

The Happy Beginning of *Z the Belle, Weltbürgerin*

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ARTICLE INFO

Available Online July 2014

Key words:

Modernism-
Postmodernism;
Transnationalism –
Weltbürgertum;
Poetry – Non-Poetry;
Fiction – Non-Fiction;
Metafiction;
Intertextuality

ABSTRACT

The source of inspiration for my essay is Therese Anne Fowler's book *Z: A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 2013. This exceptionally well documented volume is what made me start my own research of Zelda Fitzgerald's published works.

In her fancy articles, apparently far from any "intellectual" claims, Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald proves two things: on the one hand, that she assumed this worldly task in the supportive spirit of a loyal wife to the fashionable writer that F. Scott Fitzgerald was at the time; on the other hand, that, despite her lack of academic education and also despite defying an angry father like Judge Sayre, himself a believer in literary writing as a "serious" job, she was thoroughly well-read and had an infallible intuition, keeping her responsive to the influence of the best American writers, whether they be classics or her contemporaries.

Linking facts to fiction (and as a final argument, Zelda's non-fiction to Gertrude Stein's non-poetry), I have come to better understand and appreciate Therese Anne Fowler's insight and hard work, dedicated to a tragic writer of the Roaring Twenties, about whom we know so little and to whom we prefer to ascribe the conventional shallow mask of "the flapper".

As one of last year's chief best-sellers, and just like *Z* herself, its own protagonist and (self)narrator, Therese Anne Fowler's book *Z: A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald* (2013) can leave no one indifferent. It is a treat for addicted romance readers; it is a most impressive display of academic documentation; it proves the author's genuine literary talent; it speaks earnestly and convincingly about the writer's condition and moreover about human condition in general – at a universal level. Last but not least: the book is a great challenge for the professional translator of contemporary literature from the American, who has to cope with its rich documentation and make it "at home" in the "new" language and culture in which it is imported, taking care lest the book's particular literary quality should suffer in the process.

In Miss Fowler's book, *Z* is a first person narrator. Yet this is neither a novel proper (in the classic line of modern stream-of-consciousness), nor a (mock-auto)biography. The book subtitle puzzles the more attentive reader from the very beginning: "A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald." It does not say "by:" it says "of" – which may mean both *by* and *about*. Obviously, one of the contemporary writer's main merits is the stylistic artifice of recapturing Miss Zelda's fictive *voice*. Any reader of the latter's writings – fiction or non-fiction, signed or not signed by her (or rather by her illustrious husband) – can see that. The self-reflexive string (or cord) of this narrative play is distinctly audible; yet in Zelda's voice we may at times identify tones we used to ascribe to Scott.

Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald (1900-1948) is different from F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940) particularly in point of (literary) style. She does nothing on purpose to shock her readers by bold modernism: yet shock them she does. Spontaneity is perhaps her most widely acknowledged gift. She gives readers the impression of a certain (well studied?) carelessness in matters of style and form – very much like Kate Chopin (1850-1904), her true predecessor in so many respects, Old South local color included. And likewise, in respect of *transnationalism* in its version *avant la lettre* – defined (by Randolph Bourne) as "a new way of thinking about relationships between cultures."

Yet *transnationalism* is itself no more than a "new" label of a somewhat older concept: what Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749-1832) used to call *Weltbürgertum*. The quality of open-minded citizens of the world, well

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aware of the conventional relativity of frontiers on any maps. If only for her quality as a *transnational muse*, a self-aware *Weltbürgerin*, I think Goethe would have been delighted to make the acquaintance of Miss Zelda. Miss Fowler's book cannot be taken for granted – either by sentimental readers of easy-going romance, or by feminists. It is a controversial book – just like its controversial protagonist. Both a novel and a biography – yet none of the two, to its very end. Therese Anne Fowler's *Z* is a book that *novelizes the novelist*: at that time, Zelda's only novel, *Save Me the Waltz* (1932) represented serious competition to her notorious husband's *Tender Is the Night* (1934), as they both found inspiration in raw material of their life together.

The greatest merit of this recent book has been for me its compelling urge to make readers revisit Miss Zelda Sayre on their own. I have enjoyed this unique experience particularly because it has made me read more *by* and *about* Z. Much obliged for Miss Fowler's impeccably documented book, I have had to cope with it by my own (re)search: *the happy beginning* for me, the skeptical reader – a citizen of the same ghostly world as hers. Therefore I stop here to contemplate Z as *the happy beginner*, for at least two reasons.

Firstly, because in a way, the modern world was to start with her, the No. 1 Flapper. She initiated, launched, took her chances and risks. Originality has never been the easy way out: it speaks for an honest mind, with itself and the others. Mediocre followers try to adopt it: by imitation, by plagiarism. Miss Zelda was admired, envied, imitated – by her shallow "friends." As for authorship and plagiarism: there is proof of her contribution – as more than that of a "muse" – to many of her husband's works.

Secondly, Miss Zelda remains *the happy beginner* as she hardly had time to grow old properly. Her abrupt ending was by accident: she was one of the nine victims of a fire that burned to ashes the hospital where she was being treated for some mental illness. As a final frivolous question mark she left to this world – her slipper was the only clue by which they could identify her carbonized body.

*

Respectable *ism-words*: (post)modernism, transnationalism, are quite at home in our discussion here, obviously. Miss Fowler's *mise en abyme* experiment in *hybridization* tells the story of a famous couple of apparently inexhaustible travelers: Z & Scott – never quite at home, always just visiting and throwing a party, or actually invited to one, on whatever occasion. Lost Generation stars of the Parisian bohemian world of the Roaring Twenties – both of them died well before their time. Therese Anne Fowler's book reads well as *an allegoric travelogue*, with a keenly anticipated double destination: the death of a (literally) heart-broken man, plus somewhat later, the death by fire, of his dearly beloved muse and so much feared literary rival. Thereafter to meet again, as if in some poem by Emily Dickinson¹, under the ledger they share to this day, reading: "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back, ceaselessly into the past." The line is though not from any poem; it is the closing sentence of *The Great Gatsby* (1925), the novel of F. Scott Fitzgerald – and possibly of Zelda Sayre, too. And it bears also echoes from another book of the all-time American canon, Nathaniel Hawthorne's romance, *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), ending: "On a field, sable, the letter A, gules." The reflection of the two letters: *A and Z*, in/by each other, cannot escape us, as readers of literary signs in everyday life and death.

Yet this 2013 book would be missed by all those who would cling to theoretical patterns. The *Prologue* of Montgomery Alabama is warning us precisely against this mistake:

Lord help me, I miss him.

I wish I could tell everyone who thinks we're ruined, who thinks Scott's beyond washed-up and I'm

¹ Poem 448 (R. W. Franklin)/ 449 (Thomas H. Johnson)

I died for Beauty – but was scarce
Adjusted in the Tomb
When One who died for Truth, was lain
In an adjoining Room –

He questioned softly "Why I failed?"
"For Beauty," I replied –
"And I – for Truth – Themselves are One –
We Brethern, are," He said –

And so, as Kinsmen, met a Night –
We talked between the Rooms –
Until the Moss had reached our lips –
And covered up – Our names – (*The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, 207)

about as sharp these days as a sack of wet mice, *Look closer*.
Look closer and you'll see something extraordinary, mystifying, something real and true. We have never been what we seemed. (Z, 5)

*

Zelda Sayre lacked academic training, so that she remained a gifted amateur in all her artistic endeavors. She might have become a memorable ballerina, or a notable painter – but her talents never reached the maturity which only schooling may have bestowed upon them.

In chapter 19 of her book, Therese Anne Fowler evokes the moment when Harold Ober, F. Scott Fitzgerald's friend and editor, asks Zelda to write a review for her husband's novel, *The Beautiful and Damned*. It is her first "serious" writing experience. Her husband, the professional novelist, taken by surprise, acknowledges her foremost quality in writing: "*your writing voice is almost precisely your spoken voice, even in essay form.*" (150)

Thus the review got published in the *New York Tribune*, in the spring of 1922, under the title "Friend Husband's Latest" (Brucoli, 387-389). Had I not read Miss Fowler's *Z*, never could I have sensed the retort to Judge Sayre, her father, behind Zelda's alluding to Thomas Hardy, Theodore Dreiser, and especially Henry James. These represented his ideals of "serious" writers: never to be matched by his youngest daughter's suitor, young F. Scott Fitzgerald, with whom Judge Sayre of Montgomery, Alabama could never agree. Hence, in the daughter's witty dismissal of the feminine protagonists consecrated by the "serious" novelists, accepted even by the loving and demanding father – in favor of Gloria, the character of her husband's novel – one may detect her former defiance of this Deep South *father figure*, forever at the back of her mind, even after she has married against his warnings:

I think the heroine is most amusing. I have an intense distaste for the melancholy aroused in the masculine mind by such characters as Jenny Gerhardt, Antonia and Tess (of the D'Urbervilles). Their tragedies, redolent of the soil, leave me unmoved. If they were capable of dramatizing themselves, they would no longer be symbolic, and if they weren't – and they aren't – they would be dull, stupid and boring, as they inevitably are in life. (389)

Parody is the concluding note of Zelda's review to Scott's novel, *The Beautiful and Damned*. Addressing the classic issues with feminine novel protagonists, from Henry James to F. Scott Fitzgerald, i.e. *aesthetic taste* and *money*, Miss Sayre does a good job of supporting her husband against her disappointed father, Judge Sayre – whose reproving counterarguments may still hurt her silently:

The book ends on a tragic note; in fact a note which will fill any woman with horror, or, for that matter, will fill any furrier with horror, for Gloria, with thirty million to spend, buys a sable coat instead of a kolinsky coat. This is a tragedy unequaled in the entire work of Hardy. Thus the book closes on a note of tremendous depression and Mr. Fitzgerald's subtle manner of having Gloria's deterioration turn on her taste in coats has scarcely been equaled by Henry James. (389)

In a way, this was another (belated) *beginning* for Zelda: her beginning as a *publishing* writer. Whether because of her youth or her lack of creative writing education, her style is closer to that of a *newspaper* writer: hence her superficial success in the epoch. Yet it is clear that she deserves a special rank among the particularly well-read newspaper writers of either her times or ours.

*

As a *flapper*, Zelda was Scott's invention. Following her review "Friend Husband's Latest," she published her own two essays on the flapper – her most notorious hypostasis: "Eulogy on the Flapper" (391-393), published somewhat later during the same year 1922, in *Metropolitan Magazine* – and "What Became of the Flappers?" (397-399), published in *McCall*, in 1925 – the year of *The Great Gatsby*.

In "Eulogy on the Flapper" the author deplores the betrayal of the flapper's rebellious spirit by her submission to social convention. As Zelda herself puts it, "flapperdom has become a *game*; it is no longer a *philosophy*" (392) – alluding to Scott's successful volume of shorter fiction, *Flappers and Philosophers* (1920).

Flappers cannot become *fashion*, i.e. the norm, or else their spirit must die. Pleading for their *intelligence* instead of the *cynicism* for which society would formerly blame them, Zelda regarded the original flappers as “merely applying business methods to being young” (393).

It is not because of the flapper that marriage in the Roaring Twenties had lost its institutional prestige:

I know of no divorcées or neurotic women of thirty who were ever Flappers. Do you? And I should think that fully airing the desire for unadulterated gaiety, for romances that she knows will not last, and for dramatizing herself would make her more inclined to favor the “back to the fireside” movement than if she were repressed until age gives her those rights that only youth has the right to give. (392)

Zelda Sayre is still young and confident here. Her allegorical *picture of the flapper as a young woman* stands as a creed, as a hope for a decent pact with destiny. Little did she know that it was to be her part to confirm this rule she believed in, by her own exception, as the neurotic woman she became later. Such was the paradox of her double condition: as a writer sustaining the Flapper’s Lost Cause and as the Lost Flapper herself.

This is why ironically the very opening paragraph of this early article may be read as containing the kind of ending prediction its author could have hardly suspected at that time:

The Flapper is deceased. Her outer accoutrements have been bequeathed to several hundred girls’ schools throughout the country, to several thousand big-town shopgirls, always imitative of the several hundred girls’ schools, and to several million small-town belles always imitative of the big-town shopgirls via the “novelty stores” of their respective small towns. It is a great bereavement to me, thinking as I do that there will never be a product of circumstance to take the place of the dear departed. (391)

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The other one of Zelda’s two self-reflecting articles on the Flapper, taking a question for a title: “What Became of the Flappers?” – is as old as Scott’s masterpiece *The Great Gatsby*. It offers a second version of the haunting *self-portrait of the Flapper as a young woman*, even if she feels she has aged beyond this limit.

What remains is within her, beneath the mask, with all its “paint and powder.” Just like her notorious husband, Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald is a good performer, tough and vulnerable at the same time, so she can use this smart self-portrait to express an *ars poetica* for the failed artist within her mind:

The best flapper is *reticent emotionally* and *courageous morally*. You always know what she thinks, but *she does all her feeling alone*. These are two characteristics which will bring social intercourse to a more charming and a more sophisticated level. 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 art of being* – being young, being lovely, being an object. (398; my emphasis)

Obviously, Zelda neither recommended, nor indulged in cheap heroism: this is just one of her pleas for everyday originality, honesty, humor. Like any intense belief, this one, too, had to take its toll.

Earlier in this article, there is another instance of *the father figure*, old Judge Sayre of the Old South, projected upon the classic image of Zeus. The funny trick played by the Flapper-daughter-writer is to bring about in this kaleidoscope *the ultimate father figure* in tune with herself: *Jazz*. Therefore, from Zeus to Jazz, Zelda remains loyal to a certain paternal spirit, which she could only revere in her own father, disconsolate Judge Sayre:

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*. She is not a “condition arisen from war unrest,” as I have so often read in the shower of recent praise and protest which she has evoked, and to which I am contributing. She is a direct result of a greater appreciation of beauty, youth, gaiety, and grace [...] (397-398; my emphasis)

For all her enthusiasm for “a greater appreciation of beauty, youth, gaiety, and grace,” *the flapper-writer* sticks to her vision of herself as rather Minerva (Pallas Athene) than Venus (Aphrodite). Therefore, as her father’s

daughter, she values *wisdom over sheer physical beauty*. This makes her even more endearing to Therese Anne Fowler's readers, who may hope to detect here a clue to Zelda's vision of herself both as a muse and as a writer herself; both as a protagonist and as a story-teller; both as a lost daughter of a terrible father and as a terrible wife to a lost writer-husband.

*

Though never again mentioning the Flapper as such all along its two pages, Zelda's article "Paint and Powder" (415-417) represents another plea for feminine elegance. Originally published in the spring of 1929, in *The Smart Set*, this is another example of impersonal wit and humor in a nutshell.

"Paint and Powder" draws on the American capital of feminine beauty, which can only be enhanced by every woman's personal efforts, as a sign of self-esteem: "More pretty girls are prettier, until all America becomes like Hollywood where Venus shows you your seat in the theater and Salome checks your hat and coat. (415)

Again, the reader will appreciate the double hint at the art of cinema – as a sign of the 20th century – and at classic mythology (Venus does show up here, yet merely as an usher to the popular cinema hall).

Brought back to life again by Miss Fowler's book, Zelda and Scott enjoyed their popularity as an intensely *histrionic and hedonistic couple*. Their masking and unmasking were part of the performance. Their love for "Paint and Powder" seems to have kept them addicted to the world's stage, just like their frequent intoxications with alcohol. Their glamorous apparition relied on the *carnavalesque* ritual of paint and powder.

The American Dream itself relies on this ritual since, according to Zelda's article

This country needs its quota of beauty, and if we cannot get it from our young women, where will we find it? And so if our women gave up decorating themselves we would have time to turn sad eyes on the bleak telegraph wires, the office buildings, like homes of trained fleas, the barren desolateness of city streets at dusk, and realize too late that almost the only beauty in this busy, careless land, whose every acre is littered with the waste of day before yesterday, is the gorgeous, radiant beauty of its girls. (417)

*

A parallel between Zelda's only published novel, *Save me the Waltz* and Scott's novel, *Tender Is the Night* should only be enhanced now, by reading Miss Fowler's book – to which as acknowledged by the author, both novels have contributed in point of *atmosphere*. Nothing can come closer to the truth of their life together than their fiction put in a balance, now that we may afford the required detachment, plus a keen magnifying glass of a thoroughly documented scholar, like the contemporary American writer.

And yet I have found these other instances of Zelda Sayre's writing somehow better suited for this occasion. She was a witty *letter-writer* (*she* would probably be a blogger today: the Flapper as Fashionable Blogger?). Moreover, as we have seen, she was a charming, apparently frivolous writer of *non-fiction*.

Zelda's articles came into being rather on a whim, which was not even her own, as we have already mentioned. If they have to be classified as *non-fiction*, then for the sake of symmetry, we may also further resort to some *non-poetry*, by one of her contemporaries, at least as famous as herself: Gertrude Stein (1874-1946).

Patronizing/ matronizing (?) and allegedly naming *The Lost Generation* for what it was, Gertrude Stein may have been a good mentor for painters and poets alike. Yet – just as Therese Anne Fowler's book shows – she was just too much for Miss Zelda's patience. This has prompted me to select for my demonstration here "If I Told Him: A Completed Portrait of Picasso" – a work that Stein published as "a poem," in the magazine *Vanity Fair* in 1924, i.e. during the same year when Zelda published her article "Does a Moment of Revolt Come Sometime to Every Married Man?" (395-396).

*

Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald was a typically *self-taught artist*. Though gifted for the arts of dancing, painting and writing, her talents never really evolved to the professional standards. Yet her mind was vastly provided with rich and deep layers of the best reading, both classic and modern. Her particular sense of humor made her

especially responsive to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*: Lewis Carroll addressed Zelda's propensity for *nonsense humor* and *the absurd*. Zelda the Flapper is a strange concoction of various masks: the (almost) unavailable aristocratic Southern Belle of Montgomery, Alabama, plus Alice, the witty girl, who never loses courage and commonsense. A touch of cynicism in this mixture was added – if ever – in defiance of those who preferred to only see in her the charming amateur, the dilettante wife of the fashionable writer, who had given the Jazz Age its own name, proclaiming his own wife its Flapper Queen.

To suit the public taste of her doomed age – in her (rather conventional) role of a literary celebrity wife – Miss Zelda was supposed to contribute various lighthearted essays, fashionable and impersonal, to the smart (“slick”) magazines, which published her husband's short stories and also reviews related to them. As we have already seen, her articles are never too long: they evince an unmistakable taste for paradox, irony. They are elegant non-fiction pieces of writing: apparently no more than flimsy quick reads, these funny trifles still prove today much more than used to meet the eyes of her superficial contemporaries.

Published in 1924, in *Mc Call's* magazine, here is the bluntly candid introductory paragraph of Zelda's article, “Does A Moment of Revolt Come Sometime to Every Married Man?”

After every dress I buy for which I pay twenty-five dollars more than I am allowed, after every washday when his woolen socks come up from the laundry two inches smaller because I forgot to buy stretchers for them, and after every meal during which I ask him to please eat more vegetables because so much meat is not good for him, I suspect my husband of instantaneous and insuppressible revolt. (395)

It is Miss Zelda, the youngest daughter of Judge Sayre of Montgomery, Alabama, who plays *the dandy* here, this time poking fun at her morose husband. Hence, there is a dash of the *Dandy* in the *Flapper*, too, with the appropriate gender switch. Audacity in the *Flapper* is a precious heirloom from the fin de siècle *Dandy*. Oscar Wilde lives between Zelda Sayre's lines, as if tongue-in-cheek prompting here: “All men are monsters. The only thing to do is to feed the wretches well. *A good cook does wonders.*” (*Epigrams of Oscar Wilde*, 9; my emphasis)

Quick and to the point, then, comes Zelda's reply, in one of her minimalist articles, called “Breakfast,” published in a 1925 collective volume, entitled *Favorite Recipes of Famous Women*. Just as today, back in those days public hypocrisy had it so that celebrities be taken for granted in sharing the average people's passion for food and cooking – and this was Zelda's retort:

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. (Brucoli, 401; my emphasis)

Funny little mock-recipe! Little did Miss Zelda know as early as that “Breakfast” time, that cooking really would prove lethal to her, on account of (her playing with) *fire*...

If there is anything culinary about this would-be recipe, then it is inasmuch as to provide a most striking and unexpected echo to Wallace Stevens's poem, “The Emperor of Ice-Cream”²

*Call the roller of big cigars,
The muscular one, and bid him whip
In kitchen cups concupiscent curds.
Let the wenches dawdle in such dress
As they are used to wear, and let the boys
Bring flowers in last month's newspapers.
Let be be finale of seem.
The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream.*

(*Collected Poetry and Prose*, 50; my emphasis)

It is strange, but Stevens's line “*Let be be finale of seem*” returns to us early 21st century readers, from that warning we have previously quoted here, opening Miss Fowler's book of Miss Sayre: “Look closer and you'll

² Written in 1922 and first published in 1923, in *Harmonium*, Wallace Stevens's first volume of poetry. Might Zelda have read it?

see something extraordinary, mystifying, something real and true. *We have never been what we seemed.*" Poetry denies petty mortal fear and self-pity. Even in a cookbook.

Whatever menace *fire* may stand for in Zelda's pseudo-recipe – in Wallace Stevens's poem this is projected upon his *wintry mood* screen. Zelda Sayre's (too) hot bacon and eggs breakfast make a mask for the same "Emperor of Ice-Cream:" he will prevail over both Zelda's "*cook*" and Stevens's "*roller of big cigars.*" The ultimate luxury is itself a trifle, like anything else one may attach any appetite allegory to – be it ice-cream or bacon and eggs. Breakfast begins our happy day with this cheerful reminder.

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In the Irish vein of Oscar Wilde's cynical flamboyance – though Irishness is something Wilde may only share with Fitzgerald himself, not with the latter's wife – Zelda Sayre follows some lucidly considered steps in her essay, so pompously entitled as (if) to prompt the inevitable anti-hero masculine robot-portrait: "Does a Moment of Revolt Come Sometime to Every Married Man?"

But, theoretically, I believe that every happy bridegroom revolts at the altar and from then on goes revolting through life, with varying degrees of violence until his final revolt against life helps him briskly to extinguish himself. *Men seldom seem to realize that taking a wife and assuming the responsibility of living to an overripe old age are generally merely simultaneous and not absolutely connected.* The thought in their minds of what they might have been had they never married is, in most cases, incentive enough for a revolt a week – to give a minimum estimate. (Brucoli, 395; my emphasis)

Again, Miss Zelda could hardly have anticipated in 1924 that her prediction about the clash between "*simultaneity*" and "*connection*" of the two issues – "taking a wife" and "assuming the responsibility of living to an overripe old age" – would eventually mark their own actual life romance, "beautiful and damned" as it was meant to be. Miss Fowler's book opens with a fictive letter Zelda might have written to Scott, on December 20, 1940 – i.e. the very night he had the fatal heart-attack that would put an untimely end to his life, the following day:

Won't we be quite the pair? – *you with your bad heart, me with my bad head.* Together, though, we might have something worthwhile. I'll bring you some of *those cheese biscuits you always loved*, and *you can read me* what you've written so far. I know it's going to be a wonderful novel, Scott, your best one yet. This is short so that I can send it before the post office closes today. Write me soon.

Devotedly,

Z~

(*Z: A Novel of Zelda*, 1; my emphasis)

Miss Fowler has caught here the specific self-irony of Zelda's typical tone. The would-be ideal couple, the outrageously happy and *successful beginners*, young and blessed by fortune, would soon disintegrate, because of his "*bad heart*" and her "*bad head.*" Yet the promise remains of some delicious dainties ("*those cheese biscuits*") and some *fine reading* – to the "*devoted*" listener who had *written* this letter – hardly able to guess it was one of the messages meant for something like Melville's *Dead Letter Office*, where Bartleby had once used to work.

In her essay, Miss Zelda is putting on the exquisite show of *impersonality*, *bookishness* and *detachment*, specific to her emphatically *modern* generation:

From modern fiction I have learned that even a perfect husband may leave home without a moment's notice *in search of gin or the Holy Grail*, so I have turned a *propagandist*. *If I were a husband* I would certainly revolt whenever my wife hurried me with my dressing so that I got wrong studs and forgot my handkerchief and then kept *me* waiting. I would also revolt if she refused to allow me *to cook eggs* in the kitchen after midnight, because the servants didn't like it. But I would never indulge in a *strong silent revolt*, and I would most emphatically *do all my revolting at home.* (Brucoli, 395-396; my emphasis)

The closing sentence above quoted reads like a powerful echo of Hawthorne's "*Wakefield*:" the weird story of a husband in London, who...

Under pretence of going a journey, took lodgings in the next street to his own house, and there, unheard of by his wife or friends, and without the shadow of a reason for such a self-banishment, dwelt upwards for twenty years. During that period, he beheld his home every day, and frequently the forlorn Mrs. Wakefield. And after so great a gap in his matrimonial felicity – when his death was reckoned certain, his estate settled, his name dismissed from memory, and his wife, long, long ago, resigned to her autumnal widowhood – he entered the door one evening, quietly, as from a day’s absence, and became a loving spouse till death. (Hawthorne, 45; my emphasis)

Therefore, as if “in search of *gin* or the *Holy Grail*,” the fateful “*moment of revolt*” in the life of “*every married man*” may turn him into a *modern version of Wakefield*, the English husband with the most perverse mind, morbidly spying on his “forlorn” wife, from around the corner, having chosen self-exile instead of “matrimonial felicity.”

Is this the (classic) case that Miss Zelda has in mind when, threatening to become “a *propagandist*” herself (and thus ridiculing noisy feminist activism, only too popular in her day) – she pleads vehemently against any “*strong silent revolt*” and claims that the honest way to “*do all one’s revolting*” is “*at home*”? In other words, (even) if Miss Zelda were a husband, she would choose the *right way* and *place* for revolt: openly, making a clean breast of it, at home. The Flapper remains “devotedly” committed to her mission of defending the married couple’s *togetherness*, as a nice reliable wife. She believes in her choices, and expects her husband to do the same. As a gifted writer, Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald may also echo her fine Puritan predecessor who was Anne Bradstreet (1612? – 1705), an early American poet in love with her “dear and loving husband.”

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The high-brow sophisticated opposite to Zelda’s half-joke about “married men in revolt” is Gertrude Stein’s famous work, by the title “If I Told Him: A Completed Portrait of Picasso.” As previously specified in my essay here, this rather lengthy piece of (non-)poetry, aggressively championing modernism like some sort of “The Emperor’s New Clothes” from Hans Christian Andersen funny tale, was published during the same year, 1924, as Zelda Sayre’s article. It was this particular detail that has prompted my parallel, in the first place:

If I told him would he like it. Would he like it if I told him.
Would he like it would Napoleon would Napoleon would would he like it.
If Napoleon if I told him if I told him if Napoleon. Would he like it if I told him if I told him if Napoleon.
Would he like it if Napoleon if Napoleon if I told him. If I told him if Napoleon if Napoleon if I told him. If I told him would he like it would he like it if I told him.
Now.
Not now.
And now.
Now.
Exactly as as kings.
Feeling full for it.
Exactitude as kings.
So to beseech you as full as for it.
Exactly or as kings.
Shutters shut and open so do queens. Shutters shut and shutters and so shutters shut and shutters and so and so shutters and so shutters shut and so shutters shut and shutters and so. And so shutters shut and so and also. And also and so and so and also.
Exact resemblance to exact resemblance the exact resemblance as exact as a resemblance, exactly as resembling, exactly resembling, exactly in resemblance exactly a resemblance, exactly and resemblance. For this is so. Because.
Now actively repeat at all, now actively repeat at all, now actively repeat at all.
Have hold and hear, actively repeat at all.
I judge judge.
As a resemblance to him.
Who comes first. Napoleon the first.
Who comes too coming coming too, who goes there, as they go they share, who shares all, all is as all as as yet or as yet.
Now to date now to date. Now and now and date and the date.
Who came first Napoleon at first. Who came first Napoleon the first. Who came first, Napoleon first.
Presently.

Exactly do they do.
First exactly.
Exactly do they do too.
First exactly.
And first exactly.
Exactly do they do.
And first exactly and exactly.
And do they do.
At first exactly and First exactly and do they do.
The first exactly.
And do they do.
The first exactly.
At first exactly.
First as exactly.
At first as exactly.
Presently.
As presently.
As as presently.
He he he he and he and he and he and he and he and he and as and as he and as he and he. He is and as
he is, and as he is and he is, he is and as he and he and as he is and he and he and and he and he.
Can curls rob can curls quote, quotable.
As presently.
As exactitude.
As trains.
Has trains.
Has trains.
As trains.
As trains.
Presently.
Proportions.
Presently.
As proportions as presently.
Father and farther.
Was the king or room.
Farther and whether.
Was there was there was there what was there was there what was there was there there was there.
Whether and in there.
As even say so.
One.
I land.Two.
I land.
Three.
The land.
Three.
The land.
Three.
The land.
Two.
I land.
Two.
I land.
One.
I land.
Two.
I land.
As a so.
They cannot.
A note.

They cannot.
A float.
They cannot.
They dote.
They cannot.
They as denote.
Miracles play.
Play fairly.
Play fairly well.
A well.
As well.
As or as presently.
Let me recite what history teaches. History teaches.
(<http://www.writing.unpenn.edu/~afilreis/88v/ifitolfnew.html>)

We can all visualize the renowned *Portrait of Gertrude Stein* (1906), by Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), so typically asymmetrical that, when some of his friends protested she was *not* like her portrait, the cubist painter retorted: "She will." The differences between Zelda's article and Gertrude's (would-be) poem fall into a pattern of almost didactic oppositions:

The article is supposed to be simply commercial writing, with a consumerist destination. The poem is representative for modern experiment, arrogantly dismissing the kind of readership not yet ready for its challenge. The article appears to be plain and accessible. The poem appears to be haughty and abstract. The article has none the less a touch of poetry, as its writer has *a good sense of humor, plus some fine reading*, which we have already detected and highlighted in its structure full of stamina. The poem is deliberately dry and didactic. And obviously less poetic than the article – nowadays, for our aesthetic taste.

So, perhaps ironically, Miss Gertrude was right despite herself: "Let me recite what history teaches. History teaches."

However, there are strange connections possible between the two literary texts. For one thing, they were both inspired to (quite) some lady-writers, by some masculine protagonists: a typical husband (although a famous novelist himself) – for the article; Picasso himself – for the poem. From some viewpoint, Picasso may resemble Napoleon I Bonaparte (1769-1821): they are both world conquerors: the former, by his shocking paintings, the latter by his army victories; none of them quite tall, indeed, still *world conquerors*, not just *world citizens*; both dark-eyed, ambitious and passionate: rather bald, but passionate. Transnational *Weltbürgers*, too: Napoleon was contemporary to Goethe, who had actually invented the word itself.

On the other hand, the only husband known to Zelda from real life was a challenging celebrity and a conqueror of the world, too, by means of his daring books. Yet for the sake of the public, Scott, the outrageously fashionable writer at the beginning of his career, must appear in her article as a common anonymous husband. So that the average husband may be credited by Miss Zelda with his (heroic?) "Moment of revolt." Hence, a certain strong temper would bring all these famous fictive masculine protagonists under the same umbrella. Last but not least, both texts evince a bent for *nonsense humor*. Deliberately or not, Miss Gertrude may remind us here of the funny creatures populating Lewis Carroll's books of Alice. Still, had any one of them pushed their knack for nonsense as far as Gertrude Stein's poem does, some spiteful Queen might have turned up out of the blue and ordered "Off with *her* head!"

*

Along with F. Scott Fitzgerald, her husband, Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald was dutifully introduced to Gertrude Stein and her exclusive Lost Generation coterie, by Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961). In Therese Anne Fowler's 2013 book (coming soon after Woody Allen's 2011 movie *Midnight in Paris*, likewise, brilliantly and humorously evocative of the same time, same place), this mutual antipathy is rendered quite dramatically. Zelda blames Hemingway for Scott's estrangement from her, and finally for the failure of their marriage. A poem or an article cannot be much of a proof. And yet, here we are, after all has been said and done, repeating some obsessive questions, wondering, too:

"Does a Moment of Revolt Come Sometime to Every Married Man?"
Or:
"If I told him would he like it. Would he like it if I told him."

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