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"THE LONG ROADS TO FORGOTTEN REGRETTED NOSTALGIAS": TRAUMATIC WOUNDS IN THE LETTERS OF ZELDA SAYRE FITZGERALD[1]

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ABSTRACT
When twenty-five-year-old Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald asked her husband Scott Fitzgerald to resume her ballet lessons, he saw no objection to it. Fitzgerald thought the lessons would keep Zelda busy while he focused on his novel *Tender is the Night* (1934). Little did he know then that strenuous dancing rehearsals would lead Zelda to her first mental breakdown. While confined at several mental institutions from 1930 to 1948, Zelda used the epistolary form in an attempt to move from victim to artist. It is through her letters to Scott Fitzgerald that we discover her inner struggles and her longing for a career of her own. This article analyzes a selection of Zelda Fitzgerald's letters in order to determine whether the epistolary form allows Zelda to overcome or perpetuate her traumas while confined at several mental institutions.

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RESUMEN
Cuando con veinticinco años Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald le preguntó a su marido Scott Fitzgerald si podía retomar sus clases de ballet, él no se opuso. Fitzgerald pensó que las clases mantendrían a Zelda ocupada mientras que él se centraba en su novela *Tender Is the Night* (1934). Poco sabía entonces que los ensayos de baile extenuantes llevarían a Zelda a su primera crisis emocional. Mientras estuvo confinada en diferentes instituciones mentales desde 1930 hasta 1948, Zelda utilizó la forma epistolar en su empeño por retratarse como artista en lugar de víctima. A través de sus cartas a Scott Fitzgerald, descubrimos sus luchas interiores y su deseo por una carrera propia. Este artículo analiza una selección de las cartas de Zelda Fitzgerald para determinar si la forma epistolar le permite superar o perpetuar sus traumas mientras está confinada en varias instituciones mentales.

INTRODUCTION

Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald (1900-1948) is still widely known as the mad wife of Jazz Age writer Francis Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940).[2] Zelda's personality as an extravagant and troublesome wife can be traced back to twentieth-century biographies and works on Scott Fitzgerald, which have often described Scott as a victim of his own marriage and have blamed Zelda for his lack of productivity.[3] One of the most well-known detrimental descriptions of Zelda's bad influence on her husband can be found in Ernest Hemingway's *A Moveable Feast* (1964):

> Zelda was jealous of Scott's work and as we got to know them, this fell into a regular pattern. Scott would resolve not to go on all-night drinking parties and to get some exercise each day and work regularly. He would start to work and as soon as he was working well Zelda would begin complaining about how bored she was and get him off on another drunken party. They would quarrel and then make up and he would sweat out the alcohol on long walks with me, and make up his mind that this time he would really work, and would start off well. Then it would start all over again. (178-79)

[2] Zelda's biographer Sally Cline has investigated how Zelda has been given different labels both during her lifetime, and after her death in 1948. Cline noticed "how the labels progressed from 'eccentric' to 'mentally disordered' to 'schizophrenic', finally to 'the crazy wife of Scott Fitzgerald'" (5).
[3] See Arthur Mizener's *The Far Side of Paradise: A Biography of F. Scott Fitzgerald* (1951) and Andrew Turnbull's *Scott Fitzgerald* (1962).

Unfortunately, Hemingway's negative description of Zelda as the jealous wife who constantly distracted her famous husband from work has lasted up to our days. Furthermore, contemporary movies such as Woody Allen's *Midnight in Paris* (2011) or Michael Grandage's *Genius* (2016) present Zelda as a mentally disturbed person without paying attention to her artistic skills. It is through Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald's insightful letters, however, that we discover her own side of the story, her inner psychological traumas, and her unremitting longing for a career of her own. Though Zelda's epistolary productions have been mentioned by biographers and scholars, little in-depth analysis has been published yet.[4] Merely classified as 'love letters,' these writings show Zelda's lifelong traumas, along with her subsequent nostalgic and regretful feelings towards the past.[5] Despite the fact that Zelda also corresponded with friends and relatives, for the sake of conciseness and close analysis, I will exclusively comment on the letters addressed to her husband Scott Fitzgerald. Thus, this article seeks to examine a selection of Zelda Fitzgerald's letters in order to find out whether the epistolary form allows Zelda to overcome or perpetuate her suffering while confined at several mental institutions.

To start with, it should be borne in mind that letters written by women writers have been traditionally neglected, and Zelda's are no exception. The fact that they are still read as 'love letters' underestimates the artistic and meaningful potential of the epistles *per se*. As Elizabeth Goldsmith sustains in the introduction to *Writing the Female Voice*, "the association of women's writing with the love-letter genre has been perhaps the most tenacious of gender-genre connections in the history of literature" (viii). Goldsmith's statement is based on Linda Kauffman's comprehensive work on the epistolary form, titled *Discourses of Desire: Gender, Genre, and Epistolary Fictions*. While it is true that the love-letter association comes through in Kauffman's book, she also elaborates on the "suffering and victimization" along with the transformation "from victim[s] to artist[s]"

[4] See Deborah Pike's *The Subversive Art of Zelda Fitzgerald* (2017). Pike's chapters "Masquerading as Herself" and "Zelda Fitzgerald's Letters from the Asylum" comprise the most extensive analysis of Zelda's correspondence hitherto published.
[5] See Jackson Bryer and Cathy Bark's edition of the letters of Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald. This edition labelled Scott and Zelda's correspondence as 'love letters': *Dear Scott, Dearest Zelda: The Love Letters of F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald* (2002). While it is true that their courtship letters are quite romantic, most letters written after 1930 are full of reproaches, and portray how tumultuous and toxic their marriage has become.

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female writers experience when writing letters (26). Although Zelda's pattern of suffering and victimization shows in most letters, she occasionally moves from victim to artist, thus, giving a voice to her artistic and personal self. Drawing on the work of several trauma theorists, I will focus on Zelda's literary discourse in order to explore the healing—or traumatizing—effects of her own words.

Trauma scholars have often drawn their attention to the challenging intersections between trauma and narrative, agreeing on the difficulties to speak the "unspeakable" or narrate the "unnarratable" (Herman 1; Felman and Laub xiii; Whitehead 4). As Judith Herman claims in her work *Trauma and Recovery*, "[t]he conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma" (1). This contradictory conflict between "telling" and "not telling" is further explained by theorist Dori Laub when he claims that "[t]he act of telling might itself become severely traumatizing", but he later notes that "the 'not telling' of the story serves as a perpetuation of its tyranny" (67; 79). We could then argue that the therapeutic effects of Zelda's letters might vary depending on the language choices she makes, which are undoubtedly conditioned by her husband's and doctors' demands. In this sense, while we find letters written in an assertive and direct style, there are also a great number of them characterized by an apologetic and submissive attitude. As Leigh Gilmore explains, "trauma mocks language and confronts it with its insufficiency" (6). The "insufficiency" Gilmore refers to definitely parallels the above-mentioned "unspeakable" quality of trauma. Nonetheless, Gilmore also pays attention to the fact that "those who can tell their stories benefit from the therapeutic balm of words" (7). That is to say, once the "unspeakable" is finally spoken, language leads to liberation, allowing the female writer to move from "helplessness and isolation" to "empowerment and reconnection" (Herman 197). As we will see, Zelda Fitzgerald's empowerment shows in several letters, and it is precisely when she reaches this self-confidence that she is able to narrate her traumatic wounds, leave her isolation behind, and focus on her artistic and personal self. The paper division here follows Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald's traumatic events from pursuing a career in dancing in 1927 to her hospitalizations from 1930 onwards.

ZELDA'S DANCING OBSESSION: THE RE-EDUCATION PROGRAM

"[Zelda] want[s] to have something for herself, be something herself," responded a reluctant Scott Fitzgerald when asked why Zelda Fitzgerald insisted on dancing (qtd. in Milford 149). Scott's statement brings to light Zelda's main reasons to pursue a career in ballet. Zelda, known in the early 1920s as a frivolous flapper with no job prospects in mind, was now willing to turn into a professional ballerina. As early as 1925, Zelda began to realize she did not want to depend on her husband, and wished to have something of her own. Spending periods of time in Paris and the French Riviera in the mid and late 1920s allowed Zelda to get acquainted with some of the most important intellectuals of the time, as well as to make long-lasting friends. She met, for instance, ballerina Olga Koklova (Picasso's wife), and established a strong friendship with Gerald and Sara Murphy, who invited Zelda to a wide range of art exhibitions and performances. According to Zelda's biographer Kendall Taylor, when attending the Ballets Russes, Zelda would go "backstage afterward to meet the dancers and choreographers" (157). No wonder that surrounded by such educated people, Zelda became deeply interested in the arts, and was particularly fascinated by ballet.[6] Between 1925 and 1926, Zelda asked Scott for permission to resume her ballet lessons, and it was thanks to their common friend Gerald Murphy that Zelda was introduced to Madame Egorova, a ballet teacher who had opened her studio in Paris back in 1923.[7]

Although Zelda took several lessons from 1925 to 1926, it was not until 1927 that Zelda—now aged 27—became seriously determined to evolve into a first-rate ballerina. According to Scott Fitzgerald, Zelda's sudden decision to be a premiere ballerina was influenced by Isadora Duncan's death in the fall of 1927:

> Isadora was an extraordinary woman. One in the limelight, one she [Zelda] would like to have been. Isadora did it on her own. It was

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[6] As a teenager, Zelda had already attended ballet lessons in her hometown. She participated in performances held at the Sidney Lanier High School, and at the Montgomery Country Club—both located in Montgomery (Alabama).

[7] Madame Lubov Egorova was one of the most renowned ballet teachers in Paris in the 1920s. As a former Russian princess and ballerina, she was now in charge of training ballerinas for Diaghilev's Ballet Russes. She also taught private and group lessons at her studio in Paris.

> Zelda's insane wish to do the same. Replace Isadora now that she was dead, and outshine me at the same time. (qtd. in Wagner 188)[8]

Not only did Scott affirm that Zelda was willing to replace famous Isadora Duncan, but he also claimed that Zelda wanted to "outshine" him. For a few years now, Zelda's artistic talents had irritated her famous husband, and as Zelda focused on her artistic ambitions, Scott's artistic and personal insecurities increased. Among all Zelda's biographers, only Kendall Taylor goes as far as to claim that Zelda, echoing Scott's own words, suddenly turned to dance right after Duncan's death:

> When news came late that summer of Isadora Duncan's accidental death, Zelda's aspirations shifted toward dance. She was invigorated by the idea that she might replace Duncan as America's premiere dancer. (196)

Thus, once the Fitzgeralds settled down in the United States again, Zelda immediately began attending Catherine Littlefield's lessons in Philadelphia, as Scott writes in a letter to Ernest Hemingway in October 1927: "Zelda is ballet dancing three times a week with the Phila symphony" (Bruccoli 152).[9] Apart from the lessons, Zelda strenuously practiced at home for long hours, playing the same tune over and over again. According to Cline, "she practised to 'The March of the Toy Soldiers', playing the record over and over until Scott was wild with exasperation" (213). Back in 1925, Scott did not object to Zelda's dancing at all. However, from 1927 on, he began to see things in a very different light. Initially thinking Zelda's dancing would allow him more time to focus on his endless novel *Tender Is the Night* (1934), Scott became more distracted than ever. He increased his alcohol consumption, and could not stand Zelda's constant efforts to make ballet the priority and center of her daily life. No time was left now for Zelda's role as a mother and wife, and Scott felt left apart.

The worst was yet to come. Zelda's ballet training got even more intensive when the Fitzgeralds returned to Paris in the Spring of 1928.

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[8] Linda Wagner is quoting from Tony Buttitta's memoir titled *The Lost Summer, A Personal Memoir* (1987).

[9] Catherine Littlefield founded the Philadelphia Ballet Company and directed the Littlefield School of Ballet. She was also a former student of Madame Egorova. See the first-ever-published biography on Catherine Littlefield entitled *Catherine Littlefield: A Life in Dance* (2020).

Under Madame Egorova’s instruction, Zelda obsessively practiced for eight hours a day, and she barely ate to keep fit. Furthermore, her daily practice left her exhausted with no time for her husband’s drinking and partying demands. Emotionally unstable, Zelda saw ballet as a way to escape the loneliness she felt—and that included her husband. As Taylor maintains, “Zelda’s focus on ballet, to the exclusion of everything else, masked the desperate unhappiness she felt being emotionally and physically estranged from Scott” (211). Zelda’s dancing routines led her to take lessons not only in Paris, but also in Nice during the summer seasons. Besides, she performed in several recitals in Cannes and Nice, and she even produced a ballet, titled *Evolution* (214).

All these dancing efforts were rewarded in September 1929 when Zelda was offered a solo debut in the San Carlo Opera Ballet Company in Naples; bewilderingly, she rejected it. According to her sister Rosalind, Scott was the one to be blamed since he did not allow her to accept the offer: “[Zelda] told me that she received an offer from one of the Italian Opera companies as a premiere ballerina, but that Scott would not allow her to accept it” (qtd. in Cline 236; Taylor 215). This traumatic decision along with the loneliness Zelda felt led to her withdrawal from social events, and, not surprisingly, to an increasing obsession with ballet lessons. It is also at this time when she started hearing voices. Zelda progressively became more anxious, and, in April 1930, she entered a psychiatric clinic near Paris called Malmaison—this was just one out of the seven mental institutions she was admitted to from 1930 to her dramatic death in 1948. According to a doctor’s report at Malmaison when Zelda entered the clinic, she was in a state of anxiety, and begged her doctors to allow her to continue her ballet lessons: “Mrs. Fitzgerald entered on April 23, 1930, in a state of strong anxiety […] persistently repeating: ‘It’s dreadful […] what’s to become on me, I must work and I won’t be able to […] let me leave.’”[10] As events turned out, Zelda could not possibly adjust to the routine, and she left the institution some days later to carry on with her dancing. After some time passed and some medical consultations were made, it was decided that Zelda should be hospitalized at Le Rives de Prangins in

[10] Translated by the author from the French typescript kept in the F. Scott Fitzgerald Papers at Princeton University: “Madame FITZ-GERALD est entrée le 23 Avril 1930, en état d’anxiété vive […] répétant continuellement: ‘C’est épouvantable […] qu’est-ce que je vais devenir, je dois travailler et je ne pourrais […] laissez-moi partir.’”

Switzerland, one of the most renowned sanatoriums in Europe at the time.

During her stay at Prangins, Dr. Forel, as well as famous psychiatrist Dr. Bleuler diagnosed Zelda with schizophrenia.[11] They both agreed that Zelda should stop dancing, and stay focused on her treatment. To achieve this goal, Dr. Forel decided to apply a "'re-education program' for Zelda; that is, a program that would direct her toward good mothering, femininity, and the revaluing of marriage and domesticity" (Pike 84). Not only did Scott agree with Dr. Forel's program, but he also reached his own conclusions about the importance of domesticity for Zelda's improvement. In a letter written to Dr. Forel, Scott went as far as suggesting the need to adjust his visits to Zelda's biologic and sexual cycle:

> I believe she needs [...] all you include under the term reeducation. Renewal of full physical relations with husband, a thing to be enormously aided by an actual timing of the visits to the periods just before and just after menstruation, and avoiding visits in the middle of such times or in the exact centre of the interval. (Bruccoli 207)

Nonetheless, Zelda was not concerned about mothering in the slightest, as she made it clear when questioned about the role Scottie played in her life. Zelda told her doctor at Valmont Clinic: "That is done now, I want to do something else" (qtd. in Milford 160; Cline 261).[12] While at Prangins, though, Zelda still hoped to become a famous ballerina and her infatuation led her to beg Scott to ask Egorova whether she was good at dancing or not: "If you could write to Egorova a friendly impersonal note to find out exactly where I stand as a dancer it would be of the greatest help to me" (Bryer and Barks 80). In view of Zelda's obsessive thoughts, Dr. Forel saw the opportunity to trace an evil plan whereby "Scott [asked] Egorova to discourage her pupil, even

[11] Psychiatrist Paul Eugen Bleuler coined the term 'schizophrenia' in 1908. According to the American Psychiatric Association, "[w]hen schizophrenia is active, symptoms can include delusions, hallucinations, trouble with thinking and concentration, and lack of motivation." Although Zelda suffered from hallucinations, delusions, and lack of motivation, among other symptoms, both her last doctor and art therapist at Highland Hospital (Asheville, North Carolina) firmly believed she had been misdiagnosed. For further information on Zelda's diagnoses and treatments, see Kendall Taylor's and Sally Cline's biographies.

[12] Dr. Trutmann was one of Zelda's doctors at Valmont Clinic (Switzerland)—a hospital specialized in gastrointestinal ailments where Zelda stayed very briefly before moving to Prangins.

if it meant deceiving Zelda” (Cline 272). Scott did not subscribe to Forel’s plan; instead, he decided to ask Egorova where Zelda actually stood as a ballet dancer.

In the letter to Egorova in June 1930, Scott included seven questions that might clarify whether Zelda could ever succeed as a ballerina or not. The first one is perhaps the most remarkable of all as it has to do with Scott’s ongoing obsession with rating Zelda’s talents all the time. He asked whether Zelda could “ever reach the level of a first-rate dancer” (Bruccoli 186). Scott also added that dancing was preventing Zelda from getting better, and that she would not be able to dance as intensively as before. A couple of weeks later, in July 1930, Madame Egorova replied to Scott’s letter. Egorova explained that Zelda could perform minor roles and become a great dancer, but would never become a first-rate dancer because she was a late bloomer:

> Zelda will not be able to become a first-rate dancer; she has started too late [...] I am sure that in the Massine ballets, without being a star, Zelda could successfully fulfil important roles [...] I cannot stop repeating that Zelda is likely to become a very good dancer.[13]

Despite Madame Egorova’s encouraging words, Zelda became deeply disappointed. The frustration and anxiety caused by Egorova’s letter—the woman and dancer she venerated—did little to help improve her mental health.

ZELDA’S CRYING WOUNDS: TRAUMA, NOSTALGIA, AND REGRET

What Zelda’s doctors as well as her husband failed to understand was that Zelda’s quest for her own artistic voice depended on her artistic skills—be it dancing, writing, or painting. Depriving her of her artistic inclinations did nothing but worsen her condition. In fact, her last psychiatrist believed that Zelda had been misdiagnosed, and argued that “the failure of her psychiatrists was their failure to take her

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[13] Translated by the author from the French typescript located at the F. Scott Fitzgerald Papers (PUL): “Zelda ne pourra pas devenir une danseuse de première classe; elle a commencé trop tard [...] Je suis certaine que dans les ballets Massine, sans en être l’étoile, Zelda pourrait s’acquitter avec succès des rôles importants [...] Je ne puis que répéter que Zelda est susceptible de devenir une très bonne danseuse.”

talents seriously" (qtd. in Cline 286).[14] Zelda's artistic frustrations triggered different mental and physical disorders such as the painful eczemas she had to endure for the rest of her life. Thus, during her stay at Prangins, she suffered from eczemas "that covered her face, neck, and shoulders," and this skin reaction became a "warning device" to her psychological distress, which would last until her death (Milford 169 and 177). As Karen Tatum remarks, "not only does eczema cause physical pain [but] it is also frequently accompanied by varieties of anxiety and depression" (3). Zelda herself found the eczema episodes physically and mentally exacerbating. "I would have chosen some other accompaniment for my desequalibrium [*sic*] than this foul eczema," Zelda wrote to Scott in 1930 (Bryer and Barks 91). Hence, the relationship between psychic and physical trauma should not be overlooked since Zelda's eczemas, asthma attacks, and extreme slimness might be associated with a number of traumatic life events such as declining the ballet offer, or her lifelong dependence on her husband.

As a matter of fact, the need to focus on both mental and physical trauma comes from the term 'trauma' itself. According to Cathy Caruth, 'trauma' originally meant "an injury inflicted on a body" whereas "[in] its later usage, particularly in the medical and psychiatric literature, and most centrally in Freud's text, the term trauma [was] understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind" (3). Sigmund Freud argued that whereas the physical wound could be healed, the psychological wound remained longer, haunting the mind of the person who suffered from traumatic experiences (4). However, in the case of Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald, physical wounds (e.g. eczemas) are not that easy to heal as they are related to her mental illness. Apart from the connection between body and mind, it is also relevant to pay attention to the link between trauma and reality. In Caruth's words, trauma "is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth" (4). Thus, it is in her letters to her husband that Zelda attempts to write down her own truth in order to heal her crying wounds. Yet, she does so in a contradictory manner. Whilst we find letters where Zelda adopts an assertive attitude, there are others where she submissively regrets how much pain she has caused her

[14] Dr. Irving Pine was Zelda's last psychiatrist at Highland Hospital, where Zelda readmitted herself on several occasions while living with her mother in Montgomery from 1940 to 1948.

husband. In his work "Morning and Melancholia," Sigmund Freud claims that "[t]he woman who loudly pities her husband for being tied to such an incapable wife as herself is really accusing her husband of being incapable" (248). Following Freud's hypothesis, we could conclude that when blaming and reproaching herself, Zelda might be instead blaming Scott for her own suffering.

Whether written in an assertive or passive style, it goes without saying that Zelda's letters allow us to discover her artistic and personal frustrations firsthand. Overall, as Bryer and Barks sustain, there are two recurrent themes in Zelda's correspondence with Scott in the 1930s:

> [T]here are striking consistencies in Zelda's letters, in the form of two outstanding and recurring themes: first, how primary her relationship to Scott was; second, how driven she was, broken at the age of thirty, to find real work for herself—a coherent vocational identity, when her personal identity was so fractured—and a clear sense of purpose amid the chaos of her illness. (78)

Bryer and Barks' assertion needs further elaboration if we are to explore Zelda's traumas. Firstly, her relationship to Scott was "primary" because her doctors encouraged that dependence; Zelda was left with no other options, but to be re-educated into domesticity. Secondly, while it is true that Zelda compulsively insisted on having a vocational job while she was hospitalized, this was not caused by her fractured personal identity since her artistic dreams had been nurtured prior to her mental breakdowns.

One of the most faithful descriptions of Zelda's traumas can be found on a forty-two-page letter written in September 1930 while Zelda was at Prangins under Dr. Forel's re-education program. By writing this letter, Zelda tried to work through her crying wounds. Despite the fact that this letter would reach her doctors as well as her husband, she did not hesitate to elaborate on the most striking traumatic experiences she underwent as Scott Fitzgerald's wife at the same time she unveiled her innocent same-sex relationship:

> We quarreled and you broke the bathroom door and hurt my eye. […] Rome and your friends from the British Embassy and your drinking, drinking. […] Then I was horribly sick, from trying to have a baby and you didn't care much and when I was well we came back to Paris. […] I was always sick and having [injections] and things and you were naturally more and more away. […] I began to work harder at

> dancing—I thought of nothing else but that. You were far away by then and I was alone. […] I became dependent on Egorowa [*sic*] […] Twice you left my bed saying “I can’t. Don’t you understand”—I didn’t. […] it was wrong, of cource [*sic*], to love my teacher when I should have loved you. But I didn’t have you to love—not since long before I loved her. (Bryer and Barks 66-73)

As the letter clearly shows, Zelda firstly rebukes Scott for his violent attitude during their first years of marriage. She then goes on to describe their travels in Europe, and emphasizes Scott’s drinking habits. Zelda also refers to Scott’s careless attitude concerning her illnesses, and describes the couple’s estrangement, which triggered Zelda’s dependence on her ballet teacher Madame Egorova. Along with all the above-mentioned traumas, a fact that hurt Zelda was Scott’s unwillingness to have sexual intercourse with her. The letter is indeed relevant for the analysis of Zelda Fitzgerald’s traumas for it provides a faithful description of her suffering during the years she lived under the shadow of her famous husband. Zelda’s straightforward style is one of the most remarkable aspects and it should be emphasized. Her assertiveness allows us to discover her own voice, her desperation, and her mental distress. For the sake of clarity, Zelda uses short sentences such as “We came home.” Punctuation marks such as dashes are used to add relevant and shocking information as in “—I thought of nothing else but that.” Finally, she also makes use of the anaphora device and repeats words at the beginning of sentences such as “There was/were,” “We,” and “Then”. Regarding the use of the anaphora device, in her book *Trauma Fiction*, Anne Whitehead emphasizes the “prevalence of repetition” in her reading of several writings representing trauma (161). More importantly, Whitehead elaborates on the ambivalence of repetition since it might admit two readings: a) it can be viewed as paralyzing, or b) as a way to work through one’s own traumas (86-87). In the case of this letter, it is clear that repetitions help Zelda empower her reality as she makes sure Scott knows about the most troubling moments of their tumultuous marriage. Likewise, Zelda’s discourse could be considered therapeutic as she is successfully speaking the “unspeakable”—echoing Herman’s and Laub’s research works. Viewed from the outside, there is no doubt

that in expressing her inner struggles, Zelda is attempting to transform herself from victim to artist—at least in her mind.[15]

Therefore, Zelda shows her strength and ability to move from dependence to independence, and from passivity to action, as this other letter demonstrates. Here, she goes as far as to show her willingness to start a new life without Scott:

> You have always told me that I had no right to complain as long as I was materially cared for […] since we have never found either help or satisfaction in each other the best thing is to seek it separately. You might as well start whatever you start for a divorce immediately […] For us, there is not the slightest use, even if we wanted to try which I assure you I do not—not even faintly. In listing your qualities I can not find even one on which to base any possible relationship except your good looks, and there are dozens of people with that. (Bryer and Barks 87-88)

Written in August 1930, this letter illustrates Zelda's opinion about her relationship to Scott, and her determination to divorce him. The first sentence shows the passive role Zelda might have played in her marriage. That is, Scott acted as the provider of the family while Zelda was relegated to being the decorative wife of a famous author. However, it should be noted that while Zelda was financially cared for, she was not emotionally tended at all. Money allowed Zelda to be a fashionable flapper in the 1920s, as well as to be admitted to renowned mental hospitals in the 1930s; yet, by no means did money provide Zelda with the love and empathy she needed from her husband at the time. In fact, Scott Fitzgerald's lack of empathy for his wife's suffering affected her mental instability, as Dr. Carroll once wrote to Scott: "you are her emotional disorganizer" (qtd. in Milford 309; Cline 359).[16] Furthermore, regarding Zelda's traumas, the fact that she could not count on a supportive and empathetic husband to share her struggles only helped to intensify her anxiety. As Laub defends, "the absence of an empathic listener, or more radically, the absence of an *addressable other* […] annihilates the story," and I would also add that in neglecting

[15] As part of the therapy, not only did Zelda write letters, but also journals retelling her past and present memories. Therapeutic writing was to become a common practice in mental institutions all through the twentieth century. American poet Anne Sexton (1928-1974), for instance, suffering from postpartum depression and several mental breakdowns, began writing poems following her doctor's advice.

[16] Dr. Carroll was one of Zelda's doctors at Highland Hospital (Asheville, North Carolina).

Zelda's narrative, her absent—but controlling—husband is definitely perpetuating Zelda's crying wounds (68). As for the rest of Zelda's letter, she seems confident enough, as she makes use of the first personal pronoun several times, and writes a dash to emphasize she does not want to work things out with Scott: "even if we wanted to try which I assure you I do not—not even faintly." More importantly, after ten years of marriage, Zelda exclusively refers to Scott's "good looks" as the only quality he might possess. To summarize, throughout her letter to Scott, Zelda finds the courage to speak her own mind, and show how she will henceforward move on.

Unfortunately, Zelda's straightforward style would become more complex to understand as time went by. She got rid of clarity in favor of a poetic, abstract, and surrealistic style. According to Pike, Zelda represented "states of being almost impossible to communicate such as 'madness,' hyper-awareness, and physical and psychological torment" (6). In fact, it is at times difficult to draw the line between reality and fiction due to the number of figures of speech, as well as the literary references she uses. These complex-language letters could be then analyzed as oppressive tools which perpetuate Zelda Fitzgerald's self-inflicted permanent traumas. Paralleling Gilmore's argument about the "insufficiency" of language to represent trauma, Christian Perring also claims that telling a personal story can lead to oppression instead of liberation:

> People may use words, phrases, and forms of stories that work against their own liberation. Ways of telling stories carry values with them, and if a person adopts a mode of story-telling with values that demean her or endorse her oppression, then telling her own story may be self-defeating. (260)

Following Perring's argument, it can be observed that in most letters written from 1931, Zelda's apologetic language only helps to oppress and defeat her. It is by means of regretful and nostalgic statements that she adopts 'the nice wife of' label. Did Zelda really want to remain a passive wife or did she use this sort of language as a strategy to liberate herself? Perhaps, Zelda realized that the more she followed her doctors' advice about being a good wife, the sooner she would be released from mental institutions. That would explain why her initial resentful letters are surprisingly followed by loving and caring ones. As Cline argues:

> [H]er initial letters of anger, betrayal, distrust, resentment, which were seen by the medical establishment as signs of 'instability', ultimately gave way to more conciliatory, affectionate letters which were viewed as signs of 'improvement'. (265)

Accordingly, in the eyes of her doctors, Zelda was progressively improving; yet, what we really find in these letters is the distorted voice of a woman who plays the role of a victim, while she keeps trying to please her husband at whatever the cost. It should be mentioned, though, that prior to adopting this submissive and remorseful attitude (in most letters from 1931 on), Zelda tried to make Scott understand she was in pain due to Dr. Forel's treatment at Prangins. She was so desperate that she begged Scott to leave Prangins: "Please, out of charity write to Dr. Forel to let me off this cure" (Bryer and Barks 96). Once she realized this conciliatory tone did not work, Zelda assertively claimed she wanted to leave the clinic as she was prepared to take care of herself:

> I want to leave here. […] I am thirty years old and quite willing to take full responsibility for myself. Neither you nor Dr. Forel has any legal right to keep me interned any longer. […] I am not going to stay here any longer, and if you make a row about it there are lots of things that will be aired in the courts that won't do anybody any good, now or later. (97)

This time, Zelda did not play the role of a victim. On the contrary, she went as far as to threaten Scott with taking legal action if he demurred. After this letter, however, she went back to the placid tone her husband and doctors had expected from her. Though she strove for freedom, Zelda could not definitely cope with her husband's strong will. Thus, her impotence led her to feel nostalgia and regret.

However, despite her mental illness—or perhaps as a consequence of her mental problems—at times we find a hopeful Zelda—as it is the case with the letter she wrote in June 1934 from Sheppard Pratt Hospital:

> I wish we could spend July by the sea, browning ourselves and feeling water-weighted hair flow behind us from a dive. I wish our gravest troubles were the summer gnats. I wish we were hungry for hot-dogs and dopes and it would be nice to smell the starch of summer linens and the faint odor of talc in blistering bath-houses. Or we could go to the Japanese Gardens […] We could lie in long citroneuse beams of

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> the five o'clock sun on the plage at Juan-les-Pins and hear the sound of the drum and piano being scooped out to sea by the waves. Dust and alfalfa in Alabama, pines and salt at Antibes, the lethal smells of city streets in the summer, buttered pop-corn and axel grease at Coney Island and Virginia beach […] we could see if all those are still there. (Bryer and Barks 201)

The repetitions of "I wish" and "we could" show Zelda's willingness to spend quality time with Scott. Specifically, since the expression "we could" stands for a possible situation, Zelda might have used it instead of "we can" to subtly seek her husband's approval, and preserve her role as a passive wife. In this letter, she refers to her pleasant life in the Deep South, as well as to the summer vacations the Fitzgerald family spent on the French Riviera. The memories from these places enable Zelda to feel hopeful about the future. However, she bases her hopes on a past which was not as happy as she now cognitively distorts. Notwithstanding, that seems the only way to keep on moving.

Hence, romanticizing the past became a frequent theme in Zelda's correspondence with Scott in the late 1930s. While confined at Highland Hospital in August 1936, she wrote a quite chaotic—albeit romantic—letter where she idealized her life with Scott, and looked forward to spending quality time both with her husband and their daughter Scottie:

> I wish we had just been swimming together, the way it seems—I'll be so glad when you come home again. When will we be three of us again […] we'll be three […] Oh, I'll be so glad to see you on the tenth. […] O my love O my darling […] That's what we said on the softness of that expansive Alabama night a long time ago […] Happily, happily foreverafterwards [*sic*]—the best we could. (Bryer and Barks 226-27)

In this letter, Zelda makes use of powerful descriptive verbs such as "I wish." She mentions the adjective "glad" twice, and refers to the determiner "three" to emphasize her longing for Scott and her daughter Scottie—as the happy family they might have been. Zelda's joy is also portrayed by the use of the interjection "oh" (repeated three times—with and without the "h"), along with words of endearment such as "love" and "darling," preceded by the possessive adjective "my." This letter comprises one of the most wistful and loving descriptions among all the letters Zelda wrote to her husband. As proof of these fond memories—which are quite distant in time and geography—Zelda wraps up her letter in a poetic manner: "Happily,

happily foreverafterwards [*sic*]—the best we could." Though beautifully written—and at times quite passionate—in this and other letters Zelda appears to be hiding her own traumas, camouflaging her own pain and sorrows, and concealing real problems by nostalgically glorifying the past. As Elizabeth Ouka notes, in Modernist literature, "nostalgia was at best a distraction and at worst a dangerous mask for serious problems" (255). Hence, nostalgia led Zelda to fabricate a perfect life, but it took its toll on Zelda's mental health bolstering her long-lasting traumas.

In addition, Zelda was also tormented with regret, and she frequently apologized to Scott for the trouble she might have caused. For instance, in 1934, she wrote to Scott blaming herself for her own mental distress: "I am miserable in thinking of the unhappiness my illness has caused you" (Bryer and Barks 200). Similarly, in a letter written later that year she apologized for the quarrels they had while Zelda lived with him in 1932: "I am so sorry for the unhappy times we had in that house" (202). Zelda's apologetic attitude steadily increased as time went by. In quite a few letters she wrote in 1935 from Sheppard Pratt, we find several painful assertions as the following ones: "I wish I could have done it better. You have never believed me when I said I was sorry—but I am" (211); or "The thought of the effort you have made over me […] You have been so good to me" (212). These statements, among others, illustrate Zelda's remorse and sadness about her own demeanor, and her subsequent need to ceaselessly ask for forgiveness. She remarks how "good" Scott has been to her, especially because of the financial burden she has caused. There is no doubt that Zelda is once again stressing her role as the compliant and re-educated wife Scott wishes to have. It is also relevant to note the redundant use of the verb "wish" followed by the past tense as a way to regret her emancipating actions from the years Zelda pursued a career in dancing. Sadly, Zelda got to the point that she was sorry for her own illness, and her self-regretful words represent her fear and paralysis. In Janet Landman's *Regret: The Persistence of the Possible*, the author highlights that "regret tends to be viewed as harmful because paralyzing" (10). Following Landman's research on the causes of regret, two might be the main reasons for Zelda's regretful statements: 1) her low self-esteem and 2) her passivity as a woman (162-69). Therefore, in Zelda's epistolary productions, we can identify how her regretful feelings provoke her paralysis as well as they keep her traumas alive.

CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this article, I have focused on Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald's artistic aspirations as a ballet dancer, paying attention to her daily exhausting routines and to her willingness to have a career of her own. Likewise, I have analyzed how Zelda's inner struggles are represented in her letters to her husband, and how she often hides her traumas away by looking nostalgically and regretfully towards the past. By following Herman's, Laub's, and Whitehead's research on the "unspeakable" quality of trauma, I have scrutinized the "telling" v. "not telling" dichotomy underlying Zelda's letters, and how both options might be equally traumatizing. In addition, Gilmore's hypothesis on the "insufficiency" of language has provided my work with a solid basis to explore Zelda's discourse, and determine to what extent her letters allow her to overcome or perpetuate her crying wounds. After thorough examination, I argue that Zelda's letters fall into two categories: assertive and apologetic. The former definitely allows Zelda to empower her own reality as she assertively vindicates her right to be and have something of her own. The latter, however, leads her to submissively comply with her husband's and doctors' re-education requirements.

Moreover, regarding the therapeutic outcome of the letters analyzed in this paper, we could safely conclude that while Zelda's assertive style might have helped her overcome her suffering—albeit temporarily—her apologetic language works against her own independence perpetuating her crying wounds. Hence, the healing or traumatizing consequences of these epistolary productions are largely associated with Zelda's language choices—these being influenced by her mental struggles, her unsupportive husband, and the patriarchal psychiatric system of the 1930s she was immersed in. Apart from Zelda's own words, a fact that cannot be overlooked as it really worsened her emotional instability was the absence of an "addressable other." In her effort to ultimately be listened to by her absent husband, she anxiously tried to find and create a new self. Nevertheless, more often than not, Zelda ultimately resigned herself to embracing nostalgia and regret, as she once claimed: "I begin to love the long roads leading to forgotten regretted nostalgias" (Bryer and Barks 255). It is on those long roads to forgotten regretted nostalgias that we can listen to Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald's own voice, explore her permanent and complex crying wounds, and clearly identify her quest for artistic identity.

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