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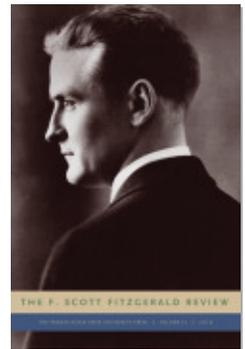
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## **Authorship and Artistry: Zelda Fitzgerald's "A Millionaire's Girl" and "Miss Ella"**

Christine Grogan

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# Authorship and Artistry

## Zelda Fitzgerald's "A Millionaire's Girl" and "Miss Ella"

Christine Grogan

### Abstract

*Much has been written on Zelda Fitzgerald as F. Scott Fitzgerald's muse and as a victim of mental illness. Her novel, *Save Me the Waltz*, and even her artwork have received critical attention, but little scholarship has focused on her short stories. In this essay, I reengage one of the few but first essays on her stories—W. R. Anderson's "Rivalry and Partnership: The Short Fiction of Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald" (1977)—and argue that we can trace her growth as a serious writer most apparently when juxtaposing "A Millionaire's Girl" with "Miss Ella." This essay provides a bio-critical reading to suggest that in the short, yet difficult, months between the publication of "A Millionaire's Girl" and "Miss Ella," she started to gain a voice of her own.*

### Keywords

Zelda, "A Millionaire's Girl", "Miss Ella", Girl stories

Legend has it that, in the early hours of a July morning in 1924, a frantic F. Scott Fitzgerald, candle in hand, banged on the door of Gerald and Sara Murphy's room in the Hôtel du Cap. Fitzgerald had driven thirty miles from St. Raphaël to find help for his wife, who he claimed had taken an overdose. The Murphys quickly went to the Fitzgeralds' villa, and Sara walked Zelda Fitzgerald "up and down, up and down, to keep her from going to sleep." To make matters even more bizarre, when Sara offered Zelda olive oil as an emetic, her response was, "Sara, . . . don't make me take that, please. If you drink too much oil you turn into a Jew" (qtd. in Milford 111). In their biographies, Nancy Milford and Linda Wagner-Martin state that the incident was never mentioned again among the four friends (Milford 111; Wagner-Martin 84); Sally Cline notes that the Murphys did recall the alleged suicide attempt—but only forty years later, long after the Fitzgeralds were dead (153).

Amidst the meticulous notes that Fitzgerald maintained in his *Ledger*, there is no mention of the July suicide attempt. Cline and James R. Mellow suggest that perhaps the Murphys mixed it up with another event (Cline 153; Mellow 213), one occurring the following August (1925) when the *Ledger* records, “Zelda drugged” (179). The closest that the 1924 section in the *Ledger* comes to mentioning anything as ominous as this note is a 13 July 1924 mention of “The Big Crisis” (178), which would presumably be the cause of the suicide attempt, if in fact there had been one.

As most Fitzgerald scholars know, what was recorded in Fitzgerald’s *Ledger* as “The Big Crisis” was his wife’s “affair” with Edouard Jozan, the glamorous young aviator who was stationed at Fréjus in the summer of 1924. While Fitzgerald finished his masterpiece, *The Great Gatsby*, a neglected Zelda took solace in the company of Jozan, swimming with him in the afternoons. The extent of the affair has never been clear. Recently, Scott Donaldson has devoted an entire section of his *The Impossible Craft: Literary Biography* (2015) to how various versions of the summer of 1924 embellish and even interject details to decide whether or not the relationship was consummated (172–88). That intimate question is not the only bone of contention. One version of the story has Zelda falling in love with Jozan, asking her husband for a divorce; a scorned Fitzgerald insisting on a show-down with Jozan, who refuses; and Fitzgerald locking Zelda away in the Villa Marie for a month, where she later overdoses. When Milford interviewed a septuagenarian Jozan—by then a retired, highly decorated Navy admiral and a World War II hero—he denied not just the divorce confrontation but ever having an affair with Zelda in the first place (Milford 108–12). As Cline succinctly puts it, “There is *no* concrete evidence that Zelda slept with Jozan” (154).

What is not debatable is that whatever happened between Jozan and Zelda proved a defining moment in the Fitzgeralds’ marriage, in part because they revisited it on many occasions. “Like much else about the Fitzgeralds’ lives,” Mellow says, “the Jozan affair seemed made for literature” (210). Both of them fictionalized the extramarital relationship, most notably through the characterizations of Lieutenant Jacques Chevre-Feuille in her *Save Me the Waltz* and of Tommy Barban in his *Tender Is the Night*. Moreover, the Fitzgeralds jointly embellished and recited the romance to others, particularly to Ernest Hemingway and his first wife, Hadley (Hemingway 172; Milford 114). In that version, Jozan became a tragic hero—a jilted lover who committed suicide.

Most critics restrict their reading of “The Big Crisis” to *Save Me the Waltz* and *Tender Is the Night*, thereby overlooking other sources, including a pair of fascinating short stories by Zelda Fitzgerald that deal with the recurring theme

of suicide. This essay examines “A Millionaire’s Girl” (1930) and “Miss Ella” (1931), two stories that serve as cautionary tales of the dangers of dependency. Although they can be used to chart the immense growth in Zelda as a serious writer, these stories remain consistent in their portrayal of women’s lack of options and the troubles within the institution of marriage. These little-read works present women who want to exist on their own terms but do not seem to know how to do so in a society that insists they couple. Zelda’s fledgling efforts to find self-definition are also apparent in the stories.

In addition to being a ballerina and a painter, Zelda, like her husband, was a writer, a “woman of letters” in her own right, most productive during the periods 1929 to 1934 and 1940 to 1948, the latter after her husband’s death until her own, in both cases during periods of hospitalization. Perhaps most significantly, we now know that she wrote stories *before* F. Scott Fitzgerald entered her life. In his preface to *The Collected Writings* of Zelda Fitzgerald, Matthew J. Bruccoli claims, “Apart from a high school poem, ‘Over the Top with Pershing,’ written in collaboration with her mother, there is no evidence that Zelda Sayre had literary ambitions before her marriage at the age of twenty” (xi). With the publication of “The Iceberg” in the 20 December 2013 issue of *The New Yorker*, we now know that she wrote a story when she was seventeen or eighteen years old and published it in the *Sidney Lanier High School Literary Journal* in 1918. In this delightful, award-winning tale of the thirty-year-old Cornelia Holton, whose family fears spinsterhood for her future, Zelda introduces themes that she later develops, including women’s desire for self-expression and work in a society that tells her that marriage is the only answer. There is a happy ending for Cornelia, who seemingly gets to have it all: not only does she maintain a fulfilling job as a stenographer for the firm of Gimbel, Brown and Company, but she marries its owner—the much older, multi-millionaire James G. Gimbel, a widower and friend of her father. Yet, through the depiction of Cornelia’s family members, this story suggests that Zelda Sayre was aware of women’s limited options even before meeting her husband.

In addition to “The Iceberg,” her earliest writings can be found in her diary and in her long letters to Fitzgerald between 1918 and 1920 (Going 122). Impressed with her letters, H. L. Mencken’s coeditor at *The Smart Set*, George Jean Nathan, made an offer to publish them but was turned down by Fitzgerald, who said he gained much inspiration from them and intended to use them in his work (Milford 71). And use them he did, most notably in *This Side of Paradise*, *The Beautiful and Damned*, and *Tender Is the Night*. For this reason, we could say that Zelda was all-but-published in 1920 when Scribner’s released

her husband's first novel, *This Side of Paradise*. Two years later, on 2 April 1922, she would see her name in print for the first time since "The Iceberg"—not in a high-school publication but in the mass-circulation *New York Tribune*. In her humorous review of *The Beautiful and Damned*, she offered this oft-quoted statement: "It seems to me that on one page I recognized a portion of an old diary of mine which mysteriously disappeared shortly after my marriage, and also scraps of letters, which, though considerably edited, sound to me vaguely familiar. In fact, Mr. Fitzgerald—I believe that is how he spells his name—seems to believe that plagiarism begins at home" (*Collected Writings* 388). Not surprisingly, she never published another review of one of her husband's books.

During the 1920s, Zelda Fitzgerald wrote a number of expository essays. In June 1922, she published "Eulogy on the Flapper" in *Metropolitan Magazine* (*Collected Writings* 391–93). "Our Own Movie Queen" (*Collected Writings* 273–92) was written in 1923 and appeared on 7 June 1924, in the *Chicago Sunday Tribune* under her husband's name, earning \$1,000, although he credited Zelda with writing two-thirds of the story (*Ledger* 6, 7). In March 1924, she published "Does a Moment of Revolt Come Sometime to Every Married Man?" (*Collected Writings* 395–96) and in October 1925 "What Became of the Flappers?" (*Collected Writings* 397–99), both in *McCall's*. In January 1928, "The Changing Beauty of Park Avenue" (403–5) was published in *Harper's Bazaar*. "Looking Back Eight Years" (*Collected Writings* 407–10) appeared in June 1928 and "Who Can Fall in Love After Thirty?" (*Collected Writings* 411–13) appeared the following October. The last two were published in *College Humor*.

Her career as a writer started to gain focus, as Alice Hall Petry notes, in early 1929, when H. N. Swanson of *College Humor* magazine asked her to write a series of stories on different types of girls in American society (71). That Valentine's Day, an office memorandum was sent from her husband's literary agent, Harold Ober, with the specifics. Editor Swanson outlined what he had in mind for these six stories: he "suggested a list of types of girls to be evoked—city debutante, young married, modern, Southern, country club, western, and New York society woman. He also requested that the pieces be 'story articles,' rather than 'philosophical discussions,' and suggested techniques to be utilized." Furthermore, Swanson "thought each girl could be given a name and she could be described as a certain kind of girl because at such and such a party, she did so and so. In other words, she could be described by instances in her life, things that she did, rather than things that were said about her, etc." (Anderson 24). The agreement stipulated that Fitzgerald would revise the pieces and that the articles would be signed with both their names. Each piece would be around

4,000–5,000 words in length, and the estimated price, \$500, or, better yet, as Fitzgerald suggested, the price could be negotiated (Brucoli, *As Ever* 127).

Throwing herself into the “Girl” series, Zelda wrote regularly and with speed and self-discipline. She finished the first by the beginning of March 1929. Described as “the story without a plot” in *Writer’s Digest* (Uzzell 17), “The Original Follies Girl” (*Collected Writings* 293–97), published in July 1929, was more of a character sketch than a story, but the 2,000-word piece sold for \$400 (Anderson 25). By mid-April, she had finished “Poor Working Girl” (*Collected Writings* 337–42), published in January 1931. “Southern Girl” (*Collected Writings* 299–307), published in July 1929, was sent in June; “The Girl the Prince Liked” (*Collected Writings* 309–16), published in February 1930, was sent in August; and “The Girl with Talent” (*Collected Writings* 317–25), published in April 1930, was sent in October.

“A Millionaire’s Girl” (*Collected Writings* 327–36) was the only “Girl” series story not published in *College Humor*: it was so good that Fitzgerald had Ober sell it to *The Saturday Evening Post* for a whopping \$4,000, earning more than all of her previous writings combined. Unfortunately for her, the high price came with a string attached—just her husband’s name appeared in the byline. Sold in March 1930, “A Millionaire’s Girl” was published two months later, on 7 May. “Miss Ella” (*Collected Stories* 343–49), formerly “Miss Bessie,” was the first story she published after the “Girl” series. It appeared in *Scribner’s Magazine* in December 1931, earning her the modest sum of \$150. In November and December 1931, she was writing stories in Montgomery, Alabama, that she hoped to publish, along with a one-act children’s play to amuse her husband when he returned to Montgomery from Hollywood for Christmas. At this time she reread many of his stories “as a way to be close to him and as inspiration for her own writing” (Bryer and Barks 113). Not surprisingly, most of her stories were modeled after his.

In just over the year and a half that separates “A Millionaire’s Girl” and “Miss Ella,” Zelda Fitzgerald suffered two breakdowns—the first in April 1930, when she was hospitalized for “nervous exhaustion” at Malmaison Clinic near Paris, and the second in June 1930, at which time she was diagnosed with schizophrenia at Prangins Clinic near Geneva, Switzerland (Lanahan 123). Clearly, Zelda, who was still honing her art, was not in the best state of mind when she crafted these stories. And yet instead of therapeutic autobiography or deeply probing psychological sketches, her short stories are fictional accounts that offer a glimpse into women’s struggle for autonomy. They are often marked by what is omitted. She is not interested, as Mary Gordon notes in the introduction to

*The Collected Writings*, with private lives (xxiv). Her characters are not fully developed; dialogue is almost non-existent. She was actually adhering to the modernist agenda of T. S. Eliot, who in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1919) argued that literature “is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality” (10). In most of her early stories, she makes her characters abstract by not allowing her readers access to their thoughts and feelings. Much like some of the character sketches in Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919), namely “Hands” and “Adventure,” stories such as “Southern Girl” and “The Girl the Prince Liked” contain imagistic power achieved through a detachment from her characters. Events are reported through exposition and narration. She employs generalizations and abstract thought, leaving gaps for what cannot, at least at that time, be articulated. In place of sharp narration and plot development is a series of impressions. Perhaps most notable is the anonymous narrator, who speaks of suicide with objectivity.

She was no stranger to this difficult subject. The Sayre family had a history of both mental illness and suicide, so it would seem inevitable that she would include these themes in her fiction. Her maternal grandmother committed suicide (Petry 80), and her aunt Marjorie Machen took her life in the family’s outhouse on 6 Pleasant Avenue in Montgomery (Cline 29). In 1917, her father was hospitalized after a nervous breakdown. In 1933, her brother committed suicide by leaping out of a window in a mental institution in Mobile. Her sister Marjorie was institutionalized periodically throughout her life for nervous troubles (West 65). And, of course, she herself began treatment for mental instability in 1930, was under suicide watch for most of the year 1935, and spent the rest of her life in and out of mental hospitals, eventually dying in one (Cline 354).

In her review of Therese Anne Fowler’s *Z: A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald* (2013), Janet Potter explores the portrait of Zelda Fitzgerald that remains dominant today, at least in pop culture: that of the unfulfilled spouse who sacrificed her happiness and eventually her sanity for three novels—*The Beautiful and Damned*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *Tender Is the Night*. Because she was married to a professional writer, she did not get to write her own story, leaving readers to fictionalize her untapped potential rather than to enjoy its fruition. Rarely discussed as a creative writer in her own right, she is too often written about as a biographical companion to her husband—and a disturbed one at that. Her illness, which was diagnosed during psychiatry’s infancy, has now been much discussed. In her 1970 biography, however, Milford lamented that readers had

more access to Nicole Diver's case history than they did to Zelda Fitzgerald's (xii). This has changed in the last forty years, as many biographies have followed Milford's, including those by Kendall Taylor (2001), Cline (2002), and Wagner-Martin (2004). Many critics have explored Zelda as her husband's unhinged muse, and some have even written sustained literary commentary on her only full-length finished work, *Save Me the Waltz*, the novel that distressed Fitzgerald, who accused his wife of stealing "his" material for *Tender Is the Night*. Equally important, her artwork has received some introductory critical attention, most notably in a 2006 *Fitzgerald Review* essay entitled "Performing Art: Zelda Fitzgerald's Art and the Role of the Artist" by Kathryn Lee Seidel, Alexis Wang, and Alvin Y. Wang.

It would seem that a discussion of her short stories should have followed the attention given to her novel and artwork; however, this has not been the case. Twenty-four years after Brucoli published *The Collected Writings*, not much critical attention has been directed to Zelda Fitzgerald's stories. In Petry's 1989 article, she notes, "For whatever reasons, critics have tended consistently to patronize Zelda Fitzgerald as a serious writer, with the result that her efforts have not received the attention they deserve" (81). The *Cambridge Quarterly* review of *The Collected Writings*, which harshly criticized Brucoli's and Mary Gordon's "unashamedly biographical" preface and introduction (328), provides a reason for why that statement is still true today: "It would have been strategically more intelligent to place these stories at the beginning of the volume where they chronologically belong and where they would at least have a better chance of actually being read, before the reader had worn him or herself out in labouring through *Save Me the Waltz* and the abominable 'farce,' *Scandalabra*, which will be of interest only to specialists or devotees" (Dreyer 330). Critics have given little attention to these works because it is presumed they are attempts at popular fiction, written solely for money. Their author's own remarks encourage this assumption: she told Henry Dan Piper that the *College Humor* stories were merely "potboilers written to pay for her ballet lessons" (qtd. in Going 117).

To be fair, in addition to Petry, a few critics have given Zelda her due for her short stories. Engaging with feminist biographical criticism, Milford, Wagner-Martin, Cline, and Mellow have all devoted portions of their books on Zelda Fitzgerald to discussing her stories. One of the most insightful and earliest close readings is W. R. Anderson's 1977 essay, "Rivalry and Partnership: The Short Fiction of Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald." Essentially, Anderson argues that examining the short stories reveals her growth from an amateur writer

for the “youth-cult-oriented *College Humor*” to a mature, professional artist (23); the stories provide “a record of Zelda Fitzgerald’s struggle toward seriousness of expression, of her growth toward competence in literary technique, and of her husband’s continuing but increasingly sparing and wary guidance” (25). Anderson discusses the stories in chronological order, moving from “Our Own Movie Queen,” to the six “Girl” stories, to “Miss Ella,” and ending with “A Couple of Nuts” (*Collected Writings* 353–63). Privileging her later stories, he concludes with this assessment: “That she had the ability to write moving and true fiction is amply witnessed in her last short stories” (40).

Building on Anderson’s assertions, this essay argues that Zelda Fitzgerald’s growth is most apparent when juxtaposing “A Millionaire’s Girl” and “Miss Ella.” Her time alone as a result of her breakdowns allowed her to develop her own identity, at least as a writer with her own style and voice. Anderson credits her with honing her technical devices, especially narrative perspective. Like Nick Carraway, the narrators in her later stories occupy the dual vantage points of observer and participant. Instead of maintaining a level of detached judgment, these later narrators are intimately involved in the plot. In addition to Anderson, a few have commented on the narrators in her stories, sometimes not so complementarily. Criticizing the “Girl” stories for not “coming to life,” Milford contends that characters and actions are described, not developed, “by a detached and omniscient narrator about whom we know nothing” (151)—including the narrator’s gender. Wagner-Martin labels the narrator of the “Girl” series as “wounded.” Unable to voice her own story apart from her husband, her narrators, and therefore her stories, lose some of their effectiveness (Wagner-Martin 123). Concurring with Milford about the unidentified narrator, Cline notes that there is a clue in “A Millionaire’s Girl,” when Caroline and Barry drive out to see their narrator friend on Long Island and Caroline questions, “Is this Fitzgerald’s roadhouse?” (*Collected Writings* 329). She reads this to mean that the narrator is either Zelda or her husband. After rereading the series, especially “The Southern Girl,” Cline becomes convinced that the narrator of these stories is also a Southern girl—most likely Zelda herself (238).

Not being able to identify the narrator—even by gender—speaks to the problem of authorship that weighed on Zelda, who, like most women of her era, struggled throughout her life to have an identity of her own. In fact, in the Fitzgerald Collection at Princeton University’s Firestone Library, there is a copy of “A Millionaire’s Girl” as printed in *The Saturday Evening Post* with F. Scott Fitzgerald’s name crossed out and Zelda Fitzgerald’s written above it (see fig. 1). Although we cannot know for sure who crossed out the name, it

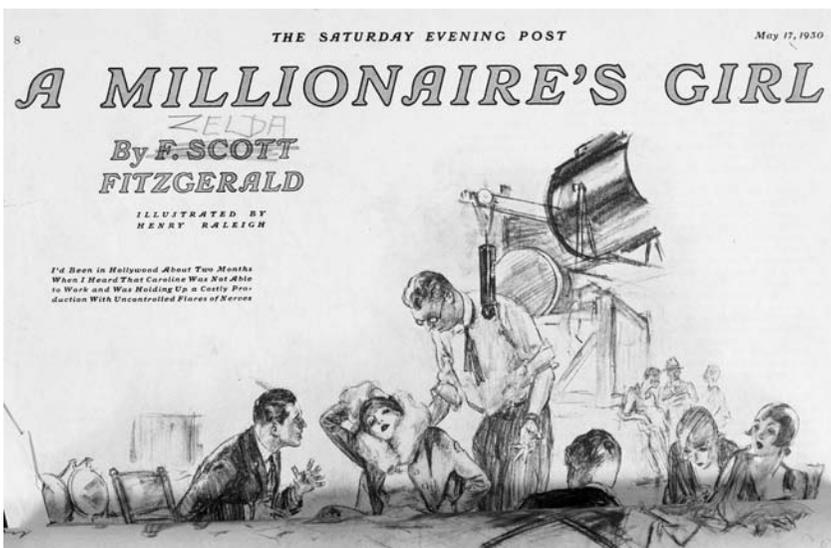


FIG. 1 The tear sheet for “A Millionaire’s Girl” in Zelda Fitzgerald’s papers at Princeton University shows Fitzgerald’s byline crossed-out and replaced with Zelda’s name (“A Millionaire’s Girl,” *Saturday Evening Post* 17 May 1930; Zelda Fitzgerald Papers [Co183], Box 3, Folder 26; Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. Courtesy Princeton University Library and the Fitzgerald Trust/Harold Ober Associates).

seems likely that she did, expressing her resentment for her husband’s getting credit for a story he did not write.<sup>1</sup> Some have argued that she acquiesced to his appropriation of her work, knowing that doing so would result in more money; after all, she did make that joke about his plagiarism in her review of *The Beautiful and Damned*. Although it is tempting to say, as Petry does, that it is not a coincidence that following the publication of “A Millionaire’s Girl” with just her husband’s name, she suffered her first breakdown, the misattribution was most likely only one of several contributing factors to her illness, many of which we will never know.

A close reading of “A Millionaire’s Girl,” which is set in New York during a post-Great War winter, reveals that she was still very much under her husband’s influence and direction when she composed the story and struggled with independence for herself and for her female protagonist. Like many an F. Scott Fitzgerald story, at the heart of this one is a love triangle, ending with the couple brought together by suicide or an attempted suicide. As the story progresses, it becomes undeniable that the narrator is not Zelda, as Cline concludes, nor any other woman for that matter. Rather, it is an admiring man who is rather fascinated by, if not longing for, Caroline, remarking at length on her body.

When describing her, the narrator comments on her “black dresses” that fall away “from her slim, perfect body,” which he “watched . . . for ages before [he] asked who she was.” He mentions her “long silk legs” (*Collected Writings* 328) and incomparable “symmetrical” figure (335), calling her “just about the prettiest thing you ever saw” (328), which indicates that in addition to a male narrator, the story presumes a male reader—or at least one who is not offended by the male gaze. This story was published, after all, not in “the youth-cult-oriented *College Humor*,” but in the more sophisticated *Saturday Evening Post*, which served the middle-class reader with its stories by leading writers of its time (Anderson 23). Even though the narrator’s focus on Caroline’s looks suggests that he is interested in this young woman, a hint is dropped early on—when Barry proposes to Caroline—indicating that the narrator is married. On the late-winter Sunday, the narrator notes, “Caroline and Barry drove out to see us” (*Collected Writings* 329; emphasis added). However, the narrator’s wife is never referred to again and from the way the narrator travels, almost chasing Caroline from New York to California, it seems likely that he is now either divorced or considering being unfaithful.

Unlike the optimism, if not irony, found in “The Iceberg,” Zelda indicates in “A Millionaire’s Girl” that the girl can no longer have both a happy marriage and a rewarding career. In one of the story’s most revealing lines, Caroline tells the narrator: “Ever since I met [Barry] everything I do or that happens to me has seemed because of him. Now I am going to make a hit so that I can choose him again, because I’m going to have him somehow” (*Collected Writings* 333–34). Although determined to have Barry and Caroline marry at the story’s end, Zelda shows that Caroline was not so sure about tying the knot at first. The sixteen-year-old Caroline, who is engaged to marry the wealthy Barry, accepts Barry’s father’s bribe to buy her off, resulting in Caroline and Barry having a very public fight. After their split, Caroline throws herself into her acting career—but all in an effort to “distinguish herself” (332) and make Barry rue the day he left her. She does become successful as “her part had grown to star proportions” (334). Her marriage to Barry, however, means leaving behind the film industry and, by implication, her independent self.

This story received extensive rewriting, done mostly by Zelda. She added the part about the bribe on her own. Although her husband’s contributions were minimal—he suggested the theme and revised the completed manuscript (Milford 150)—“A Millionaire’s Girl” is derivative of his fiction. Even the title bears his mark and evokes many of the themes he revisited in his works—youth, hope, wealth, promise, love, and idealism. By the end of the story, we

witness themes of regret, disillusionment, and failure, beautifully apparent in the heartbreaking ending to his “The Popular Girl” (1922; *Bits* 14–65). Although her unique view of the world and synesthetic imagery shine through, they are interrupted by descriptions that are reminiscent of Fitzgerald’s work. On the first page we read: “The faraway lights from buildings high in the sky burned hazily through the blue, like golden objects lost in deep grass, and the noise of hurrying streets took on that hushed quality of many footfalls in a huge stone square” (*Collected Writings* 327). The evocation of multiple senses is undeniably hers, but the “faraway lights from buildings high in the sky” is not unlike the green light at the end of Daisy Buchanan’s dock.

Like the titular hero of *The Great Gatsby*, Caroline is a social climber shrouded in mystery. She has a shaky past—she has been divorced, has acted on small stages in remote locales, and was involved in a scandal described as “that affair of Brooklyn Bridge.” Like a page taken from Fitzgerald’s stories, Caroline is predictably attracted to Barry, or, more likely, his money. The difference between the two lovers is highlighted in some of the story’s best descriptions. The “heir to fantastic millions” (*Collected Writings* 328), Barry owns three cars with “snakeskin cushions” (329). The narrator tells us: “You could see that he was rich and that he liked her, and you could see that she was poor and that she knew he did” (328). Significantly, we are not told that Caroline reciprocates his interest. In fact, the narrator informs us how annoyed Caroline is when she has to wait for Barry: “It was a nuisance, that; it meant that she had to sit there rigid, being stared at by men without knees, in spats, and bellboys without necks, in billiard-table covers, and clerks without shoulders, in cages, while Barry did something somewhere to one of his automobiles” (329).

Departing from the slower pacing of some of Zelda’s earlier stories, the plot-driven “A Millionaire’s Girl” contains foreshadowing that the marriage is doomed. At the beginning of the story, the wistful narrator notes that even on Barry and Caroline’s first date, there was “an aura of tragedy whirling above their two young heads even then. They seemed too perfect” (*Collected Writings* 328). Yet, in following the typical plot structure, the “tragedy” that is Caroline’s suicide attempt is withheld until the climactic ending. Further foreshadowing the break-up, Zelda emphasizes their bodies, which are initially in harmony as Barry leans forward and Caroline back; but on the very next page, she sits “rigid in the pink shadows,” which gives “the impression of two hidden enemies waiting to attack.” Even the way Caroline accepts Barry’s proposal with “slow dignity” suggests that the marriage is destined to fail (329).

The simultaneous attraction to and repulsion by the wealthy, which Fitzgerald’s works obviously grappled with as well, is apparent in this story,

along with the distrust of the female character whose loyalty often goes to the highest bidder. At dinner with the newly engaged couple, the narrator's thoughts drift. First he thinks of Caroline from the winter before "in creamy white georgette and a fog of gray squirrel, coming down the steps of a narrow Fifth Avenue mansion" (*Collected Writings* 329). She is crying. She has tried to crash a debut party and has been rejected. The narrator then contrasts that portrait of Caroline with the one of "elegant, impeccable" Barry, "preferred of all the mothers of girls whose families chose for them their paths of light." The narrator wonders how Barry would explain his poor choice of wife, "his intimacy with so lovely and scandalous a person[,] to his austere family" (330). The reader is not privy to Barry's explanation to his family. We do know, though, from the awful row that takes place at the popular Ciro's, that Barry's father pays off Caroline with a big check and automobile. Although Caroline claims not to understand the terms of the reward, we get hints of her shaky past at the beginning of the story that shed doubt on her credibility. The description of the fight, which is one of the funnier scenes in the story, ends with a simile that suggests how superficial the love is between Caroline and Barry, as he rejects her like a plate of food: "Barry told them to take her away, as if she'd been something inedible served from the kitchen" (330). Much like Myrtle Wilson in *The Great Gatsby*, the lower-class Caroline is objectified and easily discarded.

The second half of the story shows Zelda Fitzgerald, like her husband, employing a narrator who is increasingly involved in the couple's struggles. After bumping into Caroline on the train to California, the narrator has dinner with her, at which time she confides in him: "She told me she had a part in a movie and was going west to work. In the course of a long conversation I gathered that she was completely determined to distinguish herself and force Barry to realize the enormity of his error in leaving her so precipitately" (*Collected Writings* 332). In other words, Caroline is pursuing her acting career not so much for herself as for Barry's attention. Much like the author of the story, Caroline is ambitious and with much potential, but, as we will see, her talent remains undeveloped. The stress of such posturing gets the best of Caroline. The narrator learns that she was "not able to work and was holding up a costly production with uncontrolled flares of nerves" (333). No stranger to wrecked nerves himself (or the bottle, for that matter), the narrator intervenes and persuades her to drive to the sea with him. Unlike Barry, who owns three cars, the narrator rents one. He takes Caroline to lunch in Long Beach, where she tells him that she does everything for Barry and voices her desperate plea "to have him somehow" (334).

Like many F. Scott Fitzgerald stories, this has an air of tragedy about it as it lacks a convincing happy ending. Zelda suggests that the only way for Caroline to win Barry back is to attempt suicide. On the action-packed last page, the narrator, who is at the premiere of Caroline's film, learns that Barry is now engaged to a rich French woman. The setting cuts to the film with "two young lovers being separated by a misunderstanding," a not-so-subtle wink at Caroline and Barry. This is followed by Caroline's suicide attempt, described irreverently: "The audience was moved and would have been even more affected, I think, except for the violent clanging of an ambulance bell, jarring throughout the quiet of a pathetic episode. It was a pity; it took half the value away from the scene" (*Collected Writings* 336). The narrator becomes malicious, checking the newspapers to see who made the front page—Caroline or Barry. Nonetheless, the story concludes with the narrator visiting Caroline in the hospital, running into Barry, and relaying to the reader that they marry.

Like Tom and Daisy Buchanan's reconciled marriage at the end of *The Great Gatsby*, Caroline and Barry's union comes at a cost—Barry loses his woman in Paris and Caroline leaves behind her Hollywood career. "[T]hey have both had much to reproach each other for," the narrator observes. The story ends with this sentence: "That was three years ago, and so far they have kept their quarrels out of the divorce courts, but I somehow think you can't go on forever protecting quarrels, and that romances born in violence and suspicion will end themselves on the same note; though, of course, I am a cynical person and, perhaps, no competent judge of idyllic young love affairs" (*Collected Writings* 336). Although they are still married at the end of the story, the narrator's statement suggests that Barry and Caroline's union may be living on borrowed time.

Cline argues that "A Millionaire's Girl" is Zelda Fitzgerald's witty response to her husband's affair with Hollywood starlet Lois Moran (238), but it is more likely that she identified, at least at times, with Caroline. Like Caroline, she could not reconcile her work with her love life. Caroline meets with success as an actress, but she is not happy without Barry. Furthermore, she chooses the extreme measure of attempting to take her life just to gain his attention. She marries, but she must give up her burgeoning career. This story may have signaled to Fitzgerald that his wife was torn between love and work. As Mellow points out, the concluding lines may have been a warning to him that all was not well regarding his marriage (293).

Branching out from the "fashionable sketches" of the "Girl" series, Zelda turned to writing contemplative stories (Milford 205). While a patient at Prangins, she spent much time reading, especially William Faulkner and psychological case studies, but she claimed writing was difficult. In mid-November

1931, she wrote her husband: “I can’t seem to get started writing. I haven’t got that inner happiness or desperation that leaves a person free in the external world of imagination, but just a sort of a plugging along feeling” (Bryer and Barks 122). Although “inner happiness” eluded her, while institutionalized she must have found the “desperation” which allowed her to concentrate on her writing. A very different writer emerges in “Miss Ella,” one who is refining her art and developing her voice and style independent of her husband’s. After reviewing the galley proofs of the story and “[u]npublished correspondence of early 1931 between [Maxwell] Perkins and Fitzgerald” in the “Charles Scribner’s Sons Archive at Princeton,” Anderson concludes that “the basic composition is wholly Zelda Fitzgerald’s” and that “more than any of her earlier work,” essentially this is “her creation” (35). It received praise from Perkins, who was much impressed with the treatment of both Miss Ella and the narrator. Although she acknowledged that she was “afraid to read it herself,” fearing it was not first-rate, Zelda was overall quite pleased with “Miss Ella” and relished the “sensation” it made in her hometown (Mellow 390).

Essentially, “Miss Ella” recounts the “love story” of the Victorian spinster of the same name (*Collected Writings* 345). Like “A Millionaire’s Girl,” it contains a love triangle, but, instead of a man having to choose between two women, as we saw with Barry, here a woman gets to pick from two suitors. In stark contrast to “A Millionaire’s Girl,” the suicide attempt is successful and instead of bringing the lovers together, it destroys at least two lives. Set in what is clearly a fictionalized version of Montgomery, Alabama, its author’s hometown during its horse-and-buggy days, the story opens with pages of exposition before we learn about the key male players—Mr. Hendrix and Andy Bronson. In her youth, Miss Ella was engaged to the conventional Mr. Hendrix; but one Sunday at a Christmastime church festival, Andy Bronson catches Miss Ella’s attention by lighting a firecracker, setting her skirt—of all things—afire. He puts it out by smothering the fire with his hands. Coupling this gesture with sending Miss Ella many “treasures,” Andy steals her heart (347). She calls off the wedding to Mr. Hendrix and plans to marry Andy instead. On the morning of her wedding, however, Mr. Hendrix commits suicide, resulting in Miss Ella casting off not just Andy’s love, but all love. Instead of marriage, she spends her time posing in a hammock she does not even like and takes afternoon drives with her dull elderly aunt and white dog.

Even from the very title of the story, a notable shift can be detected from Zelda’s previous work. This is not a girl story; “Miss Ella” takes as its protagonist a woman—an elderly woman, a “faded Southern lady well past her prime” (Petry 74). No longer the belle of the ball, she is quite ordinary aside from her

red hair and bird-like tendencies. Zelda selects a nondescript Southern woman to reveal the repressed desires that confine, or cage, her. Unlike Andy Bronson, who showers Ella with elaborate gifts such as mother-of-pearl sticks, silk from Persia, and a Phi Beta Kappa key, Mr. Hendrix supplies her with small tokens of his affection (“a dance card, a butterfly pin, a doll in feathers”). He also brings his “loot” to Ella—namely, green-backed ducks he expects her to cook (*Collected Writings* 346). Yet as the narrator twice declares, Miss Ella is “not a kitchen sort of person” (343, 349). Zelda stresses that Miss Ella neither cooks nor tends the garden. She is not a typical housewife and seems to desire something more than her environment can provide.

Perhaps the most significant change between “A Millionaire’s Girl” and “Miss Ella” is the choice of narrator. Cline contends that this narrator is genderless and ageless, but subtle clues indicate that the narrator is female—a grown woman reflecting on her youth (299). Lines such as “When I was young I loved Miss Ella” (*Collected Writings* 343), and the description of Miss Ella support this reading. After he first read the story, Perkins was touched most by the narrator, as he explained to Fitzgerald:

[I]t did give a very complete strong sense of a character in this Southern old maid. It was moving in that way, but it had another quality that was still more moving.—In some way it made the reader share the feelings of the young girl through whose eyes Miss [Ella] was seen, so that she was not only real, and in some degree was not real, but was as the young girl saw her. (qtd. in Anderson 36)

Anderson and Cline agree that what makes this story work is how the narrator identifies with the title character; namely, through telling the tragedy of Miss Ella’s love story, the narrator reveals her own private pathos and discomfort in a world of changing mores in which a woman is required to repress herself or live with guilt the rest of her life (Anderson 36; Cline 299).

Unlike the action-driven “A Millionaire’s Girl,” “Miss Ella” delays the plot until the middle. In its first half, its author shows off her skills as a writer by indulging in vivid descriptions of setting and scenery, delighting in unexpected figures of speech and setting a somber mood. Her complexly metaphorical style is full of rich similes, such as the opening sentence which compares the “[b]itter things” that dried behind Miss Ella’s eyes to “garlic on a string before an open fire” (*Collected Writings* 343); and, later, her youthful figure is said to be “as slim and smooth as a figure in blown glass” (346). Much like a painting, the first pages of the story provide an impression. Essentially, we get a glimpse into the processes

of the author's creative imagination. She first emphasizes Miss Ella in her present state and then provides insight into how she got to be so listless. Illustrating her lack of conventional continuity, the movement of the plot jumps from present to past back to present, a structure that Fitzgerald later used to dazzling effect in *Tender Is the Night*. She concentrates on Miss Ella's belongings to develop her character. We hear about "her white canvas shoes" and "lace parasol" (343). She then devotes significant time to explaining the laborious effort of Miss Ella's getting into her hammock: "It always took at least three tries before she was tolerably ensconced: the first invariably loosened the big silver buckle that held her white-duck skirt in place; the second was wasted because it might result in immodest exposure of her fragile legs, by furling too tightly around her the white canvas lengths. After that she simply climbed into the hammock and did her arranging afterwards, which is about as easy as dressing in a Pullman berth" (344). Miss Ella is established as a sedentary person, ill at ease in her own environment. Then Zelda evocatively—and with a careful suggestion of what is to come—sets the scene for this tragic story: "Almost buried in a tangle of jonquils and hyacinths dried brown from the summer heat, its roof strewn with the bruised purple bells of a hibiscus overhanging its tiny gables, the house stood like a forgotten sarcophagus, guarding with the reticent dignity that lies in all abandoned things a paintless, rusty shotgun" (345).

Replaced by the suspense of finding out why Ella is a spinster, foreshadowing is subtler in "Miss Ella" than in "A Millionaire's Girl." Zelda launches into detail about the orderly garden and forbidden playhouse, which take on symbolic value when we meet Mr. Hendrix, who is associated with the former, and Andy Bronson, who is associated with the latter. The narrator and two other "romantic children" loved the garden and hold fond memories of the two mulberry trees that shade it. However, they feared the playhouse, which is described as "dry and dusty," and almost a figment of one's imagination (*Collected Writings* 344–45). Except for the narrator who "went inside but once," no one—not even Aunt Ella's grandnieces—ever went *near* the playhouse. The narrator tells us she did not venture in again because of the scary worms, which indicate death and decay. The playhouse that holds "abandoned things," including a "rusty shotgun," provides "a rough oasis apart from the rest of the orderly garden." It is overgrown with shrubbery and stands as a relic of the past, "some cherished shrine" (345). What the reader finds out later is that the steps to the playhouse were the site of Mr. Hendrix's suicide.

Departing from topics of wealth, youth, and promise, Zelda explored the theme of psychological repression in her first post-breakdown publication. The relationship of Miss Ella and Mr. Hendrix is one of formality: "They were

formally in love”; “He called her ‘dear’”; “she never called him anything but Mr. Hendrix.” When he tells her “how things were to be,” the narrator notes, “she acquiesced” (*Collected Writings* 346). Clearly, this is not a woman marrying for love. In the beginning, we are told that Miss Ella had dinner with the narrator’s family, “dodging the popping bits of blue flame from our bituminous coal” (343). Yet she cannot escape the flames lit by Andy Bronson and his firecracker. They stand in stark contrast to Mr. Hendrix and suggest Miss Ella’s sexual awakening. We are told “she loved [Andy] with desperate suppression” (347). Unlike Mr. Hendrix, who merely holds Ella’s hands, Andy kisses her while she is engaged to Hendrix: “One night he kissed her far into the pink behind her ears and she folded herself in his arms, a flag without a breeze about its staff” (347). And yet when she acts on her desires—breaking off the engagement with Mr. Hendrix to marry Andy—there are severe repercussions. Ella becomes nobody’s woman, certainly not a millionaire’s girl—a “Miss Alabama Nobody” (39) and a “backseat driver” to borrow descriptions from *Save Me the Waltz* (176)—a perpetual Miss.

Although we know that Miss Ella is doomed to a life of spinsterhood, little is directly revealed about our female narrator, particularly her marital status. We know that she admired the Miss Ella of her youth, believing “ardently” that what Miss Ella said was truth—even when it involved the preposterous act of keeping fit by standing up for twenty minutes after eating (*Collected Writings* 343). The narrator and two other “romantic children” appear to be attracted simultaneously to Miss Ella’s orderliness and to the tragedy with which she is associated (344). The whole story can be read as the narrator’s attempt to understand what happens to women like Miss Ella who are not “kitchen sort[s] of [people]” and who try to act on forbidden desires. Moreover, she questions why Miss Ella is punished so harshly for it. The narrator seems to conclude that even a strong woman like Miss Ella, who was “severe with the world” and referred to those who were not related to her as “impersonally ‘one,’” was not immune to tragedy and to letting men ruin her life (343). The narrator asks how someone so orderly can fall victim to such events. Did she have agency, any choice in the matter? And why does Miss Ella not move on, or at least move away from the tainted playground stairs? Is this what happens to women who want to exist on their own terms? Are we to celebrate her fierce independence or chide her for her guilt? One cannot help but question if Zelda Fitzgerald were reminiscing about Edouard Jozan.

Unfortunately, she does not provide answers to these questions. As Anderson indicates, she explores “the complexities of the feminine psyche struggling *unsuccessfully* for mature fulfillment” (36; emphasis added). The narrator even

feels the need to justify this tale of an aged woman: Miss Ella's story, "like all women's stories[,] was a love story" (*Collected Writings* 345). Perhaps Zelda felt that the only socially acceptable way to focus on a single, elderly woman was to present it as a love story. It is unclear how she felt about Miss Ella and her actions. Perhaps she concluded that there was no hope for Miss Ella and her generation—women who grew up straddling old Victorian values of female subservience and new ideals of gender equality—but that there might be for the next generation of women, embodied in the story's reflective female narrator.

Most strikingly, her views on suicide changed from the time she wrote "A Millionaire's Girl" to the composition of "Miss Ella." Mr. Hendrix's suicide is depicted as a serious, somber, sobering event, unlike Caroline's suicide attempt, which is more of a stunt to get back Barry. No longer the means to reunite old lovers, it is instead a tragic event that claims the lives of even those "survivors." If her own suicide attempt in July 1924 really happened, it seems safe to say that she was acting more like Caroline, pining for the attention of her husband, or even Jozan. By the time she wrote "Miss Ella," however, she appears to have understood how serious and detrimental suicide could be. The later treatment of the theme is much darker and more realistic.

We might never know what really happened that July morning in 1924 when an alarmed F. Scott Fitzgerald allegedly arrived at the Murphys' door, claiming his wife was in dire need of help. Zelda Fitzgerald's stories, however, offer a glimpse into the trouble she experienced in depending on someone too much. Even as she learned to rely less on her husband as a result of her illness, her stories show a consistent picture of women longing for love. At the end of his article, Anderson poses the unanswerable question: would she have ever reached a self-sufficient professional status, independent of her husband? (40). It is, as he notes, a moot question. That she gained much from her apprenticeship with her husband is undeniable, as evidenced in "A Millionaire's Girl." Patterned after his fiction, especially *The Great Gatsby*, it illustrates that she successfully adopted his signature style. But in "Miss Ella," she departed from his direction—in style, themes, title, plot development, and narration. She demonstrated a style decidedly her own. She paved her own way as a mature artist who, to borrow from Malcolm Cowley, had a different story to tell, one with "something there that nobody got into words before" (qtd. in Milford 264). But, perhaps, the most glowing endorsement of Zelda Fitzgerald's writing comes from her husband, who commented on her "flair for description," saying that she was "a great original in her way, with perhaps a more intense flame at its highest than I ever had" (*Letters* 78). And, in an even more honest declaration, he once said of her stories: "In my opinion they are literature" (qtd. in Mellow 375).

CHRISTINE GROGAN is a senior lecturer in the English department at Pennsylvania State University. She has published articles on Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, and Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina*. Her book project, which includes a chapter on Fitzgerald's *Tender Is the Night*, examines the topic of father-daughter incest in twentieth-century American literature.

## Note

1. In her biography, Cline writes, "The original manuscripts of all six ['Girl'] stories show [Zelda's] vigorous black handwriting scrawling out Scott's name on every by-line. Words like 'No!' and 'Me' are inserted where appropriate" (241).

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