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# **“We Have Never Been What We Seemed”:**

## **A Two-Layered Adaptation of the Life of the Fitzgeralds**

MASTER THESIS

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper attempts to explore the way in which the life of American famous couple F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald has been portrayed in Therese Anne Fowler’s biographical novel titled *Z: A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald* (2013) and its counterpart adaptation: brand new Amazon Prime series *Z: The Beginning of Everything* (season 1, 2017). In order to achieve my purpose, I will apply Chatman’s narratological approach (1978, 1990) to the analysis of the narrative elements of the story and the discourse of both the novel and the series, and I will also focus on how these elements are adapted through the contextual and intertextual filters studied by Stam (2000a, 2000b, 2005). Before analyzing Fowler’s novel and the Amazon series, I will firstly explore the different theories of adaptation that have been developed throughout the years, then, I will provide an account on all the major adaptations of both the lives and works of the Fitzgeralds, which will serve as useful information for the contextual background of the two cases in point: the biographical novel and the series. On the basis that there is neither fidelity nor correctness in anybody’s truth, this Master Thesis will try to analyze the particular recreation that the novel and the series offer of Zelda and Scott Fitzgerald to unveil the cultural, historical, aesthetics and other filters that make this portrayal more appealing for a 21<sup>st</sup> century audience.

**Keywords:** F. Scott Fitzgerald, Zelda Fitzgerald, *Z: A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald*, *Z: The Beginning of Everything*, adaptation, biographical novel biopic, TV series.

*“I wish I could tell everyone who thinks we’re ruined. Look closer, and you’ll see something extraordinary, mystifying, something real and true. We have never been what we seemed.”<sup>1</sup>*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

When we talk about adaptation, we normally don’t include the whole scope of the word. There is adaptation in almost every aspect of our daily lives, because at its core, this field typically refers to an interpretation process of a certain reality which has been perceived in different ways by different people. When applied to literature and film, adaptation is then exploited very interestingly. Being a loyal companion to film studies since their inception (Aragay, 2005, p. 11)<sup>2</sup>, the task of adapting a certain text into a different one has created a whole new interdisciplinary field that, with the technological advances of the 21<sup>st</sup> century such as the Internet, streaming broadcasting, or transmedia narratives, can now be re-discovered in the most varied ways.

Among the different forms in which adaptation manifests itself, we find the *biopic*, or *biographical picture*, a form of adapting the life of a – typically – famous figure in history into a film or any other audiovisual medium<sup>3</sup>. According to *filmreference.com*, “the biopic bases its claims to authenticity on research [...] often relying on and crediting the work of historical advisers”. However, the genre is frequently confronted with “direct and indirect forms of censorship”, mainly because “sensitive data about the personal life of the biographical subject is a common feature of the genre that elicits criticism about its historical

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<sup>1</sup> (Fowler, 2013, p. 5)

<sup>2</sup> The citation system followed in this paper is the American Psychological Association (APA) in its 6<sup>th</sup> edition.

<sup>3</sup> In further sections, I will discuss how the label “biopic” can also be applied to other media different to film.

legitimacy”<sup>4</sup>. In a similar way, the literary genre of *biographical fiction* or *biographical novel* is a way of adapting “the lives of actual historical figures”, as Michael Lackey explains in his recent book *The American Biographical Novel* (2016, p. 5). The biographical novel also requires a vast investment of time in research but, at the end, the bulk of the story at hand is an interpretation of the truth, and there is where adaptation begins.

For the current paper, my study will be directed towards the life of one of the most famous American couple of artists in the Western cultural history: Zelda and F. Scott Fitzgerald. He being one of the greatest authors in American literature, and she being the embodiment of the 1920s *flapper* girl, their life together has been a matter of public record and a widely researched topic in a number of academic fields. Because of their great popularity, both their lives and works have been adapted into films over the years and also reinterpreted by biographers and other writers. Ever since the 2013 Hollywood adaptation of *The Great Gatsby* by Australian film director Baz Luhrmann, there has been a renewed interest on the Fitzgeralds, a phenomenon that seems to have happened periodically for the past few decades<sup>5</sup>.

On this basis, the focus of my Master Thesis will be to unveil the ways in which Therese Anne Fowler’s biographical novel *Z: A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald* (2013) and the most recent Fitzgeralds-related adaptation, Amazon Prime TV series *Z: The Beginning of Everything* (season 1, 2017), are a particularly different recreation from the previous adaptations based

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<sup>4</sup> Information available at *Film Reference*: <http://www.filmreference.com/encyclopedia/Academy-Awards-Crime-Films/Biography.html>

<sup>5</sup> Films and TV series about both the works and lives of the Fitzgeralds have been appearing from the 1920s till nowadays, from the first adaptation of *The Beautiful and Damned* directed by Sidney Franklin in 1922 to the adaptation of Scott’s unfinished novel *The Last Tycoon* into a TV series created by Billy Ray in 2016. Information available at *Internet Movie Database*: [www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com).

on the Fitzgeralds' lives and works. I will especially concentrate on the cultural, historical, ideological and aesthetic filters that have contributed to draw a picture of Scott and Zelda in this form and at this specific point in time. On the grounds that there is neither fidelity nor correctness in anybody's truth, I will try to study thoroughly the different aspects in which Fowler's novel and the Amazon Prime series depict who they were: a couple madly in love or a mad couple in love?

To achieve this purpose, and with the aid of several sources that will support my argument, the paper is structured as follows: a theoretical framework will be firstly introduced as a review of the different theories of adaptation that have been explored so far highlighting the biopic from the point of view of film, and the biographical novel from the point of view of literature. The next section will include first, a trip down to memory lane through the eventful lives of Zelda and Scott Fitzgerald, and second, a brief recapitulation of the major adaptations about the Fitzgeralds' lives and works. The last section – the most important one – will be devoted to the analysis of the source work and the adaptation involved in the primary corpus: Fowler's novel and the TV series from Amazon Prime. Having as a point of reference the perspective of the biopic and the biographical novel, I will analyze the corpus through the study of narratological, contextual and intertextual filters as well as through the exploration of how the new media platforms influence the adaptation and reception of the story.

Ambitious as this paper is, the combination of the Fitzgeralds and film adaptation remains an ongoing topic of research, with new film projects to be released in the near future depicting the still fascinating history of Scott and Zelda's complicated love story<sup>6</sup>. That is why the

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<sup>6</sup> Ron Howard is said to be working on a biopic of Zelda Fitzgerald with Jennifer Lawrence in the leading role, and Scarlett Johansson is also set to star in a new adaptation of Scott Fitzgerald's *The Beautiful and Damned*. Information available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/oct/29/zelda-fitzgerald-scott-film-tv>

contents of this paper would be suitable for further investigation on the topic in more advanced postgraduate studies that go along the lines studied in the courses of film adaptation and other literature-related ones that I have taken in the Master's program of English Literature and Linguistics in the University of Granada.

## 2. LIVES ADAPTED: BIOGRAPHICAL FICTION

Adapting a source discourse into a different one is never an easy task. Many aspects have to be taken into account in order to pull an adaptation off successfully and a great deal of issues are also at stake. Having faced a consistent criticism since its inception, adaptation studies investigate the process adapters follow when using a given text to create one interpretation of its contents out of many others – as many as people are in the world. As any form of art, as human recreations of culture, adaptation products are subject to public acclaim and disapproval in equal shares by both audiences/readership and scholars.

In this section, I will review the different adaptation theories that have tried to approach the connection between source text and adapted product since the 1950s to nowadays. I will especially focus on the theories that I will be taking into account in the further analysis of my corpus such as narratology, intertextuality, adaptation filters or the latest techniques in transmedia narratives. I will also explore in this section the adaptation studies conducted from the point of view of the relationship between fiction and reality in the form of the biopic in film adaptation, and the biographical novel in literary adaptation in order to further connect the theory with my corpus analysis.

## 2.1. Theories of Adaptation: A Review

The journey of film adaptation studies in the academic world has not been plain sailing. A relatively new discipline, departments concerning film studies were created inside of literature ones in the United States and the United Kingdom during the 1960s and 1970s (Aragay, 2005, p. 11) having to struggle ever since to be taken seriously. One of our subjects to study, Francis Scott Fitzgerald, already felt reluctant to accept the close relationship between film and literature when he worked in Hollywood as a screenwriter back in the 1930s:

I saw that the novel [...] which at my maturity was the strongest and supplest medium for conveying thought and emotion from one human being to another, was becoming subordinated to a mechanical art that, whether in the hands of Hollywood merchants or Russian idealists, was capable of reflecting only the tritest thought, the most obvious emotion.

(Sklar, 2007, p. 11)

However, despite skepticism, a great number of theorists have seen the topic of adaptation as too interesting to be left aside, and so since the end of the 1950s, several theories have risen and then sunk by the appearance of new ones in a roller-coaster-like journey which has been deeply influenced by the changing times. But what is adaptation, really? Well, consensus hasn't been reached on that area neither. It wasn't for the lack of trying, though.

Thomas Leitch argues in his article "Adaptation, the Genre" that adaptation is "a genre with its own rules, procedures, and textual markers" (Leitch, 2008, p. 106) and Linda Hutcheon, in *A Theory of Adaptation*, states that an adaptation is "an extended deliberate, announced revisitation of a particular work of art" (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 170). It later became

necessary to argue about the reasons behind the ordeal that implied understanding adaptations. Leitch makes a great point claiming that “watching or reading an adaptation invites audience members to test their assumptions, not only about familiar texts but also about the ideas of themselves, others, and the world those texts project against the new ideas fostered by the adaptation” (Leitch, 2008, p. 116). Brian McFarlane is more pragmatic and argues that “the reasons underlying the continuing phenomenon of adaptation [...] move between the poles of crash commercialism and high-minded respect for literary works” (as cited in Rodríguez Martín, 2013a, p. 161). Hutcheon also makes a remark about this topic by pointing out that “human desires in every present instance are torn between the replica and the invention, between the desire to return to the known pattern, and the desire to escape it by a new variation”. She claims that “adaptation fulfills both desires at once” (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 173). Finally, French film critic and theorist André Bazin declares that “since this enterprise [film adaptation] sends many viewers back to read the books [...], what’s the harm even of mediocre adaptations?” (cited in Andrew, 2011, p. 31).

It seems that the answer of the previous question has its foundations on the most popular and yet widely criticized theory in the whole history of film adaptation: fidelity criticism. While critics and theorists have generally demolish whatever argument that may have tried to legitimize the faithfulness that film adaptations allegedly owe to the literary counterparts they are based on, a great sector of the audience have it clear that a movie should resemble its text source as accurately as possible. Richard Hand and Katja Krebs comment on this issue in their “Editorial” for the *Journal of Adaptation in Film & Performance*: “this may be symptomatic of fan culture’s reaction to and popular notions of adaptation and translation rather than academic discourse, where fidelity has been convincingly discredited as a morally

loaded discourse” (Hand and Krebs, 2008, p. 84). In turn, David L. Kranz and Nancy C. Mellerski mildly defend the persistence of fidelity criticism in their *In/Fidelity: Essays on Film Adaptation* by claiming that “adaptation from one medium to another automatically involves fidelity because it requires a mixture of repetition and difference, of familiarity and novelty, and the pleasures of adaptation *qua* adaptation require both” (Kranz and Mellerski, 2008, p. 4). Louis Giannetti, in his didactic *Understanding Movies*, discusses the topic and argues that “the real problem of the adapter is not how to reproduce the content of a literary work (an impossibility), but how close he or she should remain to the raw data of the subject matter” (Giannetti, 2002, p. 405). And on that grounds, McFarlane in his *Novel to Film: Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* states that “the reader will not always find his film, since what he has before him in the actual film is now somebody else’s fantasy” (McFarlane, 1996, p. 7). Although fidelity criticism has swarmed about adaptation research for as long as it has been conducted, other theories have come up and developed in order to explain the controversial relationship between film and literature.

For the academic world, adaptation studies became more official with George Bluestone’s *Novels into Film* published in 1957, and his medium-specific approach. Aragay claims that Bluestone’s reasons for adaptation to emerge were that the film, which had been considered a “low-brow, popular form of entertainment”, turned to “the older and more respectable art of canonical literature” to enlarge “its audience beyond the working-class by appealing to the middle class’s taste for realistic narratives and classic drama” (Aragay, 2005, p. 12). Nevertheless, his approach criticizes the assumption that “the novel is the norm and the film deviates at its peril” (Bluestone, 1957, p. 5) based on the clear-cut differentiation that Bluestone establishes between the two media (1957, p. 1). According to this foundation,

Cardwell explains in her *Adaptation Revisited. Television and the Classic Novel* the basic tenets on Bluestone's approach which are that "each separate medium (in this case, novel, film or television) is unique" and that "its unique nature gives rise to forms of artistic expression distinct from those in other media, shaping as it does the medium's conventions and setting limitations regarding the possible forms of representation available to that medium" (Cardwell, 2002, pp. 43-44). Apart from his pioneering statement, Bluestone's approach also establishes a "laudable commitment to an unbiased, fair approach to (film) adaptations, making clear his intentions not to favor the source text over the adaptation" (Cardwell, 2002, p. 45). However, as noble as his intentions may be, most of the adaptation scholars that followed have instead focused on the actual connection between the two media and their complementary characteristics as opposed to their apparent differences, as we will see later on.

There is no doubt, nevertheless, that Bluestone cleared the path for new theorists to investigate adaptations, and there were many who stepped into this intimate relationship between film and literature. Preceded by different approaches developed in the 1970s such as Geoffrey Wagner's classification of adaptations into transposition, commentary and analogy<sup>7</sup> or Morris Beja's comparative analysis<sup>8</sup>, Seymour Chatman's studies on narratology – started at the end of the 70s<sup>9</sup> and developed through the 1990s onwards – explored a different approach to adaptation studies. Claiming that Henry James would have "deplored" the term *narratology* (Chatman, 1990, p. 1), Chatman argues that it implies an approach which focuses on the analysis of narrative, not only in its literary and textual form, but also

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<sup>7</sup> In *The Novel and the Cinema* (1975).

<sup>8</sup> In *Film and Literature* (1979).

<sup>9</sup> In *Story and Discourse. Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (1978).

in its audiovisual spectrum (1990, p. 1)<sup>10</sup>. Chatman's framework is then based on manipulating narrative techniques, i.e. what Imelda Whelehan in her chapter "Adaptations: the Contemporary Dilemmas" identifies as a process "in which the stock formal devices of narrative – point of view, focalization, tense, voice, metaphor – must be realized by quite other means" (Whelehan, 2000, p. 9). Basically, this approach provides both the novel and the film with a common set of characteristics, creating two complementary texts that must be adapted on the basis of narrative elements.

A step further was taken by James Naremore in his *Film Adaptation* at the awakening of the new millennium. His vision of the "adaptation as translation" (Naremore, 2000, p. 8) is consistently founded on the belief that adaptation studies need "a sociology that takes into account the commercial apparatus, the audience, and the academic culture industry" as well as "economic, cultural, and political issues", that is, contextual and intertextual factors (Naremore, 2000, p. 10). This whole idea goes along Hutcheon's assertion that "adaptation is how stories evolve and mutate to fit new times and different places" (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 176) and the fact that, as I mentioned before, the changing times as well as previous discourses have a key influence in the different approaches applied to adaptation studies. Because of that, Robert Stam in his chapter "Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation" (2000a) included in Naremore's *Film Adaptation* (2000) studies intertextuality and contextual filters in his intertextual dialogism theory. As Stam puts it, this implies adaptations

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<sup>10</sup> Brian McFarlane's *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* (1996) follows as well the narratological approach previously explored by Chatman. McFarlane's differentiation oscillates between what he calls 'transfer' that is, the elements that can be transferred from novel to film and what he refers to as 'adaptation proper' which requires "processes by which other novelistic elements must find quite different equivalences in the film medium, when such equivalences are sought or are available at all" (McFarlane, 1996, p. 13). In any case, he refers to the same issue Chatman discusses: the extrapolation of the literary narrative analysis to the analysis of the elements in the story of a film.

being “caught up in the ongoing whirl of intertextual reference and transformation, of texts generating other texts in an endless process of recycling, transformation, and transmutation, with no clear point of origin” (Stam, 2000a, p. 66)<sup>11</sup>. According to María Elena Rodríguez Martín in her article “*Psycho* (1960) Revisited: Intertextuality and Refraction”, with this approach Stam is not implying that “we should forget the original text” but that we should also enrich “the analysis of adaptations taking into account all the texts which feed the adaptation and all the elements which act as filters in the recreation process” (Rodríguez Martín, 2013b, p. 169)<sup>12</sup>.

As it is evident in the previously explored theories, adaptation studies are part of an ongoing research heightened also by the relative youth of one of its components: cinema. However, other new media have joined the adaptation game during the last decade. With the birth and growth of television, video games, and the Internet, adaptation theorists have been provided with a very ample, varied, and different set of media with which to engage other discourses and texts in fruitful intertextual dialogue. Ruth Page in her *New Perspectives on Narrative and Multimodality* focuses on multimodal narratives and claims that “narratives may be delivered in different media. Thus a written narrative might appear on pages or digital screens of various kinds, an audiovisual narrative played out on a theater stage, cinema, television or computer screen” (Page, 2010, p. 8). This approach implies as well that the actual written literary text does not necessarily have to be always the source for the

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<sup>11</sup> Stam develops his theories of intertextual dialogism and adaptation filters in other works such as *Film Theory. An Introduction* (2000b), *Literature through Film. Realism, Magic, and the Art of Adaptation* (2004) and in a collection of essays edited alongside Alessandra Raengo, *Literature and Film: Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation* (2005).

<sup>12</sup> Other theories of adaptation developed during the 21<sup>st</sup> century are proposed by Cardwell (2002), Hutcheon (2006), Whelehan and Cartmell (2007, 2010), Leitch (2007, 2008a, 2008b), Carroll (2009), among many others. Because of the limitation of the current paper, these theories are not developed in the body of the text.

adaptation. For instance, a new video game can be based on a film or vice versa. Eckart Voigts and Pascal Nicklas refer to transmedia narrative or transmedia storytelling in their article “Introduction: Adaptation, Transmedia, Storytelling and Participatory Culture”. They claim that “regarding convergence as the flow of content across multiple media platforms”, it is important to stress “the technological, industrial, cultural and social context” to understand the adaptation processes here involved (Voigts and Nicklas, 2013, p. 140).

It is curious, to say the least, that after all this visible interest and prolific research on adaptation studies, prejudice is still a burden that theorists have to deal with every step of the way. As Whelehan explains:

Although the study of literary adaptations on film and TV is becoming more common and indeed more ‘acceptable’ as a feature of English and/or Media Studies in higher education, it is still surrounded by knee-jerk prejudice about the skills such study affords, its impact on the value and place of the literary ‘original’ and the kind of critical approach it demands.

(Whelehan, 2000, p. 3)

As Palmer states in the introduction to his work *Twentieth-century American Fiction on Screen*, “the importance of adaptations is quite limited to the fact that they make their sources more available, extending the influence of literary masterpieces” (Palmer, 2007, p.2) which is a quite simplistic though interesting way to legitimize and continue our task of transmitting past culture to future generations. Adaptation studies, however, encompass many other purposes and goals such as economic gain, recreating stories in forms that the literary text could never achieve, or enriching cinematic techniques, among many others. The fact that the task of adapting is carried out with difficulty is something that only time and effort can

improve. As Fitzgerald's Nick Carraway in *The Great Gatsby* would say: "so we beat on, boats against the current" (Fitzgerald, 2008, p. 239).

## 2.2 The biopic and the biographical novel

In her article "The Problem of the Literary Biopic", A. Mary Murphy states that "biography and biographical films share the fundamental problem of the filmed novel: they are all adaptations from a source". As such, she argues, "they require selectivity" meaning that "much must be discarded however reluctantly" (Murphy, 2002). When the life of writers is the one taken as a source to be adapted, much about their lives seems to be interesting to be explored by filmmakers and to be discovered by audiences. Murphy claims that "the world is full of assorted maniacs and drunks and clever wits and broken hearts; putting a pen in the hand of that madness and addiction and brilliance and loss makes all the difference". She also discusses that in biopics that concern the lives of literary figures, the portrayal of these writers need "to show, not only the life itself, but how the life gets into the work" (Murphy, 2002)<sup>13</sup>.

In this section, I will explore the theory behind the labels of *biopic* and *biographical novel*, showing both fields as different and, at the same time, very similar forms of adaptation – one from the point of view of film and the other from the point of view of literature. Both of them show how the limits between fiction and reality are somehow blurrily drawn lines that seem to be surpassed frequently, not without criticism involved, though.

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<sup>13</sup> Full article available at: <http://www.kinema.uwaterloo.ca/article.php?id=152&feature>

### 2.2.1 The biopic as film adaptation

Dennis Bingham, in his chapter “The Lives and Times of the Biopic”, discusses how film studies have been reluctant to acknowledge the biopic genre as an individual field of research with “its own conventions, historical stages of development, disintegration, and revival”. He argues how it wasn’t until the 2000s when the biopic gained a renewed interest that has continued proliferating nowadays (Bingham, 2013, p. 233). The interesting thing about biopics and at the same time, inevitably, an obstacle in their journey towards acceptance in the academic world, is that all biopics “overlap with other genres” (Bingham, 2013, p. 247). Biographical pictures deal with the lives of people who have caused a significant impact in a certain aspect of society, therefore depending on whatever this social area is and also the perspective of the screenwriter, director, or even biographer, a biopic can also be a musical, a historical film, or a thriller, among other genres. Bingham claims that “at the heart of the biopic is the urge to dramatize actuality”, to see the important person that the film is based on made into a fully-fledged character (Bingham, 2013, p. 253).

Included in the controversy that has enveloped adaptation studies, the biopic has also seen itself surrounded by a cloud of criticism. Bingham claims that “there’s something about biopics that makes people rush to condemn them” (Bingham, 2013, p. 233). One of the reasons why, according to Carretero González and Rodríguez Martín, is that biopics’ dealing with “historical people” provokes certain “criticism about its historical legitimacy” and so the biographical material is “sensible to direct and indirect forms of censorship” (Carretero González and Rodríguez Martín, 2012, p. 25). The other reason why – very much in tune with fidelity criticism mentioned in the previous section –, is the problem of (in)accuracy. As every form of art that bases its tenets on real life, Carretero González, Filardo Llamas,

Rodríguez Martín, and Andrés Cuevas argue that a “certain degree of historical accuracy is expected” (Carretero González et al., 2009, p. 279). Nevertheless, Carretero González and Rodríguez Martín claim that “we should insist on the fallacy of finding a one-to-one correspondence between real-life characters and their fictional counterparts” (Carretero González and Rodríguez Martín, 2010, p. 599).

Leitch works with the concept of *based on a true story* and discusses how this label erroneously seems to promise something like a documentary-like film in which everything is presented as raw truth. That quest is close to impossible to carry on. Even when the protagonists of these movies may actually be alive, it is very unlikely that everything that happened in their lives is at the full and lawful disposal of the filmmaker. Leitch claims that, similarly, “historical reenactments in cinema, no matter how carefully researched, are not historical records but fictionalized reenactments of historical events” (Leitch, 2007, p. 282). Biopics follow the same trend. In the case of literary biopics, or biographical films about important figures from the literary sphere, the recreations tend to be represented as close to the facts as possible but always with a touch of alteration, a restructuring of the events for a more epic picture of the characters. This does not elude criticism, though.

Writers tend to create characters with whom they share a special connection, sometimes making them alter egos of themselves. From this perspective, biopics tend to introduce fictional events that connect more profoundly the authors with their characters as a way to unfold some of the personal details that are not so explicitly a matter of public record, as is the case for instance of some of Jane Austen’s biographical films in which the main characters of their novels are portrayed as inspired by Austen’s acquaintances and by events that happened in her life (Carretero González and Rodríguez Martín, 2010, p. 599). Most of

the times these *fictional* episodes are about writers' romantic lives, according to Andrew Higson in his chapter "Brit-lit biopics, 1990-2010" (Higson, 2013, p. 109). This resource seems to be key in the interpretation process that is required for the task of bringing to life and to the audience the writer's life and source of inspiration for his or her literary production.

Female biopics, along this line, or literary biopics including important female roles are an interesting subgenre in which we can see the way in which reality and fiction are merged to create the fullest and truest image of the biopic's subject. Actually, Dennis Bingham argues that "biopics of women are structured so differently from male biopics as to constitute their own genre" (Bingham, 2010, p. 23). He claims that "the narrative thread of the female biopic is most often the downward trajectory, with female subjects victimized by their own ambition, or the limitations placed on them" (Bingham, 2013, p. 237). In their chapter "The Post-Feminist Biopic: Re-telling the Past in *Iris*, *The Hours*, and *Sylvia*", Dolan, Gordon, and Tincknell agree with Bingham in the representation of women in female biopics and argue that "biographies and letters of gifted women who suffered mental breakdowns have suggested that madness is the price women artists have to pay for the exercise of their activity" (Dolan et al., 2009, p. 174). As I will explore in further sections with the case of Zelda Fitzgerald, the pattern described by these authors is still followed in some of the recent portrayals of female subjects.

At the core of the issue that biopics pose is the ultimate goal to "narrate, exhibit and celebrate the life of a subject in order to demonstrate, investigate, or question his or her importance in the world [...]; and for both artist and spectator to discover what it would be like to be this person or to be a certain type of person" (Bingham, 2010, p. 10). In order to do so, literary biopics apply the theories of adaptation previously explored, such as

intertextual dialogism – because they make use of several sources to gather information about the characters, as well as their own writings – or contextual and intertextual filters that help at recreating different aspects and/or interpretations of the life of the subjects. In the following section, I will explore how, in a similar way, biographical novels explore the lives of great personalities by connecting the dots using adaptation.

### 2.2.2 The biographical novel as literary adaptation

Michael Lackey's recent publication of *The American Biographical Novel*, as well as his previous work on the topic, has been of special help for scholars interested in this form of literary adaptation. In the chapter "The Biographical Novel: a Misappropriated Life or a Truthful Fiction?", he discusses the rise of the biographical novel and the question that it proposes: "given that authors use the life of an actual historical figure in order to project their own vision, what kind of liberties can writers ethically take with their subjects?" (Lackey, 2016a, p. 229). Lackey differentiates the authors who take creative liberties when writing about real people and the ones who violate in some way the historical facts that are of public record (Lackey, 2016a, p. 242). In this case it is simply a matter of either adapting or inventing, according to Lackey's views. He claims that there is a "tacit contract" between the readership and the writer. The labeling of a work as a *novel* or as a *memoir* suggests different things and it is important to stick to the limits in that categorization. In turn, "readers need to specify the nature of the implied contract, and failure to do so could lead to serious forms of misinterpretation" (Lackey, 2016a, p. 251).

To improve understanding of this topic, Lackey organized a conference in Vancouver, Canada, in 2015 to speak about the genre of literary biographical fiction, another sign of the relevant position he holds in the field. He presented there his paper “The Legitimization of the Biographical Novel”<sup>14</sup> in which he commented on the different perspectives that this type of novel provides: “the biographical novel is unique in that it blends two seemingly contradictory activities, the non-fictional act of accurately representing the biographical subject and the fictional act of inventing characters and scenes” (Lackey, 2015). Nevertheless, Lackey highlights how “prominent figures” such as George Lukács and Virginia Woolf have “either condemned the biographical novel or dubbed it a faulty aesthetic form” (Lackey, 2015). Accuracy or the lack of it is also a burden that the biographical novel has had to carry, the same way the biopic has.

Being an influential literary genre only from the 1990s onwards, in spite of having been explored before in the 1930s, Lackey claims that the reasons for this renewed interest have to do with the rise of postmodernism. He argues that “attentive to the role ideology plays in the formation of metaconceptual systems, many twentieth-century writers became extremely skeptical of overarching signifiers and ahistorical proclamations” (Lackey, 2015). In the introduction to his volume *Truthful Fictions: Conversations with American Biographical Novelists*, he also claims that it was “the growing skepticism about and discontent with the universal and ahistorical [that] certainly contributed to the rise of the biographical novel”

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<sup>14</sup> The paper has been uploaded by Michael Lackey himself in his academic profile in Academia.edu: <https://umn-morris.academia.edu/MichaelLackey>

(Lackey, 2014, p. 17). In turn, Julia Alvarez writes that “novels arise out of shortcomings of history” (Alvarez, 2014, p. 31)<sup>15</sup>.

In the case of biographical novels about writers, we can see a previous step of that adaptation of the “truth” in the actual works by the writers themselves. Donna Lee Brien (2009) argues that the inspiration that writers got from their own experiences and settings was aimed at achieving “aesthetic truth – rather than historical accuracy”. In fact, she claims that “F. Scott Fitzgerald famously counseled writers to take their subjects from life”, which evinces the constant mingling of biographical information and fiction that has always existed in literature. To reconcile this apparently conflictive relationship between fiction and fact, contemporary authors create “hybrid texts that consciously slide between invention and disclosure, but which publishers, critics and readers continue to define firmly as either fiction or biography” (Brien, 2009)<sup>16</sup>.

The biographical novel challenges traditional assumptions and wonders, the same way the biopic does, where the limits between fiction and reality really are. Lackey quotes Michael Cunningham by claiming that “there’s no such thing as fiction, not in the absolute sense. Fiction writers work from our experience of the work and the people who inhabit it”. According to the postmodern framework – previously referred to –, Lackey declares that “fact is fiction, and consequently, history and biography, which were once considered to be separate and distinct from fiction, can no longer lay claim to being non-fictional” (Lackey,

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<sup>15</sup> Alvarez’s chapter “Fixed Facts and Creative Freedom in the Biographical Novel” is included in Lackey’s book *Truthful Fictions: Conversations with American Biographical Novelists* (2014).

<sup>16</sup> Full article available at: <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/view/186>

2014, p. 2). In another article, Lackey uses an inspirational and influential quote by American writer and academic Jay Parini about the relationship between fact and fiction in literature:

Novels are about lives, after all: about pieces of lives or whole lives. Traditionally, these lives have been made up, with half-believable disclosures at the outset that read, ‘The characters in this novel are entirely fictitious and any relation to persons living or dead is entirely accidental.’ I would prefer that novelists of the future write: ‘Everything in the following pages is authentic, which is to say it is as true as I could make it. Take it or leave it’.

(As cited in Lackey, 2016b)

Lackey discusses that “what we get in a biographical novel is the novelist’s vision of life and the world, and not an accurate representation of an actual person’s life” (Lackey, 2014, p. 7). Biographical novelists therefore attempt to portray the real characters they write about through their own lens, a lens that undoubtedly shapes these characters and the events that occur to them in a different way, a way affected, not only by the novelist’s perspective but also, as happened with the biopic, by the changing times and the different cultural, aesthetic, historical, ideological filters that are constantly evolving in society. Julia Alvarez states, I think very accurately, that the biographical novel offers a “template of how we might approach great figures: demystifying the words and deeds of those too often lazily deemed sacred” (Alvarez, 2014, p. 40), and, I would add, also doing the exact opposite: giving voice and long-awaited credit to those figures that culture has traditionally diminished as minor.

### 2.3 Aims and approach for the present work

My aim in this Master Thesis is to analyze the adaptation process that the first season of the Amazon Prime TV series *Z: The Beginning of Everything* (2017) is in relation to its source text Therese Anne Fowler's biographical novel *Z: A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald* (2013) and how, at the same time, this is another recreation of Scott's and Zelda Fitzgerald's life together. To do so, I will apply Chatman's notes on narratology to analyze the way in which the story and the discourse of Fowler's novel – as an adaptation in itself of the life of the Fitzgeralds – and the Amazon Prime series – as an adaptation of the novel but also of other sources related to Scott and Zelda's life – show the use of several filters previously explored by Stam, engaging the different elements in an intertextual dialogue that helps to unveil the techniques that have been used to recreate the Fitzgeralds' love story in this second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century<sup>17</sup>.

In this recreation, we can see many aspects that were not that present in previous biopics of Scott and Zelda – either as a couple or separately – or in the adaptations of their literary works. The current period of time and social circumstances have influenced the portrayal of Zelda as a woman, the mechanics of her relationship with Scott, the composition of his works, and of their infamous spendthrift lifestyle both in Fowler's novel and in the series. Moreover, the fact that the series is not broadcast on traditional television schedules but streaming online on an Internet platform originates a series of new paths of study due to nowadays changes in the audiences' preferences. The format of the biographical novel is as well an interesting

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<sup>17</sup> A more detailed explanation of the approach will be provided in the analysis section.

aspect to explore due to the profound and thorough study that it requires for its composition and the ability it demands to foreground aspects that had never been highlighted before.

### 3. RECREATING ZELDA AND SCOTT FITZGERALD: THEIR LIFE AND WORKS ON SCREEN

Nowadays, there is no doubt that the Fitzgeralds' life was everything but boring and so must have thought all the recent authors and scholars who have revisited their life and work in the past few years. From an analytical point of view, it seems as if everything surrounding Zelda and Scott's life has been one way or another adapted into something else: Scott's works are said to be inspired by his own life, including his childhood, his time in Princeton, his marriage with Zelda, and the experiences they lived through their unconventional lifestyle. Zelda's only novel as well, *Save Me the Waltz* (1932), was very much inspired by her relationship with Scott and her time at psychiatric institutions. All those premises have been used for the filmic portrayals of his works as well as the biopics based on their lives. Their life together has also been used as material for fiction writing, that is, for biographical novels in which actual fact mingles with the fiction surrounding one of the most popular celebrity couples of the American cultural sphere<sup>18</sup>. As Linda De Roche claims, "life and art converge in [Scott and Zelda's] fiction" (De Roche, 2000, p. 1). In this section, therefore, I will write about

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<sup>18</sup> The biographical novel studied in the corpus, Therese Anne Fowler's *Z: A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald* (2013), is included in this categorization.

some of the most known adaptations that have been made about the Fitzgeralds' literary works as well as the biopics about their lives which have been very popular over the years<sup>19</sup>.

In the introduction to his volume *F. Scott Fitzgerald. The Critical Reception* (1978), Jackson R. Bryer provides a quote by Fitzgerald himself about the transcendence of his writings. He claimed: "my whole theory of writing I can sum up in one sentence: an author ought to write for the youth of his own generation, the critics of the next, and the schoolmasters of ever afterward" (cited in Bryer, 1978, p. 11). The attention that Scott Fitzgerald's works and the life that inspired them has received over the years has been outstanding. It is not surprising then, that the cinema soon found there an interesting source for new projects for the big screen. Nevertheless, the first step was learning how to interpret Scott's works and, reaching the conclusion that they were much based on his actual life and, therefore, also on his life with Zelda, filmmakers needed to investigate the roles that the Fitzgeralds had played in their life together. The issue, however, was that adaptation was not only present in the filmic recreations of Scott's works, but also in Mr. Fitzgerald's recreation of his life in his own writing production.

De Roche notes about Scott's first novel, *This Side of Paradise* (1920), that in this book, "he gave fictional treatment to his boyhood and early adolescent relationship with his mother" (2000, p. 2). In her article for *The New Yorker*, "Saving Zelda", Molly Fisher states that "Zelda's early letters to F. Scott were the basis for Rosalind's tart misogyny in *This Side of Paradise*" (Fischer, 2013)<sup>20</sup>. Rosa García Rayego claims as well that Zelda's first letters to Scott were recreated in *This Side of Paradise* (2003, p. 9). Moreover, García Rayego argues

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<sup>19</sup> Read the Appendix section for more information about the eventful life that Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald shared together and about how their particular lifestyle affected the way they composed their literary works.

<sup>20</sup> Full article available at: <http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/saving-zelda>

in broader grounds that Scott Fitzgerald did not only have Zelda as his muse: he also used her own writings in his fiction (2003, p. 1).

Nevertheless, it wasn't until *The Beautiful and Damned* was published in 1922 that Hollywood became really interested in adapting a novel by F. Scott Fitzgerald. De Roche argued that the novel was “a bleak tale of excess and dissipation” that “like most of Fitzgerald’s fiction, [...] was immensely autobiographical” (2000, p.7). A film adaptation titled as well *The Beautiful and Damned*, based on the author’s second novel, hit theaters in the same year of its publication, in 1922, directed by Sidney Franklin<sup>21</sup>. Sarah Hughes (2016)<sup>22</sup> acknowledges as well, that Scott found inspiration in his marriage to Zelda for the composition of his second novel. In fact, that inspiration seems to go farther than that: Scott is said to have used Zelda’s writings for his novels without providing his wife with any sort of acknowledgement. Penelope Green, in her review about Therese Anne Fowler’s biographical novel *Z: A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald*, quotes from Zelda’s resentful opinion about her husband’s novel, “Mr. Fitzgerald – I believe that is how he spells his name – seems to believe that plagiarism begins at home” (cited in Green, 2013)<sup>23</sup>.

A silent movie, *The Beautiful and Damned* would be the only adaptation about one of his novels that Scott would ever see made. The rest of them were released posthumously through the different periods that have witnessed a “Fitzgerald Revival”, as Bryer calls it (1978, p.25). In 1962, Henry King directed *Tender is the Night*, and after a series of

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<sup>21</sup> Information available at: [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0012926/?ref =nv\\_sr\\_3](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0012926/?ref =nv_sr_3)

<sup>22</sup> Full article available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/oct/29/zelda-fitgerald-scott-film-tv>

<sup>23</sup> Full article available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/21/books/review/z-a-novel-of-zelda-fitgerald-by-therese-anne-fowler.html>

adaptations of *The Great Gatsby*<sup>24</sup>, the 1974 version, directed by Jack Clayton with Robert Redford in the role of Jay Gatsby and Mia Farrow as Daisy Buchanan, was highly promoted because of its great Hollywood hype. A widely awarded movie, this adaptation did not, however, enjoy as much success as Scott's third novel did back in 1925. The aesthetics, the performance, and the iconic characters constituted an attempt at portraying the 1920s and the connection to Fitzgerald's life. Roger Ebert in his review of the film, claimed that he never thought that "the events in *The Great Gatsby* were that important to the novel's success; Fitzgerald [...] was writing in a way about himself when he created Gatsby [...] For [him], there was always something unattainable; and for Gatsby, it was Daisy Buchanan, the lost love of his youth, forever symbolized by that winking green beacon at the end of her dock". But Clayton's film, it seemed to Ebert, did not have "much in common with the spirit of F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel" (Ebert, 1974)<sup>25</sup>.

However, when Baz Luhrmann released his 2013 adaptation of *The Great Gatsby* with Leonardo DiCaprio as Gatsby, Tobey Maguire as Nick Carraway, and Carey Mulligan as Daisy, everybody seemed to forget about any other adaptation that had ever been made about Scott Fitzgerald's third novel. In his review of the movie, A. O. Scott commented about the work of the director and the conveying of Fitzgerald's ideas:

Mr. Luhrmann's reverence for the source material is evident. He sticks close to the details of the story and lifts dialogue and description directly from the novel's pages. But he has also felt free to make that material his own, bending it according to his artistic sensibility and what

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<sup>24</sup> Alan Ladd played the coveted role of Jay Gatsby in the 1949 adaptation of *The Great Gatsby* directed by Elliot Nugent and Paul Rudd played Nick Carraway in Robert Markovitz's TV film adaptation *The Great Gatsby* in 2000. Information about the cast and direction available at *Film Index International*: <http://search.proquest.com/fii> and *Internet Movie Database*: <http://www.imdb.com/>

<sup>25</sup> Information available at: [www.rogerebert.com/reviews/the-great-gatsby-1974](http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/the-great-gatsby-1974)

he takes to be the mood of the times. The result is less a conventional movie adaptation than a splashy, trashy opera, a wayward, lavishly theatrical celebration of the emotional and material extravagance that Fitzgerald surveyed with fascinated ambivalence.

(Scott, 2013)<sup>26</sup>

During these last few years, the growth in popularity and technological advances of the Internet have enriched the way films and series are watched. The birth and development of streaming media platforms has transformed the world of entertainment considerably and so producers, scriptwriters, and filmmakers among others have had to adjust to the public's demands. In 2016, Amazon Prime Video released a TV series titled *The Last Tycoon* created by Billy Ray starring Matt Bomer, Kelsey Grammer, and Lily Collins<sup>27</sup>. Based on the unfinished novel by F. Scott Fitzgerald, the show constituted one of the last adaptations of one of the author's works in a different platform: not for the big screen, not for the small screen – television – but for the Internet<sup>28</sup>.

Nevertheless, F. Scott Fitzgerald's works are not the only sources that have been used to make films or TV series. The attraction and success that Scott and Zelda's works had enjoyed were soon discovered to be, in part, because of the great amount of biographical data that they had used as inspiration for the creation of their fiction. Films inspired in the Fitzgeralds' life together, that is, biopics, appeared then soon enough to explore the life of the famous American couple. In 1958, Sheilah Graham, the woman that had been Scott's lover in

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<sup>26</sup> Full article available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/10/movies/the-great-gatsby-interpreted-by-baz-luhrmann.html>

<sup>27</sup> Information available at: [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt3390892/?ref\\_=nv\\_sr\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt3390892/?ref_=nv_sr_1)

<sup>28</sup> Other film adaptations about other works by Fitzgerald, including his short stories, are: *The Last Time I Saw Paris* (1954, dir. Richard Brooks), *The Last Tycoon* (1976, dir. Elia Kazan), *Bernice Bobs her Hair* (1977, dir. Joan Micklin Silver), and *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* (2008, dir. David Fincher), among others. Information available at *Film Index International*:

<http://search.proquest.com/fii/docview/1745854812/E2F8CBD35E434B5BPQ/1?accountid=14542>

Hollywood until his death in 1940, published her memoirs titled *Beloved Infidel* in which she talked about her relationship with the writer. A year later, in 1959, Henry King directed the adaptation with the same title with great stars of the time at the forefront: Gregory Peck as Fitzgerald and Deborah Kerr as Graham<sup>29</sup>. The story in this film was told from Sheilah's point of view and so it presented the Scott she knew. Very different from his younger self, when Sheilah Graham met Scott Fitzgerald, the author of *The Last Tycoon* had very little resemblance to the author of *This Side of Paradise*.

In 1993, Pat O'Connor directed a film called *Zelda* with Natasha Richardson as Mrs. Fitzgerald, and Timothy Hutton as Scott<sup>30</sup>. For the first time, a biopic about the Fitzgeralds was told from the point of view of Scott Fitzgerald's wife, Zelda, positioning her at the center of the stage, ready to tell her version of the events. A TV film, *Zelda* established a pattern, previously followed in 1970 when Nancy Milford published the highly acclaimed biography of Zelda Fitzgerald in which she overrode all the previous criticism that the Southern belle had received over her relationship with Scott (Shelden, 2002)<sup>31</sup>. Shelden argues that Milford wanted "her subject [Zelda] to be seen in a more sympathetic light, as a creative but troubled figure who loved a difficult genius" (2002). O'Connor's *Zelda* seemed to have the same aim: showing the life of one of the greatest figures in the history of the Jazz Age with her writer husband by her side.

A series of movies in the last couple of decades have found a spot in their script for Scott and Zelda's roles, among which are worth mentioning Woody Allen's *Midnight in Paris* (2011) in which a disenchanted Hollywood screenwriter finds himself surrounded by the

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<sup>29</sup> Information available at: [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0052617/?ref=nm\\_sr\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0052617/?ref=nm_sr_1)

<sup>30</sup> Information retrieved from: [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0108648/?ref=nm\\_film\\_act\\_16](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0108648/?ref=nm_film_act_16)

<sup>31</sup> Full article available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/4728763/The-truth-about-Zelda.html>

cultural elite of 1920s Paris – including a version of the Fitzgeralds in their best years – during a trip to the City of Lights, and Michael Grandage’s *Genius* (2016) where the protagonist is Maxwell Perkins, the literary agent who catapulted some of the greatest authors in the history of America to stardom – including Fitzgerald himself<sup>32</sup>.

In 2017, Amazon Prime Video released the first season of *Z: The Beginning of Everything* created by Nicole Yorkin and Dawn Prestwich, another biopic about the Fitzgeralds starring Christina Ricci and David Hoflin as Zelda and Scott respectively, based on Therese Anne Fowler’s biographical novel *Z: A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald* (2013), in which Zelda was the protagonist once again. Brittany Volk and Chelsea Tatham write about the show in their article “Winter TV Preview: From ‘The Young Pope’ to ‘Riverdale’ to ‘24: Legacy’, 17 shows to watch in 2017”<sup>33</sup>. They claim that “this 10-episode drama showcases the brilliant and beautiful woman whose intoxicating wild antics were used in lots of F. Scott’s work” (Volk and Tatham, 2017). As we can see, adaptation never ceases to appear in the Fitzgeralds’ life and works. Using therefore this latest adaptation of the life of Scott and Zelda, in the following section I will analyze the way in which what I have explored in the previous sections is applied in the recreation of the story enacted in both Fowler’s novel and the Amazon Prime series.

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<sup>32</sup> Information available at: [www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com)

<sup>33</sup> Full article available at: <http://www.tampabay.com/features/media/winter-tv-preview-from-the-young-pope-to-riverdale-to-24-legacy-17-shows/2308288>

#### 4. ANALYSIS OF THE CORPUS: A TWO-LAYERED ADAPTATION OF THE LIFE OF THE FITZGERALDS

The complexity of the chosen corpus has motivated a complex approach. My analysis, therefore, will result in the combination of two theories of adaptation – narratology and intertextual dialogism – developed by two influential figures in adaptation studies – Seymour Chatman and Robert Stam. In the creation of a literary story, elements such as characters and setting are imperative and since on-screen productions are also stories, those essentials are also necessary for its construction. In *Coming to Terms. The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film* (1990), Chatman argued that “stories performed on stage or screen are no less ‘narratives’ than those told by literary narrators” (1990, p. 4). Back in 1978, Chatman had already connected the traditional literary structure and elements to film. In *Story and Discourse. Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (1978), he made a distinction between the story, i.e., the events and the existents (characters and setting) – *what* happens, to *whom* and *where* – and the discourse, that is, the point of view, the narrator, etc. – *how* it is presented – of a narrative text (1978, p. 19). Those elements are present in both Fowler’s novel *Z: A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald* and the Amazon Prime series *Z: The Beginning of Everything* and adapted through a series of filters that give way to what Stam calls “intertextual dialogism” (Stam, 2000b, p. 202). He argues in his chapter “Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation” (2000a) that both discourse and different ideologies influence enormously the adaptation of a novel and that this is “mediated by a series of filters” such as “studio style, ideological fashion, political constraints, auteurist predilections, charismatic stars, economic advantage and disadvantage, and evolving technology” (2000a, p. 69). That process of adaptation will be explored in further sections as a way to recreate the Fitzgeralds’ story by

attracting a 21<sup>st</sup> century audience, always taking into account that what we are given does not have to be the exact representation of the events.

Actually, the author of the biographical novel *Z: A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald*, Therese Anne Fowler, said about her book in an interview in 2015 that both her novel and other biographies that she used to document herself on the Fitzgeralds are just interpretations of what really happened (00:29:54-00:30:30)<sup>34</sup>. This way she acknowledges the way in which everything seems to be somehow a form of adaptation in what the Fitzgeralds are concerned, including her own novel.

In another interview, David Hoflin, the Australian actor who plays Scott Fitzgerald in the series *Z: The Beginning of Everything* (Amazon Prime, 2017), argues that we are never going to know exactly how Zelda and Scott Fitzgerald were since the video footages and other records about them are very scarce and of poor quality<sup>35</sup>. The challenge, he argues, lies there, in trying to formulate an opinion on how they were personally, not professionally, which is the image that we know of them today (00:04:27-00:04:50). In the same interview, Christina Ricci who plays Zelda Fitzgerald in the series, and who is also an executive producer and promoter of the series for its launching, commented upon the novelty that the series offered and claimed that this is “a story that has not necessarily been told” and that functions in a way for “rehabilitating her [Zelda’s] reputation” (00:00:34-00:01:04)<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>34</sup> “Imagined Biographies: Gavin McCrea and Therese Anne Fowler Part 2” from “The Center of Fiction” *YouTube* channel (2015). Full interview available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SRTVjurzEb0>

<sup>35</sup> “Stock Footage - F. Scott Fitzgerald Writing at a Desk in Paris” from “My Footage.com” *YouTube* channel (2011): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ToXI3H31qk> and “ F. Scott Fitzgerald” from “Footage File” *YouTube* channel (2011): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qy9vXKKPeBk>

<sup>36</sup> “Christina Ricci and David Hoflin on *Z: The Beginning of Everything*” from “BehindtheVelvetRope.TV” *YouTube* channel (2017). Full interview available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1UmmH\\_yDSLc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1UmmH_yDSLc)

Fowler's novel *Z: A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald*, published in 2013, tells the story of Zelda Sayre and her life with Scott Fitzgerald from the moment they first meet in 1918 till she dies in a fire in 1948. The whole book is written from Zelda's perspective in a first person narrator deemed as fictional because of the non-existent amount of volumes of the like<sup>37</sup>. With Fowler's literary biographical fiction we seem to finally get the story from Zelda's point of view, putting her at the center of the stage, a place traditionally held by her famous husband. In the first season of the series *Z: The Beginning of Everything*, an Amazon Prime production created by Nicole Yorkin and Dawn Prestwich released in January 2017, a section of Fowler's novel is adapted: the story goes from when Scott and Zelda first meet till her realization that she is pregnant with their first child right before they set off for their first trip to Europe. With the uncertainty of a second series in mind, season 1 offers the first glimpse of one of the most fascinating relationships in the history of America in which it captures *the beginning of everything*<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> Although there are biographies and other series of books that have collected letters or other personal writings by Zelda about her life with Scott, she never wrote an autobiography, therefore, Fowler here is adapting the story from her own perspective.

<sup>38</sup> Season 1 is composed of ten episodes described in the *Amazon Prime Video* website of the series as follows ([https://www.primevideo.com/detail/0Q7GWETG6K7T4GIT1A03AKTW0B/ref=atv\\_hm\\_hom\\_c\\_w1n001\\_2\\_1?encoding=UTF8&pf\\_rd\\_i=&pf\\_rd\\_m=&pf\\_rd\\_p=&pf\\_rd\\_r=&pf\\_rd\\_s=&pf\\_rd\\_t=](https://www.primevideo.com/detail/0Q7GWETG6K7T4GIT1A03AKTW0B/ref=atv_hm_hom_c_w1n001_2_1?encoding=UTF8&pf_rd_i=&pf_rd_m=&pf_rd_p=&pf_rd_r=&pf_rd_s=&pf_rd_t=)):

1. "Pilot": Zelda Sayre yearns to break free from the monotony of Montgomery. She sees her change when she meets a young soldier named Scott Fitzgerald.
2. "Just Humans": As Scott pursues Zelda in Montgomery, she must decide what she can sacrifice to be with him.
3. "The Right Side of Paradise": Despite living worlds apart, Scott and Zelda grow closer. Zelda tries to decide if she loves him enough to uproot her whole life.
4. "You, Me and Us": Zelda arrives in NYC to marry Scott. They celebrate their new life with all his Big City friends.
5. "The It Girl": Zelda changes her look and finds her new identity as she tries to fit in with her new high-life in New York City.
6. "Lights! Camera! Fitzgerald!": Zelda flirts with Hollywood when she does a screen test for a big director.
7. "Where There Are Friends, There Are Riches": Scott and Zelda go to Princeton for a reunion filled with emotion.
8. "Playing House": Scott and Zelda get away to a Westport vacation house so Scott can write. They have New York friends over for a party.
9. "Quicksand": Scott and Zelda work through rising marital tensions at their Westport house.
10. "Best of all": Scott and Zelda take a road trip back to Montgomery in an attempt to mend their marriage.

The new interest in the recreations of the Fitzgeralds' life together is meaningful these days as this particular adaptation shows, according to Hughes, "the many parallels between their lives and work and the period we are living through right now" (Hughes, 2016). The changing times, the current situation of nowadays society, the evolving Western mentality, all of that are influential filters that bring the Fitzgeralds back to life with a different halo. In this section, therefore, I will attempt at showing that the peculiarity of this adaptation lies in its connection to current life, in the way in which Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald and their conjoint life have been portrayed both in Fowler's book and in the Amazon series with a 21<sup>st</sup> century lens regarding its content and its form as well.

#### 4.1 Studio style and evolving technology: Platforms and formats as new adaptation filters

Some of the innovative changes that *Z: The Beginning of Everything* offers as an adaptation are its format and the platform in which it is broadcast. Unlike previous biopics about the Fitzgeralds in the form of films, whether for the big or the small screen, the Amazon Prime adaptation of Fowler's biographical novel is a series released on an online platform which constitutes a filter that connects the adaptation to the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

For the past few years, series have become increasingly more popular among audiences than films, and adaptations have had their role in this fact as is the case of shows such as *Game of Thrones* (HBO, 2011-), *Sherlock* (BBC, 2010-) or *House of Cards* (Netflix, 2013-) based on novels by George R. R. Martin, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Michael Dobbs respectively. The great popularity that these shows enjoy have attracted important amounts

of public creating this way a fan culture that can be compared with the film industry when referring to series of film adaptations such as *The Lord of the Rings* (2001-2003) based on the novels by J.R.R. Tolkien (1954-1955), or *Harry Potter* (2001-2011) based on J. K. Rowling's books (1997-2007), or other film sagas such as *Star Wars* (1977-), or *Pirates of the Caribbean* (2003-).

A great advantage that advances in technology related to the rise of online platforms poses is the way in which they allow viewers to watch their favorite show in the electronic device of their choice: smartphones, television sets, computers, tablets, etc. Besides, online streaming provides the public with the convenience of enjoying their series at any time they want, since they are always available to the viewer, unlike shows broadcast in traditional television or films showed in movie theatres which are subject to pre-established schedules.

The serial format of this adaptation about the Fitzgeralds also adds a difference with film in its process of making. On the one hand, it affects its structure. In their chapter "Introduction: Towards a Narratology of TV Series", Allrath, Gymnich and Surkamp argue that "series are by definition ongoing narratives" and because of this, they have "a number of formal characteristics, such as lack of definite closure, the occurrence of cliff-hangers, and a tendency towards minimal exposition" (Allrath et al., 2005, p. 3). All of that makes "the plot structure of TV series" subjected to "the number of episodes they consist of" and the way they are rearranged "to ensure that viewers will watch the next season". This is carried out by ending the season with a major cliff-hanger "leaving the viewers with all sorts of open questions" (Allrath et al., 2005, pp. 22-23). In the finale of the series, Zelda finds out that she is pregnant after having a great argument with Scott about their impending bankruptcy. Their lifestyle at the verge of disappearance, Zelda's pregnancy establishes here the cliff-hanger

for the potential new season. When Ricci's voice-over utters one of Zelda Fitzgerald's famous quotes: "nobody has ever measured, not even poets, how much the heart can hold"(Z: *The Beginning of Everything*, Season 1, Episode 10, 00:26:23-00:26:34), it is made clear that the story is far from its final conclusion.

On the other hand, it affects its composition. Distinctly from films which typically have just one director and one or two scriptwriters in their crew, series are developed thanks to a collaborative work between several directors and scriptwriters. During the ten episodes of the first season of *Z: The Beginning of Everything*, five different directors and eight scriptwriters worked together to create the adaptation of Fowler's novel – some of them had worked in adaptations of literary works before<sup>39</sup>. The full series was released on January 27, 2017, on Amazon Prime and it was created by Nicole Yorkin and Dawn Prestwich who adapted Fowler's novel *Z: A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald* (2013) into the series<sup>40</sup>. Produced by Christina Ricci, who plays Zelda Fitzgerald, and Fowler herself, among others, *Z: The Beginning of Everything* is the adaptation of an adaptation, i.e., it is the on screen recreation of Fowler's interpretation of the documental data about the lives of F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald. As such, the factor of intertextuality is omnipresent in the whole story, and the way in which the different texts communicate with each other leads to an intertextual dialogue that, as Stam argues,

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<sup>39</sup> Mike Barker (director of episodes 2, 3, and 10) has directed two episodes of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* adaptation for *Hulu* – another streaming platform – with the same title (2017), and Wash Westmoreland (director of episodes 8 and 9) worked in the direction of the film adaptation of Lisa Genova's *Still Alice* (2014).

Information available at: [www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com)

<sup>40</sup> More information about cast and crew available at *Internet Movie Database*: [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt4878612/fullcredits?ref=tt\\_ov\\_st\\_sm](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt4878612/fullcredits?ref=tt_ov_st_sm)

[...] refers to the infinite and open-ended possibilities generated by all the discursive practices of culture, the entire matrix of communicative utterances within which the artistic text is situated, and which reach the text not only through recognizable influences but also through a subtle process of dissemination.

(Stam, 2000b, p. 202)

That is, therefore, the way in which the adaptation at hand works: it engages in productive dialogue not only with the text in which it is officially based on, that is, Fowler's novel, but also with other sources that Fowler and Yorkin, Prestwich and the rest of the crew of the Amazon Prime series may have consulted for their adaptations of the life of the Fitzgeralds, such as Nancy Milford's famous biography *Zelda: A Biography* (1970), Bryer and Barks' collection of letters *Dear Scott, Dearest Zelda* (2003) or other films and series based on Scott's works and/or his life with Zelda, such as the ones I mentioned in previous sections. In fact, as I will explore later, Baz Luhrmann's 2013 film adaptation of *The Great Gatsby* seems to have influenced the aesthetics of the series in the characterization of the characters and the recreation of the settings.

In a way, *Z: The Beginning of Everything* stands for an example of the ultimate stage of adaptation: a much more complex product than a book-to-film equivalence, the convergence of knowledge about a topic, in this case the biographical details of the Fitzgeralds' life together, exploited through different cultural practices in an age in which the systems of entertainment are as varied as they have never been.

## 4.2 How, who, and where: Narrative elements through adaptation filters

As I mentioned before, there are multiple instances of adaptation both in Fowler's novel and in the Amazon Prime series. It is important, then, to highlight, that the adaptation process in this particular case is not merely a one-to-one equivalence between two individual sources. On the one hand, in *Z: A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald*, Fowler adapts the life of F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald, that is, actual events and actual people, into her own interpretation of the story. To do so, she found both inspiration and documental material in other biographies and other adaptations about the Fitzgeralds. As Fowler herself said in the previously mentioned 2015 interview, she read biographical material written about and by both Scott and Zelda as well as literature of the period in order to be aware of the kind of writing that was done in the 1920s and 1930s ("Imagined Biographies", 00:02:50-00:03:58). She claims in the author's note and acknowledgements of *Z: A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald* (2013) that "the richest, and in many more ways most reliable, resource was the collection of letters the two of them exchanged during their courtship, and then throughout the periods when Zelda was in the hospital and Scott was working in Hollywood" as well as the letters "Scott exchanged with his friends, his editor, his agent, and Ernest Hemingway" (Fowler, 2013, p.372).

On the other hand, *Z: The Beginning of Everything* is an adaptation of Fowler's novel, however, it is also inspired by other writings and film recreations of the Fitzgeralds' life and works. For instance, the series' logo, a big 'Z' with artful straight lines is very reminiscent to the letters of the poster of Baz Luhrmann's *The Great Gatsby* (2013)<sup>41</sup>. The Amazon Prime production also makes use of other types of contextual, social, historical, and ideological

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<sup>41</sup> In further sections, more connections with this film adaptation of Fitzgerald's novel will be explored.

filters that are either specific of the series or just more emphasized there than in Fowler's novel. They are normally used to empower the image of Zelda Fitzgerald and represent her world and her husband's under a 21<sup>st</sup> century lens that tries to appeal today's audiences.

Those filters affect the representation of Zelda and Scott, the depiction of Montgomery or New York City, as well as the point of view of the series or the narrator of the story which are elements present in the narrative of Fowler's novel and of the Amazon Prime series. In the following sections, therefore, I will explore the way in which the narratological elements studied by Chatman (1978, 1990) – story (characters, events, and setting) and discourse (point of view, narrator, etc.) – are portrayed in the novel and in the series through some of Stam's filters (2000, 2004) such as charismatic stars or auteurist predilections, among others.

#### 4.2.1 Adaptation of the discourse: telling the story

Fowler's novel, *Z: A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald* (2013), starts the story in medias-res, with the last exchange of letters between Zelda and Scott Fitzgerald in 1940<sup>42</sup> when he was working in Hollywood on what would become his last novel, *The Last Tycoon*, and she was in Montgomery, still dealing with her mental instability. The whole prologue sets the tone for the rest of the story: here we see Zelda's reflections on their lives, how worn-out both of them seemed to be, but how in love they remained. She goes back to better times and remembers dinners with James Joyce and their unfortunate relationship with Ernest

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<sup>42</sup> Even when the letters are based on real ones that were exchanged between Scott and Zelda in December 1940, in *Z: A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald* (2013), Fowler offers a recreation of those letters with her own wording. The same happens with the rest of the written correspondence that appears in the novel. In the author's note, Fowler explains that "while all the letters that appear within the novel are my creations, they are inspired by this [Zelda and Scott's numerous letters to each other] amazing body of correspondence" (Fowler, 2013, p. 373).

Hemingway. She alludes to how famous they are in Montgomery, how everyone in town seems to know everything about them, but also how wrong they are (Fowler, 2013, pp. 1-5). The prologue is important because it powerfully shows the sense of romantic tragedy that will impregnate the rest of their story. The series however, takes a step further.

In the one-minute introduction of the pilot episode of the Amazon Prime series there is a combination of Ricci's Zelda's voice-over and images of a destroyed building. In *Z: The Beginning of Everything*, the Fitzgeralds' story starts at the end showing us the clear connection with reality: the first thing we see is an elegant slipper in a burned building which represents the 1948 fire in which Zelda Fitzgerald died. In Bryer and Barks's edited collection of letters, they claim about Zelda's death that "her body was so badly burned that it could only be identified by her *slipper*" (2003, p. 386) (my emphasis). The adapting process then engages here in an intertextual dialogue with other sources, apart from Fowler's novel, that feed the story at hand. The images transmit the same thing that the prologue of the novel does: the tragedy, with the slipper representing a token of remembrance of a better and fancier past. Furthermore, we can perceive the narration in the showing of these images, while Zelda's voice-over reflects on her life with Scott:

Things are sweeter when they are lost. I know because once I wanted something and I got it. It was the only thing I ever wanted so badly. And when I got it, it turned to dust in my hands. He had some character say that. It was the way he always looked at things: tragically. But it might as well have been about me. It was always about me. Right to the very end. Or maybe it was about us.

(*Z: The Beginning of Everything*, season 1, episode 1, 00:00:01-00:00:51)

She is making here a reference to his writing and how he was always inspired by their life and by her. In the last sentence she makes a reference to the idea that Fowler's novel tries to explore which is the deriding of the Team Scott/Team Zelda contest advancing that the story will be from *her* point of view but that everything was always about *them*. Moreover, the same way Fowler's prologue presents Zelda as the narrator of the story in a point in time in which the experiences already lived make her express her reflections about the ups and downs of her relationship with Scott, the introduction of the series advances that the story will be told from a point in time located in the future with respect to the storytelling, and also that the narrator knows what happens next: the fate of the characters and the development of the events. It basically makes clear that the whole story will be a very detailed flashback.

In addition, by using a quotation from *The Beautiful and Damned*<sup>43</sup>, the audience is subtly indicated the extent of the connection between Scott Fitzgerald's characters' fate and his and his wife's own. That idea of on-going and almost cyclical adaptation of the life of the Fitzgeralds into their own works and so forth, is highlighted in other parts of the Amazon Prime series: after *This Side of Paradise* had been published and Zelda and Scott had married, Scott's Princeton friend, Townsend Martin, proposes them to star in a "picture show" based on Scott's first novel alleging that since they are already Amory Blaine and Rosalind Connage, they would not even have to act (*Z: The Beginning of Everything*, Season 1, Episode 6, 00:04:39-00:05:19). In the novel, it is a scene with Jim Ellis, a journalist that asked Scott in an interview about his inspiration on Zelda for his book *This Side of Paradise*, that evinces the adaptation process involved in Scott's works:

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<sup>43</sup> "Things are sweeter when they are lost. I know, because once I wanted something and I got it. It was the only thing I ever wanted so badly. And when I got it, it turned to dust in my hands" (Fitzgerald, 2016, p. 207).

“Ellis asked him, then, about how closely the experiences of Scott’s main character, Amory Blaine, reflected Scott’s own life. Scott said, ‘Loosely. I’ve put a character into a version of my history, is what I’ve done’. ‘So Blaine’s an alter ego?’. ‘A somewhat naïve one, yes’. [...] Ellis nodded and made a note. ‘And the selfish girl who breaks his heart – Rosalind. Is she...’ He glanced at me.”

(Fowler, 2013, p. 84)

Regarding the perspective, although it is only in rare occasions that the viewership can witness Scott’s point of view of the story in the series<sup>44</sup>, Zelda’s point of view is the one leading the story in both the novel and the show, a fact that is manifested through the use of the cinematic technique of voice-over or voice-off, among others. In the series, Zelda’s point of view and her role as narrator produce the same effect that the first person narrator – also performed by Zelda – does in Fowler’s novel: this is the case of an intradiegetic narrator, i.e., a character that both tells the story and has a role in its course of events too. Following Chatman’s conception of the “cinematic narrator”, however, it looks like the voice-over narration is not enough. He argues that it “may be one component of the total showing, one of the cinematic narrator’s devices” but that its “contribution is almost always transitory” rarely dominating “a film the way a literary narrator dominates a novel”. Chatman claims that “the cinematic narrator is the composite of a large and complex variety of

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<sup>44</sup> The novel is entirely told from Zelda’s point of view, with Scott being seen constantly through Zelda’s eyes and through his own dialogues. In the series, however, there are a few occasions in which Scott appears on scene without Zelda in a way in which it can be perceived that he is “telling” the story, which gives the series a sense of more egalitarian representation of the Fitzgeralds than in Fowler’s novel. For instance, in the pilot episode, Scott’s first appearance is inside the back of a truck, hiding from his military duties trying to write his breakthrough novel. In a brief conversation with another fellow soldier that scolds him for not exercising his leadership as lieutenant, Scott gives him a poem that he has written so the other soldier can give it to his lover, after reminding him to keep the poem safe for in the future it will be highly valuable. It is a very good scene in which Scott’s complete lack of interest in war affairs is highlighted as well as his confidence in his future success (*Z: The Beginning of Everything*, Season 1, Episode 1, 00:04:46-00:00:07:06).

communicating devices” including the auditory channel (noise, voice, music, etc.) and the visual channel (props, performances, camera shots, angles, rhythm, etc.) (Chatman, 1990, pp. 134-135).

According to this definition of the cinematic narrator, Zelda Fitzgerald is highlighted as the teller of the story in the Amazon Prime series through a combination of techniques including the channels aforementioned. For instance, in the second episode, Scott and Zelda first meet at the Montgomery Country Club in 1918. She had attended the dance with her family and performed her ballet dance in front of the crowd. Lieutenant Fitzgerald, in turn, felt mesmerized by Zelda and the feeling was mutual. The following passage of Fowler’s novel emphasizes Zelda’s perspective and reinforces her role as narrator through her description:

A pair of tall boots paler than the others caught my eye. As I straightened, I followed the boots upward to olive-colored breeches, a fitted uniform tunic, and above it, an angelic face with eyes as green and expressive as the Irish Sea, eyes that snagged and held me as surely as a bug sticks in a web, eyes that contained the entire world in their smiling depths.

(Fowler, 2013, p. 21)

In the series, at the end of the first episode, Scott sees Zelda dancing and it looks like we are seeing through his eyes how enchanted he seems to feel when looking at Zelda’s every move, a parallelism with Zelda’s scrutiny of Scott in the extract from the novel. Also his characterization is very much in tune to Zelda’s description in the book, something that accompanies the mutual feeling of wonder. The slow motion rhythm accentuates as well Scott’s staring and fascination. All of that can be perceived through the combination of camera shots, alternating Scott’s close-ups in which we can see his facial expression and

images of Zelda's dance. There is also a change in the music: from the rhythm of violins to a more melodic sound of a piano, as if the rest of the room just felt silent and empty, and Zelda was alone there, dancing for Scott<sup>45</sup>. In a way the variation in the music is also significant for the representation of Zelda's character: she is alone there, focused, a brief and subtle advance of the passion she was going to dedicate to ballet dancing in the future.

An extradiegetic narrator<sup>46</sup> shows us afterwards how, while she is dancing with other men, she can't keep her eyes off him, inciting him with her look to go and invite her to dance. When he doesn't, she kisses the man she is dancing with in order to make him jealous but Scott simply vanishes, only to reappear later again and ask her to dance with him which clearly pleases Zelda. "Excuse me, old man", he says to Zelda's companion, "I believe this is my dance" (*Z: The Beginning of Everything*, Season 1, episode 1, 00:25:48-00:26:04). Zelda's face is then captured on scene, a wicked smile included, as she turns around to see Scott Fitzgerald in his shining uniform, a point-of-view shot that allows the audience to see what she sees by evolving to Scott's close-up, showing the satisfaction in the writer's face. Finally, the scene ends with another close-up, this time Zelda's, in which the title of the series seems to be fit: it is indeed the beginning of everything.

The whole scene is very significant, since it portrays Zelda's bold attitude and Scott's utter fascination with her and her personality without much dialogue introduced. It is also interesting because it establishes Zelda as narrator but gives Scott room to have a significant role in the story as well. As Zelda's words imply in the voice-over at the beginning of the series, and also as her introduction in Fowler's prologue suggests, the Fitzgeralds' life

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<sup>45</sup> This way, we are shown how the series makes room for Scott's point of view, and not exclusively for Zelda's perspective as happens with Fowler's novel.

<sup>46</sup> The camera movements show, as narration does, the characters' movements.

together is told in these particular recreations from Zelda's perspective, but everything was always about the two of them.

The same way the discourse and its components are adapted in order to bring more visibility and equality to the character of Zelda Fitzgerald – without excluding Scott –, the story per se, including elements such as the characters and the setting, are also adapted both in Fowler's novel and in the Amazon Prime series in a similar manner. In the following section I will focus on the adaptation of the second set of narratological elements that Chatman studied – the story: characters and setting, mainly – and how it is portrayed in the novel and the series through Stam's filters.

#### 4.2.2 Adaptation of the story: characters and setting

Undoubtedly, the most important character in the story and the one that offers the greatest contrast with previous adaptations about the life of the Fitzgeralds is Zelda. The mere fact that both the novel and the series that I am analyzing are focused on her perspective about the events surrounding her tumultuous life with the famous writer constitutes a filter representing how “auterist predilections” (Stam, 2000a, p. 69) can influence the story. By focusing on Zelda, both Fowler, Yorkin and Prestwich are making more visible a character that was cast as no more than a shadow of greatness, following the lead of other adaptations that put Zelda on the spotlight, such as the TV movie *Zelda* (1993) or Milford's book, *Zelda Fitzgerald: A Biography* (1970).

It was, therefore, very important to cast the most suitable actress for the part which constitutes another of Stam's filters, “charismatic stars” (2000a, p. 69), and how that deeply

influences the adaptation process in the series. Christina Ricci<sup>47</sup>, who showed a great interest in the story from the very beginning, became Zelda Fitzgerald in spite of the initial public distrust. In her review of the Amazon Prime series, Rabon Pennington (2016) argues that the creative team of the Amazon series “faced enormous critical skepticism from literary scholars and Fitzgerald enthusiasts alike” mainly because of the casting of Ricci. However, she continues, “the team effectively wins over doubters concerned about thirty-five-year-old actress Christina Ricci’s ability to inhabit the blonde and bold role of a teenage Zelda Sayre” (Pennington, 2016, p. 249). Similarly, Robert Lloyd (2017) claims that:

Christina Ricci, the former Wednesday Addams, may not be the first actress you’d imagine to play the belle of 1918 Montgomery, Ala. — physically, she doesn’t resemble Zelda at all — but she has spirit to burn, a fierce intelligence and in her mid-30s is both completely credible as a rule-bending, skinny-dipping, cigarette-smoking, party-loving teenager and not too young to play the character through the rest of her short, fabulous, finally circumscribed life.

(Lloyd, 2017)<sup>48</sup>

Focusing on the character per se, the characterization of Zelda is a most remarkable one in both Fowler’s novel and the Amazon Prime series, since it is adapted through ideological, contextual, and historical filters that make her more similar to 21<sup>st</sup> century women. Already a modern woman for her time, she went through considerable changes in both her mentality and her physical appearance upon making Mr. Fitzgerald’s acquaintance. Back in her

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<sup>47</sup> A great celebrity during the 1990s, Ricci starred in famous films including *The Adams Family* (1991-1993), *Casper* (1995), and *Sleepy Hollow* (1999), among others. Information available at *Film Index International*: <http://search.proquest.com/fii/docview/1745079839/54660CEAE7A46BDPQ/1?accountid=14542>

<sup>48</sup> Full article available at: <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/la-2017-movie-television-preview-z-the-beginning-of-everything-1484182365-htlmstory.html>

hometown, Montgomery, Alabama, she was the black sheep of the family, and the naughty girl among her friends. In the first pages of Fowler's novel, there is a passage where Zelda escapes her house with the clandestine permission of her mother but the utter prohibition by her father. Once she is out of the house, she takes off her stockings and shoes and happily walks barefooted, not caring about appropriateness, dominated by her characteristic drive for violating authority: "the second I was out of sight, I sat down in the grass and pulled off my shoes and stockings to free my toes. Too bad, I thought, that my own freedom couldn't be had so easily" (Fowler, 2013, p. 12). Similarly, in one of the first scenes in the series, Zelda runs home barefoot as well, already being late for dinner, after swimming naked in the lake with her friends (Season 1, episode 1, 00:02:40).

Those scenes present Zelda as a young woman whose Southern confinement was incapable of leashing her to tradition. However, she did possess a strong Southern characteristic: the accent. While Fowler represents accent in alterations of spelling when dialogues are exchanged, in the series Ricci's Zelda has a most noticeable Southern accent. This is a very important aspect about Zelda Fitzgerald that needs to be highlighted, mostly because once she arrives in New York to marry Scott, her accent will stand out as a personal brand, making her different from the rest. However, even when her way of speaking sounded distinctly, in New York her extrovert behavior was not that novel.

Even when there were society ladies whose manners and routines were similar to the ones Zelda had seen at home, New York City was full of all sorts of women, including the Bankheads, two fellow Southerners from Montgomery who had fled from Alabama to be actresses and whose lifestyle consisted in parties and random male company. Zelda soon found out that it had been the city that had changed the Bankheads, with its busy pace and its

thousands of parties. Determined, therefore, to acclimate to the new environment but without losing her true self, Zelda evolved into the iconic figure that would make her immortal. In the novel, it was a French “black, sleeveless and simply cut” dress “with just the slightest suggestion of a waistline” (Fowler, 2013, p. 121) and the famous bob hairstyle what established the physical change. At the sight of her new image, Zelda thought that the Parisian girls who wore those dresses were brave, but that she “was brave, too, New York brave, Paris brave, even” (Fowler, 2013, p. 123). In the series, Zelda buys a sheer pink dress and cuts her hair too and in a powerful scene in the hall of a hotel, Scott introduces “Mrs. Fitzgerald” – and her new image – to the photographers. Showing a restored confidence, she utters “you can call me Zelda” (Season 1, Episode 5, 00:22:09-00:22:31) and in a close-up shot, we can see her face of satisfaction: this time New York City would have to be the one changing for her.

It is the emphatic representation of Zelda’s boldness what levels her up with Scott’s historical representation. With the increasing attention that gender equality has been receiving these past few years, Zelda’s characterization evinces a very current cultural and social issue. Actually, in the series, Zelda participates in a suffragette demonstration which depicts her as fully committed to the fight for women’s rights (Season 1, Episode 3, 00:09:42-00:10:20). In Fowler’s novel, however, even when Zelda seems interested in listening to other women talking about equality, she is not that involved in the fight as she is in finding herself a husband and having fun (2013, pp. 46-48). With this contrast, we can see that, in the novel and the series the representation of Zelda is different, with its on-screen adapted portrayal being more attractive for a 21<sup>st</sup> century audience. An ideological filter more

thoroughly developed in the series, in *Z: The Beginning of Everything* Zelda is more independent, more modern even, more similar to today's women.

But what about Scott? Corynne Cirilli's interview (2017) to Ricci's co-star, the "Swedish-born Australian actor" David Hoflin, offers some insight at the actor's thought about his character. At some point in the interview, Hoflin argues that he read *This Side of Paradise* so he "could get a view of the way he [F. Scott Fitzgerald] thought of himself" (Cirilli, 2017)<sup>49</sup>, again pointing to the clear connection between Fitzgerald's works and characters and himself. Both in Fowler's novel and in the series, Mr. Fitzgerald's adaptation is always tight to either his life with Zelda or his nerve-wracking obsession with becoming the greatest writer of all time – aspects that were always connected. He wanted success, fame, and recognition as soon as he could get it, trying to never let any moment of weakness destroy neither his confidence and trust in his own talent nor his impeccable slicked back hair parted down the middle. When he met Zelda in 1918, every desire of prosperity he ever wanted intensified: he needed to become the person he wanted to be in order to have Zelda and together live the life that a successful writing career could provide. In a scene in the series in which Scott is having dinner at Zelda's house with her family, he is discussing with Judge Sayre, Zelda's father, his job aspirations. At the Judge's question "Writing is a real job?", Scott answers "Writing is not a real job. Not until you get paid for it but I plan on getting paid a lot for it someday", and he adds, "Mark Twain was a millionaire and Theodore Dreiser, they were voices of our generations", to what Judge Sayre implies "You are going to be our next Mark Twain?". Blatantly confident, Scott replies "No, sir. I'm going to be the next F.

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<sup>49</sup> Full article available at: <http://www.townandcountrymag.com/leisure/arts-and-culture/a9277/david-hoflin-f-scott-fitzgerald/>

Scott Fitzgerald” (Season 1, Episode 2, 00:06:12-00:07:02). In the novel, there is a similar conversation, but here Scott is nowhere to be seen. Instead, Zelda argues about Scott’s ambitions with the Judge, her father, as if she were a lawyer defending her client, not very successfully, though:

“Writing is a good pastime, a sign of an active mind – but it’s no way to earn a living. What does he do as a profession?” “Writing books can be a profession’, I said, even though I wasn’t certain this was so” [...] “Charles Dickens – he did it. And Henry James”. Daddy’s sour expression was his response. [...] “Scott Fitzgerald is not Dickens, Baby. Nor is he James – who had family wealth, by the way, as do Edith Wharton and the rest of them. He’s [...] an Irish Yankee pup who enjoys liquor too much, didn’t finish college, and is about to be shipped off to the war with no prospects afterward – assuming he comes back in one piece.”

(Fowler, 2013, pp. 33-34)

It is interesting to see the adaptation of this scene from the novel into the one in the series in which the direction of the conversation is completely turned around, that is, in the first one Scott wins the argument, knowing exactly how to make other people see what he sees instead of the fragment from the novel in which Zelda’s father ruthlessly destroys the image of Scott becoming a writer. In the series, therefore, the characterization of Scott as having that rush and thrill for succeeding, for becoming a famous writer aged 21, becomes very relatable nowadays since, with the great variety of Internet activities and the rise of popular culture, ordinary people can become known in a relatively short period of time. In literary grounds, with the easy methods of self-publication and the right amount of promotion, beginner writers can sell their books without any aid from publishing houses. In the entertainment industry, singers, actors, comedians... people with all sorts of talents become famous by posting videos

on the Internet and quickly having hundreds of followers. Similarly, Scott and Zelda's ambition and following success at increasing their fame and status may be one of the reasons, according to Christina Ricci in a 2017 interview about the series, why people like to revisit this period and the life of the Fitzgeralds: they established a change in the class system and became famous even when they had no titles, making ordinary people identify with them (00:09:44-00:10:01)<sup>50</sup>.

Apart from the characters, the setting is an important element in the story too. Although Fowler's novel covers their entire relationship, including the Fitzgeralds' adventures in Europe and briefly in Africa, in the first season of the Amazon Prime series we only move from Montgomery to New York City, and at the end, temporarily to Westport, Connecticut. During the first eight chapters of Fowler's novel, Zelda and Scott get to know each other and perform the back and forth dance of their early days as a couple of romantic idealists who neglected the future but could not stop thinking about it. It is during this first part of the book when we can see best the depiction of the South of the end of the Great War and its people who, away from the global conflict fought in Europe, rejoiced in the peace and quiet of the traditional customs and the natural surroundings.

In *Z: The Beginning of Everything*, Montgomery<sup>51</sup> is all about colonial houses and city halls. The indoor scenes in Zelda's house indicate her well-accommodated situation and the inclusion of an African American housewife indicates the time period and the general Southern atmosphere. The parties celebrated at the city hall include patriotic decoration and

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<sup>50</sup> "Amazon's *Z: The Beginning of Everything* with Christina Ricci and Author Therese Fowler" from "92<sup>nd</sup> Street Y" *YouTube* channel (2017). Full interview available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WrO0Bq2UTDc>

<sup>51</sup> As Pennington argues the Alabama scenes were shot in Savannah, Georgia (2016, p. 249).

Yankees from Camp Sheridan who, awaiting orders to ship for more dangerous destinations, try to enjoy, while they can, the company of the local ladies and avoid potential chaperon interventions. Both in Fowler's novel and the series, the South is presented as progressing slower than the rest of the world, as advancing at its own pace, unable to evolve into something other than that traditionally well-behaved community perpetuated for generations.

New York City, however, could not be more different. The whole aesthetic of the series is very much influenced by Baz Luhrmann's 2013 version of *The Great Gatsby* but the portrayal of *the city that never sleeps* is particularly reminiscent. In Fowler's novel, Zelda claims that "nothing can prepare the uninitiated for the truth of New York City" (2013, p. 71). Zelda's first image of the Big Apple is Pennsylvania Station. The wonder and shock that Fowler writes about is portrayed in the series with a very clever combination of shots: high-angle shots provide a sense of grandeur, and the point-of-view shots, when the camera positions either on Zelda's back or as if the audience were seeing exactly what Zelda sees, are a way to narrate her feelings, fascination, and excitement. When she is out of the station, there is a shot of the street where there is a historical depiction of the New York City of the 1920s, with the classic cabs of the time, the waves of pedestrians, and a Jazz song on the background (Season 1, Episode 4, 00:02:55-00:05:18).

New York is something else, something completely different from Montgomery. Seeing through Zelda's eyes, everything seems bigger, it moves faster, there are so many events, one may struggle to have a break. People were different from each other, could do what they wanted and no one would point their fingers at their actions. However, for Zelda and Scott the city would soon become a row of carpeted hotel rooms and parties at clubs in which the Prohibition Law – effective during the whole 20s and part of the 30s – was carelessly

disobeyed<sup>52</sup>. As in Luhrmann's *Gatsby* (2013), New York represents the temple of the forbidden, the epitome of uncontrolled freedom, and the home of immoral superficiality.

In an attempt at distancing themselves from the maddening rhythm of the city, the Fitzgeralds move to a beach house in Westport, Connecticut, during a vacation period, so Scott could focus entirely on writing his next novel, and Zelda could relax and explore her new life as a wife. At the beginning, in both the series and the novel, the new summer location is depicted as an idyllic place to relax: a very beautiful house next to the ocean. With time, Scott's reclusion in his study and Zelda's loneliness and monotonous routine give the place a sense of isolation, of too much quietness now that the loud parties have gone off. It is *the beginning of everything* after all: the beginning of their relationship but also the moment in which the first signs of imperfection in the Fitzgeralds' life make their noisy appearance.

The settings in the first season of the Amazon Prime series, as it is in the first chapters of Fowler's biographical novel, are connected to Zelda's perspective: they are perceived differently according to Zelda's own experiences and feelings from the very moment Scott enters her life. For instance, in the series, upon their arrival in Westport, the surroundings are just marvelous: the shining sea bathes the sandy beach right next to the house and Zelda is glowing. With Scott cloistered in his study writing, Zelda finds an enjoyable routine in swimming, cooking, practicing piano, etc. The images are accompanied by a lively Jazz rhythm that, as time goes by and Zelda starts to feel lonely, turns into a melancholic piano song that features alongside new images of Zelda swimming, and watching the neighbors' kids ran across the beach, making their stay in the coast less idyllic and more dull (Season 1,

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<sup>52</sup> In the novel, Scott and Zelda, while living in New York, go to a clandestine party given by "someone none of [them] met" in a basement in Greenwich Village, where people were smoking "a plant [...] like tobacco, but with enhancement" and drinking "the green liquor", that is, absinthe (Fowler, 2013, pp. 100-106).

Episode 8, 00:02:04-00:07:54). Likewise, in the novel, Zelda was thrilled at the beginning with their stay in Connecticut: “the house had a wide, deep front porch that reminded me of home, and sat on a road a few hundred feet away from the ocean – a happy fact that fascinated me. I’d never seen the ocean before then” (Fowler, 2013, pp. 114-115). Her frequent fights with Scott, however, would definitely blacken the environment: “now and then he and I would get a drink or two past our limits, a debate about, say, paganism versus Christianity would jump the fence of discourse and land in the slop trough of ugly argument” (Fowler, 2013, p. 118).

These aspects previously explored give the adaptation process involved in both Fowler’s novel and the Amazon Prime series a very refreshing light, a more realistic but also bittersweet image of the apparently fancy life that the Fitzgeralds always led. Even when it is based on a biographical novel, that is, on a fictional depiction of the Fitzgeralds, both Fowler’s novel and the Amazon Prime series’ portrayal of Scott and Zelda’s life together helps the knowable public to make up a more complete picture of the Jazz Age couple now that this particular version of Zelda’s perspective can be added to our previous information about F. Scott and about Zelda herself. Still, because the first season of the Amazon Prime series *Z: The Beginning of Everything* covers less than 150 pages of *Z: A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald*, future seasons could still withdraw material from Fowler’s novel and continue adapting – with the aid of further sources as they have been doing in the current season – the rest of the story of the Fitzgeralds’ interesting and iconic journey.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In the present work, I have explored the endless cycle of adaptation in which both F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald have been involved during and after their life together: from their inspiration on their own experiences for writing their acclaimed novels and stories, to the interest taken by filmmakers, biographers and other writers to adapt their life into films, novels, etc. The popular belief that claims that art in general and literature in particular are based on real life is taken to its truest level in the case of the Fitzgeralds.

This is interestingly seen in the two-layered adaptation that has been analyzed: Therese Anne Fowler's biographical novel *Z: A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald* (2013), an adaptation per se of the documented material that Fowler studied about the Jazz Age couple, transformed into the Amazon Prime Video series *Z: The Beginning of Everything* (Season 1, 2017) starring Christina Ricci and David Hoflin as Zelda and Scott respectively, which makes use of other sources to recreate the eventful life of the Fitzgeralds. I have tried to prove how these particular recreations of the life of Zelda and Scott Fitzgerald are somehow different from the vast amount of adaptations that have been made throughout the years about both their life and works.

To do that, I have first reviewed the path of adaptation studies over time, focusing mainly on biographical fiction, which for the purposes of this paper has taken the filmic – the biopic – and the literary - the biographical novel – form. Secondly, I have briefly explored the different recreations that have been made about anything that had to do with the Fitzgeralds: novels, films, memoirs, biographies, series, etc. Finally, I have analyzed, following Chatman (1978, 1990), the narrative elements of both the novel and the film – story and

discourse – including format, characters and setting – through a number of filters, studied by Stam (2000, 2005) that compose a more appealing portrayal of the life of the Fitzgeralds.

Nevertheless, this study is far from complete. With new projects regarding the Fitzgeralds around the corner – specially the figure of Zelda which seems to be the object of new films<sup>53</sup> and future seasons of the Amazon Prime series –, the most famous couple of the Roaring Twenties is as alive as ever. It would be very interesting and even necessary to further develop the research on the topic in future investigations in order to deepen into the numerous aspects which can be analyzed both in the chosen corpus and in other adaptations.

In the meantime, with this paper I have tried to focus on the way in which Zelda seems to be more highlighted but without diminishing Scott. I have also studied how the streaming platform in which the series is broadcast – Amazon Prime Video – is of great relevance for the reception by the public and the organization of the plot. But, most importantly, I have tried to emphasize the fact that everything about these historical figures that has been recreated in both Fowler’s novel and the Amazon Prime series, as well as in all the other artistic products that have derived from this topic, even when they are based on extensive and well-grounded data, are just our interpretation, our perspective of what really happened, of who they really were, what they thought, felt, or craved. The complete truth will always be known just by the Fitzgeralds.

**Total word count: 15778 (excluding footnotes, references, and appendix).**

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<sup>53</sup> See footnote 6.

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## APPENDIX: The life and works of the Fitzgeralds

It is a matter of public record that Francis Scott Fitzgerald is one of the greatest authors in the history of America. Born in St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1896, he ascribed to the 1920 post-Great-War mentality of *Carpe Diem* and so lived to the full the so-called Jazz Age which dominated this era while writing some of the best known works in American Literature such as *This Side of Paradise* (1920), *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922), *The Great Gatsby* (1925), or *Tender is the Night* (1934), as well as several remarkable short stories. Right by his side was his wife, Alabama-born Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald, the then considered embodiment of the 20s *flapper* girl. Together they went through a crazy journey going to parties, consuming alcohol and drugs, moving around from one place to the next, hobnobbing with the cultural elite of the times both in America and Europe. Their downfall, however, started very early in their marriage. Worn out because of excessive partying, drinking, and stress over work, Scott and Zelda “made each other miserable and contributed equally to the destruction of their marriage”, as Michael Shelden claims (2002). However, “all of that came later”<sup>54</sup>.

Linda De Roche’s companion book (2000) offers an overview of the life of the author and his wife. Scott dropped out college in Princeton to join the Army in the midst of the Great War, but, as De Roche claims, this determination was not inspired by his “patriotic fervor”. She argues that “he was largely indifferent to the great historical events of his era and joined the army primarily for social reasons”. His greatest ambition was not becoming a great military figure, but to become a novelist and both college and the Army seemed to be no more than obstacles in his attempt to succeed in the literary world (De Roche, 2000, pp. 4-

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<sup>54</sup> Quote from the TV series *Z: The Beginning of Everything*, Season 1, Episode 1 (00:00:55).

5). Still, his brief and not very conflictive trajectory in the military force brought him something that his university life had just poorly provided before: love. Stationed in Camp Sheridan in Alabama in 1918 while awaiting orders to ship towards France, Scott Fitzgerald attended a summer dance in a Montgomery country club that would change everything. There she met Zelda Sayre, “the pampered daughter of a prominent Montgomery, Alabama, family [who] represented [...] the thoroughly modern new woman” (De Roche, 2000, p. 5).

In their collection of letters titled *Dear Scott, Dearest Zelda* (2003), Jackson R. Bryer and Cathy W. Barks discussed the way in which “the war imbued the local courtship rituals with an even greater sense of urgency and romanticism than usual” (2003, p. 4). Because “careers for women were still discouraged” in 1918, women’s aspirations should aim no higher than marriage but since Zelda was the daughter of a “prominent judge, [she was] expected to achieve distinction” on these grounds (Bryer and Barks, 2003, p. 3). The instant passion in which Scott and Zelda’s relationship was wrapped from the very beginning did not convince many people neither in Scott’s circle nor in Zelda’s. That was one of the reasons why Judge Sayre, Zelda’s father, never really supported her daughter’s relationship with Scott.

During their courtship and following engagement, the situation got complicated mainly because of Scott’s struggle with the publication of his first novel, originally titled *The Romantic Egoist*. Released from his military responsibilities due to the convenient end of warfare before his hands ever got dirty, Scott traveled to New York after promising Zelda the literary success that would elevate his status and allow him to marry her. Instead, he started working in advertising, a job that he despised and that filled him with a sense of failure and lack of confidence that he expressed to Zelda in his letters and that also made her doubt

about her future with him. It wasn't until 1919, after their engagement had previously been broken, when following the publication – thanks to Max Perkins from Scribner's Sons – of Scott's first novel, renamed *This Side of Paradise*, that Scott and Zelda finally made amends and got married in New York, setting the starting point in their lives and in their experience of the Roaring 1920s (Bryer and Barks, 2003, p. 5).

Bryer and Barks argue in their collection of letters that the misleading idea that Zelda married Scott only once he had become famous and rich is simply false. She was risking everything by marrying a man that wanted to make a living out of writing books – a hazardous job at least at that time in history –, a man that her father did not accept, a man that promised her the world. Zelda knew she was going to miss her hometown, her family, everything she had ever known, but love was stronger (Bryer and Barks, 2003, p. 6). However, “the great paradox of their love affair is that the same traits that attracted them to each other would also create chaos and conflict in their lives” (Bryer and Barks, 2003, p. 7).

What followed the ‘I do’ was a series of nomadic patterns, financial difficulties, obsessions with success, with being famous, known, admired. De Roche notes that, “settling nowhere and living everywhere, the Fitzgeralds gave as their address a series of hotel rooms and rented houses” (2000, p. 6). In the whirl of this new life, Zelda got pregnant with their only child, Frances Scott Fitzgerald, later known as Scottie, in 1921. The couple went to Europe then, where Zelda spent most of her pregnancy before coming back to America and giving birth to their baby daughter in 1922, a date that coincided with the publication of Scott's second novel *The Beautiful and Damned*<sup>55</sup>. Afterwards, while Scott wrote and later

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<sup>55</sup> Zelda got pregnant again sometime after Scottie's birth but neither Scott nor Zelda wanted to have another child so soon, so, as Bryer and Barks discuss, their return to America could have been caused not only due to the publication of Scott's second novel but also for Zelda to have an abortion (2003, p. 54).

published his collection of stories *The Tales of the Jazz Age* (1922), Zelda “began to publish short humorous pieces in newspapers and magazines including a tongue-in-cheek review of *The Beautiful and Damned* in *The New York Tribune*” (Bryer and Barks, 2003, p. 54), starting in this subtle way her literary career.

After Scott’s failed incursion in the world of theatre with his only play *The Vegetable* in 1923, and during a period of creative blockage, the Fitzgeralds set off to France. De Roche claims that, “there, in an alien culture for which he had no great love or deep understanding and about which he had no real interest in learning, Fitzgerald and his family would spend most of the remainder of the decade” (2000, p. 8). In the Riviera, where they had been settled since 1924, Scott wrote his third and “most perfectly realized work of art”, his novel *The Great Gatsby*, “published to almost universal acclaim” in 1925 (De Roche, 2000, p. 9).

Even when Scott enjoyed a certain degree of popularity, lived in France surrounded by the cultural elite of the times, and had the support and company of her wife and daughter, his life was not as idyllic as it looked. While he was writing *Gatsby*, Zelda met a French aviator with whom she allegedly had an affair<sup>56</sup>. The deterioration in their marriage, however, began soon after this incident. De Roche notes that, on the one hand, “Zelda’s infidelity heightened Scott’s jealousy and insecurities”, and on the other hand, “his success contributed to her frustrated desire for an artistic identity of her own”. Both of them then entered in a downward vortex of self-destruction as “their behavior became increasingly [...] bizarre in response to their personal and professional disappointments” (De Roche, 2000, p. 9).

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<sup>56</sup> Bryer and Barks discuss, though, that “the actual extent of the relationship will probably never be known” (2003, p. 56).

Everything got heightened by the too close friendship that Scott developed with Ernest Hemingway during the Fitzgeralds' stay in France. Zelda did not like Hemingway at all, so her fights with Scott over his closeness with his fellow writer friend were constant. Hemingway influenced Scott's life profoundly, mainly because Scott saw himself as Hemingway's sponsor in the literary world and relied sometimes too much on his opinions not only about Scott's professional life, but also about his personal life with Zelda. Bryer and Barks state that Hemingway and Scott's relationship was "at-times-supportive, albeit always uneasy and complicated" (2003, p. 57). All the time that Hemingway and Scott spent together, Zelda attended ballet classes taught by the famous Russian ballet dancer Lubov Egorova. She combined dancing with writing, although most of the fiction that she wrote during those years was published under a joined byline with Scott, an issue that caused fights between Zelda and her husband (Bryer and Barks, 2003, p. 60). The enormous stress under which she put herself because of her artistic ambition and the problems at home with Scott provoked her first breakdown in 1930, after which she started to be treated for schizophrenia in a Swiss sanatorium (De Roche, 2000, p. 10). From this moment onwards, the Fitzgeralds' life changed forever.

The Fitzgeralds sailed back to America once Zelda was released from the sanatorium in 1931, and settled in her hometown, Montgomery, Alabama (De Roche, 2000, p. 11). The following year, Zelda Fitzgerald published her first novel – completely solo this time – titled *Save Me the Waltz*, which she had written during the few months in which she had been hospitalized. Scott's fourth novel *Tender is the Night*, in turn, was published in 1934, nine years after *The Great Gatsby*. The fact that both novels contained similar plots based on the same set of biographical details was product of long discussion between Scott and Zelda.

However, as Bryer and Barks claim, their lives belonged to both of them, so none of them could ever claim exclusive rights to their materials (2003, p. 146). Both books ended up being published without excessively overlapping with each other, becoming “one of the most interesting pair of novels in American literary history” (Bryer and Barks, 2003, p. 147).

Following a series of intermittent periods working in Hollywood as screenwriter during the 1930s, De Roche argues that by 1935, Scott, “suffering from tuberculosis and alcoholism, [...] struggled with his demons: guilt over his role in Zelda’s breakdowns, anxiety about his waning success, and, above all, regret for his squandered talent and damaged literary legacy” (2000, p. 12). Zelda, in turn, continued their regular nomadic lifestyle but this time on her own and moving from one hospital to the next. Too ill to take care of their daughter Scottie, they sent her to a boarding school in Connecticut, at the care of Harold Ober – Scott’s literary agent – and his family (Bryer and Barks, 2003, p. 219).

In 1937, Scott moved to Hollywood to resume his career as screenwriter which did not last long. While living in California, he devoted the last years of his life to what would be his last novel *The Last Tycoon*. Away from her wife for several years, Scott had an affair in Hollywood with a gossip columnist called Sheilah Graham, who, according to De Roche, “cared enough to help him battle his alcoholism and thus to regain a measure of self-control” (2000, p. 13). Nevertheless, Bryer and Barks claim, he continued a regular correspondence with Zelda. They note that “their final letters present to us two mature individuals who dealt with later losses far better and more wisely than they had dealt with their early success” (Bryer and Barks, 2003, pp.271-272).

Francis Scott Fitzgerald died of a heart attack in Hollywood on December 21<sup>st</sup>, 1940. Eight years later, in 1948, Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald died in a night fire in the Highland Hospital

in Asherville, North Carolina. They were buried together at St. Mary's Church Cemetery in Rockville, Maryland. De Roche argues that both Zelda and Scott Fitzgerald's life was "as tragically romantic as the lives of his most memorable characters" (2000, p.14). Bryer and Barks, in turn, claim that "the Fitzgeralds' lives were unduly short; and they were tragic, but tragic in the best sense" because they encouraged us "to love life and to desire it both because of and spite of its persistent losses" (2003, p.387).

As the famous couple that they were, all that public information about the Fitzgeralds seems rather literary. The truth, however, lies in the fact that they were just two people in love whose feelings and experiences could only be fully acknowledged by themselves. Nevertheless, it is inevitable to still wonder about what inspired their stories and their life decisions.