

ZELDA FITZGERALD: THE UNREACHABLE FEMALE ARTIST AND AMERICAN DREAM

“Those girls,’ people said, ‘think they can do anything and get away with it.”¹

Abstract: This paper will explore Zelda Fitzgerald’s dual personality, both as a flapper and a writer, whilst analysing the failed female artists in her only novel and short stories. This will be done by examining how Zelda’s novel, *Save Me the Waltz*, reflects the socio-historical context in which it was produced, and more specifically the status and role of women in society in nineteen-twenties America. This dissertation will demonstrate how Zelda’s writings suggest that despite social advancements for women and new experimentation in aesthetic and form, there was still communal notions of domesticity that remained inescapable for the independent modernist woman and artist. By being split into three sections, this dissertation will follow a who, what and why framework. Chapter one will explore how Zelda enable’s narrative through autobiography, displaying herself, and her female protagonists as artists. This chapter will demonstrate how both Zelda and her protagonists are dreams, aspirers and hard-workers whilst demonstrating how arbitrarily close to their dreams they came. Chapter two is concerned with the failure of these dreams and will analyse closely what happened to these female artists following a mathematical asymptotic framework and using the American Dream as a both a theory and an idea in nineteen-twenties America. Finally, chapter three focuses on why these dreams were unattainable for female artists by exploring ideas of the patriarchy and a gendered American dream, supported by modernist and feminist theories.



Structure and Framework

1. Dancers, Dreamers and Doubles: An introduction to Zelda and her protagonists
2. The Failure, the Forgotten and the Flapper: A Fallen American Dream
3. The American Dream: A Man’s World

Conclusion: Zelda Fitzgerald was often dismissed as F. Scott's neurotic wife, she does however deserve to be recognised as an important individual artist situated alongside other modernist women of her generation who were stranded between an old model of feminine subservience to men and the new ideal of equality. Despite discourse predominately focusing on the life and writings of F. Scott, it would be interesting to research and compare the autobiographical style of them both; as *Save Me the Waltz* follows a similar period of the couples lives to F. Scott’s novel *Tender is the Night*. This comparison would allow for an elaboration on the failed female artist through the patriarchy by exploring the differences between Zelda’s own representation of herself and F. Scott’s appropriation of her life. Researching Zelda Fitzgerald as an artist, a wife, a mother and as a woman is addressing an underrepresented area in literature. It has been the intention of this dissertation to shine a light on Zelda and her autobiographical works, whilst aligning the art and the artist as something that works together. Highlighting how through her life and writing Zelda demonstrates that in the patriarchal confines of nineteen-twenties America, the American Dream was unreachable for women. I believe Zelda wished to encompass this reality not only in her fiction but her essays and paintings as a fight for female emancipation and autonomy in response to the patriarchal limitations that she faced throughout her life.

Stacey Pattinson
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Department of English and Modern Languages
15067095@brookes.ac.uk

References

¹ Zelda Fitzgerald, *Save Me the Waltz* (London: Penguin Books, 1987) p. 15.