . . . Too many parties, too many hangovers, too much money."²² As well, despite her cosmopolitan experience, she betrays at times a strong Southern bias, a protective and justifying attitude toward Zelda's family, Montgomery society, and the South in general.

Exiles in Paradise has obvious defects as a biography. Mayfield does not offer an introduction or statement of purpose and she offers no documentation, stating this can be found in the University of Alabama Library for those pursuing scholarly research. She has a tendency to make sweeping, facile statements: "As part of her Southern heritage, Zelda was endowed with a pride that would not let her truckle to the great and near great as Scott did It was the kind of hubris that invites nemesis, and it was probably the tragic flaw in Zelda's character" (p. 220). Because she also tends to express her opinions as though they were provable facts, one tends to suspect the veracity of her report when she recounts a scene in which she encountered either or both of the Fitzgeralds. For instance, she recalls admonishing Zelda to believe in herself and Zelda replying: "I want to but Scott won't let me. He doesn't want me to believe in anything but him" (p. 127). Such a comment fits so neatly into Mayfield's own hypothesis that one can't help wondering to what extent her memory may have re-shaped the original statement to suit her own requirements.

Her descriptions of Scott are vivid and invariably withering. She writes of Zelda eying Scott on the Plage de Garoupe: "His bathing trunks accentuated his long trunk, short legs, growing 'pot'. He swayed a little as he stood over us" (p. 116). Later, in Montgomery, "He was an incurable flirt; but he was now past the age for it; his style was 'vieux jeu' and his breath smelt of Sen Sen" (p. 172). She even states that "his drunken lovemaking revolted her and left her unresponsive and irritable" without bothering to clarify whether or not this is something Zelda actually confided to her (p. 132). Mayfield often praises Zelda, using Scott as the foil. For example: "Zelda . . . in those days was incontestably the saner, better integrated, and better adjusted of the two"; "Zelda [was] the more innately prudent and sensible of the two" (pp. 45-46). She endeavours to disprove the image of Zelda as a selfish, self-centered child, and stresses her capacity for being "compassionate, thoughtful, and tender" (p. 13). She goes so far as to claim that Zelda "promptly forgot about" her flirtation with Jozan after it was over, and that Scott had become "violently and irrationally jealous" for no reason (p. 96), whereas *Save Me the Waltz* reveals that the encounter with Jozan actually made a deep and lasting impression on Zelda.

Mayfield's bias clearly dominates the biography. Its only redeeming feature is that she is perfectly conscious of her viewpoint and makes no pretence of neutrality. Unfortunately, because she has so thoroughly undermined her own credibility as a biographer, readers are likely to overlook some of the more valid and interesting issues that she does raise. For example, she suggests that Zelda had more than the one abortion Milford mentions, adding that Scott "never seemed to share

Zelda's sense of guilt about her operations" (p. 116). If there is any truth in this, it would certainly be worth investigating. We still do not know enough about how Scott and Zelda each reacted to an unwanted pregnancy, even if there was only the one, and we have no idea of just how severely this may have affected her emotional balance. We can recall here her description of one of her periods of disintegration: "I was half-crazy and thought the people looked like embryos" (*Zelda*, p. 302).

Mayfield also attacks the conventional image of Scott as the idealistic, faithful husband when she writes of Lillian Hellman's account of Dorothy Parker's confession "that she and Scott had slept together. . . in a casual one- or two-night affair" (p. 80).²³ She later makes the caustic comment that Scott's anxiety about Zelda while she was at Prangins "did not prevent him from beaung Emily Vanderbilt around Paris" (p. 155). Turnbull, in contrast, describes a moving scene in which Scott was seen consoling and comforting Miss Vanderbilt in a restaurant (some time before she apparently committed suicide) as an indication of Scott's capacity for gentleness and charity. If Scott was romantically involved with Miss Vanderbilt as Mayfield implies, the restaurant scene may actually be more indicative of a capacity for romantic deception and a possible affinity for self-destructive women.

The assumption of hereditary madness in Zelda's family is also challenged by Mayfield. She claims Anthony Sayre did not intentionally commit suicide as Milford describes, but jumped out a window in the fever of a malarial hallucination. Whether she was using reports of the family, from whom Milford states "all but the most superficial details of his suicide were concealed" (p. 336), or whether she had another source of information is not clear. In any case, the question of the hereditary factor is only part of the larger question of the "inevitability" of Zelda's mental illness. It is remarkable how frequently the phase is used by Fitzgerald chroniclers that Zelda "was" insane, Zelda "was" schizophrenic, as though it were some kind of static, inherent condition, rather than a long and painful process in which an originally ebullient and intelligent personality disintegrated into a state of utter powerlessness. Equally simplistic is the notion that Scott "drove her crazy". Perhaps there was a predisposition to emotional instability that was aggravated by the unstable life they led; perhaps Zelda resorted to insanity as a response to an impossible life situation. Milford made some effort to come to grips with these questions by utilizing the theories of R. D. Laing and Harry S. Sullivan, but she could have made use of a much wider range of current humanistic psychological theory that would have been even more helpful in clarifying the nature of Zelda's difficulties.²⁴ (Particularly relevant is the

growing body of theory which argues that susceptibility to periods of personal disintegration may actually be an indication of exceptional potential for personal growth and creativity.)

Exiles in Paradise gives us such a vivid picture of Scott's irrational, unstable behaviour that Mayfield's assertion that it was Scott, not Zelda, who should have been "locked up" does not seem too far-fetched at times. To support her argument she quotes H. E. Mencken: "Too bad Scott thought of having Zelda locked up first" (p. 198). This is the same H. E. Mencken who was reported in *Zelda* as saying that "Scott would never amount to anything until he got rid of his wife" (p. 174). It is a well-documented fact that Scott adamantly refused doctors' repeated suggestions that he too should undergo some form of psychotherapy. According to Milford, Scott was "alarmed" that doctors might consider him "on the same level as a schizophrenic" (p. 326). Such a defensive reaction may be typical of an alcoholic, but it also says something about the nature of Scott's more deep-seated feelings about mental illness. If he felt that he would be somehow branded by seeking professional help, what then could his attitude have been to Zelda's breakdowns, and how may his attitude have affected her?

Probably the most extreme of Mayfield's contentions is that Scott was deliberately protecting himself at Zelda's expense by stigmatizing her with the label of madness. Melodramatically she writes, "She threatened to leave him and air her complaints in the divorce court. It was then and there that Scott realized that she had to be silenced. Hemingway had already indicated how it could be done" (p. 148). Undeniably Mayfield's position is so extreme as to be ludicrous. Yet there are elements in her argument that deserve to be examined more carefully. Why, for example, did Oscar Forel have such trouble diagnosing Zelda? Why did they call in Bleuler, the expert on schizophrenia whom Zelda considered "a great imbecile" (*Zelda*, p. 220), and not Carl Jung? Jung was well-known as an expert on neurosis and a proponent of the healing and regenerative powers of the creative impulse, whereas with Bleuler's consultation the staff at Prangins adopted the view that Zelda's artistic ambitions were "self-deceptions" that needed to be discouraged for the sake of her emotional balance (*Zelda*, p. 234). Was the choice of doctor simply a matter of money and medical etiquette as Milford states, or could it have been a matter of seeking out the man most likely to give the preferred diagnosis?

The theme of dominance and submission in human relationship is nothing new, but the role modern psychiatry and psychology have to play in this dynamic is just beginning to be explored. A book that deals in depth with this issue was published in the same year as *Zelda*. In

*Ideology and Sanity*²⁵ Dr. Thomas Szasz explores the various ways in which psychiatric classification may be used as a strategy of personal constraint. Szasz describes the social role of most modern psychiatrists as that of legitimizing or illegitimizing the social aspirations and roles of others. He even cites Bleuler as an example of the type of modern psychiatrist who considers the mentally ill person as a defective machine, and mental illness as an impersonal event rather than a personal act or decision. Perhaps Zelda was simply demonstrating her own intuitive perception of the situation when she labelled the man who invented the term "schizophrenia" an imbecile.

There are other ways in which Zelda may have been "constrained" more than helped by the type of treatment she received at the various institutions. We still do not know exactly what kinds of medication she received; their nature, their effects, or their possible side-effects. Milford refers to insulin treatment and sedatives but does not tell us anything about them. Also, in all her shuffling about from institution to institution, Zelda encountered very few doctors who were astute enough to pick up on her quick, allusive, often humorous style of thought and speech. Consequently her growing sense of isolation from the reality around her was likely intensified more often than it was eased. Other than Dr. Rennie, Dr. Mildred Squires was the only psychiatrist with whom Zelda achieved any significant rapport. She clearly had a positive effect on Zelda; in fact *Save Me the Waltz* was dedicated to her. Yet when Zelda re-entered Phipps Clinic it was not under Dr. Squires' care. We still do not know why this was so or what happened to Dr. Squires, but we do know that Zelda did not do as well at Phipps on her second stay there. After three and one-half weeks Scott transferred her to Craig House, which had been recommended by Dr. Forel or Prangins. Within nine weeks she was removed from there in an apparently catatonic state. According to Milford there was some question as to whether she was actually catatonic, as Scott had reported in his ledger, but again we are not given the details.

A contemporary fictional character whose condition bears many similarities to Zelda's is Lynda Coldridge, in Doris Lessing's *The Four-Gated City*.²⁶ Lynda also possessed exceptional faculties which were never developed due to the psychological crippling she suffered at the hands of the "helping profession" (shock treatment, insulin, various sedatives, and a continual negation of her internal reality). Zelda viewed her own predicament with frightening clarity at times: "'Don't ever fall into the hands of brain and nerve specialists unless you are feeling very Faustian'" (*Zelda*, p. 258). When the facts of her encounters with these specialists are isolated from the rest of the plethora of information about the Fitzgeralds, they stand out in relief to form an

alarming picture, and the remaining gaps in our knowledge of her situation also become more evident.

One remaining issue which has not been fully addressed by Fitzgerald biographers is the question of Zelda's talent. With the exception of Mizener, they all give many indications that this talent was liberally incorporated into Scott's work. But we still do not really know to what degree. Even if it is impossible to discover the full extent of this, it must be possible to obtain a more accurate assessment that we have at present.

Zelda wrote her own novel, *Save Me the Waltz*, while she was a patient at Phipps Clinic. Its reception by critics and the public was disappointing. A few reviewers found positive things to say about the book and viewed it as a first effort that showed promise in spite of its flaws. Because there were no further efforts, Zelda's literary talent has not been taken very seriously by biographers or critics. The comment has been made that *Save Me the Waltz* continues to be of interest mainly because its author was the wife of F. Scott Fitzgerald,²⁷ and that Zelda had in fact only a "minor gift for writing."²⁸ There is, however, considerable basis for the argument that *Save Me the Waltz* possesses a coherence, unity, and artistic merit that have so far been insufficiently recognized. Perhaps its essential problem is that the novel form may not have been the best vehicle for the expression of Zelda's particular skills, and that readers' responses have been limited and conditioned by their own expectations of what constitutes a "good novel".²⁹ A critical study of the work would have biographical significance in that it could re-evaluate the traditional assumptions of Zelda's critics which lay behind the poor response to her book that finally undermined her wavering faith in her own abilities.

Milford offers some excellent insights into the ways in which *Save Me the Waltz* serves as an indicator of Zelda's psychological condition, but she neglects to discuss one particularly revealing passage that illustrates a very definite transition from an assertive to a passive approach during the time that Scott "assisted" her with her revisions. One of Zelda's most quoted statements is that "it's very difficult to be 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*." The original version was: "one who *wants to impose* itself and have a law unto itself and the other who wants to *keep up* all the nice old things and be loved and safe" (*SMTW*, pp. 56-225); emphasis added). The change from "keep up" to "keep", the deletion of "wants to impose", and the addition of "and protected" all point to this transition to passivity that occurred between the original and the "acceptable" versions.

By most people's accounts Zelda was a strong character. But she was in a very weak position. The inner conflicts she shared with Scott, the tension between their new and old worlds, were intensified for her by the fact that she was a woman. Zelda was by nature an independent individual and was strongly drawn to the new freedom she saw in the flapper's lifestyle she helped to define. She was raised, however, in an excessively protective and patriarchal environment, and consequently it took her far too long to realize the inescapable connection between personal freedom and individual responsibility. When she finally began to develop a sense of personal ambition she had to struggle to overcome the indolence that had been fostered in a world that had her thoroughly convinced it would always take care of her. The struggle never really ceased, and at times she would lapse into a sense of futility, a feeling that none of it was really worth the effort. But the " 'will to speak' " remained (*Zelda*, p. 291), and she continued to write and paint. Zelda's religious turn near the end of her life may have been more than a matter of insane delusion or personal revelation (however one wishes to view it). It may also have been connected with a deep unsatisfied need to take refuge in an all-knowing, all-protecting, *paternal* deity. In *Save Me the Waltz* she indicates that we discover the "values more permanent than us" by "placing ourselves in our *father's* setting" (*SMTW*, p. 296; emphasis added). It was this same acceptance of the idea of herself as the weak, dependent female that led Zelda to comply so readily with Scott's notion that he was entitled to make full use of her letters, diaries, and advice in his work. He was, after all, "the breadwinner". It was a dependency that Scott alternately encouraged and resented over the years.

These themes have all been touched upon to a greater or lesser degree by the four biographies that have been discussed. Yet many unsolved questions and unresolved issues remain. In some cases the questions have not even been asked; in others the issues have been raised but either have not been dealt with adequately or have become lost in the abundance of information about the Fitzgeralds. The biographer's emphasis is usually determined by his own bias. This discussion should demonstrate that the more unconscious the bias, the more likely it is to reflect the prejudices of its own time and thereby form a "blind spot" in the author's work. The biographer must be highly conscious of his own approach to his subject, although there is an important distinction between having a point to make and an axe to grind (as illustrated by Mayfield's book). In the words of Alan Shelston: "The biographer's commitment to a particular view of his subject can result in a shaping concept which will provide not only motive but an artistic coherence for the completed work."³⁰ Yet the point of

origin remains the life of the individual; it is the source and the inspiration for whatever truth the biographer may wish to convey.

The approach I am suggesting would involve a closer examination of Zelda's breakdowns and years of confinement, a reassessment of her skills as a writer, and a more pointed emphasis on the nature of the forces that curtailed her freedom. The question that remains unanswered is why, in an age of apparent opportunity, such a considerable intelligence failed to find its own voice.

NOTES

1. In a recent issue of *Biography* Richard L. White has discussed the range and variety of some of these works, and the overall portrait that results. See "Scott Fitzgerald and the Cumulative Portrait", *Biography*, 4, No. 2 (1981).
2. Epigraph in Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* (London: Michael Joseph, 1950).
3. J. W. Beach, rev. of *The Far Side of Paradise*, by Arthur Mizener, *Yale Review*, 40 (Summer 1951), 750.
4. Budd Schulberg, rev. of *The Far Side of Paradise*, *New York Times*, 28 January 1951, p. 1.
5. G. R. Stewart, rev. of *The Far Side of Paradise*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 28 January 1951, p. 16.
6. Arthur Mizener, *The Far Side of Paradise* (1965; rpt. New York: Avon Books, 1974), p. 12.
7. Zelda Fitzgerald, *Save Me the Waltz* (1932; rpt. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967), p. 37.
8. J. Brooks, rev. of *Scott Fitzgerald*, by Andrew Turnbull, *New York Herald Tribune*, 11 March 1962, p. 4.
9. Rev. of *Scott Fitzgerald*, *Time Magazine*, 30 March 1962, p. 86.
10. Andrew Turnbull, *Scott Fitzgerald* (New York: Scribner's, 1962), p. 222.
11. Elizabeth Janeway, rev. of *Zelda*, by Nancy Milford, *Saturday Review*, 13 June 1970, p. 30.
12. H. T. Moore, rev. of *Zelda*, *New York Times Book Review*, 14 January 1970, p. 1.
13. Rev. of *Zelda*, *Time Magazine*, 15 June 1979, p. 99.
14. Nancy Milford, *Zelda* (New York: Avon Books, 1970), p. xi.
15. Quoted by Alan Shelston, *Biography* (London: Methuen, 1977) p. 65.
16. Margot Peters, "Biographies of Women", *Biography*, 2, No. 3 (1979).
17. R. Sklar, rev. of *Zelda*, *The Nation*, 17 August 1970, p. 123.
18. A. Avant, rev. of *Exiles in Paradise*, by Sara Mayfield, *Library Journal*, 96 (1971), 2306.
19. Robert E. Long, rev. of *Exiles in Paradise*, *Saturday Review*, 24 July 1971, p. 40.
20. Rev. of *Exiles in Paradise*, *New Yorker*, 14 August 1971, p. 88.
21. Arthur Cooper rev. of *Exiles in Paradise*, *Newsweek*, 12 July 1971, p. 84.
22. Sara Mayfield, *Exiles in Paradise* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1971), p. 127.
23. Mayfield apparently used as her source here Hellman's memoir, *An Unfinished Woman* (New York: Bantam Books, 1969), p. 57.
24. Some pertinent examples are: Kazimierz Dabrowski, *Mental Growth Through Positive Disintegration* (London: GRYF Publications Ltd., 1970); Karen Horney, *Notes on Feminine Psychology* (New York: Norton and Co., 1967); Abraham Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being* (New York: D. VanNostrand Co., 1968).
25. Thomas S. Szasz, *Ideology and Insanity* (New York: Anchor Books, 1970).
26. Doris Lessing, *The Four-Gated City* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1969).
27. I refer here to a review of *Save Me the Waltz*, *Times Literary Supplement*, May 1953, and to M. Brucoli's preface to *Bits of Paradise* (London: The Bodley Head, 1973), p. 11.
28. H. T. Moore, rev. of *Zelda*, *New York Times Book Review*, 14 January 1970, p. 1.
29. This difficulty was encountered by Anais Nin, whose work did not receive widespread acclaim until the publication of her *Diary* in 1966, although her novels and stories had already been published over the two preceding decades.
30. A. Shelston, op. cit., p. 52.