Ivana Čuljak

Sveučilište u Mostaru, Filozofski fakultet
ivana.culjak@ff.sum.ba
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FRANCIS SCOTT FITZGERALD AND ZELDA FITZGERALD – OPPOSING VIEWS ON THE CHARACTER OF THE FLAPPER

Abstract

The 1920s marked the emergence of the "flapper" – a symbol of rebellion against societal norms epitomizing the newfound independence of American women. Francis Scott Fitzgerald, renowned for chronicling this phenomenon, described flappers in his works as mischievous rebels who opposed the conservative values of the previous generation. However, in addition to being charming, witty, and playful, they were depicted as manipulative materialists who would do anything for wealth and social status. The depiction of flappers in Scott Fitzgerald's works differs from that of his wife Zelda Fitzgerald – a flapper herself. Through the character of Alabama, Zelda Fitzgerald offers a nuanced account of the flapper's struggle for autonomy within a patriarchal society. Alabama's journey reflects Zelda's own experiences and challenges when confronting traditional gender roles imposed by society. This article explores Francis Scott Fitzgerald's and Zelda Fitzgerald's contrasting views on the character of the flapper, exploring how their respective portrayals reflect broader societal attitudes towards women's roles in the 1920s. An analysis of these works explores the complexities of gender dynamics during this transformative era and sheds light on the enduring legacy of the flapper as an icon of female liberation.

Keywords: the flapper; Francis Scott Fitzgerald; Zelda Fitzgerald; opposing views; gender.

FRANCIS SCOTT FITZGERALD I ZELDA FITZGERALD – SUPROTSTAVLJENA GLEDIŠTA NA LIK *FLAPPER* DJEVOJKE

Sažetak

Dvadesete godine obilježila je pojava *flapper* žene – žene koja je simbolizirala pobunu protiv ustaljenih društvenih normi i postala utjelovljenje novostečene neovisnosti žena. Francis Scott Fitzgerald, pisac poznat po tome što je zabilježio ovaj društveni fenomen, opisao je *flapper* djevojke u svojim djelima kao nestašne buntovnice koje se suprotstavljaju konzervativnim vrijednostima prethodne generacije, ali osim kao šarmantne, duhovite i zaigrane, one su prikazane i kao manipulativne materijalistice koje čine sve za bogatstvo i društveni status. Prikaz Fitzgeraldovih *flapperica* suprotan je prikazu njegove žene, Zelde Fitzgerald, koja je i sama bila *flapper* žena. Preko lika Alabame Zelda Fitzgerald nudi slojevit prikaz borbe *flapper* žene za autonomnost unutar patrijarhalnoga društva. Alabamino putovanje odražava Zeldina iskustva i izazove u sukobu s tradicionalnim rodnim ulogama koje je nametnulo društvo. Ovaj članak istražuje suprotstavljena gledišta Francisa Scotta Fitzgeralda i Zelde Fitzgerald na lik *flapper* žene, istražujući kako njihovi pojedinačni prikazi odražavaju šire društvene stavove prema ženama u 1920-ima. Analiza ovih djela istražuje složenost rodne dinamike tijekom ovoga prijelomnog razdoblja i rasvjetljuje trajno nasljeđe koje je ostavila *flapper* žena kao ikona ženske slobode.

Ključne riječi: *flapper* djevojka; Francis Scott Fitzgerald; Zelda Fitzgerald; suprotstavljena gledišta; rod.

The flapper – the 1920s' icon and the new "breed" of American women who fought societal constraints and challenged the idea of Victorian womanhood with their short skirts, bobbed hair, and outrageous behavior – signified a wave of change in the lives of women. The flapper phenomenon expanded to the measure that, in 1929, the Florida State Legislature even considered banning the use of the term "flapper"[1], but flappers were there to stay. Women gained the right to vote in 1920; they entered the workforce; they rejected burdensome clothes; they became sexually freer and started using birth control. The clash between the generations was never as great as in the 1920s and

[1] Joshua Zeitz, *Flapper: A Madcap Story of Sex, Style, Celebrity, and the Women Who Made America Modern*, Crown Publishers, 2006., p. 15.

before Francis Scott Fitzgerald, the American author who became the most famous chronicler of the flapper phenomenon, observed it all in his literary works, the older generation had had only glimpses of what was being done in "flapper" circles.[2]

The young women in F. Scott Fitzgerald's fiction are mischievous and mock their parents' prudery. Fitzgerald's life became so intertwined with the flapper – "F. Scott Fitzgerald, who originated the flapper," "Flapperdom's Fiction Ace," and the nation's "Expert on Flappers"—that whenever the subject was the flapper, Scott or his wife Zelda Fitzgerald were contacted. Even though they wrote many columns and gave many interviews on the subject ("Fitzgerald, Flappers and Fame," "This Is What Happens to Naughty Flappers," etc.), Fitzgerald was not so pleased to be always connected to flappers, claiming, "I wish to state publicly that I cannot understand why, whenever the word flapper is mentioned, my name should be dragged headlong into the conversation"[3]. However, he earned whopping sums of money by writing on flappers. His short stories, mostly published in *The Saturday Evening Post* and all of them featuring young flappers as the main characters and the movie rights associated with them, were the major source of his income. Scott Fitzgerald used parts of Zelda Fitzgerald's diaries as an inspiration for his works and supposedly modelled his flapper characters on Zelda herself, yet when it comes to flappers, Zelda and Scott Fitzgerald's respective works showcase that the two had opposing views on the subject of flappers which leads to the question of what kind of a woman the flapper was: was she mischievous, energetic, attractive, but also selfish, manipulative, deceitful, and dependent on men as Scott Fitzgerald described her in his fiction, or was she clever and daring, but unable to overcome the obstacles an ordinary woman of the 1920s faced as Zelda Fitzgerald aimed to show in her novel?

Even though Fitzgerald claimed that *The Great Gatsby* (1925), the novel that established his literary legacy, contained no important female characters,[4] Daisy, the main female character, is one of the most memorable female characters in American literature playing the gender role of the flapper.

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2 *Ibid.*, p. 38.

3 Francis Scott Fitzgerald according to *Ibid.*, p. 42.

4 Rena Sanderson, „Women in Fitzgerald's fiction", Ruth Prigozy (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to F. Scott Fitzgerald*, Cambridge University Press, 2002., p. 154.

When *The Great Gatsby* opens, Daisy, a "golden girl" and a type that can be seen in all his works, and Jordan, Daisy's friend, are presented as heavenly creatures, almost ethereal, mesmerizing Nick by their clothes, laughter, beauty, and charm. However, as the novel progresses, it seems that the two women are wearing the mask of a fun, witty flapper to achieve some selfish goals. This portrayal which exhibits a mixture of both admiration and resentment might stem from Fitzgerald's ambivalent opinion towards flappers: "he was both delighted and confused by them and their influential new role in society."[5] On the one hand, he promoted the flapper lifestyle in his literary works, but on the other hand, it seems that he feared the changes coming in the sphere of gender roles.

The mixture of attraction and repulsion applies to the character of Daisy, too. To perform the role of a flapper, Daisy uses her laughter to amuse and please men, her voice to seduce men, and childish expressions to appear naïve. When Nick first meets Daisy, she tries too hard to be witty and charming, overdoing her performance and laughing even when her laughter is not necessary thus playing the role of the flapper – the role of "a beautiful little fool"[6]:

> She laughed, an absurd, charming little laugh, and I laughed too and came forward into the room.
> "I'm p-paralyzed with happiness."
> She laughed again, as if she said something very witty, and held my hand for a moment, looking up into my face, promising that there was no one in the world she so much wanted to see. That was a way she had.[7]

Daisy's seductive and unusual voice serves a similar purpose and is mentioned many times in the novel:

1. "her low thrilling voice"[8];
2. "her voice compelled me forward breathlessly as I listened"[9];
3. "her voice glowing and singing"[10];

[5] Susanne Kastberger, „The American Flapper: Male Fiction or Real Emancipated Women of the 1920s?," master's thesis, Faculty of Humanities – Karl-Franzens University, 2013., p. 20.
[6] Francis Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, Planet eBook, 2008., p. 17.
[7] *Ibid.*, p. 18.
[8] *Ibid.*, p. 12.
[9] *Ibid.*, p. 17.
[10] *Ibid.*

4. "her voice broke off, ceasing to compel my attention"[11];
5. "and yet there's something in that voice of hers"[12];
6. "The exhilarating ripple of her voice was a wild tonic in the rain. I had to follow the sound of it for a moment, up and down, with my ear alone before any words came through"[13];
7. "I think that voice held him most with its fluctuating, feverish warmth because it couldn't be over-dreamed—that voice was a deathless song"[14];
8. "Daisy's voice was playing murmurous tricks in her throat"[15];
9. "When the melody rose, her voice broke up sweetly, following it, in a way contralto voices have, and each change tipped out a little of her warm human magic upon the air"[16];
10. "Her voice struggled on through the heat, beating against it, moulding its senselessness into forms"[17];
11. "She's got an indiscreet voice"[18];
12. "Her voice is full of money"[19];
13. "her voice, dropping an octave lower, filled the room with thrilling scorn"[20];
14. "Her voice was cold, but the rancour was gone from it"[21] and
15. "She had caught a cold and it made her voice huskier and more charming than ever"[22].

Daisy believes a woman needs to be a beautiful seductress to get what she wants, and she uses her voice, among other things, to accomplish it: "More than once the importance of Daisy's voice is hinted at throughout the novel, making Daisy into a siren captivating men in her vicinity with her voice"[23].

[11] *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.
[12] *Ibid.*, p. 84.
[13] *Ibid.*, p. 91.
[14] *Ibid.*, p. 103.
[15] *Ibid.*, p. 112.
[16] *Ibid.*, p. 116.
[17] *Ibid.*, p. 126.
[18] *Ibid.*, p. 128.
[19] *Ibid.*, p. 128.
[20] *Ibid.*, pp. 140-141.
[21] *Ibid.*, p. 141.
[22] *Ibid.*, p. 160.
[23] Hanna Persson, „A Study of Daisy Buchanan's influence on Jay Gatsby in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*", thesis, Karlstadt University, 2019., p. 7.

Even Nick, intrigued by her voice, falls under its spell. Glenn Settle connects Daisy's middle name "Faye" to the Middle English word "faie", which meant enchantress, seeing Daisy's voice as a quality "that most noticeably defines her characterization"[24].

For Nick, the narrator of the novel, her voice remains a mystery throughout the greater part of the novel, but towards the end, Gatsby reveals what is so peculiar about her voice:

> "She's got an indiscreet voice," I remarked. "It's full of——" I hesitated.
> "Her voice is full of money," he said suddenly.
> That was it. I'd never understood before. It was full of money—that was the inexhaustible charm that rose and fell in it, the jingle of it, the cymbals' song of it…. High in a white palace the king's daughter, the golden girl….[25]

Daisy's voice offers a promise of wealth and status luring Gatsby into her grasp.[26]

Fitzgerald exposes Daisy as using her voice to perform as a flapper in order to fulfil her own goals of living a comfortable life where she does not have to worry about her future or the future of her child. Daisy's whole life is just pretending and playing the role of the flapper – an amusing and fun girl – because, at the core of everything, she believes the easiest thing to do is to live dependent on men. However, to live such a life, she must pretend she is ignorant, therefore, she will, for instance, ignore her husband while he is talking on the phone to his mistress, and continue her conversation with Nick as if everything is alright:

> "I love to see you at my table, Nick. You remind me of a—of a rose, an absolute rose. Doesn't he?" She turned to Miss Baker for confirmation. "An absolute rose?" This was untrue. I am not even faintly like a rose. She was only extemporizing but a stirring warmth flowed from her as if her heart was trying to come out to you concealed in one of those breathless, thrilling words.[27]

[24] Glenn Settle, „Fitzgerald's Daisy: The Siren Voice", *American Literature*, Vol. 57, No 1, 1985., according to *Ibid*., p. 7.
[25] F. S. Fitzgerald, *op. cit.,* p. 128.
[26] H. Persson, *op. cit.,* p. 7.
[27] F. S. Fitzgerald, *op. cit.,* p. 17.

Daisy is aware of Tom's infidelity as she is offering her pencil for him to write down the address: "The double-edged offer to loan Tom her 'little gold pencil,' though superficially pleasant and forthcoming, proclaims aloud her awareness of Tom's extramarital activities, letting him know that she is not a pitiful dupe"[28]. Sussane Kastberger explains why Daisy accepts Tom's infidelity: "Daisy's social status and her limited possibilities in life make her accept the double standard, meaning that she just looks away and acts as if nothing were the matter when Tom's mistress, Myrtle, whom she has never seen, calls in the middle of the day"[29]. Even though she is aware of his infidelity, she still chooses to stay with him.

Daisy's naivety together with childishness concurs with the role of the flapper:

> "Look!" she complained. "I hurt it."
> We all looked—the knuckle was black and blue.
> "You did it, Tom," she said accusingly. "I know you didn't mean to but you DID do it. That's what I get for marrying a brute of a man, a great big hulking physical specimen of a——"
> "I hate that word hulking," objected Tom crossly, "even in kidding."
> "Hulking," insisted Daisy.[30]

When Daisy nags about her hurt knuckle and accuses Tom that he hurt it, the two resemble two children fighting: Tom says that he hates the word "hulking," and Daisy childishly repeats the word just to annoy Tom. Daisy, as the flapper, tries hard to be amusing and witty, and to accomplish it, she often utters childish, silly lines: "'Look at that,' she whispered, and then after a moment: 'I'd like to just get one of those pink clouds and put you in it and push you around'"[31]. She tries to be amusing by quickly jumping from subject to subject (first she mentions the longest day in the year, then tries to make plans for the following day, and then she mentions her knuckle), making it difficult for Nick to join in the absurd conversation and leading him to confess: "'You make me feel uncivilized, Daisy,' . . . 'Can't you talk about crops

[28] Judith Saunders, „The Great Gatsby: An Unusual Case of Mate Poaching", *American Classics: Evolutionary Perspectives*, 2018., pp. 138-174., according to H. Persson, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
[29] S. Kastberger, *op. cit.*, p. 37.
[30] F. S. Fitzgerald, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
[31] *Ibid.*, p. 101.

or something?'"[32] At the end of the charade, Daisy tries to convince Nick that she has a hard life, but Nick sees through her:

> The instant her voice broke off, ceasing to compel my attention, my belief, I felt the basic insincerity of what she had said. It made me uneasy, as though the whole evening had been a trick of some sort to exact a contributory emotion from me. I waited, and sure enough, in a moment she looked at me with an absolute smirk on her lovely face as if she had asserted her membership in a rather distinguished secret society to which she and Tom belonged.[33]

The words that emphasize Daisy's performance are "basic insincerity," "a trick," "an absolute smirk on her lovely face"[34]. Moreover, Tom jokingly warns Nick not to believe everything Daisy says, thus confirming that she is just performing.

Even though Daisy behaves as if she were innocent, infantile, childish, and funny (which are the characteristics of a flapper), it becomes increasingly evident that Daisy is purposefully performing the gender role of the flapper when she reveals her actual motivation behind it and utters maybe her only true words in the novel: "She told me it was a girl, and so I turned my head away and wept. 'All right,' I said, 'I'm glad it's a girl. And I hope she'll be a fool—that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool'"[35]. Daisy's words reveal that she is not as naïve as she pretends to be and expose her performance of the role of the flapper. "[B]ecause women of that era were not encouraged or allowed to pursue meaningful work of their own,"[36] Daisy believes a woman can lead a comfortable life only if she acts oblivious and ignorant.

Similar words are uttered by another of Scott Fitzgerald's female characters, the eighteen-year-old Eleanor Ramilly Savage (*This Side of Paradise*, 1920) who "illustrates the dangerous side of women who lack identity or purpose"[37]. Despite possessing beauty, money, or, in Daisy's case children,

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 15.
[33] *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.
[34] *Ibid.*
[35] *Ibid.*, p. 20.
[36] Sarah Beebe Fryer, *Fitzgerald's New Women: Harbingers of Change*, Michigan State University, 1988., PhD dissertation, p. 49.
[37] R. Sanderson, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

they lack "meaningful activity and commitment that would give [their] lives substance and foster [their] self-esteem"[38] such as "intellectual stimulation, or professional purpose"[39]. Like Daisy, Eleanor laments being born a girl.[40] Both Eleanor and Daisy accept their role as their husband's "rib" and complain about being useless but do nothing to change it. Daisy constantly wears the mask of a shallow, stupid woman and wants her daughter to do the same when she grows up because she believes it is the only way a woman can succeed in life. Daisy believes a woman has to be beautiful and dressed up; she has to act as if she is not smart enough and she has to marry into a wealthy family. Daisy's daughter is just a part of the show as well. The little girl who appears only once in the novel is all dressed up so that Daisy can "show her off" and, clothed in white just like Daisy and Jordan, implying that the girl will be the same as the two of them – they will teach her how to perform the gender role of a "beautiful little fool,"[41] which means performing as an infantile, charming flapper to get what she wants, but once someone is not needed anymore, they are easily forgotten as Daisy does not appear at Gatsby's funeral, showing that money and her lifestyle mean more to her than Gatsby.

The portrayal of Daisy and his other flappers shows that the flappers Scott Fitzgerald described in his works seem interesting, witty, and funny at first. However, their portrayal is far from positive. They feel that they depend on men and believe that their ultimate destiny is to get married. Considering that Fitzgerald "is widely recognized as an autobiographical novelist, and a 'chronicler . . . of the world in which he lived,'"[42] his fiction reflects "his intuitive awareness of the economic, emotional, and intellectual sanctions the American patriarchy imposed on many of the women of his Generation"[43]. Fitzgerald's female characters do not marry for love and the reason for that is that American women simply lived that way at the beginning of the twentieth century. Sarah Malfait explains: "Therefore, the American woman in the 1920s could hardly achieve the same things in life as a man did; often, she had

[38] S. Beebe Fryer, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
[39] *Ibid.*, p. 58.
[40] F. S. Fitzgerald, *This Side of Paradise*, Oxford University Press, 2009., p. 202.
[41] F. S. Fitzgerald, *op. cit.*, p. 17.
[42] Scott Donaldson (ed.), *Critical Essays on Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby"*, G. K. Hall and Company, 1984., accoording to S. Beebe Fryer, *op. cit.*, p. 33.
[43] S. Beebe Fryer, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

to choose between pursuing own career with the risk of ending up alone or giving up her independence by marrying"[44]. This view is supported by Beebe Fryer as well who explains that "as women, they know that any marriage they make must be a compromise, for their society does not yet allow women to establish their own independent identities: their fates are inextricably bound to the marital choices they make"[45]. Whereas women from the lower classes had to work, for women from the middle and upper classes their marital choice was the only thing that could get them a higher economic status. Fitzgerald fails to see that his flappers behave as pragmatics who marry for money because middle- and upper-class women had no career or job prospects in the 1920s. His flappers relied "on the power of money,"[46] however, this economic dependency only turned them into prisoners.

Fitzgerald's negative portrayal of flappers is reflected through the narrator, Nick Carraway who "does not recount the story in chronological order but presents the events as he chooses to"[47]. By choosing Nick as the narrator, the readers cannot hear Daisy's or Jordan's voice but need to believe Nick's words. After having dinner at Daisy and Tom's place, Nick feels disgusted; he fails to see what motivates Daisy's behavior. Fitzgerald's critiques of flappers possibly stem from his negative experiences with Ginevra King, his first love, and Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald, his wife, who were the ultimate flappers.

Zelda Fitzgerald, Scott Fitzgerald's wife who served as the model for Fitzgerald's female characters, lived most of her life in the shadow of her famous husband, struggling to succeed as a dancer and a writer, but her success came years after her death when *Save Me the Waltz* (1932), her only novel was published in London in 1953. *The Times Literary Supplement* "called the writing 'powerful and memorable', with 'qualities of earthiness and force,'"[48] but another interesting thing that the novel offers is an insight into the other side of the gender role of flapper and the position of women at the time:

[44] Sarah Malfait, „Zelda and F. Scott Fitzgerald, Partners or Rivals? Autobiografiction, the Madness Narrative and Gender in *Save Me the Waltz* and *Tender is the Night*", Faculty of Arts and Philosophy, Ghent University, master's thesis, 2012., p. 73.

[45] S. Beebe Fryer, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

[46] Aitana Castro Coego, „Not for Old Fogies: A Look at the Flapper in Fitzgerald's Literary Production", University of Santiago de Compostela – Faculty of Philology, 2018./2019., p. 37.

[47] S. Kastberger, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

[48] Harry T. Moore, „Preface to Save Me the Waltz", Southern Illinois University, 1966., fitzgerald.narod.ru/zelda/waltz-pref.html. 13. V. 2016.

> *Save Me the Waltz* is not simply the story of one woman. It's a novel that traces a shift in women's lives as more freedoms and opportunities were becoming available both in the United States and in Europe. Women were finding autonomy: economic, political, and sexual. And yet, the institutions of marriage and motherhood still exerted a strong pull. Alabama Knight embodies these contradictory impulses and desires. And while it is certainly true that Zelda confronted them in her own life, so too did a generation of women.[49]

Whereas Scott Fitzgerald's works offer an ambivalent view about flappers, Zelda Fitzgerald's novel offers a twist on her husband's writings. During Scott Fitzgerald's first stay in Montgomery, Zelda Fitzgerald showed him her diaries and Scott Fitzgerald "was so impressed by her writings that he embedded whole parts of her diaries into his fiction, particularly in his first two novels *This Side of Paradise* and *The Beautiful and Damned*, as well as in his short story 'The Jelly Bean'"[50]. The characters Zelda Fitzgerald saw in her husband's fiction were destructive for her: "For Zelda, the disruptive figure of Daisy Fay Buchanan or the damaged and damaging character of Nicole Warren Diver are not exclusively reflections of social anxieties or archetypes replicated from other works of fiction; they are *herself* as seen through the eyes of her husband"[51]. To reclaim herself, Zelda Fitzgerald wrote her own novel – a "*cri du coeur* of a woman who wants to exist on her own terms and who is claiming back her life experience as her own material"[52].

Zelda Fitzgerald was a flapper: as a young girl, she went out, attended dances, and dated American soldiers. While dating Scott Fitzgerald, Zelda Fitzgerald wrote to him: "And you see, Scott, I'll never be able to do anything because I'm much too lazy to care whether it's done or not . . . all I want is to be very young always and very irresponsible and to feel that my life is my

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49 Erin E. Templeton according to Marcela Lanius, „*Save Me the Waltz* and Zelda Fitzgerald's 'Visual Music': an Interview with Erin E. Templeton", Institute of Letters, Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, 2019., p. 2.

50 S. Kastberger, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

51 Helen Turner, *Gender, Madness and the Search for Identity in selected works of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, University of Essex, 2015., PhD dissertation, pp. 96-97.

52 Jacqueline Tavernier-Courbin, „Art as Woman's Response and Search: Zelda Fitzgerald's *Save Me the Waltz*", *The Southern Literary Journal*, Vol.11. No. 2, 1979., p. 24.

own,"[53] thus revealing her "flapperish" attitudes. As a young married woman, Zelda Fitzgerald continued with the flapper lifestyle: she and Scott Fitzgerald partied, jumped into fountains, rode on the rooftops of cabs, and skinny-dipped. Furthermore, when asked about Scott Fitzgerald's novels, Zelda Fitzgerald responded: "I love Scott's books and heroines. I like the ones that are like me! That's why I love Rosalind in *This Side of Paradise*."[54] In the article "What Became of the Flappers?" (1925), Zelda Fitzgerald writes positively about flappers: "The flapper springs full-grown, like Minerva, from the head of her once-déclassé father, Jazz, upon whom she lavishes affection and reverence . . . She is a direct result of the greater appreciation of beauty, youth, gaiety, and grace"[55]. Similarly, in her essay "Eulogy on the Flapper" (1925), Zelda Fitzgerald describes the flapper as follows: "the Flapper awoke from her lethargy of sub-deb-ism, bobbed her hair, put on her choicest pair of earrings and a great deal of audacity and rouge, and went into the battle. She flirted because it was fun to flirt and wore a one-piece bathing suit because she had a good figure"[56]. Zelda Fitzgerald regarded the gender role of the flapper so appealing that she expressed desire for her daughter to be a flapper as well:

> I'm raising my girl to be a flapper. I like the jazz generation, and I hope my daughter's generation will be jazzier. I want my girl to do as she pleases, be what she pleases. I think a woman gets more happiness out of being gay, light hearted, unconventional, mistress of her own fate, than out of a career that calls for hard work, intellectual pessimism and loneliness. I don't want Pat to be a genius. I want her to be a flapper, because flappers are brave and gay and beautiful.[57]

Considering this, the first sentence of *Save Me the Waltz*, Zelda Fitzgerald's Bildungsroman, characterizes Alabama, the protagonist, and her sisters as mischievous and notorious flappers: "'Those girls,' people said, 'think they

[53] Z. Fitzgerald according to Jackson R. Bryer – Cathy W. Barks (ed.), *Dear Scott, Dearest Zelda: The Love Letters of F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald*, Scribner, 2002., p. 61.

[54] Z. Fitzgerald according to Matthew Bruccoli – Judith S. Baughman (ed.), *"What a 'Flapper Novelist' Thinks of His Wife." Conversations with F. Scott Fitzgerald*, University Press of Mississippi, 2004., p. 47.

[55] Z. Fitzgerald according to Matthew Bruccoli (ed.), *The Collected Writings of Zelda Fitzgerald*, Scribner, 1991., pp. 397-398.

[56] *Ibid*., p. 391.

[57] Z. Fitzgerald according to Nancy Milford, *Zelda: A Biography*, Harper, 2011., pp. 125-126.

can do anything and get away with it'"[58]. Unlike their meek Victorian mother Millie, the sisters are a "troublesome brood"[59] who have a hard time obeying their strict and patriarchal father Judge Biggs. From her young age, Alabama, the youngest of the three, shows a defiant attitude which foreshadows the future conflict between her and society's traditional gender expectations:

> "When you're going out with boys, you can't go back to short dresses."
> "I'm not going out with boys in the day-time—ever,' she said. 'I am going to play in the day and go out at night."[60]

As a teenager, Alabama falls into typical flapper behavior as she focuses mostly on her dresses, the makeup, boys, wild parties, and escaping her strict father's rules. Yet, Alabama also dwells on more serious issues, which is evident in the scene when she expresses her dissatisfaction with traditional gender roles by complaining to her father that she is "so tired of just sitting on the porch and having dates and watching things rot"[61]. Alabama further disagrees with her father who espouses the Victorian attitude that a husband should be a provider and a wife a housewife:

> "I'm glad she's going to marry Acton," he said inscrutably.
> . . .
> "I'm not glad," Alabama said decisively. "Harlan's hair goes up like a Spanish king. I'd rather Joey married him."
> "People can't live off the hair of Spanish kings," her father answered.[62]

Unlike Fitzgerald's flappers, Alabama is not pragmatic who marries for money but a romantic who disobeys her father by marrying David, a painter and a man who is not a "good match."

Early on, Alabama realizes the importance of financial independence – a woman can be free only if she is away from her family and earning her own money:

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[58] Zelda Fitzgerald, *Save Me the Waltz*, Kindle edition, p. 3.
[59] *Ibid.*, p. 4.
[60] *Ibid.*, p. 26.
[61] *Ibid.*, p. 47.
[62] *Ibid.*, p. 36.

> "I want to go to New York, Mamma," said Alabama as they read Dixie's letters.
> "What on earth for?"
> "To be my own boss."[63]

Independence is one of the main themes of the novel, reflecting the social context of the 1920s when women left their parents' home and started earning their own money. Alabama wants to be independent too, believing that, when far away from her parents, she would be free: "Alabama lay thinking in room number twenty-one-o nine of the Biltmore Hotel that her life would be different with her parents so far away"[64]. Bound by society's gender expectations, Alabama cannot achieve her independence without at least partial reliance on this society's gender norms, i.e., a husband. David Knight's surname is an indicator of the role he tries to play in the novel – he is supposed to set Alabama free from the imposing Judge Biggs: "A knight is a young man whose job it is to rescue princesses from their imprisonments. David Knight promises to take Alabama away with him into a world without restraint, without fortresses; a world in which law plays little part. It is the artistic world of New York."[65] Yet, Alabama's plans fail as every man, starting from her own father, and including David, her husband, tries to deprive her of her independence. Alabama moves with David to New York, but she only moves "from her father's house to the proprietorship of David Knight"[66]. Thus, "Alabama Biggs grows up within a world severely circumscribed first by the authority of her father, Judge Austin Biggs, and later by her husband, painter David Knight . . . Alabama finds in David both an escape from [her] home and the power of another male authority"[67]. Whereas David supposedly wants her to be a "wife-companion" – a woman equal to him in everything, he also limits her freedom.

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63 *Ibid.*, p. 22.
64 *Ibid.*, p. 63.
65 N. Milford, *op. cit.*, p. 233.
66 Linda Wagner-Martin, „'Save Me the Waltz': An Assessment in Craft", *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, vol. 12, no. 3, p. 201-209, accoording to Elisa López Padilla, „From Muse to Artist: Zelda, the 'Other' Fitzgerald", thesis, Faculty of Humanities, University of Oviedo, 2020., p. 22.
67 Mary E. Wood, „A Wizard Cultivator: Zelda Fitzgerald's *Save Me the Waltz* as Asylum Autobiography", *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, vol. 11, no. 2, 1992., p. 254.

This conflict is already foreshadowed in David's letters to Alabama from New York when David expresses his traditional attitudes: "oh, my dear, you are my princess and I'd like to keep you shut forever in an ivory tower for my private delectation"[68]. The same words, written by Scott Fitzgerald in his letters to Zelda Fitzgerald, infuriated and disturbed Zelda Fitzgerald who replied: "Scott, you've been sweet about writing – but I'm so tired of being told that you 'used to wonder why they kept princesses in towers' – you've written that verbatim, in your last *six* letters!"[69] Similarly, Alabama objects to David's idea of treating woman like a fairy-tale princess shut in an ivory tower but she conforms to his idea of their relationship as David is not as domineering and controlling as her father. Alabama's response to David's words unveils her awareness of men and women belonging to "distinct social groups, constituted in 'concrete, historically changing—and generally unequal—social relationships'"[70]. Alabama objects David's metaphors, however, Erin Templeton observes an even stronger objection coming from David and Alabama's daughter Bonnie: when David says "Then can I be King of the Castle . . . and cut off your head if you make a mistake?"[71] Bonnie replies: "You . . . are a prisoner, and I have pulled out your tongue so you cannot complain—but I am good to you anyway"[72]. In Bonnie's reply Templeton sees a "generational feminist progress"[73]:

> Whereas it took Alabama three letters to express her unhappiness at this characterization of herself as kept object isolated from the rest of the world, and even then her response was a docile question, her daughter has no such reservations. Bonnie doesn't ask; Bonnie commands. Recasting herself in the role of King, she wastes no time subjugating her father, and not only seizing the throne, but also foreclosing any possibility of complaint through an act of violence.[74]

[68] Z. Fitzgerald, *op. cit.*, p. 60.
[69] Z. Fitzgerald according toH. Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 97.
[70] Barrie Thorne, "Gender . . . How Is It Best Conceptualized?", 1980., unpublished manuscript, according to in Candace West and Don Zimmerman, "Doing Gender," Gender and Society, vol. 1, no. 2, 1987., p. 129.
[71] Z. Fitzgerald, *op. cit.*, p. 293.
[72] *Ibid.*
[73] Erin E. Templeton u M. Lanius, „*Save Me the Waltz* and Zelda Fitzgerald's 'Visual Music': an Interview with Erin E. Templeton", p. 6.
[74] *Ibid.*, p. 5.

Whereas Bonnie's words show determination and strength, Alabama exhibits a constant "ambivalence between dependence and independence"[75]. As a typical flapper, Alabama enjoys fighting society's norms and expectations, yet, when it comes to more serious issues such as finances and workplace, it seems that she gives in as evident in her revelation to her daughter Bonnie: "I am so outrageously clever that I believe I could be a whole world to myself if I didn't like living in Daddy's better"[76]. Alabama is perfectly conscious of her abilities and knows she is smart enough to succeed on her own, but still chooses to be David's "rib" and live in his shadow because she is aware of women's status quo in society. Although she knows women are capable of great things, she temporarily conforms to public opinion that their place is at home:

> "Sure. A woman's place is with the wine," David approved emphatically. "There is art to be undone in the world."
> "But you're not going to work all the time, are you?"
> "I hope so."
> "It's a man's world," Alabama sighed, measuring herself on a sunbeam.[77]

Similar worries were expressed by Zelda Fitzgerald, too: "I suppose I will spend the rest of my life torn between the desire to master life and a feeling that is, au fond, a contemptuous enemy"[78].

Due to this feeling of lack of the purpose in life, Alabama, just like Fitzgerald's flappers, feels bored and useless: "David worked on his frescoes; Alabama was much alone. 'What'll we do, David,' she asked, 'with ourselves?' David said she couldn't always be a child and have things provided for her to do"[79]. Her question echoes Daisy's desperate cry in *The Great Gatsby*: "'All right,' said Daisy. 'What'll we plan?' She turned to me helplessly. 'What do people plan?'"[80] Unlike Scott Fitzgerald, Zelda Fitzgerald offers Alabama's side of the story and reveals what causes Alabama to feel that way, alluding to society

[75] E. López Padilla, "From Muse to Artist: Zelda, the 'Other' Fitzgerald", p. 23.
[76] Z. Fitzgerald, *op. cit.*, p. 129.
[77] *Isto*, str. 126.
[78] Z. Fitzgerald according to E. López Padilla, "From Muse to Artist: Zelda, the 'Other' Fitzgerald", p. 215.
[79] Z. Fitzgerald, *op. cit.*, p. 127.
[80] F. S. Fitzgerald, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

as the one that denies women careers and ambitions other than family life: "Due to the fact, however, that she was raised in a traditional Southern family where women were not necessarily expected to work in the household, or to raise children on their own without external help, Alabama does not have many skills she can rely on."[81] Without a career, Alabama feels less worthy in comparison to the others: "Comparing herself with Miss Axton's elegance, she hated her body – her arms reminded her of a Siberian branch railroad. Compared to Miss Douglas' elimination, her Patou dress felt too big along the seams. Miss Douglas made her feel that there was a cold cream deposit at the neckline."[82]

Alabama's dissatisfaction grows, but David seems to be bothered by her constant wish to achieve and change something in her life:

> "Poor girl," he said, "I understand. It must be awful just waiting around eternally."
> "Aw, shut up!" she answered ungratefully. She lay silent for a long time.
> "David," she said sharply.
> "Yes."
> "I am going to be as famous a dancer as there are blue veins over the white marble of Miss Gibbs."
> "Yes, dear," agreed David noncommittally.[83]

After David's fling with an actress, Alabama decides to become a ballet dancer in order to "bring order to her chaotic, lonely existence"[84]. When she chooses to start a career in ballet and achieve independence, Alabama surpasses Fitzgerald's flappers: "David's success was his own—he had earned his right to be critical—Alabama felt that she had nothing to give to the world and no way to dispose of what she took away"[85]. According to Jacqueline Tavernier-Courbin, this decision is "a massive attempt at expressing herself, at driving out of herself the deep-seated resentment aroused by her situation, an

[81] S. Kastberger, *op. cit.*, p. 65.
[82] Z. Fitzgerald, *op. cit.*, p. 166.
[83] *Ibid.*, p. 185.
[84] Sally Cline, *Zelda Fitzgerald: Her Voice in Paradise*, Arcade Publishing, 2002., according to E. López Padilla, *op. cit.*, p. 23.
[85] Z. Fitzgerald, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

effort to bring meaning and order into her life and to retrieve herself"[86]. Ballet seems to be beneficial for Alabama's self-esteem as

> the sentence structure begins to seem more purposefully clear, offering a direct contrast to the syntax at the beginning of the novel. The more Alabama pushes herself in the ballet studio, the more confident, witty, and even egotistical she becomes. As Alabama's confidence in herself as a ballerina grows, so does her language.[87]

She practices ballet for eight hours a day and due to her ambition becomes estranged from her unsupportive husband and friends. Through dancing, Zelda Fitzgerald and Alabama sought personal achievement, something that was completely theirs and set themselves free from this subordinate role. On her way to independence, Alabama meets many obstacles – her unsupportive husband being the biggest among them. David's discontent with Alabama's dancing can be seen many times throughout the novel when he says sentences like this: "Are you under the illusion that you will ever be good at this stuff?"[88] These parts of the novel mirror Zelda and Scott Fitzgerald's conflicts regarding Zelda Fitzgerald's dancing and the dissatisfaction it caused to Scott Fitzgerald who believed she was neglecting her motherly duties: "Because Zelda finds her passion in something other than motherhood and serving her husband, her husband claims she is in not her 'right mind'"[89].

Unlike Zelda Fitzgerald who refused the offer to dance in Naples, Alabama fulfils Zelda Fitzgerald's dreams and accepts the offer showing the independence Fitzgerald's flappers lack. However, she suffers an injury and has to give up ballet. Zelda Fitzgerald "used the metaphor of the physical breakdown to substitute for a psychological one"[90] which she experienced in real life. Sarah Malfait interprets Zelda Fitzgerald's decision to exclude her mental illness from her novel as influenced by the doctors' advice to protect her against prejudiced readership and Scott Fitzgerald's prohibition from mentioning

[86] J. Tavernier-Courbin, *op. cit.*, p. 30.
[87] Caitlin McGraw, „Consumed by the Broken Staccato: A Feminist Reading of Zelda Fitzgerald's *Save Me the Waltz*", SEWSA Conference, Winthrop University, 2016., p. 5.
[88] Z. Fitzgerald, *op. cit.*, p. 196.
[89] S. Cline, *op. cit.*, according to C. McGraw, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
[90] S. Malfait, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

schizophrenia since it was the theme of his upcoming novel *Tender Is the Night* (1934).

The physical injury forces Alabama to leave dancing and she is again thrown back in the male-dominated world. Tavernier-Courbin argues that Zelda Fitzgerald could not let her heroine succeed permanently because of "her belief that only an extraordinarily strong woman could overcome the overwhelming odds of womanhood, marriage, social pressure, education, and motherhood in the pursuit of art"[91] which again reflects the social context of the time that deemed it unacceptable for a married woman to pursue her own dreams. At the end of the novel, Alabama is re-labelled as just a famous painter's wife. The novel hints that "the Knights will continue as they have been, the novel points to no fresh departures for they believe in none, and it gives little hope of a brighter future for them"[92]. The last words spoken by Alabama, where she refers to the emptying of the ashtray, hint that she does not feel alright: "It's very expressive of myself. I just lump everything in a great heap which I have labeled 'the past,' and, have thus emptied this deep reservoir that was once myself, I am ready to continue."[93] Alabama's restoring to her previous role of a painter's wife Malfait interprets as reflecting "Zelda's pessimism when it comes to the overcoming of gender limitations."[94] Alabama's pessimism can be noticed at the end of the novel when the guests are leaving the party – Alabama says goodbye through a wordplay with the words *dead* and *death*:[95]

> "We've talked you to death."
> "You must be dead with packing."
> "It's death to a party to stay till digestion sets in."
> "I'm dead, my dear. It's been wonderful!"[96]

Erin Templeton does not see the ending as bleak; she believes that at the end of the novel, Alabama "has achieved a sense of self that is not dependent on her marriage or her daughter though she reclaims the roles of both wife

[91] J. Tavernier-Courbin, *op. cit.*, p. 42.
[92] N. Milford, *op. cit.*, p. 246.
[93] Z. Fitzgerald, *op. cit.*, p. 328.
[94] S. Malfait, *op. cit.*, p. 88.
[95] E. López Padilla, *op. cit.*, p. 25.
[96] Z. Fitzgerald, *op. cit.*, p. 326.

and mother after her dancing career is prematurely ended by blood poisoning and tendon surgery"[97]. In her opinion, Alabama made certain progress after all – not just her progress, but a progress of a generation of women.

What is clear is that, in her novel, Zelda Fitzgerald offers her point of view on flappers that significantly differs from her husband's portrayal of them. In *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (1978), Judith Fetterley argues that "female characters in male fiction do not, indeed cannot, articulate female experience but rather are a reflection of the desires, anxieties and fears of the male author. As a result, all readers, be they men or women, must read Western literature as 'men' as the experience of men is presented in fiction as the experience of all humanity."[98] Male and female experiences differ, which is indeed evident in the way Zelda and Scott Fitzgerald portray flappers in their fiction. Furthermore, female characters in men-authored fiction often "present a specifically *male view*, and in these particular cases, a threatened male view of their times. It is in their female characters, created not experienced, that the nature of their fears and wishes will be found."[99]

In Francis Scott Fitzgerald's works, Zelda's diaries were interpreted from a male perspective and "enshrined in a male text"[100]. In her novel, Zelda Fitzgerald reclaimed her diaries and became the narrator of her story. The flappers that Scott Fitzgerald based on the diaries of his wife are fun, witty, and charming, but also manipulative and materialistic. Daisy from his novel *The Great Gatsby* (1925) is a prime example of this: Daisy is all that – she is beautiful, charming, fun, witty, supposedly innocent, and naïve, but the novel exposes Daisy as manipulating everyone with her charm and her seductive voice to keep her place as an upper-class woman. The reason why Scott Fitzgerald offered this ambivalent view on flappers could be that he was influenced by society itself and its changing gender roles. Scott Fitzgerald, an excellent chronicler of his time, recognized the changes in the gender sphere, yet he was not ready to accept it. He both admired and resented the new type of woman. Even though flapper was a different type of woman who chose to

[97] Erin E. Templeton according to M. Lanius, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
[98] Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction*, vol. 247, Indiana Univ Press, 1978, according to H. Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 93.
[99] Dolores Barracano Schmidt, „The Great American Bitch", *College English*, 32, no. 8, 1971., as citated in u H. Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 96.
[100] H. Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

party, smoke, and drink to prove she was different than the previous generation of women, it needs to be taken into account that women of that time still had fewer job prospects and career possibilities than men which possibly led to them being described as materialistic and manipulative in Fitzgerald's works.

Whereas Scott Fitzgerald offered quite a negative view of flappers by describing them as being dependent on men and deceiving, in Zelda Fitzgerald's novel, flappers embodied in Alabama and her sisters are women who try hard to make a change in their lives. However, they end up beaten by a controlling patriarchal monster – society itself. Alabama is torn between independence and dependence: as a child and a teenager, Alabama dreamt of becoming independent, yet, as a grown-up, Alabama succumbs to living in David's shadow and of his money, as it seems not only easier but what everyone expects her to do. She eventually finds the courage to fight these expectations but fails and is re-labeled as the famous painter's wife. Zelda Fitzgerald uses the gender role of the flapper that allows women to be daring and successful as an attempt to break from the shackles of society, however the attempt is cut at the core by the patriarchal society. Even Zelda Fitzgerald's attempt at providing her own story about her own life failed as the critics and readers liked Scott Fitzgerald's works more than hers: "The Zelda Fitzgerald that interested the reader, as the failure of *Save Me the Waltz* proved, was not the *real* Alabama Beggs, but rather the *ideal* Rosalind Connage, Gloria Gilbert, Daisy Buchanan or Nicole Diver – and all the stereotypes that came with them and which created the myth around a consumed Zelda"[101]. Considering the subject of flappers, a conclusion can be made that both versions have some truth in them – flappers seemed fun, charming, witty, and carefree; they yearned for freedom and independence, but were often unable to reach it – they were women who just began to discover the possibilities they had and started finding courage to achieve their dreams.

[101] E. López Padilla, *op. cit.*, p. 26.