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**Asymptotic Autobiography:
Fairy Tales as Narrative Map in the Writing of Zelda Fitzgerald**

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Dissertation

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In memory of
Hope Hale Davis
1903 - 2004

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**Asymptotic Autobiography:
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When a writer, usually a woman, uses fairy tales as a veil through which to narrate a story of her life, I call this practice asymptotic autobiography. In mathematics, the asymptote is a straight line that a curve approaches increasingly closely, but never actually touches. I define “asymptotic autobiography” as a term for discussing any personal narrative that deliberately employs fiction in order to tell truth. In this inquiry, I examine the use of fairy tale language in giving voice to women writers’ autobiographical representations, using Zelda Fitzgerald’s novel and letters as the focus for my analysis. My research and critical analysis will examine how *Save Me the Waltz*, which Zelda Fitzgerald wrote while she was a psychiatric patient in the Phipps Clinic, uses fairy tales to provide a mapping of the many performances that autobiographical selfhood entails. By experimenting with open-ended fairy tale conventions instead of

being limited by clinical truths, and by contextualizing her personal history in the realm of the imaginary, Fitzgerald removes her story from the psychiatric ward and places it safely in legend.

The first three chapters of this dissertation show how, in sequence, the autobiographical self becomes free through the use of fairy tales in three stages: once the autobiographer has worked to separate herself from being bound by illness or clinical reality (Chapter One), she is free to make the decision of which self or selves she wishes to narrate and perform (Chapter Two); only once she has established her sense of self can the autobiographer then locate her plot, her map, and her narrative (Chapter Three). In Chapter Four, I offer an example of asymptotic autobiography in the form of a one-person play script that I wrote and performed about Zelda Fitzgerald's life and hospitalization, using as a frame the fairy tale "The Swan Maiden." This hybrid essay-performance combines the play script itself with personal writing of my own in which I describe the difficulties I had approaching and performing the rich material of Zelda's life.

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Preface

Autobiography of the Quester

I am a woman writer of fairy tale adaptations, autobiography, and literary criticism; I come to this project with both a scholar's and a writer's perspective. I have experienced firsthand the need for veiled autobiography, and I have noticed it in the work of many women writers: a language struggle to cloak the personal in some other genre, such as the mythic or the folkloric.

Fairy tales and autobiography were my primary interests as an undergraduate English major at Harvard. I took multiple classes on folklore and fairy tales: Joseph Harris's Southern Folklore, Simon Bronner's American Folklore, and a seminar with Maria Tatar on Fairy Tales and Children's Literature, among others. For four years during and after college I was a member of an ongoing seminar of local memoir writers led by Hope Hale Davis, and I grew interested in the half-fiction, half-truth ways through which women portray themselves as characters in writing. During my junior year I conducted an independent study on semi-autobiographical literature written by mentally ill women, including Zelda Fitzgerald, Anne Sexton, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman. The following year, for my Bachelor's honors thesis, I wrote a memoir.

At Georgetown University, where I received my Master's Degree, I approached the study of fairy tales and autobiography through the lenses of performance and critical

theory. I presented a conference paper on the fairy tale “The Frog King,” in which I examined the heroine’s motive for throwing the frog against the wall (a natural response to an unfamiliar beast in one’s bed), and questioned the ways that the Grimms’ version—with this murderous impulse of the princess—has given way to a more popular version where the frog is transformed by a kiss. My MA thesis, titled “Manufacturing Zelda,” examined the ways in which Zelda Fitzgerald used fairy tales to manufacture her own image separate from the images her husband and psychiatrists had created of and for her. I drew conclusions linking fairy tales with early twentieth-century advertisements, and the fairy tale subject with the psychoanalytic subject. I analyzed Fitzgerald’s frenzied dancing career in the terms of fairy tale allusions about the dangerous, villainous women who dance—often to death in red hot shoes—as punishment at the fairy tale’s end.

Thus, as I complete this dissertation, I will have spent ten years working with fairy tales and the autobiographical writing process, and over ten years thinking about the work of Zelda Fitzgerald. I have seen her artwork in a traveling exhibition called “Zelda by Herself”; I have visited the house in Montgomery where she and Scott lived, briefly, in the early 1930s; I have read her published letters, a number of the many biographies about her, and the available literary criticism that addresses her writing. Although many women writers before and after Zelda Fitzgerald have used fairy tales in ways that could be conducive to this inquiry, my choice to look at Zelda Fitzgerald has to do first with the fact that her work has much to offer contemporary scholarship, and second with the fact that her life was extremely public, thus allowing a biographical backdrop against which her writing can be analyzed. She was not only a public figure in the gossip columns of the

1920s, or in her husband Scott's liberal use of her life in his fiction, or even in her medical records and public breakdowns, but also in her own attempt to become a marketable public figure in art: a dancer, a writer, and a painter. Although we as scholars must be careful not to conflate author with protagonist, the case of Zelda Fitzgerald issues an invitation to conflate, one that would be irresponsible to ignore. For this reason, the lines between her facts and her fictions are easier to decipher, making the quest to study how her autobiography and her fairy tales informed each other a valuable and not purely speculative one.

For many years, Zelda has been viewed primarily as an inspiration for Scott's work, her work an appendage to his. The following description, written by Ruth Prigozy, the Executive Director of the F. Scott Fitzgerald Society, is a characteristic summary of the public perceptions of husband and wife: "Fitzgerald is recognized as a genius, the author of perhaps the greatest—and certainly the best known and loved—American novel of the twentieth century. Zelda is a tragic figure: a woman who throughout her life tried to become an artist, but was thwarted by uncontrollable personal demons."¹ He was a genius, she was a tragic figure. Even the fact of Scott being referred to as "Fitzgerald" and Zelda being called "Zelda" is a telling detail about the general attitudes toward their lives. The intimacy of a first name—Zelda—assumes a warrant for familiarity; the respect commanded by the use of a last name—Fitzgerald—assumes a scholarly distance.

¹ <http://www.zeldafitzgerald.com/fitzgeralds/index.asp>. This website is the homepage for the 2004 musical "Beautiful and Damned," written by Kit Hesketh Harvey and with music and lyrics by Les Reed and Roger Cook. The rest of the website provides biographical information and further sources about the Fitzgeralds.

The dearth of serious criticism about Zelda Fitzgerald's writing creates a mandate for this inquiry. The critic Jacqueline Tavernier-Courbin, who in 1979 described Zelda's novel as simultaneously a response (to an unhappy marriage and personal situation) and a search (for a woman's identity) begins an article with this pronouncement: "Zelda Fitzgerald's novel, *Save Me the Waltz*, published in October 1932, is still read nowadays, as it was then, for the wrong reason—that is, because Zelda was the wife of F. Scott Fitzgerald" (22). Since then, Matthew Bruccoli has published an excellent 1991 edition of Zelda's collected works, bringing it back into bookstores. Yet still Tavernier-Courbin's ominous pronouncement rings true.

Zelda Fitzgerald's writing exhibits her understanding of the artistry of her life material, especially as used by Scott. Her writing, as Mary Gordon has pointed out in an Introduction to Matthew Bruccoli's 1991 edition of *The Collected Writings of Zelda Fitzgerald*, "assumes ... a male audience" (xxiii). It is as if she writes herself into fragments to be picked up and rewritten by some (male) other. But her writing goes deeper than that. Zelda, like Scott, raises the facts of her life up for examination, and her observing judgment, both of herself and of her world, is canny and fierce. To this point, Tavernier-Courbin observes, "Even a casual reading of *Save Me the Waltz* reveals how lonely and frustrating the role of the light-hearted wife of a genius was to a woman who was creative and brilliant in her own right and who, in time, found that she desperately wanted to prove herself" (26). It is not only biographers who make this observation. Zelda Fitzgerald observed it first, and committed it to writing. Her obvious conflicts regarding the life she had committed herself to, her depiction of the unglamorous side

effects of being somebody else's fiction, her awareness of herself as a performed, manufactured object of art, are altogether startling to read.

Many books state as their premise the desire to address a writer whose work has been seriously under-noted, or un-canonized, or in any number of different ways ignored. I recognize that it is a cliché to say that I am writing this book to give Zelda's work the degree of scholarly attention it deserves. "Deserves" is a scoundrel of a word, for one thing—the markings of being "deserving" slip into new shapes with every new era of scholars and readers. We all know that Zelda Fitzgerald's life was a fairy tale that ended badly, and to keep bringing her to the scholarly banquet table as someone deserving of a bigger serving seems futile and, frankly, boring. With so many excellent past and present writers commanding critical attention, what good (one could ask) is it to dig back into old, forgotten writers who—if they were any good in the first place—would likely have been recognized already?

In the case of Zelda Fitzgerald, the reason is simple: based on the legends of her life, she has drawn what Matthew Bruccoli has called "a Zelda cult" (*Romantic Egoists*, 241). Her name commands worldwide recognition, although few people are even aware that she wrote or painted. Fan websites and blogs offer tributes to Zelda, many operating under the assumption that most devotees wish to imitate and "become" Zelda.² A number of books have been written about her life, starting in 1970 with Nancy Milford's *Zelda*, and continuing through today. Zelda Fitzgerald's artwork has generated recent attention

² For two out of many examples of such sites, see <http://www.angelfire.com/sk/snitfit/Zelda.html> or <http://goodyzelda.blogspot.com/search/label/About%20this%20Blog>

as well; Eleanor Lanahan curated a travelling art exhibition, “Zelda by Herself: The Art of Zelda Fitzgerald,” which has attempted to raise awareness of her artistic talents and endeavors since its first gallery stop in 2001. It is still touring the United States today, in 2009. For over three decades, scholars have piped up to redeem Zelda’s writing from obscurity, and also, often, from prejudice. Some of these scholars are interested in surrealism, dance, or women’s mental health; others’ interests are simpler: these scholars believe that the just desserts of a life—in other words, the right to tell it as a story—should belong to the person living it.

In summary, the difference between Zelda and most other salvaged-from-obscurity women writers is that we have all *heard* of her, and have likely formed about her some sort of opinion. Mary Gordon neatly carves these opinion-givers into 2 camps: “the camp that sees her as a formless, scattershot nothing who made a great writer’s last days miserable with her pretensions and demands, or the camp that is sure she wrote his best work, and blames him for her disintegration” (xviii). This dissertation attempts to stand between those two dialectical camps and address Zelda’s writing without comparing it to Scott’s. Many books and articles have addressed her life in conjunction with Scott’s writing, and a number of scholarly articles have looked closely at her writing on its own. As of yet, no book-length work of criticism has attempted to look at her writing as its own body of work with its own internal logic, and so I offer this project, this inquiry into the artistic choices of her writing career, to fill that gap at last.

Introduction

Asymptotic Autobiography as Critical Tool

IN 1925, ZELDA FITZGERALD SUBMITTED THIS ENTRY to a compilation entitled *Favorite Recipes of Famous Women*:

“Breakfast”

See if there is any bacon, and if there is, ask the cook which pan to fry it in. Then ask if there are any eggs, and if so try and persuade the cook to poach two of them. It is better not to attempt toast, as it burns very easily. Also in the case of bacon, do not turn the fire too high, or you will have to get out of the house for a week.

Serve preferably on china plates, though gold or wood will do if handy.

(Fitzgerald 401)³

This sly and mocking “recipe” may appear to be an unlikely beginning for a dissertation about Zelda Fitzgerald’s use of fairy tales in her writing. After all, fairy tales are arguably understood for their celebration of domestic wizardry, feminine sincerity, and salvation through humble efforts. In this entry, Fitzgerald⁴ celebrates the opposite: for her

³ Unless otherwise noted, all textual citations using the name “Fitzgerald” come from Matthew Brucoli’s edition of *The Collected Writings of Zelda Fitzgerald*.

⁴ On the matter of naming: Using the author’s last name is traditional in scholarly writing, but so many writers refer to Zelda Fitzgerald by first name because her husband Scott seems to have the general

participation in an anthology of women's domestic texts, the easy how-to of recipes, Fitzgerald disavows any serious effort in the kitchen. She advises her readers to cook only what is available already, with the implication that if there are no eggs or bacon, then, too bad—no breakfast. Furthermore, Fitzgerald suggests that the only effort this famous wife makes is to ask other people to cook for her—casually citing kitchen fires as a likely result of her own previous dalliance with domesticity. Lastly, and perhaps most significantly, she ends her “recipe” with instructions on how to present the food: beautifully, on expensive plates. What this recipe turns out to be is ultimately a triple performance: first, of the possibility of extravagant presentation without any prior effort, blasé beauty for the price of nothing; secondly, of the certainty that comes with strategic passivity, hinting that if she does not do the work, then someone else will. Finally, this recipe performs a refusal to cooperate with the singular, coherent role she was being asked to play: of famous male author's helpmeet.

Although Fitzgerald presents herself in writing as a textured mosaic of performances, she does not present her fictional heroines as particularly complex; rather, these women gleefully perform as currency in exchanges between men, understanding that men will pay them, in marriage or attention, for their company. In her 1922 essay “Eulogy on the Flapper,” Fitzgerald writes that a woman should have “the right to experiment with herself as a transient, poignant figure who will be dead tomorrow” (392). This consciousness of how a woman must distance herself from herself, being at

monopoly on their shared last name. In this dissertation, I will refer to her as “Fitzgerald” or “Zelda Fitzgerald,” unless the context calls for an exception.

once actor and observer, is a guiding impulse in Fitzgerald's writing. Much like the female characters in the novels written by her husband, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Zelda Fitzgerald's heroines place themselves on display, trying on different costumes and personalities, performing for the simple fun of having a pretty young self as an instrument. The final line of her essay "Eulogy on the Flapper" asserts that flappers—the muses in the literature written by both Fitzgeralds—"are merely applying business methods to being young" (393). There is a marked two-dimensionality in Zelda Fitzgerald's female protagonists, which is a problematic construct because she is straightforward in basing them all on herself. She masks their deeper emotions and self-perceptions under a veneer of mundane vanities.

In this way, Fitzgerald as a writer never escapes the motif of the female self as a work of art, a performance—which is fitting because performing a work of art was her first and primary public role. With the publication of F. Scott Fitzgerald's first novel, *This Side of Paradise* (1920), Zelda Fitzgerald became a legend—both as a heroine and as a famous author's wife. Scott said in a 1921 interview, "I married the heroine of my stories," as if the heroine existed first in his mind and then he found her incarnation when he met Zelda.⁵ But biographers since have discarded this statement in favor of the belief that Scott's female protagonists were all actually representations of Zelda that evolved throughout his life with her. Kendall Taylor writes in a 2001 biography of Zelda: "[Scott] did not just base his heroines on Zelda. He copied from her letters and diaries, watched

⁵ This interview was featured in *Shadowland* in January 1921 and excerpted in Nancy Milford's *Zelda* (77).

her intently, continually wrote down her comments, and endlessly analyzed and dissected what she said” (370). Taylor concludes: “In effect Zelda was Scott’s co-author” (370).

Zelda was no beautiful little fool; she understood this borrowing and at first she appeared to enjoy perpetuating the myth that her husband had made of her. In early articles she wrote for popular magazines, as well as in the recipe cited above, she advertised her status as Scott Fitzgerald’s careless and expensive wife. When Zelda was asked in 1922 by the *New York Tribune* to write a review to help advertise Scott’s second novel, *The Beautiful and Damned*, she wrote: “To begin with, everyone must buy this book for the following aesthetic reasons: first, because I know where there is the cutest cloth-of-gold dress for only three hundred dollars in a store on Forty-second Street...” (Fitzgerald 387). Later in the review, entitled “Friend Husband’s Latest,” Zelda mischievously points out that the book’s binding makes it suitable for being read in the bathtub and dropped, and she adds that she recognizes some of her old letters in the book as those of Gloria, the heroine, adding: “Mr. Fitzgerald—I believe that is how he spells his name—seems to believe that plagiarism begins at home” (388). Given the nature of both Fitzgeralds’ early writing, it is no wonder, then, that the majority of Fitzgerald criticism looks at *his* writing and *her* life.

And yet, the combined forces of age, maturity, and illness resulted in Zelda Fitzgerald’s evolution into a more earnest writer; in the writing from her early thirties, she depicts both herself and her work in ballet more seriously, while still keeping up her veils. Her single novel *Save Me the Waltz* (1932) is essentially an autobiography with minor efforts to obscure her facts with fiction. The minor characters have only slightly

different names from their factual counterparts: the heroine's mother is Millie (Fitzgerald's was Minnie), the heroine's daughter is Bonnie (Scottie), and the heroine's father is Judge Austin Beggs (Judge Anthony Sayre). The novel's protagonist is Alabama Beggs, a smart and beautiful Southern belle who enjoys being watched, puzzled over, admired, and who marries a famous creative man. The childhoods of Alabama and Zelda are almost identical, and the two women inhabit and visit the same places; the major events of their lives are parallel. The people who were close to Zelda Fitzgerald recognized the truthfulness of the novel. Zelda's sister Rosalind Smith wrote: "The figures in her story whom I knew, are drawn with keen perception, particularly those of our parents. To be with them again I have only to read the book" (Taylor 260).⁶ In both Fitzgerald's life and her novel, the heroine is a consummate performer; in both stories, the woman's body fails. Alabama's journey in *Save Me the Waltz* is one of finding meaning in life and in herself—both typical autobiographical elements.

Yet the novel escapes being autobiography. Not only does it change character names, but it also avoids completely the topic of mental illness, which plagued Zelda Fitzgerald for almost half of her life. Instead of chronicling her own personal struggle with mental illness induced by overzealous ballet practice, the novel chronicles Alabama's struggle with *physical* illness—also induced by overzealous ballet practice. Another problematic element of the autobiographical nature of *Save Me the Waltz* is that it is written in the third person. It seems one more way through which Fitzgerald is

⁶ Kendall Taylor points out many such examples of the novel's autobiographical qualities in *Sometimes Madness is Wisdom* (260-263). The quote from Rosalind Smith is from an unpublished document in the Mayfield Collection at the University of Alabama (401).

protecting herself and her protagonist from utter transparency. And finally, the major way Fitzgerald veils her story from pure transparency is through the frequent use of fairy tale references, plot points, and language.

In the writing of Zelda Fitzgerald, fairy tale motifs surface everywhere—in her essays, her stories, her letters, and her novel. She cited fairy tales as her favorite reading material during her childhood.⁷ Years later, when her psychiatrists suggested that she write an asylum autobiography about her schizophrenia and treatment, Fitzgerald complied and referred to this piece as her fairy tale.⁸ She wrote this document in 1932, when still a patient in Baltimore at Adolf Meyer's Phipps Psychiatric Clinic of The Johns Hopkins University Hospital. She had recently finished writing *Save Me the Waltz* and was waiting for its publication, and the asylum autobiography that she agreed to write drew from the same life material that her novel did. *Save Me the Waltz* uses fairy tale imagery and motifs to explore the performances, expectations, and desires of a woman who, much like Fitzgerald herself, spends her life being watched and written. The novel invokes the language of fairy tales to show the ways that the protagonist is controlled by culture, by gender roles, by clinical notions of sanity, and by societies in which women are given a single path toward an apparently happy “fairy tale” ending.

Fairy tales have long been the female medium for exchange of wisdom; they surface in the folklore passed on to children in Western societies, traditionally teaching resourcefulness to boys and proper behavior to girls. Many writers criticize these tales for

⁷ The interview in which Fitzgerald spoke of her childhood reading material is found in Milford's *Zelda*, (12).

⁸ The hospital background information is discussed in Mary E. Wood's article, “A Wizard Cultivator: Zelda Fitzgerald's *Save Me the Waltz* as Asylum Autobiography” (248-49).

their messages to women; one critic aptly notes, “what these stories convey is that women in distress are interesting” (Lieberman, 194). Fairy tales, like recipes, may be read as forms for internalizing household imprisonment—after all, so many of the most admirable heroines are stuck in castles, coffins, magic forests and magic sleeps. And yet Fitzgerald refuses to use them so simply. As with the recipe, she uses them to demonstrate the ways in which women’s roles can be performances rather than burdens; but diverging from her flippant handling of the recipe, she takes these performances seriously, noting the illusions fairy tales create, in addition to their playful possibility for rewriting life into alternate, hopeful endings in contrast to reductive—and unrealistic—happy or sad ones. She celebrates fairy tales’ darkness, too, showing how they advertise a constant and seamless beauty that real life simply cannot deliver, and how they set up their reading audience for both wonder and disappointment.

Enabling Narrative through Asymptotic Autobiography

The problem with autobiography is that it is asymptotic: the writer may come as close as possible to telling a complete story, but the truth itself is untouchable simply because the living writer knows neither the end, nor the themes that will become apparent once the end has transpired. One person’s full autobiography may only be finished by somebody else.

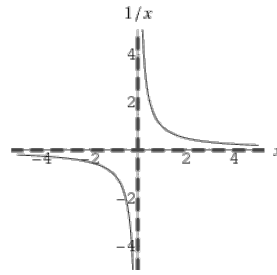
All autobiography struggles with the fact that as time moves, the past self constantly slides away from the present self. One way of attempting to close this gap between the actual life and the telling is to write conversion narratives in which the writer

tells the complete story of a past self (now “dead”) from which the present self has emerged. Another solution is to write a memoir of a highly specific time in one’s life, a possibly therapeutic exercise. This dissertation focuses on an autobiographical text that does not attempt to close this gap, but rather deliberately works to keep it open. The writing discussed here accepts the asymptotic structure of autobiography and uses it to the writer’s advantage. Veiled autobiographies take many forms, but one of the most extreme involves the employment of fairy tales—an ultimate form of “unreal” fiction.

Fairy tales, in contrast to autobiography, always have an ending. Whether that ending is happy or merely didactic varies with the tale, but the ending allows an illusion of rest after the tale has finished, in contrast to the personal narrative which can never be complete until the “I” dies. Therefore fairy tales offer microcosms of completion, tidy endings for unfinished lives. This dissertation looks at the possibilities that emerge from writing that shifts the standard fairy tale third person into the confessional first, or in the writing of Zelda Fitzgerald, the personal—but still veiled—third.

I use the mathematical asymptote to describe this type of autobiography. The asymptote is a straight line that a curve approaches increasingly closely, but never actually touches. In the diagram below, the x and y (labeled below as $1/x$) axes are asymptotes to the hyperbolas (curves) approaching the axes:⁹

⁹ Source of figure: Eric W. Weisstein, “Asymptote,” *MathWorld*—A Wolfram Web Resource. <http://mathworld.wolfram.com/Asymptote.html>.



In applying this model to the current discussion, we may call the axes “Life” and the hyperbolas “Autobiography.” Autobiography has a close, often formulaic, relationship with Life, respecting certain conventions, coming as close as possible to telling the truth. The gap is often tiny between truth and its telling, but it is measurable. The consistent approach is a key part of this model, in that autobiography must continually move toward the facts of a life in order to observe and recount them, seeking some meaning and order. Fairy tales also curve along these axes of life, but in a different way: they mirror, shadow, echo, and illuminate, but are never expected to touch. In the asymptotic autobiography discussed here, the autobiographer accepts this gap between curve and axis and widens it, using fairy tales to inform the retelling and allow it a safe distance from the straight line that represents life.

The straight line of Zelda Fitzgerald’s biography had already been exposed multiple times in Scott’s early fiction, and in 1932 when she was writing *Save Me the Waltz*, her life was on the brink of being exposed again in *Tender is the Night* (1934), a novel that Scott had been working on for twelve years, over a series of many drafts—some of which Zelda had seen. This novel took mental illness as its subject matter, specifically the devastating effects that a mentally ill wife has on her husband. The book’s protagonist is a charismatic man named Dick Diver whose life is ruined by his

schizophrenic wife, and who as a result of his wife's antics falls from being a brilliant world-famous psychiatrist into being a lonely alcoholic.

During the many years Scott worked on the novel, he made a chart comparing Zelda's illness to that of his fictional Nicole Diver's; the cases were exceedingly similar, but not identical.¹⁰ Yet the liberties he took in crafting Nicole were of further liability to Zelda because many of the truths of her life already were so heavily accounted for in his earlier novels and stories, and therefore Nicole's fictional illness would go on to contribute, perhaps more than any of his other novels, to Scott's legend of Zelda. When Zelda wrote her version of herself in *Save Me the Waltz*, she did not put herself through the indignity of struggling to disprove Scott's versions of her. Instead, she concurred with much of it and then turned the rest of her narrative into the story she wanted to bring into being, using fairy tales—which paint the world as it could be if all things were fair.

The Endless Re-Writing of Fairy Tales

Almost all critics of fairy tales observe the ways in which children and adults can fit themselves into these tales to better make sense of their lives. Much of this criticism is indebted to Bruno Bettelheim, who in turn is indebted to Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud. Bettelheim's canonical work, the *Uses of Enchantment* (1976), takes as its premise the following idea:

¹⁰ A reprint of this comparison chart may be found in *The Romantic Egoists* (ed. Matthew Bruccoli), a collection of newspaper clippings, photographs, writing excerpts, and other Fitzgerald memorabilia (194).

The fairy tale is therapeutic because the patient finds his *own* solutions, through contemplating what the story seems to imply about him and his inner conflicts at this moment in his life ... The unrealistic nature of these tales (which narrow-minded rationalists object to) is an important device, because it makes obvious that the fairy tales' concern is not useful information about the external world, but the inner process taking place in an individual. (25)¹¹

But Bettelheim was not the first writer to come to this conclusion. In his 1936 essay "The Storyteller," Walter Benjamin observed, "The fairy tale, which to this day is the first tutor of children because it was once the first tutor of mankind, secretly lives on in the story. The first true storyteller is, and will continue to be, the teller of fairy tales. Whenever good counsel was at a premium, the fairy tales had it, and where the need was the greatest, its aid was nearest" (102).

Some feminist critics disagree, however. As mentioned earlier, Marcia K. Lieberman observes that fairy tales glorify women in distress as being "interesting" (194). Karen Rowe considers these tales disappointing because "[the heroine] relies on external agents for rescue; she binds herself first to the father and then the prince..." ("Feminism and Fairy Tales" 211). However, Rowe distinguishes between the telling of the tales and the tales themselves by pointing out that "to tell a tale for women may be a way of breaking enforced silences" ("To Spin a Yarn" 297). In the case of a clinically diagnosed schizophrenic such as Zelda Fitzgerald, the reliability of her truths would be

¹¹ Notably, these references are to a male patient, a limitation which, though problematic, is also somewhat refreshing, because in the time when Zelda Fitzgerald was writing in the early twentieth century, the psychotic patient was generally assumed to be female (a deeply problematic assumption, considering Freud's attitude toward female patients).

called into question. By writing *Save Me the Waltz* in the Phipps Clinic, is she breaking an “enforced silence” by writing not merely the sanctioned history of her condition and wellness, but a work of fiction and, to some extent, fantasy? By using fairy tales in her writing, is Fitzgerald finding new ways to speak outside of the limiting psychological conditions and restricted freedoms of other patients such as herself?

If, by using fairy tales, Fitzgerald is taking refuge in the language that comforts her, then she is part of a great tradition of people for whom retelling fairy tales is a hopeful practice. In *From the Beast to the Blonde* (1994), Marina Warner observes, “The genre is characterized by ‘heroic optimism,’ as if to say, ‘one day, we might be happy, even if it won’t last’” (xx). Of the genre’s appeal, she adds, “The double vision of the tales, on the one hand charting perennial drives and terrors, both conscious and unconscious, and on the other mapping actual, volatile experience, gives the genre its fascination and power to satisfy” (xxi). Warner’s use of the word “mapping” is important to note. The familiar landscape of fairy tales and the familiar cast of characters provide a geography for the uncharted land of a writer’s personal history and imagination.

One of the reasons that these stories provide such excellent maps for personal narrative is that many of the plotlines and lessons are similar, often identical, in fairy tales all over the world, lending a universalism to the dilemmas, fears, and evolutions that occur in these tales. The standard explanation for this widespread appearance of the same fairy tales in so many different countries, cultures, and languages is related to Jung’s theory of archetypes. Jung believes that these stories spring out of the collective unconscious, something he adapted from Freud’s repressed personal unconscious, and

that the anxieties underlying these stories (Will there be food? Does my mother find me threatening and might she kill me? Are all spouses initially beasts?) are fears that we, simply by being human, have inherited. Jung suggests that these innate anxieties shape our actions and our stories, and that by telling and retelling these stories, we make sense of our fears and in doing so, reshape ourselves. The majority of analysts stand by this theory of archetypes, and many books continue to be written on the connection of fairy tales to the primal fears and anxieties of children. However, there is a second explanation about the origin and spread of fairy tales: diffusionism, which theorizes that these stories start in one place and spread, branching out with each generation of listeners.¹²

Because the archetypes in fairy tales make them easy to inhabit and adapt, and because the frequent adaptations of fairy tales add to their widespread familiarity, then it is no wonder that the fairy tales of the Western tradition (which include the Grimm Brothers and Hans Christian Andersen) are so well known and so frequently adapted. In this way, fairy tales are perhaps the most democratic form of literature. Over the past two centuries, since the Grimm brothers published their first volume of *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (*Children's and Household Tales*) in 1812, this specific set of stories has served as a generational link. Zelda Fitzgerald read these stories when she was a child, and these stories are still popular with children today—from new editions of the classic fairy tales, from the canon of Disney movies that retell many of these stories, and from hearing them told by adults.

¹² Marina Warner gives a good summary of both explanations in *From the Beast to the Blonde* (xxi-xxii).

One of the most significant ideas offered by contemporary fairy tale criticism is that the writer and the reader of fairy tales are one and the same: each listener absorbs the story, makes it his or her own, and then retells it. Jack Zipes observes in *Don't Bet on the Prince* (1986) that fairy tales demand “an open-ended discourse which calls for the readers to complete the liberating expectations of the narrative in terms of their own experience and their social context” (xi). Writers actively prove this reader-writer link to be true, as many adapters of these tales into fiction are also scholars of the fairy tale tradition. A.S. Byatt, whose best-known adaptations of fairy tales appear in the poems of the fictional Christabel LaMotte in Byatt’s novel *Possession* (1990), observes in her essay “Happy Ever After” (2004), “Writers have always used the forms of the fairy tale,” and she goes on to suggest that fairy tales have traditionally formed “the narrative grammar of our minds.”¹³ Kate Bernheimer recently edited two anthologies of writers’ ruminations on the fairy tales that have most influenced their work. Her first anthology, *Mirror, Mirror on the Wall* (1998), includes essays by Margaret Atwood, A.S. Byatt, Linda Grey Sexton, bell hooks, and twenty other women writers. Her second anthology, *Brothers and Beasts* (2007), asks the same of male writers and includes a forward by Maria Tatar and afterword by Jack Zipes.¹⁴ These books are exemplary in that they

¹³ These quotes are from A.S. Byatt’s essay, “Happy Ever After,” published online in *The Guardian*, January 3, 2004. <http://books.guardian.co.uk/review/story/0,12084,1115048,00.html>.

¹⁴ It is interesting to note that most of the female writers in *Mirror, Mirror* delve straightforwardly into the fairy tales they choose to write about, whereas a number of the male writers in *Brothers and Beasts* begin with disclaimers about their project, or tend more toward fiction or fact instead of personal recollection, or in the case of Neil Gaiman, avoid the prompt altogether and instead substitute a few fairy tale-themed poems. One could argue that, in these essays at least, writing personally about a relationship with fairy tales comes more comfortably for women than for men—possibly a side-effect of the widespread gendering of these stories as “old wives’ tales”.

combine creative and critical writing, the autobiographical and the scholarly. In *Mirror, Mirror*, Kathryn Davis concludes in her essay “Why I Don’t Like Reading Fairy Tales” that the problem is that they require their audience to be both writer and reader simultaneously. She adds that when reading fairy tales as an adult, she feels that she’s reading over her own shoulder.

This division of self from self, the ability of a person to read over her own shoulder, is echoed in Zelda Fitzgerald’s writing during her early hospitalizations. In April 1932 she wrote to Scott from the Phipps Clinic, where she was simultaneously writing her novel and being treated for schizophrenia, that the real story she wanted to write was “of myself versus myself” (Fitzgerald, 468). This statement closely echoes Davis’s statement about being at once the writer and the reader, one self versus another self, both selves belonging to the same person. Although Davis is speaking to the difference between child and adult reading strategies (the child enters the story, the adult stands outside and analyzes), while Fitzgerald deals more with the opposition of the many selves of a fractured adult, both writers encounter the same problem in storytelling: too many selves inhabiting the same protagonist. In fairy tales, at least, this too-many-self-ness is acceptable. Rewriters and re-tellers may insert themselves into all of the roles, and they do. All oral stories require both the listener and the teller to be part of the story: in written fairy tales this translates into the writer and the reader, and each reader becomes a possible re-writer in this cycle, using the truths of his or her life and circumstances to flavor the adaptation. Each reader’s autobiography may be rewritten asymptotically through the next retelling of a fairy tale.

The Limits of Traditional Autobiography

Although fairy tales, in their open-endedness, are a genre receptive to mixing with other genres, autobiography has not traditionally been quite so inviting. In *The Turning Key* (1984), Jerome Buckley recognized the blurring between fiction and nonfiction that autobiographical writing entails: “As the twentieth century approaches, it proves increasingly difficult to distinguish between the autobiography invaded by fiction and the first-person fiction involving the autobiography of the author”¹⁵ (115). Implicit in his statement is the idea that either genre is tainted when visibly influenced by the other. Buckley’s use of the word “invaded” furthers the idea that fiction—what *might* happen—and autobiography—what *did* happen—are beasts that should keep to their own ponds.

For the purposes of my study, both “autobiography invaded by fiction” and “first-person fiction involving the autobiography of the author” fall into the category of asymptotic autobiography. Both attempt to map and narrate the writer’s self by using material that extends beyond the experiential limits of the author’s own life. Twentieth- and twenty-first-century literature—as seen countless times, but especially in the work of women writers such as Jeanette Winterson, Margaret Atwood, Anne Sexton, and Maxine Hong Kingston, who blend the confessional with the mythic—indicates that a mix of the

¹⁵ Although Buckley limits his scholarship exclusively to the male autobiographer, several of his points concur with points made by more gender-inclusive scholars—namely his points about the increasing difficulty of telling the difference between autobiography and first-person fiction, and his language of the quest to self-narrate.

genres is often richer, more liberating, and riskier than either genre when it is purportedly faithful to itself.¹⁶

Of course, the goal of writing a purely faithful autobiography can never truly be realized. Many scholars in the field of autobiography, especially women's autobiography, deal with the impossibility of telling a perfectly accurate story. In their introduction to *Women, Autobiography, Theory* (1998), Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson pose the question: "To what extent is women's autobiography characterized by the frequency of nonlinear or 'oral' narrative strategies, unlike the master narratives of autobiography that seem to pose stable, coherent self-narratives?" (10). In an ideal autobiography, the self is a coherent, articulate entity, but in the subjectivity of being the living teller, the autobiographer can only come so close to being able to tell the unbiased, complete truth. Her truth may not move in a straight line of didactic cause-and-effect; it may include several contradictory truths. Lois J. and David H. Fowler speak of this problem in their introduction to *Revelations of Self* (1990), concluding, "The idea that the individual possesses a single, fully defined 'true' self, to be either disclosed or discovered, is a myth" (xxiii). Note their use of the word myth. If the possibility of a single coherent self is a myth, and if, as discussed above, fairy tales and other cultural myths have roots in the

¹⁶ There is a distinction to be made between adaptation and asymptotic autobiography as I define it. An adaptation of a text, be it a fairy tale or any other work of art, may take many forms, and the common denominator is that the new (adapted) text illuminates the original text in some new way, be it a reevaluation of a shadowy or evil character, as Gregory Maguire does to the Wicked Witch of the West in his book *Wicked*; or a restaging of the original story in a new setting, making it familiar to a new generation of readers or viewers, as director Billy Morrisette does to the story of Macbeth in his film *Scotland, PA*. Often an adaptation reshapes a work of literature into a play or film. Asymptotic autobiography is one type of adaptation, but it focuses on an individual reading of the original story or set of stories—the focus being to illuminate the life of the person or writer in question, using the story as a means to accomplish this self-illumination and analysis, to achieve a telling of an individual life.

teller's immediate social reality, then self-narrating and telling myths are parallel self-reflective acts.

The study of autobiography, like the study of fairy tales, deals with a duality: echoing Davis's statement of having to be both writer and reader at once, the autobiographer is required to be both teller of a tale and the tale itself. The raw material of life, subjectively lived, must be transformed through narrative into a coherent, singular story. Life becomes an *object d'art* as constructed by the autobiographer's selective exclusion and inclusion of details.

Autobiography, like fairy tales, contains a set of conventional archetypes that the listener/reader expects. In her introduction to *The Private Self* (1988), Shari Benstock observes that women "find through autobiographical writing a means to survive childbirth, illness, the deaths of spouses and children, loss of cultural identity and personal regard, fear of failure, aging, death, loss of beauty and physical strength" (5). In this list, Benstock enumerates the common rites of passage that many women undergo. This list corresponds to a great degree with the finite list of plot points that fairy tale readers expect to find on the journey of the protagonist. Compare Benstock's list to the rites of passage traditionally included in fairy tales:

The content of the stories women told reflected real lived experience and the particular ordeals they faced as females: the raising of offspring; their beholdenness (economically and legally) to the institution of marriage; the unremitting, menial, and repetitive chores such as spinning, weaving, or even wrapping chocolates in paper. In a society that privileged males with good

education, fairy tales offered a place where the devaluation of their intellect actually provided women and girls with the somewhat subversive and self-affirming opportunity of communicating their experiences outside the privileged realm of books and publishing. (Paradiz 45)

The minutiae of life, grouped retrospectively into themes, are what drive both genres. Autobiographical writing serves the function of giving both readers and writers a way to navigate life's crisis points through retelling stories about them—which is the same function offered by the telling of fairy tales.

Autobiography and fairy tales both feature a journey of some sort, most frequently a *bildungsroman*-type journey from youth into maturity, from innocence into experience, from ignorance into knowledge. Both autobiography and fairy tales feature, by the very fact of their existence, an idea of chronology and order at the heart of the story: for this adult to emerge, this child had to come first, and these obstacles had to be overcome. Buckley emphasizes how meaning drives this sense of order, and how a life's story, well-told, offers the keys to unlock that life's significance (hence his book's title, *The Turning Key*):

The ideal autobiography presents a retrospect of some length on the writer's life and character, in which the actual events matter far less than the truth and depth of his experience. It describes a voyage of self-discovery, a life-journey confused by frequent misdirections and even crises of identity but reaching at last a sense of perspective and integration. (39-40)

Here is the language of the personal quest. We all must go through it and we must go it alone. Both the fairy tale quester and the writer of autobiography must hack their own paths through the brambles, reducing the confusion of life to a few select threads that readers and listeners can grasp (while hacking their own way in).

As indicated above, both types of writers are mapmakers; both attempt to depict microcosms of life in order to offer wisdom to others. The difference between a map and the reality it represents is that the map is not complete. A map is a fiction. Asymptotic autobiography takes the map of a life but reworks it, adding different legends, new keys. Although this type of autobiography remains recognizably based on the life in question, nevertheless it rests on those points where fiction comes dangerously close to touching truth, but remains stoutly in its own realm—refusing to be judged by its faithfulness to fact, but rather by its merit as a piece of art.

With respect to this boundary between fact and art, Avrom Fleishman describes profound connections between self-writing and myth in his book *Figures of Autobiography* (1983): “Myth makes truth, in historical as well as in literary autobiography. The paradigm of exile and return, of alienation and repossession, is, moreover, a frequent self-conception...” (4). In this statement, he demonstrates that the conventions of myth contribute to—and perhaps enable—the telling of a life, and that the facts are less notable than the story itself. This idea is fundamental to my argument: that the choice of myths writers use to self-narrate is no less useful, and no less true, than the provable facts of their lives, such as the births, deaths, schooling, marriage, first jobs, and illnesses. Fleishman further remarks: “The autobiographer gives an order to the facts of

his history, an order not inherent in them but necessarily of his own devising and therefore a reflection of himself that is more profoundly informative than the data that he manipulates” (11). The manipulation of one’s life story and the veils created over autobiography are often more indicative of the self at work than the fact of the autobiography itself.¹⁷

Even though Fleishman writes of the protagonist problematically, excluding the possibility that the protagonist could be a “she,” many feminist scholars of autobiography concur with Fleishman’s ideas about autobiography working alongside and rewriting life. In examining what happens when the life in question is that of a woman, Smith and Watson summarize Smith’s *Poetics of Autobiography* in which “any theory of female textuality must recognize how patriarchal culture has fictionalized ‘woman’ and how, in response, women autobiographers had challenged the gender ideologies surrounding them in order to script their life narratives” (12). This theory of women’s autobiography recognizes the importance of the telling itself as a way to free the autobiographical subject from the fictions enmeshing her. Zelda Fitzgerald certainly struggled with these enmeshing fictions: as we see from her early book review and recipe, as well as her later stories and novel, throughout her life she alternately embraced and rejected the representations of herself that structured her reality. According to Smith, until the

¹⁷ Hugh Kenner, in his book *A Homemade World* (1989), discusses the ways F. Scott Fitzgerald used in his writing a similar veiling of autobiography. Kenner writes, “‘Gatsby,’ [F. Scott Fitzgerald] admitted, ‘started as one man I knew and then changed into myself,’ and was probably never very different from himself. Fitzgerald, for instance, shared with Jimmy Gatz a mystique of lists and schedules, and with Jay Gatsby sudden riches of which he was a little ashamed, and a passion for a lovely destructive woman...” (35). This shared artifice of life-elevated-into-fiction invites further study of the written work of both Fitzgeralds.

self/subject is fully free from imposed fictions and understood both internally and externally, there will be the need for a story to struggle to define the self.

However, that self, while still living and redefining its motives, always is evolving and changing. In *Composing a Life* (1989), Mary Catherine Bateson describes women's lives as an improvisatory art, and she warns against trying to view life as an overly plotted line, noting "there is a pattern deeply rooted in myth and folklore that recurs in biography and may create inappropriate expectations and blur our ability to see the actual shape of lives" (5). Although she is describing biography, not autobiography, her criticism applies to both: the idea of life as a singular quest is a fairy tale.

Method: Linking Fairy Tales with Personal Narrative

The essay that has been perhaps most fundamental to the premise of this research exploration is Mary Wood's "A Wizard Cultivator: Zelda Fitzgerald's *Save Me the Waltz* as Asylum Autobiography" (1992). In this essay, Wood interprets Fitzgerald's novel as modeled on the autobiographies that doctors encouraged their sick patients to write, partly to keep the patients occupied, partly to gain publicity for the doctors themselves. These works were often published and sold to a public that was interested in reading about the "wonders and terrors" of the insane mind (Wood 247). Wood makes a beautiful argument, showing how well Fitzgerald knew the genre. When her doctors at the Phipps Clinic suggested that she write her asylum autobiography while she was a patient in 1932, Fitzgerald complied: "not only did she refer to this autobiography as a 'fairy tale,' but she left five blank lines for her psychiatrists to fill in" (249). Wood suggests that

Fitzgerald's observation of the asylum autobiography convention in writing this piece, as well as her mocking it by calling it a fairy tale, "undercut its authenticity" as a document (249). I would add that Fitzgerald was not engaging in mockery so much as she was showing her understanding that autobiography is an asymptotic practice, and she was acknowledging that for her to frame this document as her own expression of truth would be, in some way, an untruth and a failure. If her doctors wanted a complete and non-asymptotic autobiographical account of her life, they would have to complete it themselves.

Wood notes that in *Save Me the Waltz*, Fitzgerald refuses the clinical language of illness and recovery in favor of "sensual imagery that explodes any orderliness imposed on the body of the text" (260). Furthermore, argues Wood, Fitzgerald's language "[violates] the myth that the language of autobiography must be transparent, that it must allow the reader an illusion of realism" (261). Wood ultimately places Fitzgerald in the tradition of women writing themselves away from controlling male prose when she notes, "Ostriker, Hélène Cixous, and other feminist theorists have explored the possibility of a 'woman's writing' based in female bodily experience. I think Zelda Fitzgerald is working, if unconsciously, toward this kind of writing..." (260). Indeed, Fitzgerald creates a text based in part on the rising and falling abilities of her adult body; her novel tells of the world as she experiences it firsthand through her physicality, her femaleness, her senses and her emotions. She has in essence "put herself into the text—as into the

world and into history—by her own movement,” as Cixous bid women do in “The Laugh of the Medusa.”¹⁸

My research and critical analysis will extend these analyses, examining how, viewed as an autobiography, *Save Me the Waltz* uses fairy tales to provide a mapping of the many performances that autobiographical selfhood entails. By contextualizing her personal history in the realm of the imaginary, Fitzgerald removes her story from the psychiatric ward and places it safely in legend. By experimenting with open-ended fairy tale conventions instead of being limited by clinical truths, Fitzgerald tells a story (voluntarily, and, according to her letters, happily) that she probably never would have told if bound to the strict autobiographical truth.

The mask of fairy tales both gives structure to the life story being told and helps the author discover and communicate a problematic self through adapting and alluding to the strange and fragmented natures of these stories. As I will illustrate in Chapter Three, Zelda Fitzgerald makes clear that in her life and for her generation, myth, stories, and human truths of any sort are impossible to communicate effectively—thus, the need for a storytelling aid or template. Relating to this idea, Mary Gordon, in her introduction to Matthew Bruccoli’s edition of Zelda’s *Complete Writings*, distinguishes a major difference between the writing of Scott and Zelda:

Scott Fitzgerald is a creator of myths; his characters are brought to their sad ends through forces that are foreseeable, and if unavoidable, at least explicable. The world, for Zelda, is too disorderly to be the stuff of myth; it is the material of

¹⁸ Quoted from Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle’s edition of *Critical Theory since 1965* (309).

dream, random, unfinished, with connections that can only be guessed at or left out. (xx)

I agree with Gordon that Scott's myths are more succinctly written, their morals more cleanly shaped. But in Zelda's work, the myths are there, too, but they are harder to decipher, and their systems of cause-and-effect, punishment and triumph, are not always directly logical. As Bruccoli has pointed out in prefacing his edition these *Collected Works*, "much of the unusual quality of *Save Me the Waltz* comes from its idiosyncratic prose" (5). Most critics who have address Zelda's work have suggested that it is surrealist or dreamlike. This suggestion can be seen as both an asset and an insult, as the problem with dreams is that they are only half-finished: they can never be as real to any listener as they are to the dreamer, and even to the dreamer they dissolve, gradually, as they are unarchivable.

Fairy tales, with their symbols, their imaginary landscapes, and their surreal, dreamlike qualities, makes room for this disconnectedness and for the inexplicable appearance of the marvelous. And through their offering of templates and familiar stories, fairy tales anchor the dreams, giving a beginning and ending to the fragments, and making the loneliness of incommunicable self something that can be shared. Gordon ends her introduction by expressing her hope that "a more open reading" of Zelda's work may be possible "now, in the wake of a literary movement that tries to come to terms with the artist's struggle with what cannot be said—or cannot be said in terms of what we used to be comfortable calling 'realism'" (xxvii). The use of fairy tales, themselves symbols for any number of things, allows these unsayable parts of the story a vehicle wherein they

may be contextualized and understood by association, without having to be explained—for Zelda’s writing style is not explanatory, and would suffer if forced to become so.

Because this dissertation is about a specific type of allusion—an adaptation of traditional fairy tale plot, language, and convention—much of my work in the following chapters involves mapping and making connections among texts: observing fairy tale references, logic, and language, and analyzing what purpose these references, and the tales from which they come, serve at precise points in Zelda Fitzgerald’s writing. Moreover, because this study deals with the writing of a woman who chose myth as her language of truth, it will be in many ways a feminist exploration about alternate forms of storytelling. The methods that best serve this project are, as a basis, recent fairy tale criticism: A.S. Byatt’s observation that fairy tales are a sort of narrative grammar; Jack Zipes’s assertion that fairy tales reveal society’s trouble-spots, which aids in understanding Fitzgerald’s conflation of fairy tales with advertisements and other social markers; and criticism by Marcia K. Lieberman, Maria Tatar, and Karen E. Rowe, which examines the ways that fairy tales have been used to provide solace during times of strife, a tradition that I link to Fitzgerald’s frequent use of fairy tales in the writing she did during her Phipps Clinic hospitalization. In addition, Jungian psychology (both by Jung himself and his apprentices, including Clarissa Pinkola Estes and Marie-Louise von Franz) offers a framework for thinking about the different archetypes that combine into the creation and maintenance of a self.

Autobiographical theory is an indispensable part of this dissertation, especially the theories of Avrom Fleishman, who draws profoundly on connections between myth and

autobiography. His notion of autobiography as a “quest” for self-knowledge, and of its being an “embalming” process for the actual events of a life, offers a terminology for discussing the ways fairy tales can give shape to, and often replace events from, more faithful autobiography. In addition, Shari Benstock’s discussion of the indefinite boundaries of autobiography provides a lens for examining the tenuous lines between truth and imagination in the writing of Zelda Fitzgerald, who in a letter to Scott describes her world of mental illness as one in which “for months I have been living in vaporous places peopled with one-dimensional figures and tremulous buildings until I can no longer tell an optical illusion from reality” (450).¹⁹ Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson’s excellent introduction to *Women, Autobiography, Theory* brings to my argument important background distinctions between the female tradition of oral, nonlinear storytelling and the more rigid ideal of “stable, coherent self-narratives” (10). The concept of the oral and nonlinear is crucial to any discussion of the transmission of fairy tales.

Fairy tales are, ultimately, myths that perpetuate themselves through retelling, rewriting, re-listening. Maria Tatar writes in her forward to *Brothers and Beasts* that fairy tales “create the desire to *keep reading...*” (Bernheimer xix). These stories regenerate, survive, and influence the way that the next generation reads, writes, and views the world. Both the teller of fairy tales and the autobiographer are mapmakers; both attempt to make microcosms of life in order to offer wisdom to others.

¹⁹ In her introduction to *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women’s Autobiographical Writings*, Shari Benstock writes: “In general, most of the essays show a mistrust of naming, of fixing limits and definitions, especially theoretical definitions” (5).

Margaret Atwood, who draws upon fairy tales in her work, including *Bluebeard's Egg*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and *The Robber Bride*, wrote a book in 2003 called *Negotiating with the Dead* in which she meditates on the narrative writing process in terms of the myths and fairy tales it encapsulates: she sees writing as a journey through the underworld where the dead live, and as a practice that requires the writer to split into two divergent parts: the one who writes and the one who lives—the drudger through reality and the myth-maker, both of whom depend on the other to survive. Atwood's distinction is useful for mapping the myths that serve a piece of writing and also for showing how writing itself allows the author participation in myth. This distinction is highly visible in *Save Me the Waltz*, where the drudger through reality (sick in her hospital) clutches at the stories that comfort her in order to lead her myth-maker, Alabama Beggs, out of confusion.

The antipodal roles of drudger and mythmaker are prevalent in Zelda Fitzgerald's life, too, in uncanny and reversed ways: in the role she played, as a young and famous woman, during her daily life with Scott, her drudgery was myth-making; in other words, her primary "job," as she and he both saw it, was to create legends that her husband would write. These myths that she made, the bizarre actions she performed and the idiosyncratic phrases she articulated, were written, edited, and published by Scott. And yet, she becomes a myth-maker, editor, and publisher in her own writing capacity once she is a slightly older woman, but only after her myth-making life had been reduced, unhappily, to the drudgery of being kept at home, ill, or hospitalized. But ironically, it is only during this time of illness and drudgery that Zelda becomes a serious writer—

perhaps because her life no longer offers any myths besides that of her own imagining. In her novel and many of her shorter pieces, Zelda Fitzgerald uses herself as her own best material, the most potent mythology upon which she can draw.

By reallocating the language of magic, myth, and children's literature in order to narrate autobiography, the writer is making a statement about the performance of selfhood.²⁰ Coherent selfhood, as many theorists of autobiography have pointed out, is a myth itself. In creating complicated female characters with the language of simple, singular roles, the writer is performing a character in a staged drama, real or imagined, be it womanhood, wifedom, artisthood. By casting herself as the protagonist of these fairy tales, she is depicting a situation where life is a confusing thing over which she has little control. The plot is set, but the rules and characters keep transforming, and therefore the protagonist must transform too. She must perform to the best of her ability, and according to the changing demands of her environment. Against a constantly changing background, stagnant, inflexible characters cannot keep up; in fairy tales as in life, if you stand too still you will lose. In this way, performance of the self is vital to survival.

Writers who self-narrate by using asymptotic autobiography are identifying the sanctioned set of fairy tales allotted to any given social group, and by writing through them, these writers are pressing both the limits of these stories and the survival capacities of themselves.

²⁰ In her paintings and other visual works of art (paper-dolls, lampshades), Zelda Fitzgerald drew frequently upon many well-known children's stories including "Goldilocks," "The Three Little Pigs," "Hansel and Gretel," and Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1865). Reprints of these paintings are found in *Zelda: An Illustrated Life* (88-97), as well as in the Appendix to this dissertation.

Transformations of Fairy Tale into Truth

Autobiography becomes enabled through the retelling of fairy tales—examined here in Zelda Fitzgerald’s writing—in three significant ways: 1) fairy tales allow for an escape from asylum autobiography (being a static, clinical text, exposed already by either her husband or her doctor); 2) fairy tales allow the self to operate as a series of performances; 3) fairy tales provide maps to communicate meaning and hope in otherwise fragmented narratives. The first three chapters of this dissertation show how, in sequence, the autobiographical self can become free through fairy tales in three stages: once the autobiographer has worked to separate herself from being bound by illness, boredom, or clinical reality (Chapter One), she is free to make the decision of which self or selves she wishes to narrate and perform (Chapter Two); once she has established her sense of self the autobiographer can then locate her plot, her map, and her narrative (Chapter Three). As scholars, we must be mindful that this map of sequentiality, just like any map, may be rearranged. All three of these steps relate to each other, and the process may vary and parts may interchange. But for the purpose of an organized project, we shall look at one step at a time, and in the order that frees the writer from the deepest level (self) to the most external (plot).

In Chapter One, “‘Happily Ever Afterward’: Fairy Tales as Escape from Clinical Truth,” I will look at how fairy tales provide an escape from the clinical truth and from—in Zelda Fitzgerald’s case—being a mere study in an asylum autobiography. This chapter begins by setting up some of the ways in which the novel adapts the conventions of fairy

tales. The first subsection, “Publishing the Woman who was “*sick, sick, sick*,” offers a publishing history of *Save Me the Waltz*, which explains the poor early reception of the book and also illustrates the psychological conditions surrounding its creation. In the following section, “Haunted by the Ghost of the Asylum,” I examine theories of trauma narrative, connecting them to arguments about why fairy tales would allow the suffering heroine an alternate trajectory, a route to repackage hard-to-narrate experience as something that can be articulated and even made entertaining. This final section of this chapter, “The Communicative Power of Fairy Tales,” brings forward observations on the ways in which fairy tales invite their readers to enter, inhabit the roles, create solutions to the abstract problems of the heroes and heroines, and ultimately find meaning and solutions within their own lives. In this chapter, I show how in Fitzgerald’s letters and writing at the time when she became aware of herself as ill, images of the imaginary became as insistent and visible as the mundane subjects of her daily life; her use of fairy tales increased and took on strategic new meanings after she became a patient in mental hospitals. In both the mad fairy tale environment and the landscape of a mentally ill mind, the world appears to change suddenly and in illogical ways; furthermore, the fairy tale heroine and the psychotic subject are both passive, at times silenced, objects for rescue. In this chapter I explore the ways Fitzgerald uses fairy tales to separate herself as a storyteller from her clinical reality as psychiatric patient.

In Chapter Two, ““Myself versus Myself”: Fairy Tales as Performance of Epic Self,” I discuss what happens once the autobiographer has made the break from clinical truth and is able to use fairy tales to perform all of the different selves that she wishes to

explore. This chapter looks at the ways Fitzgerald addressed the problems of her life by acknowledging these selves and the many complicated roles they play. Fairy tales are appropriate material for a woman who was at once character-creator and character, writer and fictional heroine in somebody else's books. For Fitzgerald as a writer, fairy tales allow her to perform all of the selves with whom she struggled, not only her two most famous ones (muse and psychotic patient), but all of the archetypal roles that she inhabited and with which she identified. Fairy tales as a fictional construct allow her to return to the idea of self as a performance and possibility, not a constriction—similar to the way she illustrates self as performance in her recipe for breakfast. The first section, “As Good as a Book,” analyzes how *Save Me the Waltz* places performance at the heart of personhood. This section also illustrates how the idea of “myself versus myself” pervades Zelda Fitzgerald's fiction, and how fairy tales allow reconciliation of these warring selves. In the following section, “An Advertisement for an Advertisement,” I examine how Fitzgerald rewrote her own struggle into a critique of advertising. Here, I engage Simone Weil Davis's analysis of advertisements in the novel to show how these advertisements link with fairy tales, together depicting the beautiful promises of a world gone mad. In the next section, “Self as Performance in Autobiographical Writing,” I discuss the moral obligation of the autobiographer and the self-confrontation that must occur, linking both back to the struggle between two selves: in this case, as the artist and the object of art. Finally, “A Silent Dancer of her own Woes” examines the role of dance in the novel as it pertains to fairy tales, mental illness, and the heroine's struggle to perform a coherent self.

Chapter Three, “‘A Wonderful Philosophy to Comfort You’: Fairy Tales as Maps of Meaning,” takes this exploration to its final step, once the limiting boundaries have been crossed and the self has been established, by examining fairy tales as a map for autobiography, providing coherent plot and selfhood in an otherwise fragmented narrative. Part of autobiography is the process of carving a plot out of the accidents of a life and turning the arbitrary “I” into a protagonist. Both fairy tales and autobiography plant the self in a dangerous map of people and traps through which the protagonist must journey in order to grow up, evolve, and return home. The first section, “Born into Narrative,” examines the storytelling-as-healing motif in literature and psychoanalysis, charting the ways in which untold or untellable stories can find their way into articulation through fairy tales. The following section, “Fairy Tales as Imaginative Maps,” uses Byatt’s idea of fairy tales as “narrative grammar” to show the ways in which they can help plot a map for an autobiography in addition to help the writer escape the map of a traditional, charted narrative. The section “Narrative as Promethean Lost Cause” illustrates the limits in communication suffered by the generation of characters depicted in *Save Me the Waltz*, and shows how fairy tales provide a remedy. The final section, “Flawed Happily Ever After as Bearer of Hope,” concludes the analysis by illustrating the uses of myth as a map for navigating the world. For Fitzgerald, the coherency and containment of fairy tales provide the opportunity for coherent selfhood in a contained life story—something a more faithful autobiography could never attain.

Finally, in Chapter Four, I offer and analyze a Chautauqua-style play entitled *Zelda Speaks of Swans* (2006) that I wrote in Dr. Lynn Miller’s Performing

Autobiography course at the University of Texas at Austin and have performed several times since. This one-act play, which depicts 46-year-old Zelda Fitzgerald in her hospital gown being questioned by her doctor, puts to use many of the theoretical ideas about Fitzgerald's autobiographical use of fairy tales that I have discussed in this dissertation. It stands as just one example of contemporary asymptotic autobiography and, read in tandem with the analysis, it raises questions about critical-creative writing, performed autobiography, the relationship between the writer/performer and the historical character being performed. In the case of this particular play, autobiography is told through fairy tales for the purposes of protection, amusement, and the invention of an alternate ending. This play draws from Fitzgerald's fiction, letters, and biographies in order to illustrate the dignity she assumed in all of her performances, and how important these performances were to her sense of self. The audience is cast as the doctor who controls, deciphers, and attempts to cure Fitzgerald—while simultaneously the audience is cast realistically as the inheritors of her literary legend. They (we) are responsible for controlling her legacy, for liberating her from the version of herself that was penned and stuck to her by her husband and her doctors.

Including this project forces further difficult questions to the surface of this inquiry, because multiple levels of asymptotic autobiography exist in this text. While it stands as an example of performed autobiography of a historical character, and while I (a living woman storyteller) wrote it, for the purposes of this study we shall look at *Zelda Speaks of Swans* as a depiction of a woman (Zelda) narrating her autobiography through

fairy tales. My own role as autobiographer, and Zelda Fitzgerald as my myth/fairy tale material, may be examined in a different project.

This dissertation is about a woman who uses fairy tale language and motifs in order to narrate and map her own autobiography—and my hope is that it will prove useful as a new lens for studying allusions and references to fairy tale and myth in personal writing, as well as for finding new meanings in the lives of writers who merge their own self-making with the language of fairy tale and myth. Although I will place the writing of Zelda Fitzgerald under close scrutiny, this dissertation is ultimately a theoretical study about the relationship between autobiography and fairy tale adaptations, and what is possible when they are combined. My project proposes the terminology of the asymptote to look at the ways women can and have approached the act of autobiography while preserving the self in a veil of myth—approaching the truth but never getting stuck in its confines and garish exposures. Myth and fairy tales allow this process of self-narration to remain a living, generative process as opposed to an embalmed, completed record that grows increasingly untrue as the author continues to live and change.

I hope this project will bring to the forefront of autobiography studies and fairy tale studies many new questions about the relation between the two fields: Why would a woman frame herself in her own fairy tale language? Why reduce herself to such imaginary landscapes? Why liken herself to such flat, two-dimensional characters? Why take the internal struggles of being human and translate them into landscape where the

heroine is made passive against insane external events? Why map the writing process through tales that have been already over-told, instead of retreating into the solitary uniqueness of her own situation? How can writers use the language of fairy tales to speak reflexively about personhood? What does making selves into stories add to the value of a life? How does rewriting fairy tales in the first person act out as a rebellion against a single defined self? I hope this discussion will open up new conversations on nontraditional autobiographies, both old and new. Finally, I wish that this discussion may generate further possibilities in the creation of asymptotic autobiographies—using not clinical facts, but the language of familiarity and myth, to safely and effectively narrate the self.

In both fairy tales and autobiography, a single person—the protagonist—is positioned as a scout at the edge of a map. The rest of us look to that map to find a way through the woods.

Chapter One

“Happily Ever Afterward”: Fairy Tales as Escape from Clinical Truth

Darling heart, our fairy tale is almost ended, and we're going to marry and live happily ever afterward just like the princess in her tower who worried you so much—and made me so very cross by her constant recurrence—²¹

The majority of woman-centered fairy tales involve a rescue, usually by a man, of a worthy woman from a life that is unworthy of her. Many critics complain of the passivity that is expected of the woman as she waits to be rescued—in a tower or in a glass coffin, or disguised in the cinders as a maid—always silenced, always inaccessible. It is impossible, in the case of a mentally ill woman, not to liken this model to the traditional model of psychoanalysis. The doctor, usually male, “rescues” the patient, often female, from the inability to narrate herself. The passivity is necessary in both; forces must act *upon* these women for the rescue to be complete. As a patient, Zelda Fitzgerald was moved from doctor to doctor, and one of the only doctors she truly liked and with whom she always cooperated was Dr. Squires, a female doctor in the Phipps Clinic in Baltimore. Fitzgerald’s skepticism of the fairy tale rescue model—in which the father/husband/doctor/prince ferries the unhappy maiden from an uncomfortable tower

²¹ From a letter written by Zelda Fitzgerald to her husband Scott in February 1920, two months before they were married; *Collected Writings of Zelda Fitzgerald* (447).

into freedom—may have been one of the reasons for this female identification. In the letters charting her plan to marry Scott in 1919, Zelda uses the language of the fairy tale marriage plot that promises happiness as a permanent state—though in *Save Me the Waltz*, written ten years later, she indicates her skepticism of the fairy tale rescue plot, observing the fictitiousness that anyone could be rescued, ever.

The idea of life's having a "cure" or a person being "rescuable" can be an insane idea, especially to a writer in Fitzgerald's position. In her writing, Fitzgerald links the conjured reality of advertisements and fairy tales in their promises for an illusory happy ending, for a life where contentment might be possible as a static thing. In her essay "The Changing Beauty of Park Avenue," she describes New York as follows: "High in the air float green-blue copper roofs, like the tips of castles rising from the clouds in fairy tales and cigarette advertisements" (Fitzgerald, 404)²². New York City was where Zelda and Scott honeymooned, and where their antics of early adulthood earned them their wild reputation that was so admired by their generation and so disapproved of by their elders. It is telling that this city, with its associations of hope for her "happy ever after," becomes linked in Fitzgerald's writing with both fairy tales and ads. For Fitzgerald, the offerings of both fairy tales and advertisements are suspect, in the same way that any sort of permanent beauty or comfort or sanity is an empty promise—glorious to behold, but not reliable to wish upon.

²² As in the Introduction, all citations of "Fitzgerald" refer to her *Collected Writings*.

Her letters indicate that in many ways, Fitzgerald did not want to be rescued; her sense of herself as a patient varies from letter to letter, a result that would have been consistent with her mental state. At one point she writes in a letter to Scott:

if you do cure me whats going to happen to all the bitterness and unhappiness in my heart—It seems to me a sort of castration, but since I am powerless I suppose I will have to submit, though I am neither young enough nor credulous enough to think that you can manufacture out of nothing something to replace the song I had [*sic*]. (Wood 252)

Fitzgerald, like other women writers who were treated for mental instability, suspected that her mental illness might be inextricably related to her particular sensibility, and was apprehensive about having her anxieties erased. And yet, simultaneously, she frets over her fear of being cured because she feels, intellectually, that a cure is desirable. She writes to Scott, from the Swiss Prangins Clinic, in 1930:

I am infinitely sorry that I have been ungrateful for your attempts to help me. Try to understand that people are not always reasonable when the world is as unstable and vacillating as a sick head can render it—That for months I have been living in vaporous places peopled with one-dimensional figures and tremulous buildings until I can no longer tell an optical illusion from reality—that head and ears incessantly throb and roads disappear, until finally I lost all control and powers of judgement [*sic*] and was semi-imbecilic when I arrived here. (Fitzgerald 450)

It is important to note that these letters are not the respective expostulations of insane Zelda and sane Zelda, but rather two conflicting sentiments of a woman struggling with

herself. The “vaporous places” and “one-dimensional figures” appear in her novel, mostly when she writes about expatriation (her chapter two) just before she resorts to dance for an attempt at salvation, and again in her chapter four, right after her breakdown. In these chapters, a disturbing blurriness descends between fantasy and reality, showing how the sane world and the insane world are alarmingly similar. No clear markers exist to show which world is which—the strangeness of each world approaches the other, asymptotically.

The idea of the asymptote is especially relevant for Zelda Fitzgerald in terms of the shared etymology of the word “symptom.”²³ A symptom in a medical patient indicates a problem that can be diagnosed: if a patient is asymptomatic, or has unusual or disconnected symptoms, a diagnosis is provisional at best. During her time in the hospital, Fitzgerald was diagnosed as a schizophrenic, though many of her symptoms did not fit her case. As evidenced in the above quote where she refers to a cure as a “castration,” it is apparent that Fitzgerald fears that many of her “symptoms” might simply be her version of sanity—her artistic, poetic, individual “song”—without which she could remain just as sick, but less pleased with the self she has. In this way, there might be a similar safety in having one’s autobiography be asymptotic as there is in having one’s health be asymptomatic. In either situation, the self in question is more

²³ Steven Schwartzman, in his 1996 book *The Words of Mathematics*, writes that the word “*asymptomatic*” is etymologically identical to *asymptotic*: a symptom is literally ‘a falling together’ of a bodily condition and a given disease associated with that condition” (30). He explains that both words come from three Greek words: the prefix *a-*, meaning not; the preposition *sum*, meaning together with; and the verb *piptein*, meaning to fall. In sum, Schwartzman explains, “an asymptote is a curve ... that another curve ‘doesn’t fall together with’” (30).

difficult to reduce to a case than when the symptom is noticeable, or when the curve touches the axis in a single plotted point.

Retelling one's life through fairy tales can be a way of securing the individual's "song," by insisting upon an asymptotic mapping that evades the clinical narrative. Ironically, the language of the two-dimensional story in which heroes and heroines are trapped in plot becomes, when re-appropriated, the same language that most liberates writers of autobiography away from plot and into character. Although Jack Zipes touts fairy tales for their "open-ended" nature, I would refine his statement to say that, while they are indeed open to the reader who wishes to identify with the characters (easy to do, as the characters in traditional fairy tales are deliberately undefined), fairy tales are at the same time closed stories because of their set plot.²⁴ For writers who need a vehicle for narrating an incoherent life, these set plot structures are the perfect medium to enter and retell, while still not straying too far off the path of coherent narrative.

Many psychologists, including Freud and Bettelheim, have written of the ways in which fairy tales become a medium for the unsettled mind to create a coherent story. Freud even noted that hysterical patients often replace the narrative facts of their childhoods with the fairy tales that they read as children.²⁵ In 1913 Freud wrote:

It is not surprising to find that psycho-analysis confirms our recognition of the important place which folk fairy tales have acquired in the mental life of our children. In a few people a recollection of their favourite fairy tales takes the

²⁴ Jack Zipes's discussion of the open-endedness of fairy tales is discussed, in addition to in my Introduction, in his *Don't Bet on the Prince* (1986), xi.

²⁵ See Freud, "The occurrence in dreams of material from fairy tales" from James Strachey's translation of *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. XII (1911-1913): 281.

place of memories of their own childhood....Elements and situations derived from fairy tales are also frequently to be found in dreams. (*Occurrence in Dreams*, 281)

Freud goes on to give examples from psychoanalysis of fairy tales clouding recollections of reality: one woman dreamt that her father in-law-was a marionette puppet (which she connects to Rumpelstiltskin), and one boy worried about getting eaten by wolves. Freud notes that this correlation is not surprising, and I do not find it surprising either. Not only do fairy tales and dreams share elements of the fantastic, but both the psychoanalytic patient and the fairy tale protagonist are victims of a world that has turned actively into a threat, often a senseless one. The perilous journey toward self-knowledge and the understanding of one's own capabilities, whether through psychoanalysis or through a set of fairy tale tasks, is an effective way to give meaning to a life.

In *Save Me the Waltz*, the correlation between psychoanalysis and fairy tales is first illuminated by the description of Alabama's father, Judge Austin Beggs, at the very beginning of the novel. Tower-imagery pervades the paragraph: not only is his house described as a stronghold, but also the man himself as a "living fortress" (Fitzgerald 9). Note the following: "Judge Beggs entrenched himself in his integrity when he was still a young man; his towers and chapels were builded of intellectual conceptions. So far as any of his intimates knew he left no sloping path near his castle open either to the friendly goatherd or the menacing baron" (9). Note the language of enclosure and inaccessibility in describing the home that produced Alabama—language that speaks both to the confinement of hospitalization and the traditional towers of fairy tale princesses. Note further the use of the archaic word "builded," a word that reinforces an allusion to the

medieval settings of princess fairy tales. The order of the father constitutes the necessary origin from which the heroine, the third daughter—the one to watch in fairy tales—must depart, seeking fortune and adventure elsewhere, only to return home to her “castle” at the end, when her father dies. The entirety of the novel is buttressed between the life and death of the father, the watchful figure of order, the original figure of safety and sanity.

The novel’s childhood environment—the point where fairy tales tend to start—is a world of lushness and relative luxury. The air is hot, the garden is fragrant, and the children are “incubated in the mystic pungence of Negro mammies” (10). But there is little psychological safety, which Zelda Fitzgerald illustrates in the undertones of her descriptions of physical environment: “a luminous beetle swings ferociously over the clematis, insects swarm to the golden holocaust of the hall light. Shadows brush the Southern night like heavy, impregnated mops soaking its oblivion back to the black heat whence it evolved” (11). Her language reels with ferocity and self-destruction (of insects) and there exists, just beyond the porch light, the threat of darkness and oblivion. *Save Me the Waltz* begins in Montgomery, Alabama, in the city where Zelda Fitzgerald was born, and in the state for which she named her novel’s protagonist. Instead of three sisters and a brother, all of which Zelda had, Alabama has two glamorous older sisters. The first quarter of the novel charts Alabama’s early childhood, her admiration of her sisters, her rebellions against her parents, her sensation of growing up in the deep, traditional South.

And what of the hero? Alabama is aware by her eighteenth year that many men desire her and would like to “protect” her, support her financially and rescue her from her wild reputation (32). She spends time with all of these men, poising herself to be

“rescued” and then refusing, rewriting the fairy tale and, at the same time, rewriting her suitors’ names, calling one “Felix” when she cannot remember his real name. The appropriately named David Knight proves the only successful suitor—of all of the men who have ridden into town on the coattails of the first World War, David is the only man interesting enough to tame the wild “thoroughbred” Alabama (32). He courts her, and in doing so he un-writes her: carving on a post at an officers’ club “David David David Knight Knight Knight and Miss Alabama Nobody” (39). He rewrites her courtship story with a place in it for himself, overtly performing the naming conventions of marriage; Alabama bristles somewhat, then falls in love. He is the hero and, at the same time, he is the false hero who neglects Alabama for his work as an artist, who has an affair with a ballet dancer, and who contributes to her increasing ennui. And yet, at the end, David Knight is still the prince who has managed to hold onto the princess, even though the princess herself remains unsaved.

Even though Zelda Fitzgerald never had the opportunity to complete the book of “herself versus herself” that she wished to write, it is important to note that in her novel the protagonist and the barrier to the protagonist’s happiness are the same person: Alabama Beggs. Despite its dependence on fairy tale structures, *Save Me the Waltz* has no villain. At one point on a boat ride, Alabama sings a made-up song to her husband:

Why am I this way, why am I that?

Why do myself and I constantly spat?

Which is the reasonable, logical me?

Which is the one who must will it to be? (68)

David responds: “Am I expected to answer that?” and Alabama answers, “No” (68). In this way, Alabama exposes her fundamental crisis, and arguably the crux of the author’s illness, but she expresses it as a rhyming song that is overlooked by the characters of the novel. Though this may be in part Fitzgerald’s story of herself versus herself, she never permits it to rise from hilarity into earnestness.

It could be argued that the men in her life (father, husband, beaux) indicate Alabama’s personal and artistic limitations, but at the same time each of these men functions as a provider, a savior, an enabler. It could also be argued that the women in her life (mother, older sisters, daughter, dance instructor, dancer who had an affair with her husband) give Alabama indications of herself, telling her who she is and promising who she can become; but at the same time, these women show Alabama her failures, providing uncomfortable mirrors of female archetypes which she fails to fill or does not wish to fill.

In the end, Alabama is abused by nobody; she is failed only by her own body and she is disillusioned by her inability to flesh out her illusions. Alabama Beggs is both the sought-after princess figure and the opposing character who bars the heroine from finding happiness—herself versus herself.

In Fitzgerald’s case, neither the fairy tale prince nor the psychoanalytic doctor, nor herself in her attempt to be a dancer, is able to rescue her. She is not saved, and by the end, she knows that she will not be—and somehow this certainty is a safety. The fairy tale does not work—it is merely a pretty tale—and yet its emptiness, its impossibility, consoles. It is the serving on a gold platter of a meal she did not cook; it is the gilded

promise painted onto a life that, in the end, does not give any of the things it promised. More knowingly than the insects that “swarm to the holocaust of the hall light,” Alabama and her contemporaries swarm into a frenzied life that bodes destruction. The novel shows a fairy tale that ends unhappily, with the questing third-born daughter gaining not gold nor true love—both she already has, but both lead in part to her demise—but rather, in the end the heroine gains self-knowledge, which has long been the goal of autobiography.

Yet on a larger scale, by telling the story of herself through Alabama, Zelda Fitzgerald completed her own fairy tale of becoming a published author. Dance had failed her, but the publication of *Save Me the Waltz* proved that professional success in the arts—her answer for a meaningful life—was not beyond her.

Publishing the Woman who was “*sick, sick, sick*”

To get a complete sense of the complete psychological circumstances surrounding Zelda Fitzgerald’s life as a writer, it is necessary to look at the publishing history of her book. Fitzgerald’s writing of *Save Me the Waltz* in 1932 was very closely connected to her experience as a mental patient. She wrote the bulk of the book while she was institutionalized at the Baltimore Phipps Clinic, and she dedicated the book to her psychiatrist, Dr. Mildred Squires, whom she describes in one letter as “a sprig of old English lilac in this seething witches cauldron” (Fitzgerald, 466). The circumstances surrounding the writing of the novel place it, as the critic Mary Wood has pointed out, in the tradition of the twentieth-century phenomenon of “asylum autobiographies,” survival

stories written by hospitalized mentally ill women, often at their doctor's suggestion. Many critics have commented on the non-existence of mental illness in the otherwise autobiographical text, and it is generally agreed by critics that Fitzgerald replaces the story of her mental illness with a long and earnest chapter about her attempt and subsequent failure to become a professional ballet dancer. Wood interprets this substitution by arguing that Zelda Fitzgerald escapes being reduced to a psychoanalytic text by writing her asylum autobiography and yet never once mentioning her schizophrenia. Wood suggests that this avoidance is Fitzgerald's way of critiquing the representations of female insanity as dependent upon on the objectification of female bodies. I would add that this is Fitzgerald's way of insisting that, at least as a writer, she is well.

Although *Save Me the Waltz* was completed in the privacy of a hospital, it was published in 1932 by one of the top publishers of the first half of the twentieth century, Charles Scribner's Sons. Scribner's published top-selling novels such as F. Scott Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise* and Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*. The difference between Scribner's publication of Zelda Fitzgerald's novel and its publication of other novels is that it published *Save Me the Waltz* without making any revisions. Reviewers noticed the lack of proper editing and dismissed the novel as carelessly written and insignificant. Matthew Bruccoli wrote in an editor's note to *The Collected Writings of Zelda Fitzgerald*: "Perhaps the wholesale revisions discouraged the proofreaders, or perhaps the author resisted editorial help—but whatever the reasons, *Save Me the Waltz*

was one of the most sloppily edited novels produced by a distinguished American publisher” (5).

The American publisher in question was the house where Maxwell Perkins worked. Perkins was a king-maker. While at Scribner’s he discovered F. Scott Fitzgerald, published Scott’s first book in 1920 and became his friend and editor for life. Perkins also edited and published the novels of Ernest Hemingway, Thomas Wolfe, J.P. Marquand, Erskine Caldwell, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, Alan Paton, and James Jones. Perkins garnered enormous praise for his recognition of new talent and for his foolproof understanding of the structures of books. Perkins was known to be heavily involved in his authors’ revisions, and his suggestions caused writers to abandon futureless projects in favor of fresh ones with greater chances for success. His edits changed twentieth century literature. His writers won Pulitzers.

Knowing this about Maxwell Perkins makes the publication of Zelda Fitzgerald’s novel all the more astonishing. Nobody at Scribner’s tried to work her novel into readable shape, and so *Save Me the Waltz*, which entered bookstores in October of 1932, had no chance at being taken seriously as literature. It is impossible to know what would have happened if Perkins had put the same work into Zelda Fitzgerald’s novel that he did into other works he was responsible for publishing. *Save Me the Waltz* may have been a success, judging from later reprintings in the 1950s in Britain and the 1960s in America.²⁶

²⁶ Matthew Bruccoli, in his 1991 edition of *Save Me the Waltz*, notes that the first edition to follow the initial 1932 Depression printing was in 1953 when Grey Walls Press published the book in England. Following that, the first American republishing was in 1967 by Southern Illinois University Press (5). In *The Romantic Egoists* (2003), Bruccoli states, “*Save Me the Waltz* has had six editions and many reprintings in America and England since 1967” (241).

On the other hand, Zelda Fitzgerald's 1930s short stories were not selling, despite agent Harold Ober's sincere efforts to place them in popular magazines of the time; this lack of interest, due to both the depression economy and the relative unpopularity of both Fitzgeralds once the Roaring Twenties ended, indicates that the novel still may have failed. But this is speculation. The fact is that *Save Me the Waltz* earned a total of \$120.73, received mostly negative reviews, and soon fell out of print.

As mentioned in my introduction, Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald became a legend as Scott's heroine and wife with the 1920 publication of F. Scott Fitzgerald's first novel, *This Side of Paradise*. She was a controversial public figure—a symbol of the Jazz Age, an original flapper—before her late twenties when she became obsessed with a desire to make her own art: to dance, paint, and write. She plunged herself into ballet training, practicing day after day, all day long. Her teachers praised her skill and believed that she could dance semi-professionally, but she had begun dancing too late to reach her goal of becoming a prima ballerina. In 1930, at age twenty-nine, she suffered a mental breakdown in a taxicab where she sat, traffic-jammed, on her way to a dance lesson; from there, she was hospitalized.

Zelda Fitzgerald was hospitalized first in France and then in Switzerland, where she was diagnosed as a schizophrenic. On September 15, 1931, the doctors at the Swiss Prangins Clinic felt that she was well enough to go home. She and Scott and their daughter Scottie moved back to Montgomery, Alabama, where Zelda had grown up, and they rented a house there. Scott found life in Montgomery predictably dull, and in October of 1931 he accepted an invitation to write a screenplay for Irving Thalberg in

Hollywood. He left Alabama for eight weeks. During those weeks Zelda Fitzgerald wrote. She sent eight stories to Harold Ober, Scott's agent, all of which have since been lost. Synopses of the stories remain in Ober's files, and his notes on them indicate that he found them "very well written," and in one case, "As good as Scott's earlier Southern stories" (Wagner-Martin 143). But the stories did not sell, with the exception of "A Couple of Nuts," which Ober later placed in *Scribner's Magazine* in August 1932. Unhindered by the lack of initial success, she began writing a novel and had completed a third of it by the time Scott returned to Montgomery in December of 1931 (144).

In February of 1932 Zelda Fitzgerald had another breakdown and was admitted to the Phipps Clinic in Baltimore, where the doctors permitted her to write for two hours a day. She finished her novel on March 9, less than a month after her admission. That day Zelda wrote to Scott: "My writing went so successfully that I didn't have time to make my usual observations on our social state. It's an amusing book which I will mail to you Monday. I sent a copy direct to Max, but I know Scribner's will refuse it" (Bryer 157).²⁷

When Scott learned that Zelda had sent her manuscript to Maxwell Perkins before showing it to him, he was livid. Part of his concern was that she had named her male lead Amory Blaine, after the protagonist of Scott's first novel. In addition, he was frustrated that Zelda had written into her novel much of the same material that he was writing into his novel *Tender is the Night*, which fictionalized his own autobiographical experience of

²⁷ The letters in this section are taken from two excellent compilations, cited here as Bryer and Bruccoli: Jackson Bryer and Cathy W. Barks, eds, *Dear Scott, Dearest Zelda: The Love Letters of F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald*; and Matthew J Bruccoli, ed, *F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Life in Letters*.

being married to a schizophrenic woman. The final insult was that Zelda had completed her novel in about six weeks while Scott had been working on his for ten years, interrupted considerably by having to write and sell short stories to fund Zelda's hospital expenses. In a letter dated March 14, 1932, Scott wrote to Zelda's doctor Mildred Squires and asked her to do three things: one, to find out why Zelda had sent the manuscript directly to Maxwell Perkins without first showing it to Scott; two, to tell Mrs. Sayre (Zelda's mother) that Zelda is "sick, sick, sick"; and three, to keep the novel out of circulation until he had read and critiqued it (Bruccoli 210). Two days later, Scott telegrammed Max: PLEASE DO NOT JUDGE OR IF NOT ALREADY DONE EVEN CONSIDER ZELDAS BOOK UNTIL YOU GET REVISED VERSION LETTER FOLLOWS (210).

When she found out how angry Scott was, Zelda wrote back apologetically, saying that she had not wanted to interrupt his writing and that she was anxious to send the book successfully to print. She wrote, "Max will not want it and I prefer to do the corrections after having his opinion" (Bryer 163). In a subsequent letter to him, Zelda acknowledged to Scott that indeed they shared material, but that her book lacked continuity; she offered to revise her book according to his wishes. She planned to use their joint life material, she wrote, "when I get the tranquility of spirit necessary to write the story of myself versus myself. That is the book I really want to write" (Fitzgerald 468). I call attention again to this mention of herself versus herself because I believe it is one of the most Sisyphean of the struggles she faces in her life and in her writing. Not only is it the sentiment of a woman divided between being a wife and an artist, a

traditional Southern daughter and a liberated adult; it is also the classic schizophrenic's cry.

On March 25, Scott telegraphed Maxwell Perkins:

THINK NOVEL CAN SAFELY BE PLACED ON YOUR LIST FOR SPRING
IT IS ONLY A QUESTION OF CERTAIN SMALL BUT NONE THE LESS
NECESSARY REVISIONS ... YOU CAN HELP ME BY RETURNING
MANUSCRIPT TO HER UPON HER REQUEST GIVING SOME PRETEXT
FOR NOT HAVING AS YET TIME TO READ IT ... IN MY OPINION IT IS A
FINE NOVEL.... (Brucoli 211)

Three days later, Scott wired Perkins to say that it was okay for him to read the novel, but that if he liked it to make sure to revise the middle section and to change both the book's title and the name Amory Blaine (212). In April Zelda agreed to work with Scott on revising the novel, and so the lengthy process began (Bryer 166).

Scott's letters to Perkins remained even and professional in their tone. In late April of 1932, Scott wrote Perkins: "Zelda's novel is good, improved in every way. It is new. She has largely eliminated the speakeasy-nights-and-our-trip-to-Paris atmosphere. You'll like it. It should reach you in ten days. I am too close to it to judge it but it may be even better than I think" (Brucoli 217). Scott went on to ask Perkins not to praise Zelda too much, in hope of preventing her from getting wild ideas of fame. Also he asked Perkins to speak with him before discussing a book contract with his wife. On May 14, Scott sent Perkins the revised novel along with a note saying, "It should interest the many thousands interested in dancing. It is about something + absolutely new, + should sell"

(218). He requested that if Scribner's rejected the novel, to communicate the news to Zelda through Scott. But, he added, "If you accept it write her directly and I withdraw all restraints on whatever meed [*sic*] of praise you may see fit to give" (218).

Through Maxwell Perkins' negotiation, Scribner's publishing house accepted the novel and in early June of 1932 sent Zelda the book contract, which included a provision that 50% of the book's royalties—up to \$5000—would go toward Scott's debt to Scribner's. The rules of this contract provide just one more example of how the Fitzgeralds' writing could not escape being inextricably connected: not only in material, but in monetary reward. Zelda signed the contract on June 14 and on June 26, Zelda left the Phipps Clinic. She spent the summer living with Scott and revising her novel. *Save Me the Waltz* arrived in stores on Oct 7, 1932, sold 1392 copies, and fell out of print (Taylor 263). In the letter quoted earlier, Scott had asked Scribner's not to overdo publicity on *Save Me the Waltz* so as not to give Zelda grandiose ideas about becoming an authoress. It may have been for that reason that the book was printed on cheap paper rather than Scribner's standard high-quality paper. Furthermore, Scribner's did not spend any money on publicity or on a distribution plan for the book (263). As mentioned earlier, *Save Me the Waltz* earned Zelda a total of \$120.73, not enough money for the Scott-debt provision to be activated (263). Kendall Taylor offers the explanation: "The figure was this low because Fitzgerald had not arranged for proof-reading, as he always did for himself, and much of Zelda's royalty had gone toward corrections in page proofs" (263). Although, as the book's audience immediately noted, even the corrections made were not enough for the book to appear professionally written and published.

The reviewers of the book did not miss the lack of editing. The *New York Times* wrote: “It is a pity that the publisher could not have had a more accurate proofreading for it is inconceivable that the author should have undertaken to use as much of the French language as appears in this book, if she knew so little of it as this book indicates—almost every single French word (and there are a good many) as well as many foreign names and a good many plain English words are misspelled” (Taylor 264). A review by William McFee for the *New York Sun* noted: “In the desperate attempt to be contrary and enigmatic she resembles an insane child ... The author occasionally has only the vaguest notion of the meanings of many words she uses, but the effect of the accumulated fantastic metaphors is fascination...” (William McFee, quoted in Milford 263).

Some reviewers were able to overlook the novel’s many mistakes and focus on the story and prose. These included Gilbert Seldes for *The Dial*, who wrote that the book was “a gallery of unforgettable pictures which Mrs. Fitzgerald, out of a series of images and metaphors, distills the actual spirit of the age” (Taylor 264). The *Philadelphia Public Ledger* called it “a book constructive in thought, clever in execution, individual, fascinating and brisk” (264). Critic Frank Daniels said that: “*Save Me the Waltz* is written in lively fashion, sprightly with conversations and adventure among the gay young post-war cynics of America and Europe” (264). But the fact of the matter is that, as Zelda’s biographer Nancy Milford pointed out, “[the novel] did not appear to have been copyedited by Scribner’s at all” (Milford 270).

On Aug 2, 1933, Maxwell Perkins sent Zelda Fitzgerald the check for her royalties and wrote:

Maybe I ought to have warned you about corrections for they came to a great deal. I knew they would, when the proofs began coming back, but I knew you wanted to get the book the way you thought it ought to be. The result won't be encouraging to you, and I have not liked to ask you whether you were writing any more because of that fact, but I do think the last part of that book in particular was very fine; and that if we had not been in the depths of a depression, the result would have been quite different. But as it was, nothing got any show unless it were by some writer already noted for earlier successes, or had some very special salience. (Milford 318)

Unlike her dancing, which she practiced strenuously under Madame Egorova, the director for Diaghilev's Ballet Russes, or her painting, which she studied briefly in both Capri and Philadelphia, Zelda's writing never had the advantage of any professional advice aside from that given to her by her husband. So it happened that one of the great travesties of twentieth century publishing involved Zelda Fitzgerald.

It remains unknown why Perkins would have allowed this novel to move virtually unedited into production. Certainly Perkins did not want to anger Scott. Scott's letters to him were strict and demanding, and Perkins may not have wanted to enter the politics of such a volatile spousal relationship. Economic reasons may have factored in. The novel was published during the Depression and Perkins had at the time many more financially viable clients, such as Ernest Hemingway and Thomas Wolfe. For him to invest time editing Zelda Fitzgerald's novel would have implied an investment in her as a viable author—sane—whereas not trying implied that he was doing a favor for Scott, his close

friend and client. So the book went to press with its only changes made by Scott and Zelda, both notoriously bad spellers and clumsy proofreaders. Both were too close to the book to judge it impartially, having lived the material that Zelda had written.

Maxwell Perkins' willingness to publish *Save Me the Waltz* without subjecting it to his usual rigorous editing recalls Mary Wood's description of "asylum autobiography," the institutional idea of publishing authentic stories of mentally ill women in their own words, sanctioned by the doctor's introduction. Sanctioned by the distinguished name of Scribner's, Zelda Fitzgerald became an author, even though at the time of publication her novel was in no shape for print.²⁸ By allowing the novel to go into bookstores "the way you thought it ought to be," Maxwell Perkins—perhaps inadvertently—dismissed it as a novelty written by the insane wife of Scott, rather than as a novel in its own right.

Haunted by the Ghost of the Asylum

However easily dismissed *Save Me the Waltz* was during the time and events leading into its publication, it was nonetheless a major event in Zelda Fitzgerald's expression of her own truths. Her desire—beyond all others—was to dance as a prima ballerina, and this ethereal wish was one that required her body to work at performing somebody else. When she wrote the story of Alabama Beggs, naming the heroine for the

²⁸ In regard to his editing *Save Me the Waltz* for inclusion in *The Collected Writings of Zelda Fitzgerald* (1991), Matthew J. Bruccoli, the noted F. Scott Fitzgerald scholar, used the corrected text published by Southern Illinois University Press in 1967—the novel's first republishing in America. Bruccoli wrote: "No attempt has been made to improve the author's style or to make more than the really necessary corrections. Baffling sentences have not been solved, and puzzling words have been left wherever they make any sense. Much of the unusual quality of *Save Me the Waltz* comes from its idiosyncratic prose; no good purpose would be served by tampering with it" (5).

state in which she was born, she stitched together her experience and the experiences she could have had. Although in September of 1929 Zelda Fitzgerald was invited to dance with the ballet school of the San Carlo Opera Ballet Company in Naples, but refused, she allows Alabama the opportunity to go to Naples, leave her family and dance. As if punishing herself for not taking it, Fitzgerald uses the Italian ballet experience as the catalyst to damage Alabama's body beyond further use and land her—just like her author—in the hospital. In all of its plot points, characters, and story arcs, this asylum-written novel never escapes being haunted by the ghost of its author's truth.

Just like any form of testimony from suffering humans, *Save Me the Waltz* is marked by its own struggles for communication. Elaine Showalter wrote in *The Female Malady* (1985) that madness is “the desperate communication of the powerless” (5), and I believe that this is the type of limitation that she refers to. All autobiographers must summon difficult-to-tell stories, but the psychiatrically distressed have to surmount the further hurdle of expressing these stories through their diagnosed inability to communicate sanely or—by medicine and society's standards—effectively.

But as many writers have observed, testimony is by its very nature flawed. In an article about theater and testimony, Allen Feldman points out the threat of confessional writing is that it becomes too simplistic, reducing the enormity of the writer's suffering into something tangible and articulate. This reduction happens easily in writing, and often. Feldman is concerned that “the modes of publicness and consumption through which these biographies pass will simulate a cathartic affect that too easily transcends the

violence described, as the biography is inlaid into a juridical or therapeutic resolution” (164).

Although he is writing specifically about narratives of post-human rights violations trauma, Feldman’s concerns translate into the narrative of a psychiatric patient. In both cases, in order to write an account of his or her past, the victim must work through layers of past suffering in order to recount the meanings of the trauma that has happened. Because of the public nature of the act of writing, in implying that a reader is welcome, it makes sense that a veil—be it a myth, a fairy tale, or a parable of history—may help the writer to be able to narrate the truth for public consumption. Such a veil may, in fact, be needed for the story to be told at all.

A book written in the hospital by a patient under treatment for schizophrenia constitutes one type of testimony. When we consider that the point of testimony is to hear speech from someone who has suffered unspeakable hurt, this type of writing—which offers readers a glimpse into the “wonders and terrors” of the insane mind—is not so different (Wood 247). Furthermore, looking at *Zelda Fitzgerald’s* novel through the lens of the theory of testimony helps show some of the ways that life-writing (however true to the facts) can be therapeutic. Avrom Fleishman has pointed out that if self-knowledge comes too soon, the autobiographical quest fails: “If he [or she] should, by some misadventure, find himself [or herself] understanding his [or her] life before writing it, he [or she] had better not write it at all—or he [or she] must feign a voyage to a land where he [or she] has already arrived” (12). In other words, the autobiographical impulse should end when the life in question is fully mapped—which means that once the patient is

healthy, or once the human rights victim has forgotten the trauma of the past, there is no use for personal writing. Conversely, this means that while patients and victims are still working through their “voyage,” personal writing might be an indispensable way to reach the shore.²⁹

Feldman, on the other hand, finds fault with the conventions of testimony as a genre, adding, “When a biographical narrative is processed through prescriptive expectations—that is, expected to produce healing, trauma alleviation, justice, and collective catharsis—it is emplotted” (170). Whatever therapeutic values the writing may have, the process is still too problematic and painful. This accusation is similar to the charge Mary Wood places on asylum autobiographies, in which the mentally ill woman’s story becomes sanctioned by the hospital, and becomes, at times, an advertisement for the doctor’s healing skills. Feldman describes testimonial writing as “midwifed from materialities of pain and suffering” (164); regarding asylum autobiographies, I suspect that Wood would concur.

But in the case of asymptotic autobiography, or what I argue Zelda Fitzgerald is doing in her novel, the freedom of writing fiction turns the writing process into an art, a journey on which the writer willingly embarks, instead of a narrative “processed through prescriptive expectations” (Feldman 170). Wood believes that Fitzgerald liberated herself through tampering with the asylum autobiography genre and I agree that she liberated

²⁹ In my choice to link Fleishman’s idea of the “voyage” and Zelda Fitzgerald’s illness through which she wrote, I should mention that the link between insanity and water has a long history. See the first few pages of Michel Foucault’s *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*.

herself through writing—though I think the more important method she used was blending her life story with the symbols and conventions of fairy tales.

Asymptotic autobiography does nothing to hide its deliberate conflation of the actual and the hopeful. Part of any sort of autobiography involves a tension between telling the story that is most accessible to the author in addition to the story of what the author desires to tell. In her book *Ghostly Matters*, Avery Gordon speaks to this tension when she explains:

Complex personhood means that the stories people tell about themselves, about their troubles, about their social worlds, about their societies' problems are entangled and weave between what is immediately available as a story and what their imaginations are reaching toward. (4)

To be a fully complex being telling a complex story means to create a tapestry of truths representing a life. It is for this reason that imagined truths can still be considered true.

Fairy tales have traditionally been told and retold and retold again, with the tellers and listeners constantly reinventing them and inserting into the telling their own truths. By using these stories to narrate a self, these writers free their own stories from the sick individual and pass them into the tradition of heroines who suffer adversity and survive. The rewriting of fairy tales is a way for the writer to become the heroine of her own story, and to contextualize her own small experience in the frame of a great and timeless tradition. These stories serve the purpose of making trauma tellable, at times entertaining, or at least comfortable. They relocate the familiar language of play, children, and safety to show that to survive life, childhood, and play requires great courage.

Bettelheim made the case that fairy tales relocate internal fears into external plot devices, thus turning the fairy tale into a tangible map for a child's worries. The forest represents confusion, for example. Rapunzel's rescue via her hair is any way for a woman to save herself through her own body. In *Save Me the Waltz*, Alabama Beggs suffers from fairy tale symbols adapted into modern life: a dance injury replaces schizophrenia; a raucous trans-Atlantic boat ride with fellow American expatriates stands in for the journey away from home; and the language throughout, the communication difficulties marking the sticky and confusing situations Alabama navigates, creates the woods through which the protagonist must journey.

While an individual is the author of his or her personal writing, no single individual may claim fairy tales as his or her "own." Nobody owns fairy tales. They change constantly with each incarnation, as each new listener's response dictates the details brought out and further embellished by the teller. They are some of the only true public property—in contrast to autobiography, the individual stories of lives, which only one person (the writer) truly can claim. Yet both fairy tales and autobiography make public the struggles of an individual. While Rapunzel had hair to lower, Zelda Fitzgerald had art to make: both tools initiate an escape, but both must be mediated through the men (a prince, a husband, a doctor) who can allow her a way out. The heart of the novel is Fitzgerald's intense preoccupation with her own experience, but the novel reflects her role as a quester in a great tradition of female quests. She moves the story glamorizing her suffering away from the self-pitying and clinical and into the realm of folklore and fantasy. Thus, fairy tales are a veil, lending to Fitzgerald's narrative journey through

illness something anonymous, but no less personal—something that enables her to escape into a story she wishes to tell.

The Communicative Power of Fairy Tales

Perhaps the greatest dilemma faced by Alabama Beggs in *Save Me the Waltz* is the inability for self-expression. The novel opens with a young Alabama asking her parents for narratives of herself as a child, trying to piece together some cohesive, external sense of self—and it ends with a broken, disillusioned, middle-aged Alabama emptying out ashtrays and noting that her way of doing it is very “expressive of myself” (Fitzgerald 196). These words indicate that she has seen beyond the promises made by fairy tales and cigarette ads, and is now, like a good adult, cleaning up the disappointing mess left over. She spends the bulk of the novel trying to locate satisfying external outlets for her internal energy and earnestness, and she is never able to find a consistent fit. In many ways, this novel does tell the story of herself versus herself that she had been intending to write, and the struggle for one of these selves to surface and explain itself in narrative form is enabled by the fairy tale form. Consider the application of Deborah White’s definition in this respect:

A hysteric is someone who cannot tell a story. At least, a hysteric cannot tell a coherent story—a story whose disparate parts hang together. When a hysteric’s narrative reaches its climax it tends ... to hang fire: an explanatory scene is missing, a key motive misplaced. At this, the analyst, too, is left hanging as he scrutinizes the shadow or the narrator’s excuse and the body of her pain. (1035)

What follows is that until the story of her life is complete, a mental patient remains ill; her cure is contingent upon her ability to narrate herself, and to understand her own narrations. Being a psychoanalytic patient requires her to observe herself and create fragments of text that “readers” can recreate into coherent texts. If in her state of mental flux, Fitzgerald is unable to piece together her life coherently, it follows that she might turn to using the fairy tale medium, which is both structured in a way that she knows and can uphold, and at the same time imaginary—inherently refusing reason and cohesion. It is no wonder that a patient in this state would borrow her narrative from stories she knows and by which she is comforted, stories with characters who are themselves symbols, not personalities.

Fairy tales are ultimately performances, attempts to share wisdom. By using the fairy tale medium in the form of a novel, Fitzgerald works within the joint avenues of activity (as questing heroine) and passivity (as women waiting in tower/hospital for rescue) that her situation requires of her. She is manufacturing herself and her story for a new set of writers by telling a fairy tale with herself at its center, and at the same time, she is requiring that the reader listen. If madness is in fact the “desperate communication of the powerless,” then Fitzgerald requires a form of communication that is grounded in wisdom and consolation, a form of telling that has already been told, that cannot fail—hence, a fairy tale (Showalter 5).

In Zelda Fitzgerald’s hospital letters to Scott in the 1930s, she writes incessantly about fairy tales, and in many of these letters she tells sympathetically of fairy tale old women, witches and furies—the potential dancers at the end of the tale, not the heroines.

Fitzgerald, who knew fairy tales well, would have been familiar with dance as the quintessential punishment for the witches and other mad females; in the end of the story, these women are often forced to dance a “mad tarantella” in red-hot shoes at the wedding of the “good” heroine (Gilbert and Gubar 55). Many women writers, including Anne Sexton (“The Red Shoes”) and Margaret Atwood (*Lady Oracle*), have used red dancing shoe imagery to describe the traditional, punishable madness ascribed to the woman writer.³⁰ Fitzgerald wrote to Scott from the Phipps Clinic, “Did you know the Furies turned out to be respectable old women who went about the countryside doing good and laying eggs in their night shirts? So much for Eschyllus [*sic*]. The old moralist!” (Fitzgerald 466). In this quote she is overturning classical tragedy (Aeschylus) in favor of a type of comedy: the Furies are not demonic monsters but rather kindly grandmothers, whose good deeds have in them a touch of the Easter Bunny.

From the mental hospital, Fitzgerald’s letters show traditional fears reversing themselves—witches are not frightening, and the world is innocent and innocuous—the rest of the world, and all of life itself, seems merely fairy tale material. One of her most fairy tale-laden letters to Scott was written around this time, in 1931 from the Prangins Clinic in Nyon, Switzerland, where she was then a patient:

Darling, Berne is such a funny little town: we bumped into Hansel and

Gretel and the Babes in the Wood were just under the big clock. It must

³⁰ In the fairy tale “The Red Shoes,” a poor girl adopted by a wealthy woman becomes vain about a pair of red dancing shoes she procures from a diabolical cobbler. The wealthy woman would not have approved, but she was too blind to see the shoes’ actual color. The poor girl thinks about her red shoes so much, even at church, that finally she becomes cursed and when she performs a dance in them, her feet cannot stop dancing—and so her feet are cut off.

be a haven for all lost things, painted on itself that way. Germanic legends slide over those red, peeling roofs like a fantastic shower and the ends of all stories probably lie in the crevasses. We climbed the cathedral in whispers, and there it was hidden in the valley, paved with sugar blocks, the home of good witches, and I asked of all they painted statues three wishes. [*sic*]

That you should love me

That you love me

You love me!

O can you? I love you so.....

O my love—how can you love a silly girl who buys cheese and plaited bread from enchanted princes in the public market and eats them on the streets of a city that pops into life like a cuckoo-clock [*sic*] when you press the right note of appreciation

I *love* you, dear. (461)

Note her playful engaging with the imaginary, her association of the traditional beauty of Switzerland with childhood folklore and legend. Note also that her Berne is a “haven for all lost things, painted on itself that way,” language that recalls a map for finding that which has been lost. Furthermore, in this description her reality physically touches the fairy tale realm: she “bumped” into Hansel and Gretel, and she sees Germanic legends “sliding” over the roofs, in whose tangible crevasses, she suspects, exist the intangible ends of stories. The road she walks is “paved” with sugar blocks. These mythic meetings

are impossible meetings, but Fitzgerald superimposes them onto a hospital outing to a small Swiss town. In this letter to Scott, the curve of the fairy tale events becomes the reality of the day: fairy tale autobiography becomes more functional, and more meaningful, than the truthful axis of whatever really happened that day in Berne or whatever her doctors would have reported.

Furthermore, note the use of folkloric characters in this sketch: Fitzgerald meets three witches—good witches who deal in wishes of love; the suspense throughout the cathedral climb suggests that the witches’ home was the desired end, the resting place of all wisdom and hope. After asking these witches to grant her wishes, Fitzgerald writes herself into being a heroine/princess again: a “silly girl” engaging with princes. Fitzgerald uses fairy tales to engage a number of roles, showing herself as a girl trying on personalities, the heroine and the witch; while at that time in her life, she is a hospital patient, a case on whom doctors are trying on theories.

In this way, Zelda Fitzgerald’s use of fairy tales in her writing during the time of her illness is hopeful. It indicates that individual personhood is infinitely more complex than any doctor-made definition could gauge, and it accepts that complexity; to act as if a person could fit a theory would be merely performing. Furthermore, in her fairy tale adaptations she indicates that salvation, sanity, consolation, goodness, and wickedness are all inventions—and that accepting truth this creates the opportunity, however humble, to find wonder in the performance of life.

Chapter Two

“Myself versus Myself”: Fairy Tales as Performance of Epic Self

Of course, I glad [*sic*] submit to anything you want about the book or anything else ... However, I would like you to thoroughly understand that my revision will be made on an aesthetic basis: that the other material which I will elect is nevertheless legitimate stuff which has cost me a pretty emotional penny to amass and which I intend to use when I can get the tranquility of spirit necessary to write the story of myself versus myself. That is the book I really want to write.³¹

Like straw into gold, Zelda Fitzgerald spun, through her novel, her life into a fairy tale—complete with rescues and crones and magic and transformation. In *Save Me the Waltz*, she injected her own experience both into the suffering heroine who needed rescue and into the witch who (by her insanity) had caged the heroine into the tower. Both of these identities surface in her writing: she performs her different identity elements through the different roles in the tales that influence and shadow her writing. In doing so, she shows how these conflicting selves pull each other down. At times, the narrator of a fairy tale can be the victor, the heroine, the beneficiary of the happy ending. But at other

³¹ From a letter written by Zelda Fitzgerald to her husband Scott in April 1932, when she was being treated for schizophrenia at the Baltimore Phipps Clinic; *Collected Writings of Zelda Fitzgerald* (468).

times, fairy tales require the narrator to empathize—and in empathizing, inhabit—less desirable roles including villains, dwarves, the misunderstood and the disenfranchised. Fitzgerald uses fairy tales to examine her life both as desirable fairy tale heroine in her early years and as dejected fairy tale misfit in her later years, thus plotting two of her “myselfs” at odds with one another.

In the letter she wrote to Scott in April of 1932, quoted above, in which she responds to his frustration about their novels using the same subject material (described in my Chapter One), Zelda begins by performing wifely passivity: promising to “submit to anything you want about the book or anything else.” But her letter strikes back at Scott midway through, when she exacts the boundaries of exactly what she is willing to change. She insists that she will make revisions on an “aesthetic basis,” rather than on the necessity of privileging his truths or her truths. This emphasis on aesthetics indicates that even though she used her life as her subject matter, as if the book were an autobiography, she is ultimately crafting it into a story that she hopes will be aesthetically pleasing, plot-based, and able to stand alone. Most importantly for the purposes of this chapter, she belittles the book she has written by telling Scott that it is not the book she “really want[s] to write”; she goes on to explain that the story of herself versus herself is the true struggle that she wishes to explore in writing, once she has the emotional resources—in other words, once she is stronger or, perhaps, cured.

Zelda, Scott, and all people involved in the publishing of *Save Me the Waltz* were in agreement that Zelda was far from cured at the time when she was writing the book—even though she was often coherent in her letters and disciplined in her work ethic. The

fairy tales motifs and allusions she wrote into her novel work to normalize the experience of mental illness and criticize ordinary life as being, at times, insane. The writer Richard Siken notes in his essay “Hansel” that if you run into a house made out of candy, you are either dead or crazy. Fairy tales invoke a world where the insane and imaginary become normalized—and the normal (e.g., parents who wish to protect their children) becomes imaginary. These are stories in which things and people can be transformed into and away from what they are supposed to be; the “good” and the “bad” might reverse at any time. Greg Bills puts forth the insight: “Fairy tales ... offered an unregulated sanctuary not only for creatures that could not exist in actuality—talking animals, shoemaking elves, Baba Yaga’s chicken-legged house—but for emotions that had no conceivable outlet in reality” (Bills 45). In the logic of fairy tale thaumaturgy, such magical machinations appear all the time. The effects can be unsettling or playful, but they are always open to sudden, inexplicable change. It is in the nature of fairy tales to normalize the insane, hallucinogenic, and strange; in her writing, Zelda Fitzgerald hints that all of the extreme roles within fairy tales are performances that everyday people play in everyday life.

Furthermore, in her novel Fitzgerald links these performances of self to the performances of society; if a performing self stands as an advertisement for its (true) self, then a performing society is one in which advertisements loom large in the mass imagination, overwhelming and standing in for the objects or experiences they purportedly represent. Fitzgerald neither fully condemns nor fully celebrates these performances; rather, she offers them up and examines them, as if to say that this is just

the way it is. Fitzgerald is revolutionary in writing about the self as performance in a time period when selfhood was considered fragmented, as well as worthy of fiction, but not necessarily performative.³² Her novel stands apart by its acts of recycling the seemingly innocuous children's story language from childhood to process and describe the unsanctioned, insane, and epic events marking her own adulthood and the adulthoods of her peers.

“As Good as a Book”

In *Save Me the Waltz* Fitzgerald recasts life itself as a series of performances. Alabama Beggs plays the heroine, the heroine's interior “villain,” and many other roles in between; her conception of the self is performative, depending on its environment and on whichever cast of characters is currently making demands. As a child, when she watches her older sister ritually charming one of her suitors, Alabama “wished it were herself. There would be her father at the supper table. It was nearly the same; the necessity of being something that you really weren't was the same” (25). She learned early on that part of her sense of self, and her way of giving life meaning, required that she experience the playfulness of performing, of being a character that “you really weren't.”

The simple, generic roles in fairy tales allow Fitzgerald a medium to demonstrate that the idea of a cohesive, single-role self is a fiction. At the very least, any conception of performance-less self would lack a “song”—recalling her fears of having her illness

³² Certain works of 1920s-1930s literature, such as Nella Larsen's *Passing* (1929), focus on the motif of performing race, but I don't know of any other writers who deal so intimately with the idea of performance being at the heart of personhood.

cured and undergoing “castration,” and as a result being left song-less. In “The Queen’s Looking Glass” Gilbert and Gubar illuminate the idea that many fairy tales do contain both sides of any given woman—the acquiescent “angel” persona, “invented and defined by the magic looking glass of the male-authored text,” and the inner “monster” that at any moment threatens to surface (Gilbert and Gubar 43). It could be argued that Zelda Fitzgerald was writing a fairy tale for this precise psychological tension—the suppression or promotion of one of two selves, which she, fretful about “myself vs. myself,” would have understood. As her writing indicates, she knew that every woman was in fact many different women; she also knew that she was being instructed to let go of some of those women who were known to be insane. Parceling out who was who became, for her, a lifelong challenge.

The following excerpt from *Save Me the Waltz* deals with the driving need of Alabama Beggs to perform a series of different selves instead of merely a single, static one. In the following passage, which takes place on a boat ferrying Alabama and her husband and child from America to Europe, Alabama presents herself as a paper-doll figure³³ that can be dressed up and down into different personalities. She defines herself to a stranger by renouncing the idea that the self exists unperformed. When the passage begins, Alabama is walking through the boat, humming a flower duet from Madame Butterfly. She is approached by an Englishman:

³³ One of Zelda Fitzgerald’s most well known bodies of artwork is the paper-doll collection she made for her daughter Scottie. The paper-dolls included Zelda herself, Scott, and Scottie—in their negligees but with a collection of elegant clothes; the family of Louis IV; The Big Bad “Wolff” [*sic*] from Red Riding Hood (who, for clothes, owns two outfits: a party dress, and a hunting costume complete with guns). Images of her paper-dolls can be found in *Zelda: An Illustrated Life* (ed. Lanahan). The “Wolff” and her costumes are reprinted as Figures 5 and 6 in the Appendix.

“Are you artistic?” asked the Englishman.

“No.”

“But you were singing.”

“Because I am happy to find that I am a very self-sufficient person.”

“Oh, but are you? How narcissistic!”

“Very. I am very pleased with the way I walk and talk and do almost everything. Shall I show you how nicely I can?”

“Please.”

“Then treat me to a drink.”

“Come along to the bar.”

Alabama swung off in imitation of some walk she had once admired. “But I warn you,” she said, “I am only really myself when I’m somebody else whom I have endowed with these wonderful qualities from my imagination.”

“But I shan’t mind that,” said the Englishman, feeling vaguely that he should be expectant. Anything incomprehensible has a sexual significance to many people under thirty-five.

“And I warn you that I am a monogamist at heart if not in theory,” said Alabama, sensing his difficulty.

“Why?”

“A theory that the only emotion which cannot be replicated is the thrill of variety.”

“Are you wisecracking?”

“Of course. None of my theories work.”

“You’re as good as a book.”

“I am a book. Pure fiction.”

“Then who invented you?”

“The teller of the First National Bank, to pay for some mistakes he made in mathematics. You see, they would have fired him if he hadn’t got the money *some way*,” she invented.

“Poor man.”

“If it hadn’t been for him I should have had to go on being myself forever.

And then I shouldn’t have had all these powers to please you.”

“You would have pleased me anyway.”

“What makes you think so?”

“You are a solid person at heart,” he said seriously. (69-70)

Alabama is herself, she explains here to her one-person audience, when she is acting or inventing. Her spiritual center exists in the very state of storytelling itself. Alabama manufactures herself before the Englishman as something that can be created, shown off, and then tucked away for some later use. Even her walk is not really her own, but imitative of something else. The scene ends abruptly, the Englishman is disposed of within the novel, and Alabama returns to her family to write herself into another role.

By acknowledging the emptiness at the center of the performance of self, Alabama is refusing the prescriptions of psychology that require cohesiveness of identity. In the above quote about being a monogamist, she is in fact performing herself as a good,

faithful wife; but by the very nature of performing, she renders the ideal of good wifehood problematic, even folkloric. By claiming that she is “pure fiction,” she aligns herself with fairy tales, inserting herself self-consciously into heroine status or art-object status, calling attention to her existence within a story. Moreover, the idea of “pure fiction” makes her appear completely self-invented, fun, weightless, and free—all characteristics of her generation’s zeitgeist. By calling herself a book, she asserts her desire at once to write herself and to be written. In admitting that none of her theories work, she is left without a diagnosis: she is a case who must flit between philosophies, a performance that professes itself to be heartless. She blames the bank teller for “inventing” her, which, in turn, portrays her as a type of currency, a remake-able, tradable object. This idea of invention and trade hearkens back to her description in the essay “Eulogy of the Flapper” of the flapper as a woman who has learned to apply “business methods to being young” (Fitzgerald 393).

By consistently and playfully eluding any single role to which we as readers could confine her, Alabama’s self-narration remains safely removed from being a static biography. The story she tells about herself curves asymptotically along the lines of her life. By veiling herself through performance, Fitzgerald creates between Alabama and the reader a distance, a sense of irony and a sense of humor. Much like fairy tale and myth heroines, Alabama remains opaque enough for readers, both male and female, to be able to watch her, theorize about her, and to enjoy the spectacle she presents. Even though she is our narrator, our only avenue into the story, she feels—as a character—imaginary. But unlike the one-dimensional heroines of fairy tales, Alabama is aware that she is part of a

story, and that by presenting herself as an archetype, she—like all good fairy tales—will be picked up, rewritten, and thus will pass onto posterity as an interesting “artifact.” In a way, Fitzgerald disseminates Alabama’s story as unfinished material that new writers could pick up and adapt for their own stories. To archive herself, Alabama self-mythologizes inside the text, similar to the way that the Zelda-inspired heroines become enchanted objects in Scott’s novels.

In proper Newtonian fashion in which every action has an equal and opposite reaction, it is telling that in *Save Me the Waltz* only other people adequately provide reflections. Mirrors do nothing but dissatisfy Alabama, further demonstrating the necessity for performance. The continual distorting effects of mirrors on Alabama discount any idea that the self is a reliable audience. We see many examples of unreflective mirrors in the novel’s first chapter: in a mirror her “feet look as if they were somebody else’s” (23), and she is constantly disappointed when she looks at herself “in the hope of finding something more than she expected” (30). What *is* is not interesting; what is performed is. Later in the book, when Alabama is helping close out her old dance studio, she is unable to find anything worthwhile in or behind the mirror:

At her last lesson, Alabama searched behind the dismantled segments of the mirror for lost pirouettes, for the ends of a thousand arabesques.

There was nothing but thick dust, and the traces of hairpins rusted to the wall where the huge frame had hung. (140)

Simone Weil Davis reads this passage soundly, observing: “Alabama’s furtive search behind the mirror (which so typifies self-presentation) for something of substance, yields

nothing. The Lacanian mirage of a solid self is rendered absurd by the sad discovery of ‘dust to dust’” (172). I would further point out that although she seeks, in the mirror, the ephemeral performances of dance (pirouettes, arabesques), she finds only traces of the unromantic, cheap means for preparing oneself for the stage—not even hairpins, but the traces of where hairpins got stuck. Alabama seeks beauty at the mirror, but she finds only the work behind it. She believes in the possibility of “pure fiction,” but when looking she merely discovers the strings and rigging that hold it up.

When Alabama is alone, reflecting herself to herself, she does not perform, or if she does, she performs a quiet ordered self. At the beginning of the novel, she observes of her older sister: “Everything about Joan had a definite order. Alabama was like that herself sometimes on a Sunday afternoon when there was nobody in the house besides herself and the classic stillness” (27). This idea of order as a private performance resurfaces later in the book, when Alabama decides to become a dancer. But until that point, the main performance, the public performance, is the performance of effortlessness, as one mirror reflection accurately reveals: “Alabama stared woefully at her reflection. The Knights hadn’t changed much externally—the girl still looked all day long as if she’d just got up” (58). Like the recipe for breakfast, this description plays on the most fundamental performance, strategic passivity in appearance. Note that she refers to herself as “the girl”—as if she were looking at the couple from a distance, knowing only enough to identify Alabama as young and female. In this way, Zelda Fitzgerald steps into the voice of the indistinct “they,” the audience, the anonymous society who observes the Knights.

Because effortlessness is the only acceptable attitude, *Save Me the Waltz* assures its readers that in this time and place, holding anything sacred is sacrilege. When Alabama fears for her life on a stormy trans-Atlantic ride, she winds up feeling very “second-rate” (64). Everybody else agrees that life is not worth the fear of losing, and by the end of the storm, Alabama herself vocally subscribes to this logic, exclaiming on the savagery of the elements, and how she does not really care if they sink or not. It is this performance of effortlessness, of acknowledging the emptiness at the heart of existence, against which Alabama ultimately rebels, using dance as to inject significance and work into her life. In pursuing an actual performance art, she loses her interest in audiences, and she is able to shed her preoccupation with the daily performance of self.

In the novel, the frenzied American expatriate party has grown absurd and overwhelming, and it blurs the lines between sanity and insanity by the time Alabama quits and takes up dancing. One of the most notably one-dimensional caricatures in the Knights’ social group, Dickie Axton, ultimately suggests that Alabama dance:

“I really think you ought, you know,” she said decisively. “It would be almost as exotic as being married to a painter.”

“What do you mean ‘exotic’?”

“Running around caring about things—of course, I hardly know you, but I do think dancing would be an asset if you’re going to care *anyhow*.” (108)

Here depth of emotion is a novelty, and shells of appearance are all that remain valuable; This is one of the moments when the world becomes overrun by the illogic of

meaninglessness, and sanity and insanity become inseparable, when performances of life and self are all that life holds.

At times this performance of selfhood becomes trying, such as during the weekend when Alabama's parents visit and disapprove of her raucous lifestyle. After they leave, she complains to David that "it's very difficult to be two simple people at once, one who wants to have a law to itself and the other who wants to keep all the nice old things and be loved and safe and protected" (56). Here the old struggle of myself versus myself rears itself again, and shows itself, as always, to be irreconcilable. During her parents' visit, Alabama exhausted herself trying to be the simple person "who wants to keep all the nice old things," and still her parents saw through her performance. Alabama's sense of self is awkwardly suspended between the law of her parents on one side—where she is "loved and safe and protected"—and on the other side, the freedom of her life with David Knight. Neither life as a good daughter nor as a modern wife is entirely satisfying for Alabama, possibly because both roles are part of her and yet cannot coexist. If Alabama is the paper-doll in her negligee, then both roles are outfits that do not quite fit.

Several chapters after her parents' visit, Alabama wears herself out in her performance of the other person, the one who "wants to have a law to itself." In this case, she has been floating along a carnival stream of Paris parties, watching her contemporaries perform the worst, most careless and watery performances of themselves, and she is soon tired of the lack of direction, morality, sincerity, or anything that is stabilizing and sacred. When David returns home, nonplussed, after having had an affair

with a ballet dancer, Alabama's first wish is that she could help him to seem more "legitimate" (110). Finally, Alabama's frustration boils over her façade of lawless nonchalance, resulting in an outburst: "'I can't stand this any longer,' she screamed at the dozing David. 'I don't want to sleep with the men or imitate the women, and I can't stand it!'" (111). And yet, her way of asserting herself as a legitimate personality is by imitating the performance, the ballet dance, of her usurper; she *does* imitate the women. As an individual, she is ignored by her husband, but to be seen on a wider scale, she is bound to perform within a tradition.

Alabama further observes of this time period:

The Americans gave indications of themselves, but always only the beginning like some eternal exposition, a clef before a bar of music to be played on the minors of the imagination. They thought all French schoolboys were orphans because of the black dresses they wore, and those of them who didn't know the meaning of the world 'insensible' thought the French thought that they were crazy. (99)

All of the Americans give "indications," not fleshed out, tangible personalities; all of the Americans need audiences to marvel at their mysteries and absurdities. They write themselves according to a script of simple hedonists, token people who collect other token people, all of who have had their souls ripped out by the war. They appear as advertisements for further riches within, but Alabama discerns that those riches are far from being cultivated. People assume traditional roles for the sole purpose of abusing them—marry for the opportunity to have extramarital affairs, win war medals in order to demolish them as "pistol practice targets" (108). In this part of the book, the realistic

account of life becomes imaginary; centaurs and other mythical characters make unexpected cameos, and strange verbs appear in sentences to sweep characters through the monotonous, manic days. At this point the novel reads like the frenzied tea party in *Alice in Wonderland*, which Zelda Fitzgerald used as inspiration for many of her paintings; she describes the expatriate community as part of a dreamlike fantasy world that starts out fun and grows progressively darker and more frightening, until the child (or the narrator) simply wishes to wake up and return to the normal and dull.

While everybody is acting for everybody else, advertising formulas and fairy tales for how to live, Bonnie Knight, David and Alabama's young daughter, is observing and learning from her surrounding adults. Indeed, her role in the novel is one of imitating the adults in her own childish ways, and of offering up baby logic to be considered by the illogical adults. One afternoon in the French Riviera, Bonnie casts her doll into a nearby pond and chaos ensues:

“She’s thrown her doll in the goldfish pool,” observed Nanny excitedly. “Bad Bonnie! To treat little Goldilocks that way.”

“Her name’s *Comme ça*,” Bonnie expostulated. “Did you see her swimming?”

The doll was just visible at the bottom of the sleek green water.

(77)

Bonnie has named her doll the French phrase for “like this”—a call for an audience, an indication to do it “like this.” Bonnie is performing for her own audience of adults, showing them how she already has learned to overturn tradition, to abuse fairy tale

conventions about what dolls should be named and how they should be played with. Bonnie is creating for her audience her own recipe for how to live with a sense of picturesque absurdity—imitating her mother, but without the invisible seams of experience that have created her mother’s performance. In the passage, we see the regenerative potential of children’s lore to be adapted by the next generation.

An Advertisement for an Advertisement

In the writing of both Zelda and Scott Fitzgerald, consumer mass culture takes on a seductive, dangerous, fairy tale quality. Both Fitzgeralds craft characters that are haunted by the traces of an America gone wild on promises. For these characters, value in life parallels value in advertising: desire creates value, and value sustains itself through the endless deferral of excitement. Advertisements function in a similar asymptotic structure to the way that fairy tale narratives shadow and approach the facts of a life; ads promote endless approach toward an ideal that is impossible to possess.

This idea of reaching earnestly for the inaccessible is a well-known and often written about element in Scott Fitzgerald’s writing, especially in *The Great Gatsby*: Gatsby’s green light, T.J. Eckleberg’s huge billboard eyes, and the iconic Daisy Buchanan’s voice pervade American speech today, providing cultural capital at cocktail parties. In Daisy, the charm of advertisements and fairy tales are linked closely: she acts as a vehicle to other “gay, exciting things hovering in the next hour”—but as we see throughout the novel she is incapable of carrying out her promises (S. Fitzgerald, *Gatsby* 14). Her voice is full of money and after Gatsby points this out, Nick’s narrating mind

moves immediately from money and its “inexhaustible charm” (127) to fairy tales and their infinite promise: “High in a white palace the king’s daughter, the golden girl...” (127). Daisy—who is classified by critics as a composite character crafted from elements both of Ginevra King, Scott’s first love interest, and of Zelda—represents the most marvelous American façade, the fairy tale of the American Dream.³⁴

Save Me the Waltz deals, too, with the problems of a culture overly invested in advertisements. At the expense of creating a plot that changes and affects her autobiographical protagonist, Zelda creates a protagonist who stands as an advertisement for herself: a witty, beautiful, and flirtatious woman who manufactures herself throughout

³⁴ It is worth noting that in *The Great Gatsby*, Scott Fitzgerald describes all of the major female characters in terms of ads and the promises of products. When Nick Carraway is preparing to meet Tom’s mistress Myrtle, he notes, “Though I was curious to see her I had no desire to meet her” (28). Furthermore Myrtle exists in Nick’s mind primarily according to what she buys: a dog, cold cream, perfume, “Town Tattle” (31)—and the last view we have before Tom breaks her nose is of Myrtle making a list of all the things she must buy (41). She is absurd because she believes that these products and lists will better her life, lending it meaning.

Jordan in her full golf get-up looks to Nick “like a good illustration,” even though Jordan, of all the characters, seems the least influenced by the culture of consumption (185). Unlike other female characters who merely consume, Jordan actually produces—specifically, a good golf game and autographs for people who ask. Perhaps it is due to her failure in Nick’s mind to produce the lures that women like Daisy and Myrtle can produce, that Jordan is never portrayed as being intriguing the way the other women are. Jordan is the stuff behind the ad, rather than the ad itself, and for this reason she fails to reach the iconic American status of Daisy.

Daisy more than any other character has the promise of American capitalism as part of her appeal; she is the advertisement for what is possible in America if one has money—and Jay Gatsby stands as the trusting consumer of what she offers. Early in the day when the explosion between Tom Buchanan and Jay Gatsby takes place, Daisy tells Gatsby, “You look like the advertisement of the man.... You know, the advertisement of the man—” but is interrupted by Tom before she can remember which advertisement she means (125). This interruption before the meaning is significant because in this novel and in mass culture it is impossible ever to fully know the thing on the other side of the ad. That same day in a hotel, Daisy builds up the possibility of a row between her husband and her lover, but she still seems astonished when she actually is asked to perform a role in choosing one man over the other. When pressed by Gatsby, Daisy looks pleadingly at Nick “as though she had never, all along, intended doing anything at all” (139).

Daisy talks about plans and memories, but rarely does she discuss the present: her baby is mostly glossed over, and her husband is primarily portrayed in his bullying of her. Most of Daisy’s present tense actions and conversations are neither charming nor interesting; she exists in the future and in the past—from distances where she can be desired—but in the present, as a “product,” she falls flat and cannot satisfy.

the book to stir desire and interest from the book's other characters and, most importantly, from the reader. Parts of *Save Me the Waltz* read like propaganda for why Zelda was an appealing muse, and rather than forming a version of Zelda who diverges sharply from her husband's version, it concurs with Scott's version. Both writers portray heroines who are performers and who are held at bay, lacking full character subjectivity. Instead, both writers' heroines are notable for being desired and enigmatic: smart, hugely self-confident, witty and wild but often unhappy, elusive, and widely admired. However—and significantly—both writers' depiction of Zelda carries a strong warning of the side effects of being a desired object.

Simone Weil Davis describes *Save Me the Waltz* as “a detailed and rather sinister examination of the impact of 1920s' commodity culture on female subjectivity, self-presentation, and desire” (143). Davis's book, *Living Up to the Ads*, a close-reading of advertising culture in several works of 1920s/1930s fiction, characterizes the 1920s as a time when “the prizing of sincerity and self-reliance characteristic of nineteenth-century advice literature had given way, in writing pitched toward the urban and suburban classes of the United States, to the endorsement of a more theatrical, even salesmanlike selfhood” (2). Davis further divides the 1920s popular concepts of selfhood into three highly gendered subjects: the adman (male), the consumer (female), and the advertising model—or “vehicle” (2). She points out that this vehicle “functions as a metaphor, her own commodified but canny presence representing and augmenting the appeal of the commodity with which she poses” (3). There is a connection between vehicle and dancer, in that both are aptly described as metaphors—the physical woman performer is

representing something else; I will discuss this point further later in this chapter. Zelda as muse, icon, famous wife and spender would have fit into this third category of vehicle. By the early 1930s when she was writing her own work in earnest, Zelda Fitzgerald had already been mass-produced.

As mentioned before, Scott based the majority of his heroines on Zelda, inserting her words into the mouths of his female characters.³⁵ In this way, Zelda could never escape this role of being a muse and a reproducible text, and her words and actions found their way into his novels even when she had her guard down, such as when she was giving birth. In *The Great Gatsby*, Daisy Buchanan's infamous words at giving birth to a daughter ("I hope she'll be a fool—that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool") came from Zelda's experience in the hospital when she gave birth to Scottie. In his Ledger, Scott recorded his wife's first post-anesthesia words: "Oh, God, gofo I'm drunk. Mark Twain. Isn't she smart—she has the hiccups. I hope its beautiful and a fool—a beautiful little fool [*sic*]" (Milford 84).

Recall that Zelda Fitzgerald's earliest writing in the early 1920s was intended to advertise her husband: the recipe for "Breakfast" quoted at the opening of this dissertation, and the book review entitled "Friend Husband's Latest" discussed shortly after. What Zelda is doing in both of these examples is advertising herself as Scott has written her to be and as America has expected her to be—flirting with her audience by

³⁵ I briefly discuss Scott's use of Zelda as material in the Preface and Introduction to this dissertation, but I do not go into further detail because so many biographers have already charted (with excellent thoroughness) Scott's literary use of Zelda. See, for example, Kendall Taylor's *Sometimes Madness is Wisdom* (2001), Nancy Milford's *Zelda* (1970), Andrew Turnbull's *Scott Fitzgerald* (1962), and Matthew Bruccoli's *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur* (2002).

presenting to them a woman who refuses to cook, who spends lots of money, and who has sarcasm and humor but little depth or feeling. She writes failed formulas: a recipe that requires others to cook for her and a book review which, if taken seriously, would be unlikely to sell many books. My reason for including these examples is to show the ways in which Zelda Fitzgerald performed herself—often jokingly—as an advertisement for her husband’s writing, for the American ideals it represented, *and* most significantly, for herself.

If Zelda is the advertisement for an American good time, and Scott is her pimp/producer, and the American public are the consumers, then the triangle becomes extraordinarily more complicated when Zelda becomes her own producer, as she does in *Save Me the Waltz*. Zelda Fitzgerald understood that she was a product that had been manufactured for a national audience, and in her novel she continues—unsteadily—to produce herself. In a way, she wrote herself as an advertisement for an advertisement, creating incisive but at times flawed and distant fiction.

Building on my observation in Chapter One that Zelda Fitzgerald links advertisements with fairy tales in her writing, it is important to understand the ways in which fairy tales, like advertisements, prolong hope: recall that, when describing the beauty of Park Avenue, Fitzgerald wrote, “High in the air float green-blue copper roofs, like the tips of castles rising from the clouds in fairy tales and cigarette advertisements” (Fitzgerald 404). Here advertisements, like fairy tales, offer lovely, empty promises of fulfillment, of a life that is epic and performed. She continues in her description of Park Avenue: “little shops, like sections of a glass-fronted dolls’ house, nestle in the corners

along the lower avenue—shops of the boudoir sort, where one may buy an apple with as much ritual as if it were the Ottoman Empire, or a limousine as carelessly as if it were a postage stamp” (404). The world she describes in these extravagant street blocks boasts a satisfying illogic of life that requires money, otherworldly beauty, and nonchalance about both; it is a quaint doll-house world to which the laws of life do not apply, where currency can perform any way it wants, and where value varies with desire; it is an illusory world, an advertisement for a happily-ever-after.

In her novel, Zelda Fitzgerald suggests that these imaginary ideals are better admired than pursued. She became a celebrity in the 1920s, in the golden days of American hope, when she and Scott moved to New York in the 1920s and became “America’s Couple,” manufacturing themselves as the quintessential consumers of all that their decadent age had to offer. Zelda wrote her novel three years after the depression started, once American illusions had broken from too much consuming and once American credit had lost its value. In *Save Me the Waltz*, she recounts these early days, offering the self-knowledge not of who she was, but of how her generation’s obsession with the flashy world of advertisements and the constant action of mass reproduction has made it impossible for authentic selves to form and emerge. Simone Weil Davis links Zelda Fitzgerald to the surrealist movement,³⁶ noting, “Both Fitzgerald and the surrealists reeled at their own immersion in commodity culture and responded in the same way,

³⁶ Several other critics have made this observation. In “(Im)Possible Lives: Zelda Fitzgerald’s *Save Me the Waltz* as Surrealist Autobiography,” Susan Castillo connects the dreamlike quality of surrealist art to the free-associating narrative voice in *Save Me the Waltz*: “In dreams, concepts of time, space, and causality are radically altered; free from the constraints of logic and morality, the dreamer is able to form startling associations...” (60).

taking up as central themes commodification and the image of woman” (174). Zelda uses herself, as Scott uses her in his writing, as material, muse, and sacrifice.

The illusion of a glamorous life, gaudy, and liberated life becomes a compulsory performance for the characters in *Save Me the Waltz*. Parties last too long and scandal is so commonplace that it no longer shocks anybody, and all of it seems to exist solely in order to preserve something that has long lost its soul. Several times in the novel Zelda uses the word “taxidermist” to describe her characters; one of these times is in relation to her father, whose hands had the “cruel concision of a taxidermist at work” (16). Here, Judge Beggs is ending the telephone conversation between one of Alabama’s sisters and a beau of whom he disapproved; like a taxidermist, the Judge was preventing the life of this love affair, and thus establishing its status as a pretty, but lifeless, illusion. Another taxidermy mention occurs regarding Gabrielle Gibbs, the famous dancer with whom Alabama’s husband has an affair, and who is stuffed and uninteresting and beautiful; Gibbs’s face is described as being “as innocent as is she had just been delivered from the taxidermist’s” (102). Similarly, in the aftermath of David’s affair with Gibbs, at a luncheon that she did not wish to attend, Alabama thinks to herself:

The macabre who lived through the war have a story they love to tell about the soldiers of the Foreign Legion giving a ball in the expanses around Verdun and dancing with the corpses. Alabama’s continued brewing of the poisoned filter for a semiconscious banquet table, her insistence on the magic and glamour of life when she was already feeling its pulse like the throbbing of an amputated leg, had something of the same sinister quality. (111-112)

In this passage Alabama condemns her life as a piece of post-war taxidermy, a sickening performance of past glory, an inability to let the dead die. Both through images such as these and through fairy tales, Alabama Beggs strives during the course of the story to preserve some lost, romantic notion of the world as it had been advertised to her, all the while knowing acknowledging this hope as a futile, imaginary practice. Similar to the passivity of the fairy tale heroine who waits for rescue, the passivity of the novel's characters is inherent and strategic—activity breaks illusions, and fairy tales, like mass culture, work only when belief in magic is preserved.

Many twentieth-century cultural theorists shared Zelda Fitzgerald's skepticism of the American advertising model and its relation to human contentment. One of the primary concerns of the Frankfurt School—influenced by Walter Benjamin, and including Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer—was to criticize mass culture for the way it reduced its people to a prescribed set of desires, and in doing so, took away all possibility for satisfaction. Adorno and Horkheimer phrase the paradox when they write, “The culture industry perpetually cheats its consumers of what it perpetually promises ... All it actually confirms is that the real point will never be reached, that the diner must be satisfied with the menu” (139). In his 1986 book *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*, Andreas Huyssen articulates the feminization of mass culture in fairy tale terms: he notes that Adorno and Horkheimer characterize mass culture “as the evil queen of the fairy tale when they claim that ‘mass culture, in her mirror, is always the most beautiful in the land’” (48). Huyssen adds, “The lure of mass culture, after all, has traditionally been described as the threat of losing oneself in dreams

and delusions and of merely consuming rather than producing” (55). In all fairy tales, the evil queen looking into her mirror is the female agent, the deceptive creator of a plot to harm the protagonist. Like the queen, the culture of advertising ostensibly harms Alabama Beggs, who internalizes its offerings and desires. Adorno and Horkheimer’s descriptions apply themselves seamlessly to Fitzgerald’s world in which the flapper and the expatriates in her novel are emblematic of the modernist, soulless, war-logged phenomenon, where the best anyone can do is consume and be admired—or in other words, pretend to be beautiful and a fool.

Similar to fairy tales, ads are written all-inclusively so that the audience will insert themselves into the roles, emotions, and situations offered. Part of the work of advertisements is to make their audience—the general “you”—feel watched, inferior, and insecure, and then offer to rescue them through a purchasable product. In *Living Up to the Ads* Davis wryly suggests, “The only viable alternative to sheer retreat or public humiliation is to step behind a battery of shielding commodities that will disguise and, especially, protect one from detection” (10). She adds, “For the audience, the sharp jolt of self-recognition, the identification, is with the blemishes or flaws that the ads heave into the limelight for exposure” (11). Much as in fairy tales, the “you” is in trouble and requires rescuing. Both fairy tales and advertisements hail everybody who comes within their reach, offering solutions in lively make-believe language. However, unlike ads, the product of a fairy tale is a narrative that can be recycled; unlike the products of ads, fairy tales cost nothing. Yet belief in both ads and fairy tales can be dangerous, even incapacitating to believers.

One final way that advertisements and fairy tales are linked is in their recipe for creation and salvation, their ability to break down the mystery of happiness, love, or beauty into series of neat steps. In *Save Me the Waltz*, all people and natural objects have a formula for how they can be broken down, recreated, or bought. Of crabs, Alabama says, “I believe I could make one, if I had the material” (29). Of the moon: “They’re two for five at the five-and-ten, full or crescent” (106). One of the most poignant examples of the reduction of something irreducible occurs near the beginning of the novel, when Alabama observes the departure of her older sister Joan’s beau, after the Judge has commanded Joan to marry somebody else:

Harlan and Joan rocked in the swing, jerking and creaking the chain and scraping their feet over the worn gray paint and snipping the trailers off the morning glories.

“This porch is always the coolest, sweetest place,” said Harlan.

“That’s the honeysuckle and the star jasmine you smell,” said Joan.

“No,” said Millie, “it’s the cut hay across the way, and my aromatic geraniums.”

“Oh, Miss Millie, I hate to leave.”

“You’ll be back.”

“No, not anymore.”

“I’m very sorry, Harlan—” Millie kissed him on the cheek. “You’re just a baby,” she said, “to care. There’ll be others.”

“Mamma, that smell is the pear trees,” Joan said softly.

“It’s my perfume,” said Alabama impatiently, “and it cost six dollars an ounce.” (28)

What occurs here is what Walter Benjamin might describe as the loss—or the mechanical reproduction of—an aura. If an aura is “the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be,” a term usually applied to works of art, then the phenomenon of the porch scent as an aura of natural art (a pause in time, a static and prepared-to-be-remembered moment in a life) should be held to the same rules (Benjamin 222).

Alabama, as a representative of her generation, remakes the world in terms of human possibility.

The reason for this world-making is not that the world means nothing on its own to Alabama, but rather that it is supposed to mean something. It is art that she wants, after all—to be in touch with and to be art. Benjamin writes, “In principle a work of art has always been reproducible,” and one way we see this at work in the writing of Zelda Fitzgerald is in her attentiveness to the breaking down of the irreducible art of nature, scent for one, as well as weather and—repeatedly—the moon (218). The problem with this reduction, as it appears to both Benjamin and Fitzgerald, is the direct correlation between the diminishing sacredness of art and its ability to be collected: the departure from the idea, in Benjamin’s words, that “the earliest art works originated in the service of a ritual—first the magical, then the religious kind” (223). What was once believed supernatural is now archived as art, and in this age of reproduction and consumption, this magic-turned-art extends everywhere and is capable of transforming anything. The problem, in addition to the removal of art from its original environment, is that it can be

reconstructed anywhere to the point that reverence and desire toward it have become something of the past. Alabama darkly makes note of this cheapening when she thinks to herself, “It wasn’t easy to be a goddess away from Mt Olympus” (Fitzgerald 189). She herself—a sacred, artful object in her small Alabama town where she is in custody of a godlike father—diminishes in worth once she is removed from her original context.

Note, in *Save Me the Waltz*, the constant attempts toward reproduction of all things natural, ranging from Alabama herself to all mentions of scent: “She smelled of Cherokee roses and harbors at twilight” (36); her husband David Knight’s initial scent: “new goods”(39); the streets of New York: “acrid and sweet like drippings from the mechanics of a metallic night-blooming garden” (49); a mossy, medieval castle wall: “Chanel, Five” (72); later, of the studio where she studies Russian ballet: “[it] reeked of hard work” (114); of a pitiful girl from the ballet: “butter and the mechanics of life” (135). Like any other abstraction, the perfumed remnants of things can be broken down, in most cases to objects of exchange. The sort of castle one finds in fairy tales is reduced to the commercial scent of Chanel, Five. In the case of the ballet studio—the one institute to whose law Alabama does deferentially subject herself—the scent is reduced to exertion.

Furthermore, elements of nature, traditionally cited in the name of love and beauty, are subjected to commercial uses in this novel. They seem to have exhausted their un-ironic value in some tradition of the past, and are left only as things to be used or contained by humans. The moon does strange things in the novel: in addition to its being on sale at the five-and-ten, we are told in the midst of a description of the gaudy days of

New York in the 1920s that “tired moons ask higher wages” (57), hinting that everything, even nature, has the right to some sort of compensation for its performance. In other moments, the moon is contained inside human spaces, such as when “the moon slid mercurially along the bright mathematical lines of the ultra-modern furniture” (60). Although Alabama describes David as having “pale hair like eighteenth-century moonlight” (39), David dislikes the moon because “it spoils the darkness” (68). The significance of the moon getting in the way of the night makes sense within the context of reproducible art—what was once a romantic night symbol is now disenchanted, useful and exchangeable, or else detrimental to the beauty of something else. The limitations set on the possibilities of nature are significant in terms of the story. Benjamin quotes Valéry in noting that people no longer have the patience to imitate nature, which of course was the creator of the originals: “All these products of sustained, sacrificing effort are vanishing, and the time is past in which time did not matter. Modern man no longer works at what cannot be abbreviated” (93). Here, nature itself imitates humans, as opposed to the other way around—and in the process, both lose something of themselves, their own potential for communicability.

Flowers, too, which appear overwhelmingly in both Fitzgerald’s writing and her paintings, are manufactured just like everything else. In a particularly frenzied episode in Paris, Alabama observes, “They made nasturtiums of leather and rubber and wax gardenias and ragged robins out of threads and wires. They manufactured hardy perennials to grow on the meager soil of shoulder straps and bouquets with long stems for piercing the loamy shadows under the belt” (98). The problem being, of course, that

natural things are being subjected to human purposes, and no perennial, no matter how hardy, could ever grow on a purse; likewise, the people (the women are referred to by David as flowers) in this existence are forced to flourish on unnatural, imitative grounds. Later in this description, even weather is subjected to the possibility of consumption, when: “They ordered the weather with a continental appetite, and listened to the centaur complain about the price of hoofs” (99). In this novel, everything exists in the circuit of exchange; and, as is the case with most make-believe, it is forced to end when something dies. In this case it is David’s fidelity to Alabama, which suicides on a summer night with a famous dancer, leading to Alabama’s outburst that precedes her own dancing career. As mentioned earlier, Alabama responds to David’s infidelity by casting herself fully into becoming a dancer—imitating the professional calling of the ballerina with whom David betrayed her. Possibly more dangerous than the replication of art, here we have the replication of nature and people into objects of advertisement, imitation, and exchange.

These are the demystified stories—the formulaic rewriting—of natural objects. In her reading of these phenomena, Davis observes, “Fitzgerald grants commodities, and indeed objects in general, an animism that disorients” (146). Davis connects this animism to the advertising phenomenon of having objects speak for themselves to better appeal to the buyer—and I would add that it connects also to fairy tales, where gates ask to be oiled, trees cry in pain, and houses pivot around the woods on chicken legs. The environment comes alive, demanding things of its characters, in both fairy tales and advertisements—both of which are at work in the novel.

Advertisements, like fairy tales, are only a template. The viewer/listener's life must fit itself into the grid of either the product or the narrative, but the grid is there for anyone's taking. The novel's characters are advertisements for a whole self beyond the façade—and Fitzgerald's point in this novel is that nobody ever is able to cultivate a self beyond the ad, which makes people incapable of communicating, of sharing experience, at any deep level. Her great smugness and ultimate disappointment lie in how well she herself is able to act as an ad, too.

Self as Performance in Autobiographical Writing

In the final pages of the novel, as if gesturing toward a moral conclusion, Alabama explains herself to a salon of interchangeable visitors: "We grew up founding our dreams on the infinite promise of American advertising" (195). This moment occurs on the cusp in time after Alabama's father—the pervading symbol of convention and law throughout the novel—has died, and before Alabama and David Knight—representing creativity and the thrill of the indulgent, immoral present—escape again from Alabama's childhood home in the South to another unknown, and unpromising, attempt at creating a meaningful settling point. Because of its critique of the disillusioning effects of commercialism, I quote a long passage from the final pages of the novel:

On the cocktail tray, mountains of things represented something else; canapés like goldfish, and caviar in balls, butter bearing faces and frosted glasses sweating with the burden of reflecting such a lot of things to stimulate the appetite to satiety before eating.

“You two are lucky,” they said.

“You mean that we’ve parted with segments of ourselves more easily than other people—granted that we were ever intact,” said Alabama.

“You have an easy time,” they said.

“We trained ourselves to deduce logic from experience,” Alabama said.

“By the time a person has achieved years adequate for choosing a direction, the die is cast and the moment has long since passed which determined the future. We grew up founding our dreams on the infinite promise of American advertising. I *still* believe that one can learn to play the piano by mail and that mud will give you a perfect complexion.”

“Compared to the rest, you are happy.”

“I sit quietly eyeing the world, saying to myself, ‘Oh, the lucky people who can still use the word “irresistible.”’”

“We couldn’t go on indefinitely being swept off our feet,” supplemented

David. (194-195)

Here, at the end of the novel, we see the problem with this pattern of departures and returns: people are escaping from the past to the future and back, but always escaping. The characters are at any given point anxious to escape any seams in experience that fall short of the legendary; in seeking pleasure, they fall prey to Adorno and Horkheimer’s definition of pleasure as helplessness: “Pleasure always means not to think about anything, to forget suffering even where it is shown. Basically it is helplessness. It is flight; not, as is asserted, flight from a wretched reality, but from the last remaining

thought of resistance” (144). This “pleasure” is exactly what fairy tale heroines are accused again and again of engaging in—a state of paralysis, helplessness, and yet attractively poised and ready to be rescued.

Furthermore, the appetizers mentioned in the conclusion of *Save Me the Waltz* are designed to represent something else, which is symbolic because of all of the people, too, are trying not to seem sincerely like themselves. In addition, these appetizers “stimulate the appetite to satiety before eating”—invoking something eerily close to Adorno and Horkheimer’s critique, noted previously in this chapter, of the culture industry as requiring the diner to be satisfied with the menu. In an article entitled “Autobiography as the Presentation of Self for Social Immortality” (1977), Irving Louis Horowitz observes, “The task of the autobiographer, whether consciously or otherwise, is to interpret to society how one should conduct the ‘good’ and avoid the ‘bad’ influences of that society” (173). This “task” has certainly left its mark in *Save Me the Waltz*, though in ironic, conflicted ways; the book both judges and interprets society’s influences as it traces one woman’s journey through the thrill and moral vacuum of the roaring 20s and 30s.

Even after Alabama has pinpointed her life’s meaninglessness as a side effect of faith in advertising, no exchange of conversation follows, and nobody benefits from her wisdom. She arrives at her own conclusions and everybody else seems to arrive at theirs, but in the process of throwing them at each other like confetti, everybody is too busy creating meaning and escaping boredom to the point that nobody has the energy to listen. Because human pleasure is bound up in desire for escape, not idea exchange or true character development, these characters are left no escape except for going back to the

lawful and ordinary—in the case of *Save Me the Waltz*, back to the realm of the dying father.

For this reason, rather than writing a story with a plot that shapes and changes a protagonist, Zelda Fitzgerald creates a protagonist who is an ad, an indication, as if she does not have the patience to wait around for her own story to end. This distancing from Alabama seems to invite the reader—seduce him or her, if you will—to observe and rewrite her, just as Scott had done for so many years. In a lighter chapter of the book than the one quoted from just above, Fitzgerald reveals Alabama’s tendency to manufacture herself as an object of art and fiction—recall her performance of being “as good as a book” and “pure fiction” for the Englishman on the boat. Spontaneous generation of selves (or inner selves who are replaced by ads for that self) ultimately replaces the possibility of sharing meaningful experience.

Fitzgerald connects the mythologized 1920s flapper to the women of classical mythology in an article entitled “What Became of the Flappers?” She writes, “The flapper springs full-grown, like Minerva, from the head of her once-déclassé father, Jazz, upon whom she lavishes affection and reverence, and deepest filial regard” (397). Note that the flapper, something like Alabama, is first defined as a daddy’s girl—even though she escapes the confines of her father’s realm, she still accepts the height its towers offer. In this article Fitzgerald continues, “I believe in the flapper as an involuntary and invaluable cupbearer to the arts. I believe in the flapper as an artist in her particular field, the field of being—being young, being lovely, being an object” (398). The original cupbearer to the Greek gods, Hêbê (the goddess of youth), abandoned her job to marry

Heracles and was replaced with Ganymede, Zeus's legendary boy-toy. Whether deliberately or not, Fitzgerald's characterization of the flapper as "cupbearer" makes an allusion to two of the flapper's most notable physical qualities: youth and boyishness.³⁷ It should be further noted through this mythological allusion that the (female) flapper bears the cup for the male ruler or lover. Simone Weil Davis cannily connects the business of the flapper to the business of Alabama's many performances by pointing out that in her novel Fitzgerald "implies that 'the art of being' is largely the art of being someone else" (151). I might add that this art of being someone else is always *for* someone else's viewing pleasure.

Zelda Fitzgerald's writing presents a conundrum of sorts, not only in its own questionably surrealist landscape, or her use of her life in her writing; rather, *Save Me the Waltz* deals with one woman's awareness of herself as an instrument, something to be advertised and used, and yet still in need of a significance, a settling point. As a woman whose original fame lay in being desired, Zelda Fitzgerald's greatest commodity was herself; as the muse for her husband F. Scott Fitzgerald, who wrote about uncontrollable, uninhibited, self-promoting women, she understood that she was on display, and capable of becoming and unbecoming art. This self-awareness is relevant to any reading of *Save Me the Waltz* in terms of the Modernist novel. Note Huyssen's insights:

³⁷ The flapper wore her hair in a "bob," "shingle," or "Eton crop" (recall Lady Brett Ashley's hair being "brushed back like a boy's"), and she modeled her clothes on little boy's clothes, a look called "garçonne" (little boy) that Coco Chanel, among others, claimed to have started. For more on this, see *Producing Fashion: Commerce, Culture, and Consumers* by Regina Lee Blaszczyk, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007 (235). To minimize curves and breasts, flappers wound cloth tightly around their chests. For more on this, see *Cleavage* by Nora Jacobson, Rutgers University Press, 2000 (56).

Women as providers of inspiration for the artist, yes, but otherwise *Berufsverbot* for the muses, unless of course they content themselves with the lower genres (painting flowers and animals) and the decorative arts. At any rate, the gendering of an inferior mass culture as feminine goes hand in hand with the emergence of a male mystique in modernism... (50).

Fitzgerald spent much of her life positioning herself both as the “inspiration for the artist” and also as the authorial creator of a mystique of her own through her self-referential, experimental, and frequently ironic language; this balance is mirrored in the balance of her characters, their own struggles to be both object and creator, story and storyteller—and their ultimate failure to effectively be either. Meanwhile, being written by her husband, Zelda’s sole responsibility was to perform herself, manufacturing enough of her own mythology for Scott to find fascinating; in her life, she *was* art.

Zelda Fitzgerald exhibits herself as someone who is more comfortable as an object of exchange than as a woman, and in *Save Me the Waltz*, her attempt to create—rather, perpetuate—her mystique often contradicts her attempt to be a convincing narrative voice. Recall from Chapter One that one reviewer, soon after the book’s publication, wrote of Alabama: “In the desperate attempt to be contrary and enigmatic she resembles an insane child” (William McFee, quoted in Milford 263). In Scott’s fiction, Zelda exists as a series of beautiful and enigmatic women, always possessing a magnetism that shows itself most convincingly through its effect on the male protagonist. In her own writing, we have a similarly charming third-person enigma, only we are

positioned to admire it and to depend on it as a suitable narrator; as our author, she begs us to do both.

The self is always a performance in autobiographical writing, even if it comes across as a single cohesive voice. Adapted fairy tales and myths complicate the performance of self by helping to show all of the archetypal selves each person contains, and by showing how, in essence, selfhood is a landscape of different levels and masks, all influencing and challenging and enabling each other, all voices of their own. Horowitz denounces the idea that autobiography must be classified as either truth or fiction, suggesting instead that it simply be viewed as “self-confrontation” (176), adding that “the real purpose of autobiography is to construct a meaningful mosaic for others, while subtly insuring a place in the cosmos for one’s self” (176). He notes:

Most twentieth-century cultural and political figures have a highly secular view of immortality. What they are interested in is not so much to affect the course of heavenly events, but, like Casanova, to make sure that their impact on worldly events is not easily forgotten. Perhaps this is one reason why, in the felicitous remarks of Philippe Lejeune, not a few autobiographers pretend to speak about themselves as someone else might: that is, by using the third person, or inventing a fictional narrator. (174-5)

By this logic, the third-person “autobiographer” in *Save Me the Waltz* might simply be a way for Fitzgerald to point to a version of herself and bid readers remember her—not only as she is and was, but as she might have been. Or the lack of a first-person narrator could be related to Christa Wolf’s observation that the fear of a “lapse into subjectivity or

kitsch” keeps female writers from comfortably using “I”—a fear, Huyssen observes, shared by many Modernist writers, male or female (Christa Wolf, quoted in Huyssen 46). Zelda Fitzgerald, of course, wanted to be art, not sentimental kitsch. Related to this idea is Suzanne Clark’s point that the Modernists considered narrative writing a somewhat dated practice. She asks: “If narrative itself is suspect, and the desire for narrative is itself sentimental, what kind of subject or ethos may function with authority? What kind of relationship to the audience—what pathos—may be seen as legitimate?” (3). Clark’s questions are useful questions for discussing Fitzgerald’s narrative decisions. The veil of the third person, as well as the distance, irony, humor, and many performances of selfhood, contributes to the book’s lack of sentimentality. Zelda Fitzgerald, it seems, prefers to be appraised, or confusing, or admired and seductive, but not (God forbid!) reduced to sympathy. Fairy tales, in their templates for story, provide simple and unsentimental maps. She can both tell a story for fun and let her life work its way into narrative. A fairy tale drastically lowers the stakes in the Modernist arena.

Written as a novel but with far too many expostulations of personal truth to be viewed as “pure fiction,” Fitzgerald’s book makes the journey that Horowitz traces in many autobiographies: “One moves along an almost inexorable path from the autobiography as moral instruction, to personal transcendence, to social ideology, and finally, to divine or historical immortality” (175-6). This progression of purpose can be found in the autobiographical potential of *Save Me the Waltz*: moral instruction (showing her generation’s immoral divergence from the previous generation’s sensibilities), personal transcendence (illustrating one woman’s salvation through dance), social

ideology (critiquing the taxidermy culture of mass produced everything in the 1920s and 1930s), and then immortality—which she already had secured in Scott’s novels, but which she wanted to rewrite on her own.

By such a process the autobiographical self becomes an immortalized object, like a fairy tale, that may be passed on through generations.

“A Silent Dancer of her own Woes”

The crisis of *Save Me the Waltz* occurs when the insignificance of a world made out of imitation and advertisement becomes overwhelming, and Alabama seeks a remedy in dancing—creating art through work, rather than merely mimicry. When, in chapter three of the book, she finally settles upon dancing as a form through which she can express herself and, more importantly, exert herself, the language changes from ironic to earnest; characters are developed instead of glossed over as an interchangeable “they,” and desire manifests itself in her goal to perform in one of the Russian ballets. Suddenly the problem in the book, the idea of the infinitely accessible, has a much needed boundary; Alabama, who observes at the beginning of the book, “I like paying for things I do—it makes me feel square with the world,” up until her dancing, has never had to pay for anything (33). Unfortunately, once she finally pays in advance with work, she finds that she will never be rewarded with success. Davis links the novel’s description of the work of dance with Zelda Fitzgerald’s earlier description of the flapper’s work of being an object: “when Zelda and her heroine Alabama become dancers, they channel all their insight and stamina into the production not of concrete, lasting artifacts, but of transient

kinesis, the ‘art of being’”(175). Their work is ephemeral in both cases, but in the case of dancing, the performance is admittedly—and publicly—hard work.

Dancing in *Save Me the Waltz* has been often interpreted as representative of the invisible mental breakdown in the text. This sort of substitution is a common motif for women writers, according to Gilbert and Gubar, who make the following point: “In publicly presenting acceptable façades for private and dangerous visions women writers have long used a wide range of tactics to obscure but not obliterate their most subversive impulses” (74). This practice would suggest that Zelda Fitzgerald’s use of dancing is merely a convenient mask: something she knew well and was interested in, but more importantly something that she could write so that she did not have to write about the illness that was truly preoccupying her. Mary Wood spins off of this idea to address the rebellious nature of this substitution, namely Fitzgerald’s refusal to be a medical text, yet ultimately her inability to escape being a male text, a work of art:

As she neglects the story of her mental breakdown, she parallels and subverts the expected narrative of psychological journey and cure by telling the tale of her career and failure as a ballet dancer. This tale brings into the foreground the cultural construction of women as the material of male art, whether in dance or psychiatry. (253)

What is especially interesting in this quote, in terms of the fairy tale motif, is the tension between Fitzgerald as creator of herself and as creation, again the teller and the tale—and how her existence as both necessarily absolves her of the responsibility, or perhaps of the ability, to read herself as anything other than a symbol. Reining her body under control

within the dance, Wood notes, functions alongside the clinical estrangement that many female patients feel from their body—a statement which brings to mind Fitzgerald’s plan to write “myself versus myself” (Fitzgerald 468). In the story she tells about herself, Fitzgerald opts to become a work of art, a dancer, instead of a medical text, a patient.

So instead of madness, Alabama Beggs suffers from dance. As I mention in Chapter One, dancing has long been associated with female villains in fairy tales—often these women are punished for their forthrightness and harshness by being forced to dance themselves to death. Even in dance criticism, associations exist linking the successful female dancer with attractive fairy tale villainy: one 1908 reviewer of Maud Allan described her as a “white witch,” noting that “the desire that flames from her eyes and bursts in hot gusts from her scarlet mouth infect [*sic*] the very air with the madness of passion” (Koritz 35). In the story of “myself versus myself,” dance is certainly a potent metaphor for conflicting systems of selfhood. Alabama shifts from performing playfully for an audience, from making herself into a “book” to be read, to performing for herself, speaking only with her body—paralleling the mad queen at the end of *Snow White* who is “a silent dancer of her own woes, a dancer who enacts rather than articulates” (Gilbert and Gubar 43).

Even when the dancers are not overtly vilified, they are still viewed as not-quite-real. Alabama herself recognizes the supernatural associations of the dancer; she describes the best dancer in her studio as “almost an elf, but her stockings were always wrinkled and she talked in sermons” (124). In other words, the dancer is a not-quite-real creature, poor but talented, someone who, in conversation and most likely in dance,

presents tales of morality. In a further link between dance and the supernatural, Felicia McCarren, in her book *Dance Pathologies: Performance, Poetics, Medicine* (1998), addresses Albert Smith's book *The Natural History of the Ballet-Girl* (1847), in which Smith distinguishes between the reality of the dancing body—subjected, as it is, to such brutally rigorous physical practice—and the spectacle upon the stage, viewed by the audience as “smiling elves, who appropriately people the ‘Realms of Joy’” (McCarren 7, quoting Smith 19).³⁸ Again, as in Alabama's observation, the dancer is elfin. In both authors' descriptions, this fantastical sight on stage masks an unhealthy, overworked, underpaid female body. Regarding this terrible juxtaposition, McCarren poses the questions:

Why is the ballet-girl everywhere associated with nature—animals, insects, flowers, fairies—and the sick? The romantic ballet, across the nineteenth century, will cast its female *corps de ballet* as both flora and fauna: otherworldly, magical, beautiful creatures, sometimes charitable, sometimes vengeful, sometimes sick, and often dead. Why should the ballet-girl be linked, in this age's imagination, to the subhuman and superhuman...? (8)

Perhaps because of the traditional subject matter of ballets (timeless love stories and fairy tales, often set in forests and palaces), a link emerges between the dancer and the supernatural. The demands of the dancer's profession require that she is not what she appears to be—a paradox that often comes as a warning in stories about the supernatural.

³⁸ On a related supernatural note, Smith also observes of the ballet dancer: “Her early life must be something like that of the fairy changeling” (*The Natural History of the Ballet-Girl*, 13-14).

When Alabama decides to take up ballet dancing, an older female dance instructor enters the story, enabling Alabama to journey from being an unhappy wife into a purposeful ballerina. It is especially surprising that Zelda Fitzgerald, who notoriously in her earlier writing praised youth and feared age, all of a sudden begins to identify herself with old women.³⁹ Old women in fairy tales fall almost exclusively into two roles: evil stepmothers and fairy godmothers. At one point in the novel, Alabama, after a dance practice, had “worked so hard that she felt like an old woman by a fireside in a far Nordic country as she sat on the floor dressing afterwards” (159). Another time in a new ballet studio, “Alabama stood alone with her body in impersonal regions, alone with herself and her tangible thoughts, like a widow surrounded by many objects belonging to the past” (140). Note both the separation of Alabama from her body and her comparison of herself to a widow, often the oldest, most full-of-loss woman. Her sense of herself as aged comes after work, showing that she has performed not the passivity of a young heroine, but the exhausting activity of an agent in her own plot—and in fairy tales, the female agent is most often the villain. As Aguiar points out in *The Bitch is Back*:

The Brothers Grimm collections of fairy tales (and their “Disney-fied” film counterparts) are laden with witches, crones, sorceresses, hags, shrewish wives, villainous sisters, disgruntled fairies, and, of course, homicidally evil stepmothers
... In all of these horror stories, the first lesson to be learned by readers is this:

³⁹ During their courtship, Zelda wrote in a letter to Scott: “We will just *have* to die when we’re thirty” (Milford, 49). At age twenty-eight, she wrote an essay entitled, “Who Can Fall in Love After Thirty?” Zelda, born in 1900, was the same age as the century—a fact that Scott returned to often and found romantic. Much of her age-fear centered around the age of thirty, which both in her life and in the century marked the end of the “Roaring Twenties” and the beginning of a major depression.

stay away from powerful females, especially if they are older than adolescent age.

(58)

Zelda Fitzgerald's letter to Scott about the Furies, discussed in Chapter One, her pursuit of dancing, and her struggle with herself not only as protagonist but also as villain of her own life, all suggest a special affection for the female antagonist, whose evil she then dispels.

The fairy godmother figure, as opposed to the villain, appears in *Save Me the Waltz* as an enabler, the necessary transformer of Alabama into an artist. One critic describes fairy tale godmothers as "fortuitous magical agents who promise transformations to make external circumstances responsive to the heroine's inner virtue" (Rowe, "Feminism and Fairy Tales," 214). This moment of transformation comes when Alabama decides to become a ballerina. Her role up until then has been as a married woman with no marketable talent; no longer up for grabs as a wife, she has been taken out of circulation, out of the desire market, which—for so many years—gave her a guaranteed audience for her skills as a performer. When she uses David's infidelity as a catalyst to cultivate an art of her own, she finds "Madame," a Russian ballet instructor, to help her shape her external circumstances—in this case, her body—to fit her determination and seedling talent. In this way, she reenters commerce, though her performing art has become professional instead of merely personal.

Madame, the helper, fits beautifully into the tradition of powerful older woman in fairy tales, who are "rarely on the scene; they only appear in order to save young people in distress, and then they're off again ... They are not human beings, they are asexual,

and many of them are old ... they do not provide meaningful alternatives to the stereotype of the younger, passive heroine” (Lieberman 196). Madame is all of these things, except for the obvious fact that she is a human being; her appeal, at least as far as Alabama perceives her, is in no way sexual; she appears in the novel to teach dance, leaves the novel once dance has been taught. Lastly, and most significantly, she does not prove to be a meaningful alternative to the heroine’s role, as the major purpose of Alabama’s dancing—to give meaning to her life and to her sense of self—is a journey Madame has already made.

Once she is able to work toward stage performance, Alabama is able to escape the nonchalant daily performance of being human; her seams of effort show, and she is shedding strategic passivity in favor of excruciating physical activity. She refuses audiences during her practice, spends her days in front of the studio mirrors, and for the first time forgets about her own reflection. One afternoon David visits, and Alabama cries to the studio manager, “My lessons are not a circus. Why did you let them come in?” (134). She continues dancing, bites her tongue, and bleeds. David and his friends comment on her dance, noting its grotesqueness and its uselessness for parlor performance purposes. In response, “Alabama had never felt so close to a purpose as she did at that moment” (134).

Alabama’s use of dance to avoid daily performance of self deviates deliberately from her impression of the performance of a dancer, through Alabama’s observation of Gabrielle Gibbs, the famous dancer who has an affair with David. Gibbs’s face is described, as I mentioned earlier in this chapter, as a piece of taxidermy, and her

performance of herself is mechanical and feeble: “she sat up and begged; she played dead dog” (103). This moment is seminal for Alabama’s pursuit of something outside of performance, as she watches a successful performance of selfhood and is at once usurped by it and nauseated by its plasticity. Simone Weil Davis interprets Gabrielle Gibbs as someone who “can only be experienced from without” (157), someone who excels at being an object but who has no subjectivity. Davis further notes that Alabama “uses dancing not as an advanced form of seduction/reflection, but as an escape from her old social scene, again in marked contrast to Gabrielle’s life as a dancer, which apparently revolves around pleasing others with her affect” (164). In her pre-dance days, Alabama enjoys her ability to please others with her ability to be “pure fiction,” or “as good as a book” with theories that do not work; but when Alabama dances, she simply performs dance, forgetting entirely about any need to perform herself socially as a dancer.

I noted in the Introduction that the performance of passivity forces the world to shape itself around the passive performer: if Zelda Fitzgerald does not cook eggs for breakfast, as she makes clear in her “recipe,” then somebody else will. This idea of strategic passivity returns and reverses itself in her writing about dancers. In a short story called “Other Names for Roses,” Zelda Fitzgerald writes about a dancer named Belanova who “wound the twilight about her other shoulder,” and who is suspected by her gentleman caller as having “more designs than the wolf in ‘Little Red Riding Hood’” (379). Both of these quotations speak to the dancer’s agency, her complicated ability to arrange the world around herself until it fits her wants and her needs and her dancing body. Note the association with this particular wolf, who both appears in Fitzgerald’s

paper-dolls as “Wolff” (see footnote 33), and also who is a known villain of the woods who, once inside a domestic space, masquerades as an innocuous grandmother—a performing “wolff” indeed. Likewise in *Save Me the Waltz*, Arienne, a professional dancer in Alabama’s studio, stood “winding the ends of space about the rigidity of her extended thigh” (113). Through the hard work of dancing, dancers shape the world to them; rephrased, through acknowledging the necessity of human performance and relocating it to a tangible stage, people may carve out a more substantial space in their surroundings, becoming agents of themselves as art, rather than simply passive art-objects.

Furthermore, it is important to consider what dance means in the context of mental illness. Earlier in this chapter I connected Davis’s point about the advertisement vehicle being a metaphor, a constant symbol for all that a product promises, to the “vehicular” role of the dancer. In the following passage from her book about gendered bodies in twentieth century dance, Amy Koritz illustrates through a passage of Mallarmé’s writing how a dancer, too, becomes a metaphor:

At its most extreme, however, treatment of dance in the symbolist aesthetic does away with the physical dancer altogether. In Mallarmé’s essay, ‘Ballets,’ he assimilates the dancer completely to language: ‘*she is not a girl*, but rather a metaphor which symbolizes some elemental aspect of earthly form ... *she does not dance* but rather, with miraculous lunges and abbreviations, writing with her body, she *suggests* things which the written work could *express* only in several paragraphs of dialogue or descriptive prose.’ (112) [Her] agency has at best a

precarious place in this formation, since she is text, writing implement and meaning all at once, while at the same time not being a subject who could write.

(64)

Koritz observes that dance turns the dancer into a “living symbol,” an “image that resolves the alienation or ‘disunity’ between body and soul” (Koritz 65). Disunity is the fundamental crisis of the mentally ill, especially the schizophrenic—it is telling that in a moment when Zelda Fitzgerald’s concern was that of herself versus herself, that dancing became her metaphor of choice.⁴⁰ In her study of madness and femininity, Elaine Showalter observes, “In modern literature and art, the schizophrenic woman stands for the alienation and fragmentation of the age” (19). This passage describes the dancer in ways that relate to descriptions of the psychoanalytic patient, who “writes” with her body and its symptoms. In both, the woman is a text, a metaphor to be read and deciphered.

The dancer, the advertisement, and the schizophrenic all are linked in their symbolism, their irreconcilable dualities. They are one thing, yet they exhibit “symptoms” of being something else. Showalter’s idea of the schizophrenic woman symbolizing the “fragmentation of the age” transfers quite easily to the idea that the dancer—in this case, Alabama—stands as a related symbol. She is out of step with the rest of her world, and her pain manifests itself. On the flip side, the pain of the post-war expatriates of her generation is repressed into fun, as these characters float around from

⁴⁰ In his poem “Among School Children,” W.B. Yeats beautifully poses the question: “How can we know the dancer from the dance?” By the logic of this argument, the dancer is the one who suffers being two selves at once. The dance is simply what one of those selves performs. Jacqueline Tavernier-Courbin uses lines from this Yeats poem to frame her 1979 article, “Art as Woman’s Response and Search: Zelda Fitzgerald’s *Save Me the Waltz*.”

place to place, trying to escape ennui. Ennui is a leisured problem, and Alabama fights it with hard work. In her book on boredom, Patricia Spacks makes the following point: “Ennui implies a judgment of the universe; boredom, a response to the immediate. Ennui belongs to those with a sense of sublime potential, those who feel themselves superior to their environment” (12). In Alabama’s case, she judges the lack of meaning or beauty or naturalness in her environment, and her response is to make artistic contributions to her society. She has “sublime potential” as a performer, and she feels that her skills are superior to the context in which she has been using them. Dance offers Alabama the chance to use her skills for a more sublime purpose.

It is worth noting that many romantic fairy tales involve a heroine who dances with a prince. Cinderella dances with a prince at a ball, thus winning the prince’s heart. The twelve dancing princesses slip out of their bedrooms to meet twelve princes in a secret underground ballroom; each night they wear out their shoes, causing their father to fret; each night they choose dancing in secret over marriage. (Their father catches them, so they all wind up married anyway.) Dancing often serves as the metaphor for a metamorphosis, and as Marina Warner has pointed out, “metamorphosis defines the fairy tale” (xx). Fairy tale heroines are one thing before a dance, and another thing afterward. Dancing with a prince is a perfectly suitable activity, a means toward the safeguard of marriage, a vehicle for sanctioned metamorphosis. Dancing alone in fairy tales is always either a rebellious act or a punishment—usually fit to the crime of a rebellious act. Recall the poor motherless girl who danced until her feet had to be chopped off. Recall, too, so many stepmothers dancing to death in their sizzling shoes.

Alabama dances alone. Although the title of her book invokes dancing in pairs with the imperative, “save me the waltz,” one could reasonably ask: Save *whom* the waltz? Alabama dances with David briefly, during their courtship—but even her dance with him becomes a sort of dance with herself, as she notices: “So much she loved the man, so close and closer she felt herself that he became distorted in her vision, like pressing her nose upon a mirror and gazing into her own eyes” (40). In the following paragraph, Alabama “crawled into the friendly cave of his ear,” beginning the cerebral exploration that critics often hail when characterizing her writing as surrealist (40). David becomes distorted into a mirror image of Alabama herself, and he becomes his brain. What dancing with David produces for Alabama, in other words, is first a closer glimpse at her own visage, and second an opportunity to let her imagination wander into the direction of physiology, where she reduces him to his “sleek gray matter” (40). Later in the book, Alabama dances briefly with a French aviator, a move that infuriates the jealous David. For the rest of the story she dances alone. Could the book’s title refer to David’s affair, alluding to Alabama’s acknowledgment that he may dance with whomever he wants, but that he must save the waltz for her? Or is the title an imperative to herself, from herself—a way of negotiating a contract that she will, one day, dance? The waltz, some say, originated from Bavarian peasants. Does the title allude to the history of a thing, like Alabama herself, caught in suspension between its old meaning and its new permutations and possibilities, half-metamorphosized between tradition and modernity?

This final interpretation may come the closest, as it is true that *Save Me the Waltz* charts a half-metamorphosis of its heroine: Alabama attempts change, but her body is

broken before she can succeed. The desire is there, but not the ability. Clarissa Pinkola Estes argues that the ending of the fairy tale “The Red Shoes,” in psychological terms, represents a half-metamorphosis. The girl, in purchasing red shoes, tries to be a certain type of woman and to seek a particular brand of joy; but the result is that the shoes take over and the girl must have her feet cut off. Estes notes, “The gruesome conclusion to this tale is typical of fairy-tale endings wherein the spiritual protagonist is unable to complete an attempted transformation” (219). Not unlike the crippled dancer in this tale, Alabama comes asymptotically close to becoming a dancer, a prima ballerina, but she does not reach the desired point. Her story ends when she is still merely half-transformed.

Because dancing, like any performance of the self, requires a body, an inconsistent and possibly rebellious body, the chance for failure is always present. Yet dancing is an important psychological form of salvation, because the possibility for it exists in the dancer long before she knows how to dance; in fairy tales, here in *Zelda*’s fairy tale, the solution, once the prince-rescuer has failed, is in her own body, existent and merely needing to be mastered. In his seminal explanation of why fairy tales instill meaning into children’s lives, Bruno Bettelheim observes,

Rapunzel found the means of escaping her predicament in her own body—the tresses on which the prince climbed up to her room in the tower. That one’s body can provide a lifeline reassured [the child] that, if necessary, he would similarly find in his own body the source of his security. (17)

Alabama’s bodily lifeline, her dancing, also functions as a life-breaker, demonstrating yet another ambiguity of her author’s relationship to fairy tale rescue paradigms—they work,

but only up to a point; they maddeningly hold salvation (happiness) at bay, but in doing so they give hope, or at the very least they offer a map for how hope might be sought.

Chapter Three

“A Wonderful Philosophy to Comfort You”: Fairy Tales as Maps of Meaning

Stop looking for solace: there isn't any and if there were life would be a baby affair. Johnny takes his medicine and Johnny get well and a quarter besides [*sic*]. Think! Johnny might get some mysterious malady if left to develop and have it named for him and live forever, and if Johnny died from not having his syrup the parable would have been a moralistic one about his mother....

Stop thinking about our marriage and your work and human relations—you are not a showman arranging an exhibit—You are a Sun-god with a wife who loves him and an artist—to take in, assimilate and all alterations to be strictly on paper—

Darling, forgive me, I love you so. I can't find anything to say beyond that and I'd like a wonderful philosophy to comfort you.⁴¹

In the above quote, Zelda instructs Scott not to let his life-roles taint his work and cause him grief. She tells him that he is a “Sun-god,” not a showman. He becomes a creature of myth, not a human with the seams of his project showing. Similarly, in her

⁴¹ From a letter written by Zelda Fitzgerald to her husband Scott in August 1931, when she was a patient at the Prangins Clinic in Nyon, Switzerland; *Collected Writings of Zelda Fitzgerald* (461).

parable about Johnny, Zelda Fitzgerald imagines a boy who does not follow the tried-and-true rules of medicine and society (you get sick, you take your medicine), but who instead allows his ailment to grow unchecked into something mysterious and absolutely new, and who gains immortality through being the first to exhibit such bewildering symptoms. In both personifications, the fantastic replaces the ordinary. Here, she uses the didactic morality of the fairy tale to ridicule the possibility of any single logical solution, and she wanders off into the grand possibilities of the solution-less, as if to suggest that illness, incurable, irrational illness, could be an opening, rather than a sure and damning close. The inflexible hopelessness of madness, in this letter, seems to offer a way to reconcile hope with actuality: calling hope's bluff in order to preserve it, like philosophical taxidermy. At the end of this letter she apologizes for having no comforting philosophy, but by disavowing the possibility of one, she has created some sort of solace.⁴²

Many times in Zelda Fitzgerald's writing, both in her letters and in *Save Me the Waltz*, the mythic or fictional ruptures through the narrative. Important life events are omitted or obscured, and actual life borders into a fairy tale or myth. Rather than attributing this genre-muddying to the untrained editing skills of a sick mind, I read

⁴² In the 1930s, both Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald had fallen far from their celebrity glory in the 1920s, and both were finding solace hard to come by. Zelda was living full-time in a string of psychiatric hospitals; Scott was trying to reinvent himself as a scriptwriter in Hollywood, but with unsatisfactory success. His drinking and related lack of discipline had become such a problem that he had trouble holding down jobs. Furthermore, money was a problem—lacking both for Zelda's treatment and their daughter Scottie's education—so for years Scott borrowed money from many of their reluctant (and often former) friends. Both Fitzgeralds were examining themselves closely in writing—both in their letters to each other and in their published work. In the years after Zelda published her novel, Scott wrote a series of stories based on a Hollywood hack writer named Pat Hobby. The pathos was apparent: the fallen-from-grace Pat was based, in many intricate and sad ways, on Scott himself.

Fitzgerald's conflation of fairy tales and autobiography as a deliberate act that strives to communicate a depth of personal truth that a more "faithful" autobiography could not. Fitzgerald preyed upon her own life in order to produce literature, harvesting her triumphs and embarrassments and milling them into story. In essence, fairy tales and myth provide a map for her to be able to transform her life into writing—refusing to take the "medicine" of identifying as only sick, and instead weaving a narrative of her life as it might have been, combined with details from her life as it was.

Kristin Bloomberg in *Tracing Arachne's Web* (2001) uses fairy tale language to describe the stereotype of the early twentieth-century woman writer: "She remains always the youthful Cinderella whose ball was cut short by the midnight stroke of war" (16). She goes on to cite Victoria L. Smith on the difference between fact and legend: "the stories of the disempowered only get remembered in legend, which has the valence of fiction or myth, whereas the stories of the powerful get remembered as history, which has the valence of fact" (94). Bloomberg's conclusions relate to my theories on the use of fairy tales: myth gives lost women a pattern to follow in order to make sense of life in "the patriarchal underworld" (108). One could say that in their literary legacy today, Scott Fitzgerald is the purveyor of fact (readable, commercially viable, historically valid books about the 1920s and 1930s), and Zelda is remembered as legend. In her novel she uses fairy tales to address this marginalization, while at the same time embracing it (and many of her other roles) for their offerings of imagination and safety.

Familiar stories are ultimately a map for survival. In rewriting fairy tales, the author still must enter the woods, but these are familiar woods where the pathway out has

already been trodden and the end is known. In this way, children's stories provide maps for lost adults. In *The Midnight Disease* (2005), the neurologist Alice Flaherty compares a psychiatric ward to a writer's retreat like Yaddo, noting how in both, the quarantined clientele often write prolifically. Flaherty further points out that hypergraphia (compulsive writing) is sometimes caused by schizophrenia (41). Flaherty cites Victoria Nelson, who observed, "Like Hans Christian Andersen's little dancer⁴³ who couldn't get the enchanted red shoes off her feet, the compulsive writer cannot stop writing. Compulsive writing is, in fact, a way of hiding from some of the deeper demands of literary and emotional experience" (Flaherty 47). In a cloister of people who cannot stop talking or writing or letting go of their internal chaos, these stories are a known vehicle, a way to talk in familiar terms, to let off steam in the form of written white noise. Most of the writing that comes from psychiatric wards, unfortunately and understandably, is incomprehensible—which is exactly what several early reviewers called *Zelda* Fitzgerald's novel. Yet the story holds together, aided by fairy tales. These stories offer a pattern to the fragmented mind of a hopeful storyteller, someone who has suffered awesomely and in abstract, unmapped ways—but who has no credible words to externalize her suffering into narrative, which permits comprehension, solace, and escape.

⁴³ I summarize the "The Red Shoes" in footnote 30. It is an important tale to consider when looking at *Zelda* Fitzgerald's writing, because it both speaks to the connection between mania and castrated female creativity, and it also uses dance as punishment for disobedient women.

“Born into Narrative”

In an essay on the fairy tale “Hansel and Gretel,” writer Richard Siken asserts, “We are born into narrative” (156). If this is indeed the case, that all of our lives we spend making sense of our stories through words, then it is no wonder that the most familiar stories become a map for narrating ourselves, for keeping our stories alive and for locating coherency in their chance details.

Being “born into narrative” comes with a grave responsibility of having to articulate one’s way into clarity, into having a purpose and a sane sense of self—an articulation not unrelated to psychoanalytic ideas about sanity and the ability to tell a story. Karen Rowe, in “To Spin a Yarn,” connects fairy tales with psychoanalysis through the story of the *Arabian Nights*: “Like an analyst upon whom the patient projects his murderous jealousy, so Scheherazade’s stories function for King Shahryar, who with reasoning powers restored and heart cleansed returns from mania to sanity” (303). Storytelling, from the *Arabian Nights* to contemporary therapeutic practices involving narrative, has always been a useful tool both for teaching and for comforting. Fairy tales in particular have long been associated with these purposes. The fairy tale critic Marina Warner has noted that their utility, especially when told through the authoritative voice of the storyteller or crone, is for “the instruction of the young” (xxiv). Warner makes the further point: “The stories’ greater purpose [is to] reveal possibilities, to map out a different way and new perception of love, marriage, women’s skills, thus advocating a means of escaping imposed limits and prescribed destiny” (24). Fairy tales, many critics agree, historically have provided maps for social behavior: “folklorists counter any casual

dismissal of folktales as mere entertainment by arguing that they have always been one of culture's primary mechanisms for inculcating roles and behaviors [and portraying] basic human problems and appropriate social prescriptions" (Rowe, "Feminism and Fairy Tales" 210). Note Rowe's use of the medical term "prescription"—written as a medical solution to discomfort or illness.

Women, as Elaine Showalter has pointed out in *The Female Malady*, comprised the majority of clients for early twentieth-century psychiatric wards. She exposes the fundamental alliance between women and mental illness, which ally in such elements as "irrationality, silence, nature, body" (3-4). Women are also constantly associated with fairy tales, often called "old-wives' tales." The link between women and fairy tales has many origins, but one of the primary ones critics note is women's history of repetitive labor, connecting to the presence of repetitive labor: spinning (as the heroine of Rumpelstiltskin must spin straw into gold), cooking and cleaning (the lifework of Cinderella, Snow White), and sorting the bad peas from the good peas (a gauntlet test for many fairy tale heroines, usually administered by a maleficent older woman to prevent the heroine from attending some function by which she might escape). Mary Catherine Bateson notes in her book *Composing a Life*, "Women are accustomed to tasks that have to be done again and again, undone almost as soon as they are done. The dinner is eaten right after it is cooked ... the bed is unmade every night" (213). If women throughout the centuries have found, as Bateson does, a "special satisfaction to repetitive tasks" (213), then the historical relationship between fairy tales and women further crystallizes. Marina Warner speaks further to women's relationship with fairy tales: "[F]airy tales give

women a place from which to speak, but they sometimes speak of speechlessness as a weapon of last resort” (xxv). Both Showalter and Warner write of women’s silence and speechlessness—often a strategic omission, but more often helpless and powerless, a forced necessity when a victim in a vulnerable or sick situation. Combining their arguments makes a strong case for why women, more so than men, would narrate their lives in asymptotic autobiography. If you cannot speak out, then perhaps you can write. If you cannot define your life in words, perhaps you can observe the nature of its inchoateness. If you cannot make something new, perhaps you can retell a favorite story.

Psychoanalysis, in addition to feminist and fairy tale criticism, observes the significances of silences and omissions. In “Studies on Hysteria,” Deborah Elise White discerns that the patient “must recognize her place in language as misplaced. The narrative which emerges from this recognition will, however, be less a history than an allegory....” (1044). White adds that whatever narrative emerges will be “an utterance [that the patient] cannot understand” (1044). In other words, White contends, a hysteric’s narrative cannot be fairly identified as her story. The two are separate works. Put in the terms of the math used here, the curve is once again the body of narrative, while the axes are the entire body of symptoms and history that the patient and the doctor work together to articulate—and the two bodies shall shadow each other but never quite meet. By this logic, Zelda Fitzgerald writes herself as a text, but due to her illness, she is unable to *read* herself accurately as that same text. Relating back to Flaherty’s observations about asylums and writing retreats like Yaddo, it could be similarly noted that Fitzgerald might

have been able to write, perhaps compulsively, more than she is able to understand coherently.

Related to the distinction between history and allegory, at one point in the novel David Beggs says to Alabama, “Your lack of a historical sense is the biggest flaw in your intelligence, Alabama” (72). She responds, “I don’t see why I should have to have a chronological mind to appreciate these white-powdered roads. We remind me of a troupe of troubadours, your carrying the baby like that” (72). Alabama’s observations traffic in the associative forms of simile, allegory, and metaphor—in this exchange, she refuses history, chronology, and facts in favor of pointing out that something is “like” this, or “reminds me” of that. In her frequent reference to myth and fairy tales, both inculcators for social behavior, Fitzgerald frames her protagonist in allegory, perhaps knowing that any history she attempted would be incomplete.

Of the idea of female patient as faulty narrator, critic Mary Wood celebrates Fitzgerald’s writing for its contrariness: “As the male self was acknowledging its displacement and its inability to know the world, Zelda Fitzgerald wrote against the ever-increasing tendency of realistic psychiatric and medical narratives to create worlds in which women’s bodies would remain the described, controlled objects of discourse” (261). In her writing, undertaken in hospitals and grounded in the realities of illness, Zelda Fitzgerald refused to be a stable object—instead she moved, asymptotically, toward some other place of potential. Part of the beauty of her book is how, as Wood observes, Fitzgerald’s language and tangents refuse to cooperate with straightforward autobiography, but rather push the narrative into some other genre. In refusing to

cooperate, Fitzgerald's language must "[violate] the myth that the language of autobiography must be transparent, that it must allow the reader an illusion of realism" (Wood 261). I appreciate Wood's use of the word "myth" here; in the novel, Fitzgerald both breaks old myth and makes new ones of her own, all of which contribute to her self-portrayal. The flapper's realm is the art of living, and the dancer's is the art of moving beautifully—the common denominator is that neither can be archived, and so other people (observers, husbands, doctors) must perpetuate Zelda Fitzgerald's myths. Perhaps fairy tales, myths for the borrowing, give hints for how this might be done.

In my Chapter One I discuss Fitzgerald's fear of losing her symptoms and experiencing—as she wrote it—"a sort of castration." Wood acknowledges that if the goal for psychoanalytic therapy is to render a complete story out of the expostulations of an insane patient, then Zelda Fitzgerald is playing with the completeness of her story, pasting wild language onto its clinical edges, and refusing to make any of it airtight. In essence, she is challenging the entire path of her treatment, writing against the "castration" she feared she would experience in being "cured." White, in "Studies on Hysteria," quotes Steven Marcus in saying that Freud's case histories are about narration itself, and that the goal is a complete story:

[I]n the course of psychoanalytic treatment, nothing less than 'reality' itself is made, constructed, or reconstructed. A complete story—'intelligible, consistent, and unbroken'—is the theoretical created end story. It is a story, or a fiction, not only because it has a narrative structure but also because the narrative account has been rendered in language, in conscious speech, and no longer exists in the

deformed language of symptoms, the untranslated speech of the body. (White 1036)

How interesting, then, this definition of “fiction” as a thing that fits the joint criteria of possessing a narrative structure and bearing the marks of having been translated into language. Marcus distinguishes between a narrative account made in the language of “conscious speech” as opposed to the “deformed language of symptoms,” yet he links reality and fiction as both being the reconstructed end of psychoanalysis. Recall the similarities of the words asymptomatic and asymptotic—both dealing with a connection (between meaning and words, between illness and its manifestations, or between an axis and a parabola) that has not been fully articulated. I love this passage for what it says about the nature of narrative: yes, it assumes that there are two types of narrative languages, but it does not claim that one is “true” and the other “fiction.” One is rawer than the other, but both are fundamentally translations—one of the body’s unconscious into symptoms, and the other of symptoms into words. The two narrative languages are linked and may coexist.

In a letter to Scott in early March 1932, Zelda wrote from the Phipps Clinic:

Darling—I miss you so. It’s very interesting here, however. Every now and then somebody opens the door and I say

“And what do you see my sister” and they answer “Nothing but the dust up on the hills,” and I go back to wishing I had never stolen the golden-key and awaiting the return of Blue-Beard⁴⁴.

I am proud of my novel, but I can hardly restrain myself enough to get it written. You will like it—It is distinctly École Fitzgerald, though more ecstatic than yours. (Bryer 156)

Note how in this letter Zelda moves immediately out of the sadness of her medical situation—missing Scott in the hospital—to how “interesting” she finds it: she uses fairy tales to make her situation interesting, to lend “pure fiction” to her drudging life of illness. Fantasy and tragedy are opposite faces of the same wall: they border and frame each other, and they keep each other at bay. In this passage, is Zelda using fairy tales to distract and amuse herself? By “awaiting the return of Blue-Beard,” is she making reference to Scott, whose visits she always looked forward to, in connection to the murderous blue-bearded husband who kept his dead wives hanging in the closet while he went travelling? Is she punishing him for hampering her novel-work and trying to cut her lifeline, her desire to write? Or is she making reference to herself, the final living wife, who is noteworthy not for her curiosity (all of the wives found the bloody closet) but for her ability to trespass into knowledge and still survive? Maria Tatar, in *Secrets Beyond the Door* (2006), makes the point that the trespassing woman motif in Bluebeard runs counter to the many myths about men who trespass into knowledge. She observes,

⁴⁴ Both Maria Tatar and Shuli Barzilai both have written full-length works on the many manifestations of the Bluebeard myth. See Tatar’s *Secrets Beyond the Door* (Princeton UP, 2006) and Barzilai’s *Tales of Bluebeard and His Wives from Late Antiquity to Postmodern Times* (Routledge, 2009).

“While Western culture has developed many new myths to reflect on male identity and the quest for knowledge and experience ... Bluebeard’s wife constitutes an exception”

(3). While men in myth are rewarded for their courage and curiosity, the women in this tradition—who include Eve and Pandora—are almost always punished.

In terms of this punishment, Nancy Comley in her 1998 essay “Madwomen on the Riviera” connects the writing of Scott and Zelda with that of Ernest Hemingway, who, in his unfinished novel *Garden of Eden*, created a trespassing, insane heroine whom he may have based in part on Zelda. Comley writes:

Yet it is the women who pay the price of madness for transgression, and as we have seen, transgression consists not only of sexual acts but also of the women’s attempts at creativity. To try to compete with the male ... is to trespass. A woman had to be crazy to do it—like Zelda—or, if one tried to create, one’s incipient madness surfaced.... (292)

Though Scott Fitzgerald also made references to fairy tales in his novels and notes, it was Zelda who commandeered them and allowed them to saturate her letters and her fiction. Her letters indicate that she felt some concern about infringing upon Scott’s material; she offered to revise according to his wishes, even though she stood up for her story and her right to write it. Perhaps, by using the traditional female storytelling medium of fairy tales, Zelda found a way to seem less competitive with her husband. It would not be outrageous to theorize that her constant return to fairy tales for material indicates both a desire for comfort-stories and for stories that would limit her work from trespassing. But

being caught in many strands of the same narrative as her husband, she must decide which stories to tell—a process that requires delicate mapping.

Fairy Tales as Imaginative Maps

A map is a way to make sure paths can be retraced. Maps keep us found, keep us alert and in control; maps make it so that being found is not merely a matter of luck and chance. In *Women Who Run with the Wolves* (1996), Clarissa Pinkola Estés lauds maps for their utility in women's lives. She writes, "What we are composing is a map of the woods in which we live, and where the predators live, and what their *modus operandi* is ... It is this knowledge that gives [a woman] the edge in living as freely as possible" (253). Richard Siken begins his essay "Hansel" with the question: "Why make a map?" (152). He answers himself: "We do not walk through a passive landscape. Sometimes you need a map to find the food, the hiding places" (152). To find his way home in the fairy tale, Hansel left a track of pebbles and bread crumbs as he and his sister wandered, frightened, through the forest. Siken leads his readers to ask these questions of ourselves: What are our trails? What pebbles and crumbs lead us home?

This mapping idea is integral to the connection between fairy tales and autobiography. The writer/teller gratefully welcomes the limits of the story: she or he knows the beginning (birth, or once upon a time), and the end (now, or happily ever after). Everything that happens in the middle remains confined between these two plot points. When the journey for character formation is the point of the story, as it is in both

fairy tales and autobiography, it is helpful for the plot to remain familiar, a backdrop to the protagonist's evolution.

Zelda Fitzgerald uses fairy tales to map out an alternate ending to her autobiography. It is important to note the ways in which Fitzgerald rewrites her illness as a critique of mass culture, as examined in Chapter Two. As the author she may claim that she is not ill; her world is. By mapping her story and life onto fairy tales, she shifts the fractured worldview from herself onto the world itself. Fairy tales, which she connects with advertising at various points in her writing, allow her to write a story that she wants to write, freeing her from her tormented autobiography, turning her life experience instead into a portrait of her generation. She is able to observe her time period carefully, from the position of participant and authority and victim, instead of purely the position of victim. The story is all about her, but she makes it bigger than her; she maps her anxieties and her world's anxieties together onto the same narrative map. Fairy tales form a map for this narrative and critique. In her wonderful essay "Happily Ever After" (2004), writer A.S. Byatt describes fairy tales as the original grammar for a writer's mind:

An all-important part of our response to the world of the tales is our instinctive sense that they have rules ... As a little girl I compared it in my mind to the pleasures of Ludo and Snakes and Ladders and Solitaire played with cards, in which only certain moves are possible and the restrictions are part of the pleasure.

As an adult writer I think that my infant synapses grew like a maze of bramble-shoots into a grammar of narrative.... and mathematical forms. (Byatt)⁴⁵

Her decision to link fairy tales, narrative, and math makes sense in the world of the map. Formulas, patterns, and algorithms are narrative gifts, simply because they allow writers to know how to start again once they have lost their way. Often in fairy tales, obstacles come in threes: two mistakes or misdirections, before the third correct one. Two foolish siblings fail on a quest before the third, generally the youngest and least experienced, tries and succeeds. The first two obvious guesses in a riddle are wrong; the third, unexpected one opens to the answer. In the map of fairy tale logic, these series of three show that nothing worthwhile is ever done perfectly on first try, an idea that offers hope to others who try. It encourages listeners and participants to look beyond the obvious and to imagine qualities of value in hungry dwarves, tarnished pots, and gnarled trees. Often these quests take the form of there-and-back: of leaving home before being able to return. Many of these motifs factor into *Save Me the Waltz*.

The idea of fairy tales as “narrative grammar” invites a host of important questions to the banquet table: Do fairy tales in fiction gesture toward endings because in life writing endings are impossible and stories are incomplete? They certainly open up psychology about why people do drastic, awful things. A woman who is mentally ill and abusive in life, in a story is merely acting like a stepmother. Are these stories simply maps, templates, for writers to adapt into cause-and-effect tales of motive and

⁴⁵ In this essay, found at: <http://books.guardian.co.uk/review/story/0,12084,1115048,00.html>, Byatt also references Shakespeare’s plays, which follow the standard fairy tale motifs in their plots of marriage and retribution.

psychology? The tales themselves are objects laid out without explanation; we as readers bring to these stories the subjective idea of what lies behind pure evil or good, or any other form of “pure fiction.” It is we who challenge these characters’ personality types and assumptions. Fairy tales are self-reflexive in this way, always acting as a map for the reader to hunt for him or herself, and to make sense of the emotions of the people around them. Because these stories exist to be retold, it is natural that in the end, the listener is always another writer, simply addressing another myth.

Aguilar quotes Elaine Showalter from her introduction to *New Feminist Criticism*: “In its earliest years, feminist criticism concentrated on exposing the misogyny of literary practice: the stereotyped images of women in literature as angels or monsters...”

(Showalter 5, quoted in Aguilar 4). In her novel, Zelda Fitzgerald casts herself as both the lousy monstrous mother who abandons her child in order to dance, and the graceful, sensitive woman who feels wounded by the follies of her age. Devil, angel; madwoman, prophet; jealous stepmother, fairy tale girl; modern flapper, Victorian mother: these dichotomies stalk the novel threateningly, forbidding a woman from trying to be more than one thing at once, mapping out the limits of what a woman can be. But this identity mapping is not solely a limiting practice in Zelda Fitzgerald’s work. Avrom Fleishman writes that “the way in which metaphors dynamically become myths is the general model for the ways in which autobiographical narrative generates a self or personal myth” (26). *Save Me the Waltz* deals significantly with the problem of self-myth, whether through performance, dance, or advertising. By allowing all of these dichotomies to rise, be

visible, and break, Fitzgerald makes a point about self-mythologizing as a twentieth-century phenomenon.

It could be said that self-mythologizing continues as a phenomenon throughout the twentieth century; many texts for and about women call attention to the possibilities of self-invention and performance as a necessity in modern society, where guidance is hard to come by, but advertisements promise easy happiness. In an essay about the popular HBO series “Sex and the City,” which deals humorously with the dearth of fairy tales in modern romance, Kim Akass and Janet McCabe illustrate another way that heroines need maps: “It is fair to say that fairy tales featuring innocent heroines conclude with the prospect of marriage and family. Yet the heroines’ mothers are noticeable by their absence. Patriarchal stories forever remove the maternal figure—leaving the fairy princess to grope around in the patriarchal textual maze without guidance” (193). So the narratives the four women tell one another—always in New York, usually at a favorite brunch haunt, generally detailing a past attempt at romance—themselves become maps for these women to follow toward tidy, coupled endings.

In *Save Me the Waltz*, Alabama Beggs has her tidy, married ending by the end of the first chapter, meaning that the following three chapters must work to show further endings beyond the obvious one, and must complicate the happily-ever-after into something worth exploring. So part of her work in the book is to abandon the map, having used it to get this far. As Alabama Knight (no longer Beggs), the protagonist must navigate the patriarchal landscape that posits woman as male text, and she must risk the scorn and difficulty that comes with her attempts to write herself. Male interpretation is

often questionable, and the only way to escape it, as we recall in the case of Freud's Dora, is to refuse to return—to literally walk off the map. Freud's famous case-study simply removes herself from the situation where her doctor can read her as a text and all her unconscious actions as performances. Escape was the only way she could assert power over her psychoanalyst. In short, Dora got tired of being literature. So did Zelda, in many ways. She was made literature through Scott for a large commercial audience. In the privacy of a mental hospital, in the extreme unglamour of treatment, she became an active agent trying to escape her inexplicable texts. She walked off the map by creating her own texts, writing her own fairy tales—the ultimate escape literature.

Furthermore, Zelda Fitzgerald's paintings (seven of which are reprinted in Appendix A) equip her subjects with escape routes from an audience's gaze. Alongside writing and dance, painting functioned as one of Fitzgerald's lifelong creative arts. From her earliest lessons in her early twenties to her final paintings done in the gardens of hospitals, she depicted fairy tales, myths and Bible stories, people she knew, cities where she lived, and flowers. In her paintings that contain people, the characters Fitzgerald depicts all have their heads held back, their eyes closed and their throats exposed to the viewer. As the viewer, you cannot read their expression or meet their eyes; they refuse empathy, they ignore judgment. Simone Weil Davis suggests that in Zelda Fitzgerald's early paintings the effect is insouciance and in the later paintings devoutness. She adds, "All Fitzgerald's heads ... seem held back and held still by force" (180). They look, at any rate, inaccessible. I would add to Davis's analysis that these paintings force their faces into masked unavailability, enforced loneliness. Nobody communicates, smiles,

makes contact. The characters float like dolls with their eyes shut. They have an inescapable third-personness to them. Fitzgerald refuses them subjectivity. Are they mythologized, or simply incredibly cut-off from people? Even her cityscapes evoke a similar unavailability: identical, mathematical façades of hotels or office buildings stacked innocuously, the windows as blank and unreadable as windows in a hospital.

In her paintings, much more so than in her novel, Zelda Fitzgerald closes her characters and objects to further interpretation, to the risk of anyone else trying to give them voice. In her paintings, she silences the narrative and slams the book shut.

Narrative as a Promethean Lost Cause

A major pitfall of being “born into narrative” is that our stories need outlets and audiences in other people. Unlike the dancer, the writer works alone. She is dependent on her product—not her image—to project her skills into the world. But indebted to the ideas of staging, ballet, and performance, Fitzgerald creates a heroine who, like the melancholy Jacques in Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*, believes staunchly that “all the world’s a stage.” In *Save Me the Waltz*, Fitzgerald’s art loses its ethereality and becomes tangible: words, ink, and paper, and forevermore static, off-stage, and able to be archived. The very writing of a book shackles its writer to a single narrative self—a frightening feat for someone whose two “selves” seem always at war. This inability or refusal to narrate a transparent self is one of the reasons why, throughout her novel, Fitzgerald plays at performing herself, always insisting that the self is not to be trusted or relied upon.

That her writing takes the form of a novel is also relevant, especially because, as Walter Benjamin has observed, “The novelist has isolated himself. The birthplace of the novel is the solitary individual, who is no longer able to express himself by giving examples of his most important concerns, is himself uncounseled, and cannot counsel others” (87). This idea of the novelist being unable to counsel others takes root in *Save Me the Waltz*. Wisdom is not—and cannot be—passed onto the young. Indeed, wisdom may only come from adults revising and revisiting their lives through the “wise” folklore and advice they vaguely recall hearing when they were children. The communication of Alabama’s life, like the stories in most novels, possesses what Benjamin refers to as an “essential dependence on the book,” because, according to the commercial attachments of the age, no faith exists except for in the tangible (87). Compared to Benjamin’s definition of the storyteller, whose source material is “experience which is passed on from mouth to mouth,” it is clear that Alabama is witnessing and recording a generation of novelists, not storytellers (84). Not only do David and Alabama Beggs refuse the advice of their parents’ generation, but also they are refused in turn by their daughter Bonnie and her generation.

One of the most notable silences in *Save Me the Waltz* is the silence of aborted oral folklore. When Alabama is a little girl, she begs her mother, “Tell me about myself when I was little” (11). Millie Beggs offers the disappointing answer: “You were a good baby” (11). After this exchange, Fitzgerald continues:

The girl had been filled with no interpretation of herself ... She wants to be told what she is like, being too young to know that she is like nothing at all and will

fill out her skeleton with what she gives off, as a general might reconstruct a battle following the advances and recessions of his forces with bright-colored pins” (11).

The rest of the novel charts Alabama’s attempt to answer this question of what “she is like.” It becomes her own reconstructed battle. When she is grown up, married, and living on the French Riviera, Alabama falls in love with a French aviator named Jacques Chevre-Feuille (“honeysuckle” in French); while they dance, he tenderly says, “Tell me about when you were a little girl” (86).⁴⁶ Considering the muted nature of storytelling in the novel, it is no surprise that Alabama does not answer—whether the intimacy of such a question runs too deep for words, or whether it is simply an amateur question for someone of her generation to ask, she does not indicate. But she does kiss him in the next paragraph.

Toward the end of the novel, two instances point to the impossibility of storytelling as a way to connect different generations. These instances parallel each other exactly: at two separate points, in two separate countries, Alabama and David try to tell stories (respectively, about Greek temples and about Prometheus) to their daughter Bonnie and her friends; in both instances, children interrupt the story with requests for condiments, and in both cases the adults cannot remember how the story ends. Expression and narrative, then, become lost causes, and wisdom is difficult to dispense in the uncertainty of life outside a text. In these ways and others, fairy tales are useful

⁴⁶ Zelda Fitzgerald had a relationship with a French aviator named Edouard Jozan in 1924, while living with Scott on the French Riviera, and it is generally acknowledged that she based Chevre-Feuille on Jozan.

vehicles for transmitting wisdom and for reinventing the self. But in other ways, the limitations of fantastic tales are apparent. Compare the following passages:

“Don’t you want to hear about the Greek temples, all bright reds and blues?” Alabama insisted.

“Si, Signora.”

“Well—they are white now because the ages have worn away their original, dazzling—”

“Mummy, may I have the compote?”

“Do you want to hear about the temples or not?” said Alabama crossly. The table came to a dead expectant silence.

“That’s all I know about them,” she concluded, feebly.

“Then may I please now have the compote?” Bonnie dripped the purple stain down the knife pleats of her best dress. (166)

“The old will order for the young,” announced David, “and I will tell you about Prometheus so you will not notice that you are not getting what you want. Prometheus was tied to an immense rock and—”

“May I have the apricot jam?” interrupted Genevra.

“Do you want to hear about Prometheus, or not?” said Bonnie’s father impatiently.

“Yes, sir. Oh, yes, of course.”

“Then,” resumed David, “he writhed there for years and years and—”

“That is in my ‘Mythologie,’” said Bonnie proudly.

“And then what?” said the little boy, “after he was writhing.”

“Then what? Well—” David glowed with the exhilaration of being attractive, laying out the facets of his personality for the children like stacks of expensive shirts for admiring valets. “Do you remember exactly what *did* happen?” he said lamely to Bonnie.

“No. I’ve forgotten since a long time.”

“If that is all, may I please have the compote?” Genevra politely insisted.

(173)

Not irrelevantly, both parents are interrupted and both conversations end with requests for compote. Consumption, literally, overrides myth. Once each parent/storyteller has cleared a space for myth to enter, the myth is forgotten, the space closed. The children are uninterested in the stories. In the case of David’s story, his announced purpose in telling it is to distract the children from noticing that they “are not getting what [they] want”—a strategy that is undermined, of course, by his rhetorical move to call attention to it. (173). The adverbs describing the parents at the end of these attempts (“feebly,” “lamely”) contribute to the idea that storytelling presents the teller with a problem: while Alabama and David feel obligated to pass on folklore for their children’s sake, they are rendered verbally impotent because neither the tellers nor their audience find these stories compelling enough to remember. These two compote-interrupted myths indicate an anxiety about the failing usefulness of stories in this culture. Hence, the necessity for a

novel as a personal channel within which the author may quarantine a reader, allowing space and time for untold myths to resurface in other ways.

These examples of interrupted folklore appear grounded in a fear that myth has been all forgotten, that the wisdom of the old is dead and that the protagonists are responsible for letting it die. In this vein, David and Alabama Knight's attempts to recount these stories to their daughter Bonnie seem a gesture of respect to folklore and the past, to the oldest narrated wisdom. So in telling the story of her generation and their modern age, Zelda Fitzgerald uses the form of fairy tales with their rounded out, well-worn and overworked truths. Adaptation of myth was done frequently in Modernist literature; two of the most definitive Modernist works, Joyce's *Ulysses* and Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, contain the three unities of Greek tragedy: unity of place, time, and action, and *Ulysses* in particular grafts itself against the ancient myths, portraying as it does a modern Dublin story divided into and told through the stages of the Odyssey.⁴⁷ Part of the reason for this use of the classics (whether Greek or German, myth or fairy tale) may have been a widespread anxiety that the early twentieth-century's break with the past was so profound that the past was completely lost.

⁴⁷ William Faulkner, in one of his most famous works, *The Sound and the Fury*, preserves this unity by giving each of his four narrators a single day to narrate. Although I have not examined Faulkner in this dissertation, his writing is deeply grounded in the storytelling and myth of the old South, and it has been documented that Zelda Fitzgerald read and loved his work. As Nancy Milford has observed of Fitzgerald's reading of Faulkner, "she was nurtured by a kindred South" (204). Milford further notes that Fitzgerald was reading Faulkner in 1931, before she wrote "Miss Ella," a short story that draws imagery of heat and fire to depict a lonely Southern spinster. I have not been able to find any other records of Faulkner's influence on Zelda Fitzgerald's work. However, both of these Southern writers incorporate elements of performativity into their work. For more on the performative aspects in Faulkner's writing, see James G. Watson's *William Faulkner: Self-Presentation and Performance* (2000).

Personal storytelling, too, presents a problem. As mentioned above, Alabama is unable to glean any outside perception of herself as a child other than her mother's meager response of, "You were a good baby" (Fitzgerald 11). Through the beginning of the novel, Alabama revels in the excitement of being included in family secrets, most notably the dramatic scenes of her two older sisters' forbidden romances, but of herself she grasps and finds no folklore, and so as she ages, she generates her own fantastical notions of herself. She does this impatiently as a child, and then more deftly as an adult; we watch her present herself beautifully and conceitedly to various men, beginning with her sisters' beaux, moving to the officers of World War I who are stationed in the state of Alabama, then focusing on one of these officers whom she ends up marrying. We know that he will distinguish himself in her affections apart from the other officers because from the beginning, he, too, manufactures his own folklore out of nothing: "A blond lieutenant with one missing insignia mounted the Beggs's steps. He had not bought himself a substitute because he liked imagining the one he had lost in the battle of Alabama to be irreplaceable" (37).⁴⁸

In essence, Alabama appreciates when her peers present themselves as being ripe with personal myth; but she finds that the downside of her community of artists is that communication in its deepest level has become obsolete, and that art- and artifact-making has taken its place. Marina Warner quotes Karel Čapek, a utopian Czech writer, who in 1931 wrote, "A fairy story cannot be defined by its motif and subject-matter, but by its

⁴⁸ The novel makes no specification as to which Alabama battle fostered the loss—the historical battle, which would be heroic, or the young woman who spent the summer collecting soldiers' insignia.

origin and function ... A real fairy tale, a fairy tale in its true function, is a tale within a circle of listeners..." (17). A fairy tale is a performed attempt to share wisdom. In using the fairy tale medium in novel form, Zelda Fitzgerald addresses both the lost idea of a circle of listeners and Benjamin's idea of the lonely reader and writer of the novel. Jack Zipes speaks to this alienation in his article "Breaking the Disney Spell":

One of the results stemming from the shift from the oral to the literary in the institutionalization of the fairy tale was a loss of live contact with the storyteller and a sense of community or commonality. This loss was a result of the social-industrial transformations at the end of the nineteenth century with the *Gemeinschaft* (community-based society) giving way to the *Gesellschaft* (contract-based society).... (341)

In a community-based society, stories would be the foundation of all shared knowledge and wisdom. In a contract-based society, such as the one in which Zelda Fitzgerald was living, stories would have functioned as fallen stars—no longer soaring, no longer bearers of light. In reusing fairy tales, Fitzgerald is both paying homage to the wisdom of the old and mourning the loss of community and communication within her society.

Save Me the Waltz shows how consumerism, mass culture, and a culture infiltrated by advertisement ruin the possibility to convey any storytelling meaning for life. The novel is cognizant of the failures of individuals to identify themselves within a culture that promises status as art and legend in exchange for adhering to a lawless structure that strips its inhabitants of desire and turns them into "indications" and advertisements. Her characters—so preoccupied with their own creation and destruction,

trapped within the own unhappy cycle of art-making—are presented in this novel as an aesthetic phenomenon. Walter Benjamin, in “The Storyteller,” predicted this problem as a symptom of modernity: “Mankind, which in Homer’s time was an object of contemplation for the Olympian gods, now is one for itself. Its self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order” (242). Zelda Fitzgerald deals with narrative and identity as Promethean lost causes, only after trespassing into, and being disappointed by, the unbounded territory of the gods. Thus, the traditional idea of the story as a communicator of meaning erases itself throughout the novel. Words do not serve as functional carriers between two individuals. Through this idea that nobody has time anymore to listen to stories, the novel suggests that the only way to tell a fairy tale is to *be* a fairy tale.

Flawed Happily-Ever-After as Bearer of Hope

The rare occasions when characters are successful in making up and telling fairy tales in *Save Me the Waltz* usually occur in the moments of crisis, death, or some other devastating loss of meaning. By borrowing from conventional folk stories and representing their imaginary worlds of order and beauty, Fitzgerald reinstates meaning into a world, the post-war twentieth-century world of wandering Americans, where belief in the sacred has become sacrilege. Similarly, by using folklore and storytelling, death and madness are held in abeyance—an artificial and yet necessary buffer state. In many of her usages of them, these tales present escape into the romance of the past, into a performed world that she no longer believes in but nonetheless thinks is wonderful. Her

novel deals with the awareness—itself a crisis—that meaning in life, at this time and after mental illness, is as imaginary as these tales. In fairy tales, the good triumph and the not so good are punished. Fitzgerald's life, both in and out of the asylum, forced her to look backward at this fairy tale logic in order to pull hope from the plight of princesses in towers, tombs, and dysfunctional families, and to find empathy for the witches, queens, and stepmothers who subjugated those princesses and tried to prevent their happily-ever-afters.

Although stories are unlimited vehicles for possibility, on the other side of fairy tales, or of any performance, lies death, insanity, or complete lack of order; outside the map of folklore—with its boundaries and rules—lies chaos. Fairy tales, existing in liminal spaces and acting as doorways between worlds, play with the borders of these maps—tempting characters out into the wild, into the woods, into the places where the civilized order of cause-and-effect vanishes in favor of other, more savage forces. Marina Warner writes of the historical function of fairy tales to console people against the onslaught of horror or of the unknown. She notes that in *The Golden Ass*, an old woman tells the story of Psyche to an unhappy, kidnapped young bride; the old woman says tenderly, “My pretty dear ... let me tell you a fairy tale or two to make you feel a little better” (14). The implicit understanding is that the story keeps the listener comforted now, able to forget that tomorrow—or one day soon—grief will surely come. However, the unspoken hope is that in that comforted state the listener can gather her wits and resources, and find a way to save herself.

Toward the end of *Save Me the Waltz*—primarily throughout chapter four—performances of fairy tales and other folklore surface with an almost desperate consistency, each time interrupted by the appearance of death. When Alabama is dancing in Naples, and David is in Switzerland with their daughter Bonnie, the following conversation occurs:

“Has the little one slept well?” asked the people recovering from long illnesses who painted the view in the garden.

“Yes,” answered Bonnie politely, “but you must not disturb me—I am the watcher who tells when the enemy is coming.”

“Then can I be King of the Castle?” called David from the window, “and cut off your head if you make a mistake?”

“You,” said Bonnie, “are a prisoner, and I have pulled out your tongue so you cannot complain—but I am good to you anyway,” she relented, “so you needn’t feel unhappy, Daddy—unless you want to! Of course, it would be *better* to be unhappy, perhaps!” (176-7)

They go on like this for a while, until interrupted by a telegram with the news of the impending death of Judge Beggs. There are two particularly interesting things to note about this passage: one, that the people with the illnesses painting the flowers in the garden are a direct reference to Zelda Fitzgerald’s own hospital pastime—during certain months of her hospitalization, she painted gardens all day, though few of her paintings have survived. Secondly, Bonnie Knight, a representative of the new generation, has adopted her parents’ generation’s use of make-believe, and in this impromptu fairy tale

with her father, their game is ended by death, which ultimately ends all make-believe. In this case, fairy tales provide a buffer against all that is inevitable—against the unpleasant facts of adult reality.

Once back in Montgomery, Alabama, the setting of both the beginning and the end of the book, Alabama and David and Bonnie talk to the dying Austin Beggs and distract Millie Beggs, whose widowhood impends. After the Judge dies, Alabama watches her mother reminiscing about her past and her daughter fabricating her future, and she thinks, “It was very pretty to see [Millie] with Bonnie, both of them pretending great wisdom about things, both of them eternally pretending” (192). They are making up their own stories, becoming heroines in their own fairy tales, and Alabama is struck by the poignancy of their playtime, by their need to tell of some meaning that has lasted and therefore will last.

The final pages of the novel involve a farewell party for the Knights, a gathering that is laden with frivolous and uninteresting guests. The party ends with the following chorus of anonymous farewells, all underscored with death:

“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!” (196)

Alabama seems to be the only one to notice the sinister nature of this departure, and the anticlimax with which the book ends seems, in a way, an acceptance. Alabama is preparing her experiences for a story form, to be shaped and rewritten for a new

audience, and although death is the end of the father plot, and of the party and of most performances, the acceptance of life as a performance against death has rendered death innocuous to Alabama.

Alabama undergoes her disillusionment, and in turn her willingness to play make-believe with her former illusions, through dancing and advertising and the promises of the American 1920s. Zelda Fitzgerald in her letters appears to be undergoing a similar process, through the revelations that come with madness. One critic uses the phrase the “‘safe’ mask of madness” (Friedman 47), and the notion of safety in madness carries slightly different significance for Zelda. In a letter to Scott, Zelda writes: “God! the point of view of sanity, normality, beauty, even the necessity to survive is so utterly arbitrary ... sometimes I think I would loose [*sic*] my mind if I were not insane” (466). The clarity of her writing during this time, and in this letter, suggests that her assimilation into the category of the insane allows her a certain safety, a freedom from the maddening performance of trying to define herself according to the standards of this seemingly mad world. In being mad, she no longer fears the emptiness and fragmentation associated with madness; she has seen them, survived them.

That there is no consolation is consolation to her, and she tries to make this existential idea a sort of consolation for Scott. Her disavowal of the language of sanity that locates and controls her leads her to categorize this sane language, the fable of a sane state of being, as merely another fairy tale. In her “Johnny takes his medicine” letter to Scott, written from Prangins Hospital in 1931, “Johnny” becomes a legend, a positive

force, through his sickness and suffering. Here, and in much of Zelda Fitzgerald's writing, the flawed happily-ever-after becomes a bearer of hope.

How amazing, then, that fairy tales—themselves full of binaries—could allow a writer to create a beyond-binary situation. Zelda Fitzgerald empathizes with fairy tales' many roles and performances, uses them to reflect upon her mess of a life and finally entertain the idea that a story can be bigger than that. These stories create mazes; inside the mazes good and evil, safety and fear, innocence and wisdom all become arbitrary. Inside the mazes every person can become sympathetic, each situation can have multiple interpretations. Just as absolute value in math removes the negative charge from a number, fairy tales offer a redeeming clarity to even the darkest of life's events. No shame or self-consciousness exists in these stories: all of these archetypes, all of these characters, are necessary for the story to take place and offer its *dénouement*, whether surprising, pleasing, platitudinous, or ambiguous. However it ends, it could not have ended any other way. The map works because the endings are set in stone: the paths to them, the emotions, the reasons all may be debated. In fairy tales, things simply *are*, and an adaptor's job is to provide explanations for how they got to be that way.

Instead of being caught suspended in the old plot of "myself versus myself," both sides of self become compatible members of the same life plot through this use of fairy tales in writing an asymptotic autobiography. And so the questing autobiographer, in borrowing these motifs, can write just the sort of story in which both the witch *and* the heroine could live happily, or at least self-acceptingly, ever after.

Chapter Four

Performing Contemporary Asymptotic Autobiography

In Performed Autobiography, the performer depicts either some part of her own life, some part of another person's life, or some combination. The one-act play included in this chapter stemmed out of a desire to perform Zelda Fitzgerald not as she was legendarily known, but in a more intimate role.

The idea for this adaptation started when I was reading Zelda Fitzgerald's writing for my Master's thesis and I found it puzzling that recent films have been made about Sylvia Plath, Iris Murdoch, Frida Kahlo, female artists that struggled, in their own ways, to make art in the midst of marriage problems, mental or physical illness, infamy and fame; and yet no recent films have been made to focus on Zelda, whose biography is quite well known. She seemed to be an obvious pick.

Then it occurred to me that most people do not think of Zelda Fitzgerald as an artist or a writer. A "combustible showpiece" in her husband's writing, as Elizabeth Wurtzel characterized her in the book *Bitch*, but not really a serious creator of her own (194). So I began this project in hope of showing Zelda as the complicated character that she was, alluding to the legends that are publicly known of her (the Southern belle, the famous writer's muse), but also undermining her "biography" by trying to show her awareness of her performances. I wanted to illustrate her decision to become a dancer, then an artist, then a writer, a decision that was paralleled by her diagnosis with

schizophrenia and her subsequent series of hospitalizations. When she was well and a new wife, she *was* art for Scott (providing her diaries for him to use, as well as providing her own mythology and picturesque adventures); once she was ill and forced to abdicate the active roles of wife and mother, she spent the bulk of her life in the hospitals, making art by painting and writing. I have returned many times in this dissertation to Zelda's statement in a letter to Scott that the struggle of "myself versus myself" lay at the heart of what she wished to write. It is clear that this struggle signified many different possibilities in her life, but the one that seemed to plague her most was whether to be an artist or the art. She seemed to think that she could not be both at the same time, and her life proved her right.

In the early drafts of the screenplay, I wrote her the way that in her novel she writes herself: chimerical, flippant, observant, constantly performing, her feelings hard to read. But in keeping her observers neatly at bay, her world becomes lonely and inaccessible. She is the self in it, the main and only character, and everyone else is intrigued, charmed, and deceived. This would not work, if my goal were to open her up and give the audience a way in to her. If drama is what happens between characters, it cannot happen if Zelda remains closed and unchallenged.

I changed tactics and wrote a play. A play seemed more likely to force a character into intimacy. Given the confines of a single performer (me), the performed would have to be alone with herself; she would have to be—to some extent—at rest. I drew heavily upon two bodies of source information: Zelda Fitzgerald's fiction, letters, and biographies, and the classic fairy tales. Because of their frequent appearances in her

writing, I knew that I would have to use fairy tales. At the beginning of her life, when she was a teenager, she alluded to these tales romantically in happily-ever-after love letters to Scott. As a middle aged woman (by her standards—really she was in her late twenties), she used them to talk of their illusions; she wrote about the glamorous lives promised by cigarette ads and fairy tales, and how the happiness they promise is shallow and unreal. At the end of her life, after spending significant time in hospitals, she began to write about and identify with the witches and the crones, the ancient women who suffer and work hard, gaining wisdom but not much else.

The play in its first draft comes closer to removing the inaccessibility of the screenplay. In this version, she and Scott are together, and surprisingly honest, it seems—playing games and provoking each other, but at least connecting, having a relationship, challenging and, in their own ways, loving each other. But still I needed an objective witness, somebody besides Scott, who was used to her. I wanted the audience to be able to witness her moments of extreme sanity and charm, and to see her exactly how she has been written in history: thoroughly and hallucinatingly crazy. But why was this necessary?

I think the witness was necessary because I wanted the audience to be extremely aware of Zelda as a woman who was not simply one person; a woman for whom masks were often who she most wanted to be, and who ultimately was diagnosed with a disease that would split her into more selves than even she could track. She spent so much time acting out the role of wild Judge's daughter, elusive Alabama belle, and author's fearless wife, that she became these selves in her writing. Her natural ease at being art precluded

her ability to make art, and even in her schizophrenic state, she understood that this might be her ultimate tragedy. I think she is most interesting once she has made this realization. With Scott around, she falls too clearly into only one of her many roles. Therefore, I omitted Scott from the play and replaced him with a doctor.

Zelda Fitzgerald appears in my final, performed version of the play as disappointed, unglamorous, haggard, middle-aged. The very existence of her at that age (about 46) would've appalled her; after all, this is the woman who went down in history as the 1920s poster-child for unencumbered youth, who never wished to live beyond thirty. By taking her out of her mythical teens and twenties, I found that she immediately became more complicated, a figure with whom an audience could form a more intimate connection. I cast her in her nightgown, bare and vulnerable, and, like the characters in fairy tales, stripped to her essentials. To the doctor, she is one of many patients he must see in a day. She is not important to him; she knows this, and she seeks his recognition. In this play, I switched the vectors of desire: the earliest screenplay focused on other people's desire *for* her, and what this play does is to show Zelda incomplete and desiring something—some understanding or communication with others.

The decision to replace Zelda's factual ending of the story of her life with Scott indicates some possibility of hope and freedom. Many critics, most notably Jack Zipes and Marina Warner, have characterized fairy tales as a genre that addresses the realities of life, while at the same time providing hope for change. The fairy tale protects her from the sadness of her situation, amuses her in conversation with the doctor, and enlightens the audience about her desires: it shows the facts of her life alongside her hopes for what

it could have been. The decision for Zelda to tell this story to the doctor provided her with a necessary audience. Her writing indicates that performance is vital to her sense of self. It was vital for my depiction of her that her performance failed, and setting it in the dismal surroundings of the hospital provided necessary limitations—a place where her performances would do her no good. Through superimposing her life onto the fairy tale “The Swan Maiden,” I feel that I have been able to come closer to the truth of who she was.

I entered this project believing that the best approach for adapting the life of Zelda Fitzgerald would be an extremely faithful one, but in the end, literal translation has not been the most effective method. I chose to tell this story through performed asymptotic autobiography in order to give shape to her performances of herself, to remain faithful to her use of fairy tales, and to show the polarities of the roles she inhabited, and how they affected her sense of her self and of her writing. In this play, we see her primarily in two roles, the two roles, mentioned in the Introduction to this dissertation, that Margaret Atwood describes as making up a writer: the drudger-through-reality and the myth-maker.

This playwriting process has gotten me thinking about why exactly the need for her performance needs to be told. Perhaps there’s another story I’m after, that this one is helping me access. Originally my plan was to write a screenplay that was a fairly straightforward biography of her entire life. Instead, I chose to focus on a much smaller segment, a point where she has already outlived her own legend and is disappointed—once her gorgeously spun gold has already turned to back into straw.

“Zelda Speaks of Swans”: An Autobiography in One Act

Time: 15 minutes.

Set: A sofa, a table with a lurid fake flower to the R of the sofa, a table with a glass of water & a stack of white origami paper to the L of sofa. A blanket and white sheet cover sofa to evoke a hospital bed. Before the play begins, there is either silence or music from Tchaikovsky’s Swan Lake.

Lights off, and then on. Silence.

ZELDA sits on a bed in the center of the stage of her hospital room, wearing a white nightgown with a thin blue robe covering it but open. She takes a sheet of paper from the stack and folds a single paper swan, which takes about a minute. She drops it next to her on the sofa, and then she looks to Stage Right, where the invisible DOCTOR has come into the room. She becomes self-conscious, tying her robe around her and fidgeting. She follows him with her eyes to where he sits (center, front row) and then watches him throughout the performance.

Hi. (begins nervously twisting her hands)

Fine. And you, Dr.—Carson.

Doctor Asher—oh. I’m sorry. I confused you with that—

Yes. 5 glasses. And then I went to the bathroom.

No—I’ve had one already today. (*holds her arm, where a doctor would’ve drawn blood*)

Later this afternoon? I’m going to practice—ballet.

No, thank you, I’ve eaten.

No.

No.

Yes, I know, I kn—

No—oh! Actually, yes, I do—I do have one question for you. Will you ask the night nurse to stop locking the doors to our rooms? I wanted a drink of water and I couldn’t get out.

But what if I don’t want to call the nurse?

(panicking slightly) What if I can't find the nurse? What if there's a fire? What if—

Fine. Fine. Then what do you want to talk about?

Yes—I'm still having them. Every night. They're not as bad as they used to be. Although last night I dreamt that Dr. Myers came into my bedroom dressed as my grandmother, wearing a pink cap and a nightgown. He wouldn't talk *(pause)* or open his mouth, even though I kept making fun of his costume so that he would say something. He just went around, taking tests, tidying up, and finally, just before he left, he turned around and smiled—and I saw that his teeth were wolf's teeth, dripping with blood.

Reaches for more paper and continues folding.

What do you think that means?

Well—

Yes, we have talked about that. He knows I love fairy tales.

The reason it came up is because he calls us birds.

Yes he does. Just because you haven't heard him doesn't mean it doesn't happen. *(beat)*
He says: Time for breakfast, birds! Then he unlocks our rooms and we twitter out. Crazy
like a loon. Have you ever heard a loon, Dr. Cars—I mean Dr Asher? I used to hear them
at night when I was growing up in Alabama. They sound like ghosts.

So that's why I told Dr. Myers the story of the Swan Maiden. Because I don't think we're
loons at all, but swans. Some hissing and biting, but mostly tame. We're a—school of
angry women who don't know how to do anything by ourselves, but who all remember
having once been graceful. *(beat)* But when our bodies fail, we lose our minds
completely.

Then I told him—

What?

Because it's true.

(She sits and pulls up her dowdy hospital gown and reveals healthy brown legs and arms)

Bodies fail. That's the hardest part.

My body failed. I thought using it to dance—that that would be the thing that saved me. Until I turned 27 I wasted my life. So I decided that it was time to use my body to make art. Scott and I laughed about how ballet would be the hair that I flung to get out of my tower—*pause*. That’s from Rapunzel. *(Sigh. Reprimanding him by her tone, looking straight at doctor when saying this; she returns to folding quietly.)*

Last night? There wasn’t much to do. I was awake. So I made some swans. And some paper dolls. *(brightens)*.

I used to make them for Scottie when she was a baby. She had the three of us, me in my night-gown, Scott in his turquoise socks and with wings behind his shoulders—

She also had Red Riding Hood, as well as the big bad wolf, and I even made a pink party dress for the wolf, in case she got invited anywhere—as well as a hunting costume and guns, for when she needed to be a bigger, badder wolf—

And I made the entire court of Louis the fourteenth. *(very pleased)*.

Why what? Wings! Scott always seemed like someone who would have wings. I noticed that from the very beginning. He just seemed somehow—elevated. *(She turns suddenly toward Stage Right.)*

Was that the door? Scott? Scott? Did you hear that? (*beat*) You didn't hear that?

Sometimes Scott comes in the afternoons...I thought—I thought—you didn't hear....you didn't hear anything?

My husband Scott. You haven't heard of him?

Do you—read—books?

Well...he's a writer. A very good writer.

Oh, he writes about all sorts of things. He mostly writes about me. You might've heard of Daisy Buchanan...or Nicole Diver, who goes crazy and drags her husband down with her—that's me.

Oh yes, I write. I mostly dance, but I also sometimes write.

I wrote this to Scott, the first time I was hospitalized:

(*closes eyes and recites*) Take me home. I hate it here, and I feel so fetid—and everything constantly smells of rubber. I don't know how deep a soul can sink in its shackles, but after a certain point everything dissolves in humor and all I want to do is fly a kite and eat green apples and have a stomach-ache I know the cause of—and wade in a creek and feel

mud between my toes, and be covered with the flake of dried sea water and fall asleep with you on a hot afternoon—

Do you like it? Scott liked it. He thought it was good. Not good enough for a novel or anything like that, but good for his wife in the hospital. He liked the stories I told him more than the ones I tried to write. I never could shed my past around him. I was ready to let it drift into the wind, but he wanted to keep it nearby for use in his fiction. He always wanted to know what I was writing and whether it used the same material that he was using for his novel—the one about his wife in the hospital.

(she is quiet for a moment)

The hospital was a relief. *(beat)*

Scott died six years ago.

I hope I die soon.

Oh, come on—don't write that down, Doctor—

I know. Dr. Asher.

The other day I overheard one of the doctors—the woman, I can never remember her name—saying that a hysteric is someone who can't ever tell a story. Meaning her own story. *(beat)*

Do you believe that?

My beginnings are all right—and endings are easy, either marriage or death. But I never know what to do with the middle. Which is one of the reasons why I love fairy tales, since we all know what happens in them—but still, my stories sag at the center; it's as if they're missing their souls...and I think what makes them soulless is that I don't know anymore who I am in them. Scott always knows who he is in his stories. I can always recognize myself in his, but I don't know who I am in mine. I was the girl, but now I'm too old. So perhaps I'm now the witch. *(beat)* Do you think I'm the witch?

Right now? But I've already taken them this morning! Two. It's not time—that's not what Dr. Myers said—really, Doctor—I have already taken them, and it hurts my stomach if I have too many. Doctor, please, I am telling the truth, I want to get well—No! Don't do that. Fine. I will. *(meekly)* Fine. *(picks up imaginary pills from the table and takes them with water.)*

I forgot what were talking about. *(irritably)*

What? You know my age.

Yes you do.

You do. You don't need to ask.

It's written there—on the upper left corner of the sheet you're holding—

Of course it's right.

Forty-six.

(Pulls up her top sheet to cover herself more fully, and hundreds of swans fall out onto the floor.)

Scott always likes to talk about the future. The last time I saw him, he wanted to know what I thought I'd do with the rest of my life. Would I write, he wanted to know? Keep trying to dance?

I was feeling disagreeable that night. I told him, my life is over. You're just the one who sometimes waits for me at night. *(beat)*

Scott was so sensitive. He was always frightened that I was about to leave, because he believed that it would devastate him but not me. Which was true and not true. It would have broken me into pieces. But people in pieces survive all the time. So whenever he would ask, I would have to give him two answers. Because each version of myself has a different answer.

But Scott is a man who has one answer for everything and it is discipline. Hard work. It's a good answer some of the time. But surely there must be other answers.

That's another thing about fairy tales—they all have two answers. Marriage for the heroine, death for the villain. And each woman is always the other's villain. *(beat)*

But there is a third ending that I found on accident. Madness is somewhere in between. If you can't decide between the two endings, you wait and you wait and you wait and eventually you go mad. That's how it was explained to me.

Oh, I don't know. I suppose it was explained to me by myself.

Well, the princess either stays in the castle with her father or gets stuck in a different castle with a prince. I don't know which is better. Or the swan maiden. In some versions she flies away. In others she gets locked in her cage and burns. Which ending do you prefer? *(trying to sound casual)*

Why can't I talk about that? It doesn't upset me. I'm not upset.

(Falls to her knees and begins gathering up the swans around her. Then sits back on bed.)

When Scott met my father...oh poor Scott. He had such high hopes—he thought the background which could have hatched me would have to have been something.... Well, that was one thing we had in common—we both should have been born to other families. He saw in me a girl who had more fun—who was younger than anyone else in the world...and I let him think that because he was young too, and an author, and I liked the things he invented.

So Scott came to dinner, and my father was complaining about how little I ate and how my mother spoiled me—which she did, of course—by making me different meals than she made everyone else. Everyone was eating roast beef that night except for me. I was eating stuffed tomatoes.

So I began to complain to my mother about how much my father ate—my father was a judge, a solemn, portly judge, a judge the size of a bed, and though he wasn't sensitive about his weight, he was sensitive about being ridiculed, especially in front of Scott. So he stood up and took the butcher knife out of the roast beef. I stood up too and ran away

to the other side of the table, and he chased me around and around and around the table until Mother stood in front of him and took away the knife. *(she is amused)* Then my father and I sat back down and we all had dessert. I think it upset Scott.

No, it didn't run in my family. People were depressed, but it wasn't depression. My brother Anthony jumped out a window after he lost his job, so now I only have sisters left. But he was a special case. The rest of us grew up fine.

But Scott couldn't get over it. When he was stuck in the middle of writing *Tender is the Night* and trying to turn me into Nicole Diver, he blamed her schizophrenia on sexual abuse from her father. *(appalled beat)* My father never would have done that. In addition to the usual reasons, my father was too afraid of the law.

What are you writing?

Don't write that. I just told you that it's not true. That's Scott's writing. That didn't happen to me.

(long angry pause where she stares at the doctor) I know what you're doing. I could refuse to talk.

I will—I'll stop talking.

(silent for at least a minute—her body still active, legs moving, her hands still folding swans. She stares down doctor.)

I don't know. I don't have a watch; there are no clocks in here. Why? Do you have to see another patient now?

Her?

Oh lord. She's crazy.

I know. Sorry.

I don't know.

No.

No.

No. I won't tell you any more because you keep distorting everything.

(silent for a moment longer)

Who says that's the rule? That's not the rule. I think you just made that up. *(beat)* This place has so many rules. Here's a new rule. If you're just going to make things up, then I get to make things up too.

Fine.

Once upon a time...

Once upon a time a man saw a group of swans at the edge of a pond take off their feather-skins and bathe. He fell in love with their leader and came back to watch her every day for a year. She was a swan, so he couldn't keep her. Finally he got advice—from a wizard—or maybe his mother—to hide her skin, so that when she came out of the water, naked, she would be forced to marry him.

The trap worked, they got married in a little church in New York, and they moved in together and kept house. She was a rotten housekeeper, always leaving sticky dishes on all the tables and never replacing the buttons when they fell off of his shirts. But they loved each other. Though every evening when the swans went for their swim, she heard their noise and it made her sad. Her husband noticed. He thought of burning her skin to sever the link to her past, but it was too beautiful, the feathers too pearly and fine, and so instead he folded it up and kept it hidden.

They had a child. Their child grew up.

Then one day, this woman who used to be a swan was in their bedroom looking through her husband's dresser for his favorite pair of turquoise socks, which she planned to darn that day as a surprise, when she found it—her skin, a little dusty and wrinkled, but otherwise the same. She decided to try it back on for size—to see if she had lost the weight she put on during pregnancy.

It fit perfectly. Her husband came into the room just as she was about to take it off.

(She begins to look concerned because the doctor, her audience, seems to be getting up and leaving. She watches him move, and she begins to talk desperately)

You want to know what she did? *(Her eyes still following the doctor off toward stage R, her voice rising.)*

Doctor Asher—do you want to hear the end of the story?

She kissed him, and flew away. *(loudly, defiantly, as he's leaving the room)*

(Sharp blackout. Real or imaginary click of a door locking.)

Rescuing Zelda F.

- I. THE END: FIRE
- II. THE RESCUE: MYTH
- III. THE DOCTOR: AIR
- IV. THE BODY: EARTH
- V. THE MATERIAL: PAPER

THE END: FIRE

Like a geometry problem, my play begins with a given: I make sure that my audience knows that Zelda Fitzgerald died in a fire when she was locked in a psychiatric hospital. This is one of the standard stock facts, the final spin that posterity uses to turn her life from a romance or a madcap comedy into a tragedy. Each time I perform “Zelda Speaks of Swans,” I include a biography of myself and of Zelda Fitzgerald, and in hers I always tell how she died. Her death is what my play depends on and works toward; without the audience knowing how she died, my play is incomplete. At the end of my play, when Zelda retells her own life through the fairy tale “The Swan Maiden,” the narration is poignant because it is impossible. Zelda, the swan-girl, the beast, the madwoman, is locked into her room and cannot fly away.

In writing this play, I wanted to reveal to the audience her incredible mental and physical vulnerability, while at the same time showing the dignity she assumed in all of her performances. I wanted to show her trying to be something and failing while we watch. The hospital framed her narrative by showing the actuality of what her life had become, rendering her performances sad and powerless. She couldn't pretend her way out of it, but she could try to entertain herself and her doctor.

In editing her life into a 15-minute performance, I wanted the audience to see her love of art and of a good story; her connection to the South, where she grew up; her sense of having outlived the events that gave meaning to her life; and her innate enjoyment of having an audience. Despite all the harm he and other doctors have caused her, Zelda is pleased to have the doctor as a visitor.

I struggled with how to end the piece. Once the doctor leaves, she could return to folding swans. Or break off speaking in some terribly incomplete way. Or the doctor stays onstage and Zelda leaves. Or starts dancing. Or says, "I don't remember how the story ends." Or lies down dead in a fiery splash of orange-red light.

Instead she ends with a fairy tale.

THE RESCUE: MYTH

There is both risk and safety in this type of creation. Risk because it exists publicly and in real time, and because it requires a body to show up and act. Safety because it is autobiography enabled and tempered through the interpretation of facts. For scholars and other people trained in the academy to be wary of using "I," auto/biography

is a halfway confession: revealing the self, cloaked in the life of the other. In this way, all performance is an act of rescue. In performing, we rescue earlier editions of our own selves that would be lost if left unwritten and unperformed.

I wrote *Zelda Speaks of Swans* in Dr. Lynn Miller's Performing Autobiography course in the spring of 2006 and have since performed versions of it three times: first in Dr. Miller's course, second in the 2007 Cohen New Works Festival, and again—using the text included here—for the 2008 Long Fringe FronteraFest. Using as my sources her fiction, letters, and biographies, in addition to several of the classic fairy tales, I wrote the autobiography of 46-year-old Zelda Fitzgerald as she sits in her hospital gown being questioned by her doctor.

I turn to fairy tales because fairy tale motifs surface everywhere in Zelda's writing—in her essays, her stories, her letters, and her novel, *Save Me the Waltz*. She cited fairy tales as her favorite reading material during her childhood.⁴⁹ In 1932, when she was a patient in Baltimore at Adolf Meyer's Phipps Psychiatric Clinic of The Johns Hopkins University Hospital, she was told by her psychiatrists to write an asylum autobiography about her schizophrenia and treatment. Zelda complied and referred to this piece as her fairy tale.⁵⁰ At the time when she was hospitalized, it was often standard practice for doctors to instruct their (mostly female) patients to write an asylum autobiography—meaning a story of their illness and treatment, which served the dual

⁴⁹ The interview in which Fitzgerald spoke of her childhood reading material is from Milford's *Zelda* (12).

⁵⁰ The hospital background information is discussed in Mary E. Wood's article "A Wizard Cultivator: Zelda Fitzgerald's *Save Me the Waltz* as Asylum Autobiography" (248-49).

purposes of keeping the patient busy, and of giving the doctors positive publicity if the story were a success story and published as such.

In 1932 Zelda had just finished writing *Save Me the Waltz* and was waiting for its publication, and the asylum autobiography that she agreed to write drew from the same life material that her novel did. *Save Me the Waltz* uses fairy tale imagery and motifs to explore the performances, expectations and desires of a woman who, much like Zelda Fitzgerald herself, spends her life being watched and written. The novel invokes the language of fairy tales to show the ways that the protagonist is controlled by culture, by gender roles, by clinical notions of sanity, and by societies in which women are given a single path toward an apparently happy “fairy tale” ending.

In their introduction to *Voices Made Flesh* (2003), Lynn Miller and Jacqueline Taylor describe the book’s focus on how “woman, across categories of difference, continue to struggle to find a powerful and embodied voice, one that permits them to function as authors of their own experience” (7). This is very much what I worked to do in “Zelda Speaks of Swans”—to stage Zelda as the author of her own experience. The performance allows her the directness of first person as she explains herself to her doctor, before retreating into the fairy tale third.

She spent her twenties in the third person, narrated by her husband. He painted their life a fairy tale with her as its heroine. He painted her as a character who required rescue from her family, from the throngs of other men who desired her, and from herself. She lived wildly and always on the edge of self-destruction. But perhaps that was her appeal all along: the reason her parents spoiled her, and why so many Southern men

wished to make her their wife; why her husband Scott saw in her the emblem of the era he sought to define, and why biographers have used her life material over and over and over. Perhaps it was always about rescue. Perhaps, then, her art was no simple expression, but rather her way of asserting that she, too, had a voice in the midst of so many people, her parents and suitors and doctors and Scott, surrounding and defining and controlling her, and failing—all of them—in their attempts to rescue her.

By narrating her life through fairy tales, Zelda Fitzgerald (and I as her editor and performer) makes a statement about the performance of selfhood. Coherent selfhood, as many theorists of autobiography have pointed out, is itself a myth. By showing herself to be a complicated female character, and by doing so through the language of folklore and myth, Zelda is performing a character in the staged dramas of womanhood, wifehood, and artishood. By casting herself as the protagonist of these fairy tales, she depicts a situation where life is a confusing and insane thing over which she has little control. The plot is set, but the rules and characters keep transforming.

At the end of the play when Zelda retells her marriage to Scott by adapting “The Swan Maiden,” she offers an alternate ending to the story that ended with her in the hospital. It is her way of trying to rescue herself.

By choosing to perform her, I, too, was setting out to rescue her.

THE DOCTOR: AIR

The silence of the room is not a comfortable silence, but an eavesdropping, this-room-is-too-small silence, a silence that reeks of an intruder’s guilt. Zelda carefully folds

an origami swan, paying great attention to each crease. Then, after much craft and care, she casts the bird aside.

My Zelda exists in the hospital in the face of her failure: the failure to dance, to thrive, to make art, to stay sane. She sits on a bed in the center of a stage. She is stuck in a hospital room performing for the doctor. At age 46 she has outlived both her husband and the legends he made of her. In this room she has no privacy, no belongings, no clothes. She is stripped bare and has nothing to do. The limitations of the room are always present.⁵¹ She is an inmate in a hospital where the doctor is in control. In this play, she faces the audience wearing a nightgown, and she puts on a blue hospital gown as soon as the doctor arrives.

The audience is cast as the doctor who controls, deciphers, and attempts to cure Zelda—while at the same time, the audience is cast realistically as the inheritors of her literary legend. They are responsible for controlling her legacy, for rescuing her from the version of herself that was penned and stuck to her by her husband and her doctors. For the legend of Zelda that we have inherited is one that was midwived through these men.

It is a guilty and helpless feeling to be an audience member, watching this woman being destroyed (by you, the doctor) and not being able to save her. Making the viewing more difficult is the fact that at times she seems sane. Both her sanity and her insanity

⁵¹ Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1899), a seminal text in showing how resting in confinement can *cause* mental illness, rather than ease or prevent it, certainly relates to my portrayal of Zelda Fitzgerald in this play. Many feminist critics have posed questions about whether Zelda was actually insane or whether the circumstances of her marriage and hospitalization drove her insane—a question anchored in the very issues that *The Yellow Wallpaper* addresses. My offering of an answer is that Zelda Fitzgerald thought she was insane; whether or not she was a diagnosable schizophrenic by today's standards, she felt, while she was living first with Scott and later with her mother, that she needed treatment.

come through during the performance, each in unexpected moments. She is articulate and aware of other people's perceptions of her. She is also an excellent listener. Each time the doctor speaks, even when he interrupts her, she is attentive to him.

Both Zelda and the audience are helpless together, linked by the presence of this invisible doctor. By the end, the audience requires rescuing, too. They are just as helpless as she is.

THE BODY: EARTH

I encountered difficulties defining my relationship to Zelda Fitzgerald. I tried to imagine us having a conversation, sitting over coffee or lunch. But it was difficult, impossible to face her. She had suffered through marriage, frustration, madness, and fire; and I am a graduate student with leisure time to study people of the past, to sit quietly with a cup of tea, uninterrupted, sane, and manufacturing Theories about her life.

Her life, as I saw it, looked all too much like a morality tale: the promiscuous youth tamed into young fierce wife, who turned sharply into wild artist woman, then evolved (naturally) into madwoman, and then...nothing. She was known publicly as insane for almost twenty years, longer than she was known as anything else. She was not innocent, nor was she happy, but she was of hardy stock and not about to die. It was as if someone wrote her life as a fable about the dangers of the roaring twenties.

Before performing her, I had much research to do. I had to watch her first, to know her well, to think what her body would do so that I could teach my body to perform it.

I waited for her to come out of a restaurant with Scott. They had finished a late lunch and she kept stumbling over the sidewalk bricks and he kept catching her. They were small, both of them—he was my height, 5'6", and the top of her head reached the middle of his cheek. She was wearing a silvery-brown squirrel coat that I recognized from photographs. He slid his arm inside the coat and pulled her closer. His face had slowed into contentment, but Zelda looked watchful; she peered out from behind her short, messy blond hair.

I had read that her eyesight wasn't very good, but that she was too vain to wear glasses. I did not worry that she would see me. One of her beaux had written that when she looked at you she looked too long, and that her eyes smoldered and accused. Suddenly she looked at me and I knew at once what he meant. I felt trapped in her line of vision.

During the months that I followed her, I never once saw her with a woman. At a distance I could see how she made herself into a myth—I saw her fall off her chair laughing at an opera, and I saw her at a nightclub, egging Scott on in a fight with the bouncer. Scott lost, of course. I saw her break their wedding china one morning when Scott made her angry, and I watched her the night when she made her famous dive into that fountain.

As I watched her, she aged. I watched the luncheon where she suffered a nervous breakdown and was driven, resigned, to the hospital where the doctors would diagnose her, unquestionably, as schizophrenic. She painted flowers in the garden in between doctor visits, and she did not like the other patients. I felt guilty watching her there, so

stripped she was of her natural dignity. So I stopped. The twenties had ended and all of the hotels they had loved were being torn down. I spent many afternoons drinking martinis at the Ritz, trying to decide what to do, how to proceed.

One of these afternoons I saw Scott. He had aged too, although his pretty bow mouth—a mouth that worried you, Hemingway had once written—had not changed. He was telling the bartender about the four ways that a man could attract a woman. Being rich is the first. Second, animal magnetism. The third and fourth were intelligence and handsomeness. “I have those two,” he said. “But those are the second-tier ones. Zelda had all four.”

The bartender moved down the bar to listen to somebody else.

Scott finished his drink and slid down the bar next to me. “You know,” he said, “it’s been lonely since Zelda left.”

THE MATERIAL: PAPER

Thirty years after Zelda’s death, Shigeru Miyamoto, the creator of the Nintendo game “The Legend of Zelda,” named his video game princess after the wife of F. Scott Fitzgerald. He said in an interview reported by Todd Mowatt, “She was a famous and beautiful woman from all accounts, and I liked the sound of her name. So I took the liberty....”⁵²

In this game series, the player sets out to rescue the beautiful Princess Zelda, who in different games has different misfortunes befall her: in one game she is captured, in

⁵² From Todd Mowatt’s 2006 interview, “In the Game: Nintendo’s Shigeru Miyamoto,” *Amazon.com*.

another enchanted into a magic sleep. In each game, the player/protagonist—the “you” watching the screen—must explore the wide world in hope of rescuing Zelda.

Playing Nintendo is not so different from folding origami swans.

“Zelda Speaks of Swans” is a play that uses paper to connect the performer (Elisabeth McKetta) and the woman being performed (Zelda Fitzgerald). Zelda and I come together in the labor of folding of the birds. I am the performer whose hands know this craft. She is the hospital patient with time to kill. When the play opens with the mathematical precision of the folding of the first swan, she and I both are in the room. The folding takes time. It requires silence. By the time the doctor enters, my labor has become her labor, and I have vanished from the room.

To begin the performance with the silence and monotony of Zelda’s folding is to reveal two truths. One: in contrast to the Zelda-myth of a constantly active and exciting life, her life from about her late twenties onward was spent almost entirely in hospitals or living with her mother. And two: doctors in the early twentieth century encouraged patients to stay busy with crafts and other handiwork, in order to keep their minds off of themselves. The making of small dispensable trinkets might have been the main form of art that Zelda would have been allowed to do on a daily basis.

In fairy tales, the birds are often the rescuers or the bringers of information. In “Fitcher’s Bird,” the wife dresses up as a bird to escape the husband who wishes to kill her. In “The Juniper Tree,” the little boy who has been murdered by his stepmother transforms into a bird to tell the truth about what has happened. In “The Swan Maiden,” the untamable woman rescues herself from marriage by turning back into a swan. As in

all tales in which people shift from being animals into being people again, the point is not merely transformation, but also escape. Margaret Atwood has asked why, in fairy tales, “do souls so often become birds rather than something else?” And she answered herself: “Birds and souls ... seem to have a natural affinity—it must be the airiness, the seeming weightlessness, the wings, the singing.”⁵³

Zelda’s paper swans connect her soul to these fairy tales, and at the same time they stand as souvenirs of her body’s attempt to stay productive in such a sterile environment. She has been in this room for a long time, folding. When she pulls up her sheet to cover herself, hundreds of swans spill out. Many, many birds. So many hidden birds. More birds in the room than we know.

⁵³ Margaret Atwood, “Of Souls as Birds.” From Kate Bernheimer, ed, *Mirror, Mirror on the Wall: Women Writers Explore Their Favorite Fairy Tales* (36-37).

Appendix A: Zelda Fitzgerald's Paintings



Figure 1. Hansel and Gretel. Gouache on paper. (Between 1943-1947)



Figure 2. Goldilocks and the Three Bears. Gouache on paper. (Between 1943-1947)



Figure 3. Times Square. Gouache on paper. (c. 1944)



Figure 4. Adam and Eve. Gouache on paper. (Late 1940s)



Figure 5. Wolff, Wolff. Gouache on cardboard. (Between 1943-1947)



Figure 6. Wolff Costumes: "Who also owns a party dress" (Left); "The bigger and badder of wolves" (Right). Gouache on paper. (Between 1943-1947)

Afterword

The Future Relationship of Fairy Tales and Autobiography

There is language that locates and controls, and there is language that sets free. For Zelda Fitzgerald and for many writers, both female and male, the language of the fairy tale becomes this second type of language, allowing the disclosure of self in a way that could not be possible in more traditional autobiography (as defined in the Introduction). Asymptotic autobiography allows stories to find their own shapes according to the narrators' wishes. Fairy tales are only one way of doing this.

Three media of control hover closely around *Save Me the Waltz*: self-narration, hospital-bred sanity, and the careful manipulation of the body into physical performance. Each of these three sedates its subjects into passive roles that can then be fitted neatly into a larger scheme. Zelda Fitzgerald is aware of this and she understands what is being asked of her. And so, in her novel, she plays with these media, performing roles, theories, and selves, demonstrating that her alter-ego protagonist is not a case or a theory, but a unique case that tries on different theories, a self-proclaimed performer in a world that is made up only of performance.

What arises, then, is a story of how one woman dealing with these forces manufactures meaning, manufactures hope, manufactures herself using fairy tales. Rather than being oppressed by these mechanisms of passivity, she uses them simply as formulas for roles for herself that she can slip into and discard at will. In Zelda's letters to Scott promising to alter her novel to his will, she demonstrates that passivity is not merely

inactivity, but rather a rich and complicated activity of allowing the world to shape itself around her until she is ready to act. Zelda didn't write for the critics, to be unwound; she wrote for writers, to be internalized and rewritten. Scott writes myths to be unraveled—Zelda writes herself as the myth.

Fairy tales make self-as-metaphor possible, with their easily assumed and discarded roles, their oppositions between things that seem unlike and turn out to be parts of the same, such as the female villain and the heroine, or home and away, danger and safety. Zelda Fitzgerald's relationship with fairy tales in her novel, stories, essays, and letters is rich and varied, and it would be a mistake to assume that she condemns these tales as simplistic or considers them sinister in their expectations, or believes in their messages—although she comes to the edge of all three. In essence, she appreciates fairy tales for the same story-value that she appreciates in herself, and in the end, she uses them to rewrite herself in a form that is forever being retold, rewritten, performed again and again—a tale for a circle of listeners.

My goal in this dissertation has been to demonstrate how asymptotic autobiography may be used as a lens to read and to take seriously writers who have a story to tell but for personal, professional, or other reasons are reluctant to traffic in the exact, mappable truth. As Norman Lock observes in his essay on the influence of fairy tales on his writing, "The fairy tale is the world at its most out of joint" (94). When a writer, male or female, turns to fairy tales to express the facts of a life, that writer may be depending upon fairy tales to create a context for that "out-of-jointness" in his or her own life. Any appearance of fairy tales in a story that purports to be personal narrative would

fit (however loosely) within my category of asymptotic autobiography. This dissertation does not suggest that every use of fairy tales is autobiographical, or that every untraditional autobiography must lean on mythic elements. Nor do I claim that fiction and the author's life are easily conflatable—a claim that we as scholars must innately mistrust. Rather, this dissertation looks at autobiographical “truth” as a self-reflexive, mythical, and many-layered affair, and it questions why and how the democratic truths of fairy tales can be such effective tools for life-narrative.

In this Afterword I'd like to comment first on how the material in these chapters connects and can be read as a process; and second on the logical next steps for this project, this reading and writing process, and for the tools and terminology offered by asymptotic autobiography.

In this dissertation, I have outlined a three-part way for the autobiographical self to free itself to narrate the story it must tell through the narrative use of fairy tales. In Chapter One, I demonstrate how the adaptive, healing power of fairy tales allows the autobiographer to separate herself from being bound by clinical reality; in Chapter Two, I show how, through the inclusive nature of fairy tale characters and environments, the narrator is free to make the decision of which self or selves she wishes to narrate and perform; finally, in Chapter Three, I examine fairy tales as a useful template for plot, one that allows the narrator to graft her own narrative onto a familiar, pre-mapped series of stories. Throughout this process, life material blends with fairy tale or myth material, becoming so closely interwoven that the two materials are no longer separate stories, and the lines of fact are no longer so starkly defined. Finally, by offering an example of

performed asymptotic autobiography in Chapter Four, I illustrate how this blending process can capture a life—not narrowly, but generously and generatively.

Throughout my analysis of *Save Me the Waltz*, I show how the heroine, Alabama Beggs, is placed, essentially, inside a fairy tale. In the same letter Scott where she agreed to make changes to her book on “an aesthetic basis,” Zelda Fitzgerald also summarized the story she was telling as “the old prodigal son, of course [*sic*]” (Fitzgerald 468). The novel is much more than that, but it is true that the plot runs the traditional fairy tale gamut of sending a protagonist (the son or daughter) away from home to learn some lessons, and then allowing him or her a final return, with those lessons learned. The father, Judge Beggs, buttresses the story from the beginning; his name gives his daughter, our heroine, social clout, though the rules of his household keep her somewhat oppressed. Yet throughout the story Alabama learns that the gifts her father/home gave her are useful gifts—that the old gifts have some merit still, even against the societal backdrop where everything must constantly be renewed, and where advertising and widespread commoditization creates a bizarre fairy tale landscape of promises, temptations, and threats.

Early in the story Alabama Beggs marries a man surnamed Knight—and described in terms that, in other venues, she used to describe her husband Scott. David Knight is vaguely chivalrous, but in a mocking sort of way. After giving birth to a single child and moving abroad—both clear indicators of a journey away from childhood—Alabama Knight suffers both abuse and confusion, both mostly self-inflicted, as a result of her conflicting expectations of life and of herself as a woman in a society where those

expectations are impossible. At a moment when rescue is needed most, Alabama is adopted by a fairy godmother-type of mentor, who teaches her how to dance (dance being the traditional punishment for wicked women in fairy tales). Then, finally, Alabama Beggs is injured beyond repair through dance and forced to return home, possessing only the gifts she set out with and whatever wisdom she has acquired through her journey. All throughout the plot, the heroine is performing madly, trying on roles, testing out who she wants to become, waiting for the moment when she “grows up” and becomes someone else. And then at the end of the novel, Alabama learns one of the harshest, most eternal fairy tale lessons: you are who you are. Through her upbringing, her marriage, her attempt at a career in the arts, her unhappy tenure in a half dozen mental hospitals, and her ultimate inability to escape the consequences of these experiences, Zelda Fitzgerald, as indicated in her letters, learned the same lesson.

Further attention can and ought to be given to the blending of fairy tales and autobiography in Zelda Fitzgerald’s artwork, which I discuss briefly in Chapter Three and of which I offer a sample in the Appendix, but which should be examined much more deeply and richly, in a book-length inquiry of its own. A logical next step to complement the work I have so far done on Zelda Fitzgerald would be to use the lens of asymptotic autobiography to re-examine the novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald. He made reference in his writing to fairy tales, though perhaps not so much as his wife did, and in one of his notebooks he wrote, “The two basic stories of all times are Cinderella and Jack the Giant

Killer—the charm of women and the courage of men.”⁵⁴ Because I have wished for this inquiry to focus solely on the writing of Zelda, I have not examined Scott’s writing here in any detail. However, his relationship with fairy tales would be fertile ground for further exploration—especially because, like his wife, Scott was known for milling his life material into plots for his books and for using himself as his subject. Additionally, Scott kept extensive notebooks on his life, ideas, and publications, which have been extremely useful to scholars in the past, and which would be useful here as well.

Additional study is needed to refine, test, and expand the application of these fairy tale-autobiography links. The ideas offered by this dissertation could be effectively expanded to study the work of other men and women in the twentieth century (or earlier) who use fairy tales in their writing, and who demonstrate a clear interest in writing about selfhood, particularly their own self-formation. Writers who keep diaries, letters, or of whom we have extensive historical records, would be especially useful. Although we should not assume that a journal, letter, or diary is ever a complete or accurate portrait of a life, we can at least use these personal documents to compare how a writer records his or her life with how he or she crafts it into a story. The works of Anne Sexton⁵⁵, especially the fairy tales mixed with hospital and illness imagery in *Transformations*

⁵⁴ Notebooks #1071, (163).

⁵⁵ In a 1971 *Paris Review* interview by Barbara Kevles entitled “The Art of Poetry XV: Anne Sexton,” Anne describes her path to becoming a poet in terms of the plot of “Snow White.” Sexton’s biographer Diane Middlebrook summarizes it: “The queen in [Sexton’s] story was her impressive mother, the daughter of a writer [Arthur Gray Staples]. The poisoned apple was society’s pressure on Anne to leave a conventional life in the suburbs of Boston, caring for her two daughters and helping her husband advance his career in the wool business. The poison took: she became sick, attempted suicide. The magical transformation came in treatment by a psychiatrist who, something like the prince in the fairy tale, stumbled onto a remedy that woke her into a new life as a poet” (3).

(1971), would be a logical next step for study, but there are many others: Jeannette Winterson blends fairy tales and autobiography in her novel *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, and who in essays writes clearly and directly about her writing process; Karen Russell, who inserts fairy tale motifs into stories about standard human rites of passage⁵⁶; or any of the women and men featured in one of Kate Bernheimer's collections (*Brothers and Beasts* and *Mirror, Mirror*), which include Margaret Atwood, A.S. Byatt, Neil Gaiman, Gregory MacGuire.

A careful study of how a wide array of writers, especially those who have undergone illness, asymptotically self-autobiographize using myth or fairy tales would contribute tremendously to both the field of autobiography studies and the field of fairy tale studies. Both would move a giant step forward through having the terminology and the lens of asymptotic autobiography as their link. This is especially true today, in a time when the media has become greedy for both retold fairy tales and personal narratives. Any look at a bestseller list, or at the movies at the top of the box office list, suggests the mass-scale interest in these two genres. The tools and processes of asymptotic autobiography may help answer questions about how these two genres gain their staying power, and why they capture audiences as they do. The reason may be that these stories provide maps of how a self survives the trials of personhood, how a protagonist or group of protagonists carve their way through the woods.

⁵⁶ For example, Russell's story "St. Lucy's Home for Girls Raised by Wolves," from the story collection by the same name, casts werewolf children as heroines in her depiction of the painful, awkward process of assimilating into adulthood.

This study offers many contributions to existing knowledge and scholarship: in the field of autobiography, the model of the asymptote illuminates moments in texts when the mythic or fictional ruptures through the narrative, or when important life events are omitted or obscured, or where the actual life is compared to a fairy tale or myth. This model allows discussion of why these ruptures may be deliberate and what they might accomplish in the telling of a life that a more “faithful” autobiography could not. In fairy tale studies, asymptotic autobiography offers insight into the many adaptations of classic tales, allowing further analysis of why these stories are so often adapted by writers into stories of a more familiar reality, and incorporated into telling contemporary stories and imparting contemporary wisdom. One major contribution this model makes is to complicate the existing Zelda Fitzgerald scholarship, showing the ways in which she used fairy tales in revolutionary and life-saving ways: to make strange the ordinary truths of life and to normalize the strange, revealing the fictions and performances inherent in sanity, art, personhood, and womanhood. In short, she used her art deliberately to critique many of the roles she was penned into by her husband’s writing, by her doctors, and by the legends that became her legacy.

This dissertation addresses and furthers discussion of many interdisciplinary questions on the border where literary study and psychology meet. How are reading and writing therapeutic? Where does literature serve as entertainment, and where does it teach? How do people become themselves in response to the words they read and write? How does the rewriting of old stories become a way to create new ones? Each of these questions may be pursued through the study of fairy tales alongside autobiography. In

addition, asymptotic autobiography generates interdisciplinary discussion between literary criticism and creative writing. Fairy tales, with their implicit invitation to be retold and their complicated psychology and history, are fertile microcosms for the personal to merge with the scholarly. Each retelling of a fairy tale offers readers and listeners a story to remake as their own. Autobiography, too, is a way for a writer to reshape his or her life and offer it as art, as advice, and as material for a younger generation of writers and scholars.

My hope is that this dissertation will inspire scholars to look more seriously at the process by which writing autobiography and adapting fairy tales have informed each other in past and contemporary literature. Autobiography lends truth and pragmatism to fairy tales, while fairy tales allow the freedom of invention within autobiography. I hope for this dissertation to prove a useful tool for writers as well, especially writers who seek templates for narrating their “out-of-joint” experiences of personhood. And lastly, I hope that this book-length critique of the writing of Zelda Fitzgerald generates many more such books that look deeply at her writing and its contribution to twentieth century literature, to join on bookshelves the many existing books that look at her biography or at her representations in the novels of Scott.

In all autobiography, capturing the truth is a lofty and imperfect feat. The twin difficulties of writing and of making sense of one’s life come together, rendering the process of autobiography a daunting one indeed. My focus here is on the problem of writing or narrating autobiography for people who may not be able to tell coherent and exact stories. In the *Arabian Nights*, the crazed king heals through hearing stories.

Throughout literature, the motif of storytelling as remedy recurs. This dissertation offers only one example of a writer who attempts to rescue herself through turning her life into a story; there are many, many others.

Every dissertation ends with the offering of some seed of wisdom, a souvenir of sorts, to the kind readers who have made it through to the end. I offer two of these seeds: First, for scholars, remember that there are many ways to write a truthful story, some of which succeed by costuming life's facts in the fantastic. Second, for writers, and for all who have reason to fear that their "I" is being controlled, remember to take refuge in the language that comforts you.

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