

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

ZELDA FITZGERALD'S SAVE ME THE WALTZ:

A CRITICAL REAPPRAISAL

by

VALDINE CLEMENS

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF

MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

1985

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank Dr. John J. Teunissen, whose knowledge of myth and myth theory has greatly enhanced my appreciation of literature, and my advisor Dr. Evelyn J. Hinz, whose guidance, insight, criticism, and encouragement were indispensable in the writing of this thesis.

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis studies stylistic and thematic elements of Zelda Fitzgerald's Save Me the Waltz in order to demonstrate that technically it is a considerably more sophisticated work than has heretofore been recognized, and that its style is highly organic, intricate, and integrated with theme.

Thematically, the work addresses the problem of breakdown in cultural and religious values, and the implications of that breakdown for modern artistic and literary expression. The problems of the protagonist, Alabama Beggs, are in many ways representative of this larger cultural dilemma. Also, her story is told from a distinctly feminine perspective and in this respect is relevant to contemporary women's issues.

The first chapter deals with some of the work's significant aesthetic techniques, such as patterns of cyclicity, prose rhythm, and metaphoric style. The second chapter examines various other art forms, including ballet, that are introduced organically throughout Save Me the Waltz, and their implications for literary theory. The third chapter concerns the problem of identity, and traces Alabama's development from an egotistic to a mythic sense of self, again bringing in the literary ramifications of this development, as well as discussing the feminist critique that is involved in the portrayal of her predicament. The last chapter examines the theme of the degeneration of patriarchy and concomitant breakdown in religious symbolism, and explores Alabama's descent into the Christian

myth.

My critical approach is interdisciplinary, inter-artistic, and archetypal. I wish to show that although Save Me the Waltz was a commercial failure when it was published in 1932, it anticipates some major concerns and techniques of more recent twentieth-century literature, and could probably be more readily appreciated today than it was at the time of its first publication.

"I am so utterly forsaken that, to any divine image  
whatsoever, I offer my impulses toward perfection."

Arthur Rimbaud

## INTRODUCTION

Save Me the Waltz was first published by Scribner's in October, 1932. At the time its author, Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald, was a patient in a mental asylum, Phipps Clinic of Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore. Most of the novel was composed there within about a six-week period during February and March of the same year, although some of it had been written earlier in Florida and Montgomery, Alabama.<sup>1</sup> Before it was finally accepted for publication by Scribner's, it was extensively revised at the insistence of the author's husband F. Scott Fitzgerald, who was infuriated by what he perceived as personal exposure that would be detrimental to his own reputation, and also by what he felt was his wife's trespassing on his own literary territory.<sup>2</sup>

The book was a commercial failure, earning Zelda Fitzgerald only \$120.73.<sup>3</sup> Inadequate proofreading did not enhance its reception, for although according to Max Perkins the proofreading costs were exceptionally high,<sup>4</sup> it has been widely recognized that "Save Me the Waltz is one of the most sloppily-edited novels ever produced by a distinguished American publisher."<sup>5</sup> Two more editions of the work have nevertheless been printed, one in 1953 by Grey Walls Press in London (apparently with a favorable critical reception),<sup>6</sup> and another in 1967 by Southern Illinois University Press, in their Crosscurrents/Modern Fiction series.

When the first edition was published, several critics noted the editing problems, and also found the author's use of metaphor somewhat confusing.



Although impressed by the vigor and originality of the work, they complained that these qualities were obscured by the "almost ludicrous lushness of writing" that a more astute or interested editor should have seen fit to curb.<sup>7</sup> One reviewer felt that Save Me the Waltz was "vibrant" and "sensitive," but criticized the "constant recurrence of exaggerated images."<sup>8</sup> Another wrote that the author "has created almost another language and when this does prove intelligible its effect is devastating."<sup>9</sup> The Forum critic noted "a talent for crisp dialogue and . . . a pleasant sense of the humorous," but felt that the "extremely involved prose style" clogged the book.<sup>10</sup>

Some critics argued that the book lacked overall structural coherence, although they admired the power of its writing. H. R. Pinckard wrote that despite the novel's "weird vocabulary . . . [and] narrative incoherence . . . . for some reason which I probably shall not be able to explain, I did read it. Stranger still, I received an extraordinary number of emotional reactions from characters who were unconvincing and from situations which were definitely vague."<sup>11</sup> Arthur Mizener, reviewing the 1967 edition, described Save Me the Waltz as a "remarkable book" of "flawed impressiveness," marred by too many "abrupt transitions, omissions of obligatory scenes, and over-development of logically insignificant ones." Although he also pointed out that its "violent style" was a deliberate effect, a conscious abandonment of novelistic conventions, in his opinion that attempt failed to come off partly because of "rhetorical incompetence," and also because Zelda sometimes "failed to distinguish between the merely schizoid discontinuities of her imagination and the difficult but meaningful ones that defined the . . . fullness of response which was her reality."<sup>12</sup>

Mizener's observation about the deliberate abandonment of novelistic conventions was astute, but unfortunately he failed to apply this insight to his own interpretation of the text. As I shall demonstrate, Save Me the Waltz is in fact both unified and coherent, not in terms of conventional novelistic standards of linear plot progression, but in terms of both overall structure and patterns of metaphor.

Another problem with criticism of Save Me the Waltz is that much of it has been conducted by Scott Fitzgerald scholars, who quite naturally tend to privilege his work over Zelda's, and to regard her work primarily in terms of its relation to his. Matthew Bruccoli, the textual editor of the 1967 Crosscurrents/Modern Fiction edition, has stated that "the blunt fact is that Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald's work is interesting today mainly because she was F. Scott Fitzgerald's wife."<sup>13</sup> H. T. Moore, in his introduction to this edition, compares Save Me the Waltz to another work by a woman--The Journey Down (1938) by Alice Bernstein, who had provided the female model for some of the women in Thomas Wolfe's novels as Zelda had for those in Scott's; "The Journey Down, the work of a sensitive and gifted woman, is only a thin echo of Wolfe's own writing vitality, but the novel has an importance for those who want to view Wolfe from a special angle, that of a woman in love with him." Moore grants Zelda only a "flair" and a "surface ability" to write, but does allow that although her work lacks the "finished craftsmanship" of Scott's fiction it does draw upon many "modernistic attitudes for its effects of style" and deserves to be read for its own sake.<sup>14</sup> Moore neglects, however, to consider what these "modernistic attitudes" might be--although he does devote a full page of his four and a half page introduction to a description of Scott's prolonged and laborious composition of Tender is the Night.

The autobiographical nature of Save Me the Waltz has also presented difficulties in critical evaluation. Zelda's biographer Nancy Milford describes it as being "naively autobiographical," and suggests that "because it is so deeply autobiographical, the transmutation of reality into art is incomplete."<sup>15</sup> As many writers and critics have recently noted, however, it is characteristic of women's writing in general that the distinction between "art" and "reality" can be confusingly blurry, so that "[w]omen's novels are often called autobiographical, women's autobiographies, novelistic."<sup>16</sup> Critics tend to treat Zelda and Alabama as one and the same person, ignoring the author's use of the third person voice. Henry Dan Piper, for example, explained that most of the textual problems in exposition in Save Me the Waltz disappear as the work progresses because "once Zelda reaches the point where her life takes on purpose and meaning--in the dancing studio of Egorova--the chaos in her writing (and her mind) disappears."<sup>17</sup>

This assumption of a direct autobiographical connection, in overlooking the extent of the fictional transposition that has actually occurred in the text, tends to underestimate the considerable technical skill with which it has been shaped. As Milford tells us, Zelda did keep a personal diary, which George Jean Nathan, who with H. L. Mencken edited The Smart Set, once offered to publish. Scott refused the offer on the grounds that "he had gained a lot of inspiration from them and wanted to use parts of them in his own novels and short stories." Zelda, twenty years old and in the first year of her marriage to Scott, did not object.<sup>18</sup> Whether she acquiesced to his plagiarism out of love for him, or out of a belief that the diary did not constitute "serious" and therefore publishable writing, or out of adherence to the flapper code of frivolity she then espoused,<sup>19</sup>

and whether or not she later regretted her acquiescence, we do not know. But it is probably safe to surmise that in regard to the relationship between her diary writing and her fiction, she would have agreed with Anais Nin, who said that her novels were extensions of her diaries, but in the sense that they expressed a "reality pushed to its mythical other dimension--the further dimension."<sup>20</sup>

More recently, efforts have been made to evaluate Save Me the Waltz on the basis of its own independent merits. Meredith Carey (1978) has argued in the Fitzgerald/Hemingway Annual that to read Save Me the Waltz merely as the autobiographical document of a diseased imagination and "the losing side of a novelistic duel" is to miss the work's "impressive artistic control of both form and content . . . [that is] thoughtfully and carefully balanced."<sup>21</sup> Jacqueline Tavernier-Courbin (1979) sees the book as "one of the earliest studies of the predicament of women in a male-dominated society."<sup>22</sup> And Linda W. Wagner (1982) praises it as a "haunting novel" in which prose rhythm is adapted to emotional tone with remarkable artistic effect.<sup>23</sup>

This continued interest in a work which has been out of print for almost twenty years can be partly attributed to the increasing academic interest in women's writing in general, for as Tavernier-Courbin has pointed out, the story is told from a distinctively female perspective, and offers a penetrating critique of patriarchal society. But there are also other reasons for the strong emotional response the work arouses in some readers.

Like her literary contemporaries F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway, Zelda Fitzgerald addresses in her novel the issue of cultural failure, which becomes especially poignant in the light of a woman's

perspective. The personal collapse of the protagonist is presented in part as an index of a larger collapse in cultural values. Conversely, her story also documents a development in awareness from an egotistic and romantic perspective to a mythic world view, from grasping her problems initially as "affairs peculiar to herself" to understanding them later as "racial heritages."<sup>24</sup> In addition, the author incorporates a discussion of literary theory into Save Me the Waltz, examining various art forms and their implications for the literary artist, so that the theme of personal identity becomes integrated with the question of literary identity or form, and simultaneously expands from a question of social and biological determinants to one of cosmic identity and fate. Accordingly, the significance of Save Me the Waltz lies not only in its acute representation of specific social and historical conditions, and its largely unappreciated technical skill, but also in its exploration of fundamental questions of human existence, and the role of art in the life of the spirit.

INTRODUCTION

NOTES

<sup>1</sup>See Nancy Milford, Zelda (New York: Avon Books, 1970), pp. 252-53, 260-61; and Sara Mayfield, Exiles From Paradise (New York: Delacorte Press, 1971), pp. 180-81, 183.

<sup>2</sup>See Milford, pp. 262, 307, 328. On Scott's role in editing, also see Jacqueline Tavernier-Courbin, "Art as Woman's Response and Search: Zelda Fitzgerald's Save Me the Waltz." Southern Literary Journal, 11, No. 2 (1979), p. 24.

<sup>3</sup>Milford, p. 318.

<sup>4</sup>Letter from Max Perkins to Zelda, 2 August 1933, in Milford, p. 318.

<sup>5</sup>Matthew J. Bruccoli, "A Note on the Text," in Save Me the Waltz, Zelda Fitzgerald (1932; rpt. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press; London and Amsterdam: Feffer & Simons, Inc., 1967), p. 241.

<sup>6</sup>This is according to Harry T. Moore, in his Introduction to Save Me the Waltz (1932; rpt. 1967), p. x.

<sup>7</sup>Dorothea Brande, rev. of Save Me the Waltz, Bookman, 75 (November 1932), p. 735.

<sup>8</sup>Anon. rev. of Save Me the Waltz, Books, 30 October 1932, p. 10.

<sup>9</sup>Anon. (W.E.H.) rev. of Save Me the Waltz, Boston Transcript, 30 November 1932, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup>Anon. Rev. of Save Me the Waltz, Forum, 88 (December 1932), p. xi.

<sup>11</sup>H. R. Pinckard, "Fitzgerald's Wife Presents Her First Book," Huntington (W.V.) Advertiser, 30 October 1932 [unverified]. In Ray Lewis White, "Zelda Fitzgerald's Save Me the Waltz: A Collection of Reviews from 1932-1933," in Fitzgerald/Hemingway Annual 1979, eds. Matthew J. Bruccoli and Richard Layman (Detroit: Book Tower, 1980), p. 167.

<sup>12</sup>Arthur Mizener, "The Good Gone Times," rev. of Save Me the Waltz, NYTBR, 13 August 1967, pp. 1, 32-33.

<sup>13</sup>Bruccoli, preface to Bits of Paradise (London: The Bodley Head, 1973), p. 11.

<sup>14</sup>Moore, pp. vii-ix.

<sup>15</sup>Milford, pp. 262-63, 271.

<sup>16</sup>Judith Kegan Gardiner, "On Female Identity and Writing by Women," in Writing and Sexual Difference, ed. Elizabeth Abel (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 185.

<sup>17</sup>Henry Dan Piper, F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Critical Portrait (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), p. 200.

<sup>18</sup>George Jean Nathan, "Memories of Fitzgerald, Lewis and Dreiser," Esquire (October 1958), pp. 148-49. Quoted in Milford, p. 98.

<sup>19</sup>See Zelda's "Eulogy on the Flapper," Metropolitan Magazine, June 1922. Reproduced in The Romantic Egoists, eds. Matthew J. Bruccoli, Scottie Fitzgerald Smith, and Joan P. Kerr (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974), p. 78.

<sup>20</sup>Anais Nin, in Anais Nin: A Woman Speaks, ed. Evelyn J. Hinz (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1975), p. 175.

<sup>21</sup>Meredith Carey, "Save Me the Waltz as a Novel," in Fitzgerald/Hemingway Annual 1976, ed. Matthew Bruccoli (Englewood, Colorado: Indian Head, Inc., 1978), pp. 65, 66. Unfortunately Carey does not develop the relationship between form and content to any significant extent.

<sup>22</sup>Tavernier-Courbin, p. 31. About half of her article, however, is devoted to the biographical background.

<sup>23</sup>Linda W. Wagner, "Save Me the Waltz: An Assessment in Craft," The Journal of Narrative Technique, 12 (1982), pp. 209, 201.

<sup>24</sup>Zelda Fitzgerald, Save Me the Waltz (1932; rpt. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press; London and Amsterdam: Feffer & Simons, Inc., 1967), p. 7. Subsequent parenthetical references will be to this edition.

CHAPTER I

THE ART OF SAVE ME THE WALTZ

Save Me the Waltz is the story of a rebellious and beautiful Southern belle named Alabama Beggs who, raised in a protective and traditional home environment, marries a successful young artist by the name of David Knight and moves with him in the early 1920's to New York. After a hectic, exciting period there, they travel with their young child Bonnie to France. In Provence Alabama almost has an extramarital affair with a handsome French Lieutenant. The affair is never consummated, but Alabama's husband, knowing about it, indulges in an overnight tryst of his own after the family has moved to Paris.

Insecure in her marriage and disillusioned with the decadent social life of Paris, Alabama decides to study the ballet. After prolonged training and perseverance, she is given a position in a ballet company in Naples, where she journeys to give her first successful public performance. Then she develops a foot infection and becomes seriously ill, whereupon her husband and daughter (who have stayed behind in Paris and then Switzerland) rejoin her. At the same time, news arrives that her father is dying, and when she is better the family goes back to America for Judge Beggs' death and funeral. Because the infection necessitated the cutting of tendons in her feet, Alabama can no longer dance, and is once again confined to her former roles of wife, mother, and party hostess.

The title of the book is somewhat ironic. There is only one scene in which Alabama and David are actually described waltzing together, and in



that, he is tripping over her feet (p. 47). Although the title seems to prepare the reader for a courtly romance, in fact the work's central concerns lie within its examination of dance as an art as opposed to a social custom,<sup>1</sup> and--as the first two words suggest--the problem of personal salvation.

Structurally, Save Me the Waltz is divided into four sections, each corresponding to a particular phase in Alabama's life, which may be described as innocence, experience, aspiration, and resignation. The work has a highly organic style, in which prose rhythm, structure, and patterns of imagery are adapted to the thematic concerns of identity, creativity, and the problem of perception.

It is one of the achievements of Save Me the Waltz that much of its meaning is conveyed at levels below the threshold of conscious perception. In studying the dance, Alabama comes to realize that her primary task is that of developing the non-intellectual dimensions of her own awareness. When her dilettante acquaintances question the worth of her dancing, she reflects that "'Why,' was something the Russian [her teacher] understood and Alabama almost understood. She felt she would know when she could listen with her arms and see with her feet. It was incomprehensible that her friends should feel only the necessity to hear with their ears (p. 143).

Alabama's concern is reflected as a principle of literary practice in Save Me the Waltz, which one critic has described as a "tone poem" because of the way in which Zelda Fitzgerald has utilized prose rhythm to convey emotional mood.<sup>2</sup> Reader response is stimulated not only at the intellectual level, but also at the emotional/physiological level of experience, for each phase of Alabama's life is recounted in its own tempo,

and the very act of reading involves a participation in, and recreation of, the pace, rhythm, and mood of that particular period. In order to illustrate the effectiveness of this technique, I have selected what I believe to be representative passages from each book.

In the first period of childhood safety and innocence, the prose (although occasionally punctuated by outbursts of defiance) moves mainly in a smooth, undulating, wave-like harmony, with all the restfulness of a lullaby:

From the orchard across the way the smell of ripe pears floats over the child's bed. A band rehearses waltzes in the distance. White things gleam in the dark--white flowers and paving-stones. The moon on the window panes careens to the garden and ripples the succulent exhalations of the earth like a silver paddle . . . .

Thinking, she thinks romantically on her sister's beau. Randolph's hair is like nacre cornucopias pouring forth those globes of light that make his face. She thinks that she is like that inside, thinking in this nocturnal confusion of her emotions with her response to beauty. . . . To herself, she appropriates her sister's love affair. Her alertness makes her drowsy. She has achieved a suspension of herself with the strain of her attenuated dreams. She falls asleep. The moon cradles her tanned face benevolently. She grows older sleeping (pp. 7-8).

In the second period, as Alabama steps into the high, glittering life of New York with her aspiring artist husband, the tempo quickens, becoming progressively more hectic, uneven, and jagged. There is more extended dialogue, which also becomes increasingly disjointed and uneven:

"Good--by--e!"

"Don't we adore each other?"

Vincent Youmans wrote the music for those twilights just after the war. They were wonderful. They hung above the city like an indigo wash, forming themselves from asphalt dust and sooty shadows under the cornices and limp

gusts of air exhaled from closing windows. They lay above the streets like a white fog off a swamp. Through the gloom, the whole world went to tea. . . .

People waiting for other people twisted the tips off the palms into brown moustache-ends and ripped short slits about their lower leaves. . . . Debutantes said to each other "Isn't that the Knights?" and "I met him at a prom. My dear, please introduce me."

"What's the use? They're c-r-a-z-y about each other," smelted into the fashionable monotone of New York. . . .

Serious people took them seriously; David made speeches about visual rhythm and the effect of nebular physics on the relation of the primary colors. Outside the windows, fervently impassive to its own significance, the city huddled in a gold-crowned conference. The top of New York twinkled like a golden canopy behind a throne. David and Alabama faced each other incompetently--you couldn't argue about having a baby.

"So what did the doctor say?" he insisted. (pp. 45-46)

That the author is highly conscious of this adaptation of rhythm to mood is indicated by a narrative commentary near the end of Part II; "In her deepest moods of discontent, Alabama, on looking back, found the overlying tempo of that period as broken and strident as trying to hum a bit of 'La Chatte'" (p. 111). Alabama's reflection is framed in a series of rather discordant dialogues in which everyone is talking but nobody seems to be listening:

"But what a 'lahvely' night!" Hastings proffered facetiously.

"Weather is for children."

Somebody mentioned the moon.

"Moons?" said Alabama contemptuously. "They're two for five at the Five and Ten, full or crescent."

"But this is an especially nice one, Madam. It has an especially fashionable way of looking at things!" (p. 111)

Several pages later we have the same characters, the same party, and the same broken, aimless chatter that reinforces the overall effect of discontinuity:

"In the meantime, it is exceedingly difficult to direct a life which has no direction."

"You've a child, haven't you?"

"Yes," she said "there's the baby--  
life goes on."

"This party," said Dickie, "has been going on forever. They're saving the signatures on the earliest checks for the war museum."

"What we need is new blood in the party."

"What we all need," said Alabama impatiently, "is a good ----" (p. 115).

The third section, as we are informed in the first paragraph, is one of "[e]ffort and aspiration, excitement, discipline, and an overwhelming seriousness" (p. 119). The prose describing Alabama's struggle to become a professional dancer is characterized by sharp, self-contained phrases:

A man sat sketching on a broken iron chair; two heavy bearded personages of the theatre pointed to first one, then another of the girls; a boy in black tights with his head in a bandana . . . and the face of a mythical pirate pulverized the air with ankle beats.

Mysteriously the ballet grouped itself. Silently it unfolded its mute clamor in the seductive insolence of black jetes, insouciant pas de chats, the abandon of many pirouettes, launched its fury in the spring and stretch of the Russian stchay, and lulled itself to rest in a sweep of cradling chasses. Nobody spoke. The room was as still as a cyclone centre.

"You like it?" said Madame implacably (p. 123).

Later, the disintegration of the marital relationship is similarly described in clipped, short statements that reveal Alabama's growing

preoccupation and distractedness, her sense of having reduced her life to what seem to be its barest elements:

David complained that her room smelled of eau de Cologne. There was always a pile of dirty clothes in the corner. The voluminous ruffles of the skirts wouldn't fit in the closets or drawers. She wore herself to a frazzle, and didn't notice about the room. (p. 145)

David said he would help her to become a fine dancer, but he did not believe that she could become one. He had many friends in Paris. When he came from his studio he nearly always brought somebody home. They dined out amongst the prints of Montagne's, the leather and stained glass of Foyot's, the plush and bouquets of the restaurants around the Place de l'Opera. If she tried to induce David to go home early, he grew angry. (p. 153).

The final section of the book is concerned with failure and death. Bonnie's visit to her mother in Naples is a fiasco; Alabama's performance is a success but she is too emotionally exhausted to savor it; she develops the foot infection that ruins her hopes of a career in dance; and her father dies. The tone gradually becomes one of distance and removal, isolation and resignation. This last section is the only one in which there is an extended passages that does not include Alabama, in the account of David's and Bonnie's time together in Switzerland. Alabama's fever-induced hallucinations are also suggestive of her sense of withdrawal from the surrounding world. The prose gradually develops a flat smoothness, with longer pauses between the phrases that seem to evoke the growing silence and solitude of Alabama's life. In the delirium of her fever she imagines that the walls are moving: "The walls of the room slid quietly past, dropping one over the other like the leaves of a heavy album. They were all shades of gray and rose and mauve. There was no sound when they fell" (p. 193).

When Alabama and David arrive in her home town, the verbal rhythm again

creates a mood of pause and retreat: "The David Knights stepped out of the old brick station. The Southern town slept soundless on the wide palette of the cotton-fields. Alabama's ears were muffled by the intense stillness as if she had entered a vacuum. Negroes, lethargic and immobile, draped themselves on the depot steps like effigies to some exhausted god of creation. The wide square, masked in velvet shadows, drowned in the lull of the South, spread like soft blotting paper under man and his heritage" (pp. 195-96).

The last paragraph of the book, with its pauses and repetitions, is reminiscent of the liquid quality in the earlier descriptions of Alabama's childhood, but the brevity of the individual phrases, and the passage as a whole, conveys a sense of emotional depletion that was not there before: "They sat in the pleasant gloom of late afternoon, staring at each other through the remains of the party; the silver glasses, the silver tray, the traces of many perfumes; they sat together watching the twilight flow through the calm living room . . . like the clear cold current of a trout stream" (p. 212).

The correspondence between rhythm and theme is clearly too consistent throughout the text to be merely accidental, and suggests a high degree of literary intention and aesthetic intuition on the part of the author. The fact that this quality has been largely unrecognized by readers may be due partly to the editorial problems already suggested, but it may also be because our critical tradition has had a tendency to ignore the non-intellectual aspects of reader response.

The author's sensitivity to rhythm, and what another writer has termed "the meaning of sound"<sup>3</sup> is also conveyed through the frequent references to music in Save Me the Waltz, and the way these references correspond to the

mood of each section. The Judge's feeling of "detached tenderness" toward his children is compared to "the kindness of Beethoven's 'Springtime' sonata" (p. 4), while David's and Alabama's life has for its background the "jibberish of jazz" (p. 39) reflecting the modern mood of disintegration, and the popular music of Vincent Youmans,<sup>4</sup> with its choruses explaining "why we were blue" (p. 45, 56, 60). In the section on the ballet, references are made to various classical composers, in terms of the different dancers' abilities to express and respond to their music: "the measures of a Chopin mazurka" (p. 151), "the elegant cerebral abandon of Mozart," "the voluptes of Beethoven," the "romantic cadences" of Schumann (p. 152), "the reclaiming tenors of Schumann and Glinka," "the embroiling rumbles of Liszt and the melodrama of Leoncavallo" (p. 158).

The overall pattern of Save Me the Waltz can also be compared to a musical score which is composed of variations on a theme, for certain motifs and combinations of images are repeated, with variation, throughout the novel. This pattern follows as well the psychological principle of association. Again, the author provides an indication within the text that the technique is intentional; when Alabama inspects the rococo ceiling of the villa they are about to rent, she comments to David, "'I can never think of a rossignol without thinking of the Decameron. Dixie used to hide it in her top drawer. It's funny how associations envelop our lives'" (p. 79). Of course this comment brings the reader back as well to the description of Alabama's childhood ("she had read the rough passages" of the hidden book, p. 8), and creates a connection between the themes and incidents of that period with those of the present one. In one sense, then, the reader is being instructed in how to understand a life as a group of variations on a theme. The first problem is, of course, to understand

the theme itself.

The plot of Save Me the Waltz follows a straightforward linear progression, from Alabama's youth to her middle age; but the sequentially ordered incidents are accompanied by this highly intricate pattern of recurrences that creates a contrasting effect of cyclical repetition. The cyclical pattern can be read in part as an attempt to give expression to a distinctively feminine mode of experience,<sup>5</sup> although it may also point to another underlying and perhaps related artistic impulse--the desire, in the words of Mircea Eliade, "to devaluate time," to loosen the bonds of history and restore in some measure the vitalizing primitive sense of connection with eternally recurring cosmic rhythms.<sup>6</sup>

When the Knight family travels along the edge of the Mediterranean David informs Alabama about her intellectual limitations: "'Your lack of a historical sense is the biggest flaw in your intelligence, Alabama.'" She unconcernedly replies, "'I don't see why I should have to have a chronological mind to appreciate these white-powdered roads'" (p. 73). In fact her resistance to chronological sensibility seems to enhance rather than detract from her ability to appreciate the white-powdered roads, for she imagines herself and her family as troubadours riding those same roads in centuries past, and the roads as witnesses to similar, oft-repeated human journeys, while in the distance the "baritone of tired mediaeval bells [proclaims] disinterestedly a holiday from time" (p. 72).

In the plot as a whole, however, time seems to win out and Alabama is overcome. For the pattern of recurrences traces primarily a downward movement, from energetic innocence, to fatigue, confusion, and despair. Yet in the text itself, the motif of cyclicity seems to predominate, remaining resistant to the demands of linear sequence, establishing its own



quality of continuity and coherence, and providing, in the process, further evidence of considerable authorial skill.

One group of repeated motifs deals with loss of illusion in the maturing, qualification, or failure of Alabama's early dreams and ambitions. As a young girl, she fantasizes about her future life: "With adolescent Nietzscheanism, she already planned to escape on the world's reversals from the sense of suffocation that seemed to her to be eclipsing her family, her sisters, and mother. . . . Full of . . . presumptuous resolves, she promised herself that if, in the future, her soul should come starving and crying for bread it should eat the stone she might have to offer without complaint or remorse. Relentlessly she convinced herself that the only thing of any significance was to take what she wanted when she could" (p. 29). After the later disappointment of her unconsummated love affair with Jacques Chevre-Feuille, she qualifies her position somewhat: "You took what you wanted from life, if you could get it, and you did without the rest" (p. 98).

The bread and stone metaphor, the idea of taking what you want, and their association with her family circumstances are introduced again when Alabama discovers that the foot infection has destroyed her chances of becoming a professional dancer: "She lay there thinking that she had always meant to take what she wanted from life. Well--she hadn't wanted this. This was a stone that would need a good deal of salt and pepper. / Her mother hadn't wanted her boy to die, either, she supposed, and there must have been times when her father hadn't wanted any of them dragging about his thighs . . ." (p. 195). The Nietzschean will to power proves to be an inadequate resource for Alabama, in the face of life's inexorabilities.

Alabama's resolve to study dance is motivated in part by a desire to rise above these inexorabilities through art. The complexity and development of her motivation is suggested in two scenes which involve the illustration of a dance on a table-top. Dining at the "Tip Top" Cafe with her sister and her sister's boyfriend, the young Alabama is asked if she can put together a dance in three weeks. She replies "'Sure. I know some steps from last year's carnival. It will go like this, see?' Alabama walked her fingers one over the other inextricably. Keeping one finger pressed firmly on the table to mark the place she unwound her hands and began again. '--And the next part is this way--And it ends with a br--rr--rr--oop!'" (p. 12).

Later, Alabama's Paris acquaintances speculate that an art such as dance might "'be the very thing'" for her; it would explain her peculiarity: "'Running around caring about things--of course, I hardly know you, but I do think dancing would be an asset if you're going to care anyhow. If the party got dull you could do a few whirly-gigs,' Dickie illustrated her words by gouging a hole in the tablecloth with her fork, 'like that!'" (p. 113; second emphasis mine). The contrast between the two scenes highlights the difference between the simple naive exuberance that first prompted her youthful performances, and her later need to provide her own compensation for the destructive futility and spiritual barrenness of the life around her.

After intensive discipline and training, Alabama finally has her first public debut, but, as we can see through the contrast between the two "applause" scenes in the book, she discovers that public achievement for its own sake proves to be of very limited value. After her first professional success, the cheers and applause ring about her ears "like

persistent gnats." She thinks, "'Well, it's done,'" and a little later that "'there should be something to do after a success'" (pp. 171-72). After the performance she gives as a young girl, on the other hand, the applause sounds like "a mighty roar of traffic" (p. 13). Whereas the public accolade once seemed to usher her into a modern, faster-paced world beyond the sleepy South, it now strikes her as a rather irrelevant, and even malevolent, nuisance.

During the scene in which Alabama is ill with blood poisoning that announces the final defeat of her professional ambitions, various phrases refer back to earlier periods of her life. In her delirium she travels to strange and sometimes menacing landscapes: "Crows cawed from one deep mist to another. The word 'sick' effaced itself against the poisonous air and jittered lamely about between the tips of the island and halted on the white road that ran straight through the middle. 'Sick' turned and twisted about the narrow ribbon of the highway like a roasting pig on a spit . . ." (p. 194). The word "sick" is used previously in reference to Alabama during her affair with Jacques, when David, angry and frightened, accuses her of being sick and insane, and threatens to leave her and go back to America alone if she sees the French Lieutenant any more (p. 93). After a confrontation between Jacques and David, Alabama backs out of the affair, and for the rest of their time in Provence has to ask David's permission to go anywhere (pp. 97-98). Alabama is also described as feeling sick during the scene in which David and Gabrielle Gibbs are charming each other in front of her (Alabama blames it on the champagne; p. 110), and earlier on the boat to Europe, when the storm makes her feel "scared half to death," looking "as if she [has] lost her mind" because she feels so "sick and nervous" (pp. 64, 65). A delicate but oblique connection seems to have

been drawn here between the constraints and psychological undermining that Alabama has encountered in her marriage, and her failure to establish an independent career in dance.

During her hallucinations Alabama also imagines that she asks for juice, then remembers that it was Bonnie who had done that a long time ago (p. 192). Her recollection refers back to the scene of the whitewashed roads (as does the passage just discussed) in more than one respect. For on this walk Bonnie also incurs a scratch which requires disinfectant (at the hospital Sirgeva comments that Alabama's infection set in because she neglected to disinfect her blister; p. 192), and the Knight family treks back to the hotel where Bonnie starts bawling for "'orange juice'" while her parents look for Nanny (pp. 74-75).

This last set of correspondences is part of another major group of related motifs which concerns the cycles of generations. The impression created by these motifs is that everything that occurs, recurs, although at different times and in somewhat different forms, so that Alabama's struggles are portrayed not simply as uniquely individual events, but as part of a larger pattern that extends beyond the limits of her personal life. The sense of continuity that Alabama craves is established in the text through the many parallels that are drawn between the experiences of different generations. The conflict between individual assertion and the often overwhelming force of social tradition is woven into the stories of Alabama, her mother, and her daughter. When the young Alabama hears the story of Uncle Cal's failure to marry the woman of his choice because of his own mother's opposition, the young girl insists that she wouldn't have stood for it, although her mother tells her laughingly that "'grandmothers always have their way.'" Her laughter is that of "a profiteer recounting

incidents of business prowess, apologetic of its grasping security, the laugh of the family triumphant, worsting another . . . family in the eternal business of superimposition" (p. 6).

Then, when Alabama's father opposes her older sister's romance with a man he considers to be an unsuitable suitor, Alabama again insists, "If I was Dixie, I wouldn't let him stop me. I like 'Dolph'" (p. 10). But Alabama later admits that her mother's lawless tolerance and over-protectiveness ill prepared her for the necessities of effort and compromise: "She spoiled me and gave me everything I wanted. Crying for things I couldn't have grew to be quite characteristic of me" (p. 89). She hopes to spare Bonnie from the same mistake, and enters her into ballet school in the hope that it might teach her that she must work for anything she wants. But Bonnie quits, and when Alabama inspects her daughter's messy purse in Naples, remarking that "I used to make you keep your things in better order," Bonnie laughs and replies, "I do more as I please now" (p. 175; also echoing Dixie's words, p. 9, and Alabama's, p. 118). The lesson, it seems, is one that Bonnie, like her mother, will have to learn on her own.

The search for identity through one's personal (and to some extent collective) past is also presented as a cyclical recurrence. At the beginning of the book Alabama asks her mother, in a rather peremptory fashion, to tell her what she was like when she was little. To her mother's vague assurance that she was a good baby she responds with the violent directness of a child: "And did I cry at night and raise Hell so you and Daddy wished I was dead?" Her mother's reply is again evasive and placating: "What an idea! All my children were sweet children" (p. 6). Much later, when Alabama is tempted to embark upon the illicit love affair

with Jacques, he makes a similar request, although with a rather different intent: "'Tell me about yourself when you were a little girl' he [says] tenderly" (p. 89).

The theme is repeated again after Austin Beggs' death, when Bonnie and her grandmother play house. They reverse roles, Bonnie playing the "head of the family" and Millie Beggs the daughter. Millie pities Bonnie because David and Alabama have tried to prepare her for life's exigencies more thoroughly than Millie ever did her own children. She tells Bonnie that "'When your mother was young, she charged so much candy at the store that I had an awful time hiding it from her father,'" and Bonnie replies, "'Then I will be as Mummy was,'" at which her grandmother chuckles; "'As much as you can get by with. . . . Things have changed.'" Then Bonnie stares intently at her grandmother, and asks the same old question: "'Grandma, tell me some more about when you were little'" (p. 207). By this time, it seems that "you" and "I" have come to merge into a larger identity, and the pattern of continual return which opposes the historical sense David so admires is manifested as an experience that is at once individual and communal.

Another pattern of cyclicity of an especially feminine nature is created by the moon motif. The moon plays a very important part in Alabama's youth, but as she moves into contemporary society it seems to fade, and finally it disappears entirely. At the beginning of Save Me the Waltz it exhibits a highly personal quality that is evocative of the ancient moon mother-goddess,<sup>7</sup> as in the passage quoted earlier when it "careens to the garden" and "cradles her tanned face benevolently" (pp. 7-8). When Alabama's aging parents are finally left alone in the house after their last daughter leaves, the moon is like an old woman who

"waddle[s] about the tin roof and bounce[s] awkwardly over Millie's window sill" (p. 42). Its light is much softer and more subtle than the "brittle and arrogant" light of the morning shade under the chinaberry tree that is associated with her father (p. 9). When Alabama awaits David's arrival, the moon's transcendent and transformative nature is invoked: "the holiness of creation misted the lone green things outside; the moon glowed and sputtered nebulous as pearls in the making. The night picked itself a white rose" (p. 35).

As they move into the New York life, the moon becomes less magical and more subversive to Alabama. "Tired moons ask higher wages" (p. 57); the "moon slid mercurially along the bright mathematical lines of the ultra-modern furniture;" the "spring moonlight chipped the pavement like an ice pick; its shy luminosity iced the corners of the buildings with glittering crescents" (p. 60).

The moon also reflects Alabama's growing awareness of her own sexuality. In one description it resembles a woman's clitoris after lovemaking: "The muddy afternoon sky disgorged a white moon for teatime. It lay wedged in a split in the clouds like the wheel of a gun-carriage in a rutted, deserted field of battle, slender and tender and new after the storm" (p. 59). And just before Alabama meets Jacques, the moon seems to presage her sexual attraction to him, "bulging low over the land like a full wineskin" (p. 80). But after the failure of their affair, it does not appear again. Its last direct appearance is as an "unjubilant moon . . . tarnished with much summer use in the salt air," with "shadows black and communicative" (p. 91).

Having succumbed to the pressures of convention and her own desire for safety, Alabama begins to see the moon in terms of a violation of what once

seemed sacred. She says contemptuously to her Paris acquaintances that moons are "'two for five at the Five and Ten, full or crescent'" (p. 111). After she begins dancing, however, she is described occasionally in terms of the moon. In one passage her "long legs [break] the white tutu like a statuette riding the moon," and Madame, the mystical "white lady," also appears as an inspirational moon goddess (p. 150). When Alabama attempts to tell her story of the Greek temples to the children at the birthday party in Naples, "their little faces [follow] hers like pale pads of clouds under the moon." It is thematically consistent with this image that there should be two references on the same page to the Christianized version of the mother goddess ("'Hail Mary!'" and "'Mother of women'"), and three to the "spirit lamp" Alabama sends with Bonnie, for the moon in primitive societies was regarded as a kind of "spirit lamp," and the light of the waxing moon as being particularly efficacious for fertility (p. 179).<sup>8</sup>

It is even possible to view the entire novel as being structured upon the four phases of the moon, with its growth out of darkness and back again into darkness. Viewed in this light, Alabama's story can also be understood as a failure to harmonize with the phases of her own life; for in terms of the structural framework her decision to study ballet occurs at the mid-point of the cycle--the full moon just before it begins to wane. We commonly speak of the new moon and the old moon, and Alabama is frequently reminded that despite her natural talent and her perseverance, she is nevertheless "too old" to realize her physical abilities to their fullest capacity.

In addition to cyclical patterning and prose rhythm, a third distinctive characteristic of Save Me the Waltz is its highly metaphoric style, which some readers have found obscure and difficult to understand.



Part of the problem in reader appreciation at the time of publication lay in the fact that Zelda's literary sympathies were much closer to those of the French symbolist poets (at one time she apparently wanted to translate Rimbaud<sup>9</sup>) than to anything that was happening in American literature at the time. Like the symbolists, she employs a vivid, free-ranging imagistic technique, based, according to one of its exponents, on the premise that to interpret reality metaphorically is to transform it. In Andre Breton's words, "'Life is an ever restless aspiration toward transformation, which can make the earth more translucent than water and let the metal ooze out of its shell.'"<sup>10</sup> Such a technique obviously demands an extremely flexible and receptive reader response, one which would not immediately protest the illogic of metal oozing out of its shell.

As we know our language is based on metaphors, most of which we use so habitually that we are unaware of them: the arm of a chair, a bed of roses, etc. Such expressions have been termed "dead metaphors" because they no longer trigger the shock of awareness which a fresh metaphor can elicit when it introduces an unexpected association between disparate things.<sup>11</sup> According to Aristotle, the ability to create good metaphors "implies an eye for resemblances" and is "a mark of genius."<sup>12</sup> Perhaps the best suggestion of the possibilities of metaphor has been offered by the psychologist Julian Jaynes: "The lexicon of language . . . is a finite set of terms that by metaphor is able to stretch out over an infinite set of circumstances, even to creating new circumstances thereby."<sup>13</sup> Metaphor, then, not only generates language, but also generates--and transforms, as Breton has asserted--awareness.

Metaphor is also used to refer from the known to the unknown, attributing to the unknown certain qualities of the known. All religious

language is metaphorical in this sense--consider, for example, the possible differences between God the Prime Mover of the Newtonian mechanistic universe and God as the living voice or breath of all creation.<sup>14</sup> Metaphor thus becomes the paradoxical means by which language transcends itself. As David reflects in Save Me the Waltz, all art is "the expression of the inexpressible," thinking of it (perhaps rather typically) in terms of a quantitative or mathematical metaphor; "Like the X in physics" (p. 128). The metaphoric style of Save Me the Waltz accordingly provides yet another aesthetic dimension that is closely integrated with theme, the text itself reflecting the protagonist's desire for transcendence.

One of the features of this technique is the way in which individual characters are described according to associated images which seem to capture their psychological essences rather than their physical attributes, in a startling, succinct, and often humorous way. Captain Farreleigh, for example, "was a tavern sort of man locked into his uniform, strapped with the swagger of beef-eating England, buffeted by his incorruptible, insensitive, roistering gallantry" (p. 33). Gabrielle Gibbs, described by one man as having a "'body . . . like white marble,'" makes her first appearance drunk and vomiting in the bathroom: her "long blonde hair streamed in chiselled segments about her face, a platinum wisp floated in the bowl of the toilet. The face was as innocent as if she had just been delivered from the taxidermist's" (p. 107). The model of a current ideal of pure beauty thereby also acquires the attributes of a mounted moose head: frozen, glazed, displaced, and dead.

Alabama's habit of constantly metaphorizing reflects on the one hand her desire to bridge the duality of existence, as when (as we will discuss later) she projects other-worldly qualities on various characters,

particularly men. On the other hand, it suggests her own feeling of division and disintegration, in passages where the metaphors seem particularly unrelated or discordant. The description of the dinner party where David and Gabrielle seduce each other has this quality: "David opened and closed his personality over Miss Gibbs like the tentacles of a carnivorous maritime plant. Dickie and Miss Douglas leaning against the mantle suggested the weird Arctic loneliness of totem poles. Hastings played the piano too loud. The noise isolated them all from each other" (p. 111).

At other times Alabama uses metaphor either to romanticize or escape from the present. When she sits on her swing with the boring, earnest aviation officer, she thinks "'He's just like a very majestic dog . . . or hound, a noble hound! I wonder if his ears would meet over his nose.' The man vanishe[s] in metaphor" (p. 29). As a young girl, she projects her own romantic aspirations onto her sisters' suitors; she "thinks romantically on her sister's beau. . . . [whose] hair is like nacre<sup>15</sup> cornucopias pouring forth those globes of light that make his face. She thinks that she is like that inside" (pp. 7-8).

In the book as a whole, several distinct patterns of metaphor emerge. One which is sustained from the beginning is the feudal imagery, with its associations of female protection versus imprisonment, medieval romance, a crumbling social order, and the erosion of traditional religious authority, to name a few. Another motif which Nancy Milford has noted<sup>16</sup> is the flower imagery which is always used to reinforce theme, particularly flowering or development, or lack of it. There is also a group of images based on an evolutionary theme, from primitive life forms, to animals, to prehistoric man, again connected with the idea of psychic stages of development.

Things are also compared occasionally to ectoplasm (the shaving-cream-like substance that is supposed to be discharged by mediums in a certain type of trance) to suggest the co-existence of the spirit world and the material world.

Many of the metaphors in Save Me the Waltz involve synaesthesia. In one instance the music of Schumann is presented in a visual and tactile image: "The high parabolas of Schumann fell through the narrow brick court and splashed against the red walls in jangling crescendo" (p. 119). In another, the light in a room is described acoustically: "The deserted dining room buzzed with the turbulent glare of midday in the tropics" (p. 75). The tactile and visual are intermingled again when "the breeze [blows] a blue path through sea-drenched shadows at Jean's" (p. 88). In all these instances the effect is of an extension of awareness, beyond the limits of more conventional descriptive techniques.

One last aspect of literary style which should be considered here is the motif of animism in Save Me the Waltz. It is closely related to the cyclicity and moon imagery previously discussed, in that it presents another manifestation of the primitivist impulse, the desire for a return to psychic origins. According to Mircea Eliade, it follows from the ancient and universal belief in our autochthonic origins that everything the Earth brings forth, whether animal, vegetable, or mineral, is organic and animated.<sup>17</sup> Zelda responded intensely to this perception when she encountered it in the visual art of Vincent Van Gogh.

While working on Save Me the Waltz, she was also reading Ian Gordon's Modern French Painters, and she was struck by his description of "the sense of growing things" in Van Gogh's work. She wrote Scott that "'Those crawling flowers and venomous vindictive blossoms are the hallucinations of

a mad-man--without organization or rhythm but with the power to sting and strangle. I loved them at Prangins. They reassured me.'"<sup>18</sup> She explicitly refers to his art in her novel when she describes the flowers Alabama buys for Madame, some of which have "the brilliant carnivorous qualities of Van Gogh" (p. 139). In her letter, she probably guessed that a conventionally "sane" person might question the rationality of feeling reassured by such a malevolent vision, for she commented shortly after this description that "'It is impossible to feel sorry for crazy people since their realities do not coincide with our normal conceptions of tragedy etc.'" She clearly appreciated the relationship between psychotic disturbance and ecstatic vision that studies in primitive shamanism have explored.<sup>19</sup> Undoubtedly, her sense of reassurance came from both the invigorating energy of such a vision, with its implication of the destruction of the oppressive rigidity that can characterize any dying or outmoded form, and the fact that she could see it confirmed, and so in a sense legitimized, in the work of another artist.

The animate world is not, however, always malevolent in Save Me the Waltz; it is sometimes benevolent, and sometimes indifferent. We have already seen how the moon is a benevolent presence at the beginning of Save Me the Waltz. Later, when Alabama is an adolescent, impatient with the deadening tedium of her life, of "having dates and watching things rot," the season of the year corresponds to the season of her life, in its absence of growth and fertility: "The sun sagged yellow over the grass plots and brusied itself over the clotted cotton fields. The fertile countryside that grew things in other seasons spread flat from the roads and lay prone in ribbed fans of broken discouragement. Birds sang dissonantly" (p. 31; emphasis mine).

This technique involves more than the well-known "pathetic fallacy," in which nature is accorded moods which correspond, for effect, with those of the fictional protagonist or poetic speaker. For in Save Me the Waltz, even the man-made world is presented as having an independent energy of its own, as in this passage: "Outside the window gray roads pulled the Connecticut horizons from before and behind to a momentous crossing. A stone minuteman kept the peace of the indolent fields. A driveway crawled from under the feathering chestnuts. . . . Tar melted in the sun along the loping roads. The house had been there forever chuckling to itself in the goldenrod stubble" (p. 44; emphasis mine).

The consistent use of the active verb for supposedly inanimate objects is not simply a literary device; it presents rather a conviction about the organic vitality of the surrounding world, about the nature of existence. Such a perception affirms the primitive sense of connection with the cosmos by dissolving the separation between the self and the surrounding world that is entailed in the modern, detached, empirical attitude;<sup>20</sup> in its view even human creations are not solely man-made, but the vital outpourings of life itself, of which the human creator is the instrument and mediator.

In general, the aesthetic techniques of Save Me the Waltz all tend to illustrate this principle of eros or connectedness, which is usually associated with women. The extent to which the techniques are inter-related and thematically integrated, as well as the element of self-reflexive narrative commentary, indicate that the work is clearly more sophisticated than a mere naive effusion of autobiographical self-expression, and that Zelda Fitzgerald was highly aware of her artistic method in her articulation of a distinctly feminine perception of life.

CHAPTER ONE

NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Jacqueline Tavernier-Courbin also notes that it is a custom which demands a passive role for women; p. 32.

<sup>2</sup>Linda W. Wagner, p. 201. Wagner does not, however, present a detailed examination of the prose rhythms themselves.

<sup>3</sup>Shirley Hazzard, interviewed by Catherine Rainwater and William J. Schieck, Texax Studies in Literature and Language, 25 (1983), 214.

<sup>4</sup>Vincent Youmans was a popular composer of the twenties who collaborated with such well-known lyricists as Ira Gershwin and Oscar Hammerstein II. He wrote music for the 1921 stage show, "'Two Little Girls in Blue," mentioned in Save Me the Waltz (p. 47), and for the enduring favorite, "Tea for Two." Interestingly, he was born two years before Zelda and died two years before she did; his career like hers was cut short by illness, and he died in a tuberculosis sanatorium. From The Complete Encyclopedia of Modern Music and Jazz 1900-1950, ed. Roger D. Kinkle (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1974), III, pp. 1985-86.

<sup>5</sup>See M. Esther Harding, Woman's Mysteries, Ancient and Modern: A Psychological Interpretation of the Feminine Principle as Portrayed in Myth, Story, and Dreams (New York and London: Harper Colophon Books, 1971), for an illuminating discussion about how woman's biological experience influences her sense of self and reality.

<sup>6</sup>See Mircea Eliade, The Myth of the Eternal Return, or Cosmos and History, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1965), esp. pp. 85-87.

<sup>7</sup>See Harding, esp. pp. 39-54, 98-116.

<sup>8</sup>Harding, p. 102.

<sup>9</sup>This is according to Sara Mayfield, p. 161.

<sup>10</sup>Andre Breton, quoted by Anna Balakian, "Metaphor and Metamorphosis in Andre Breton's Poetics," French Studies, 19(1965), 34-41. From Metaphor: An Annotated Bibliography and History, Warren A. Shibles (Whitewater, Wisconsin: The Language Press, 1971), p. 37.

<sup>11</sup>See Colin N. Turbayne, The Myth of Metaphor (1962; rev. rpt. Columbia, S.C.: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1970), for an examination of the ways in which metaphors can shape perception.

<sup>12</sup>Aristotle, Poetics, in Critical Theory Since Plato, ed. Hazard Adams (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1971), p. 62.

<sup>13</sup>Julian Jaynes, The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976), p. 62.

<sup>14</sup>See Turbayne, pp. 208-17.

<sup>15</sup>According to the Concise Oxford Dictionary, "nacre" means a "(Shellfish yielding) mother-of-pearl." Zelda is fond of using such out-of-the-way words in Save Me the Waltz, but in every case the usage is accurate and appropriate.

<sup>16</sup>See Milford, pp. 270-97.

<sup>17</sup>Eliade, Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries: The Encounter Between Contemporary Faiths and Archaic Realities, trans. Philip Mairet (1957; trans. rpt. New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p. 73.

<sup>18</sup>Letter from Zelda to Scott (ca. February 1932), in Milford, p. 260.

<sup>19</sup>See Andreas Lommel, Shamanism: The Beginnings of Art, trans. Michael Bullock (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967). Lommel cites the studies of Ursula Knoll-Greiling, begun about 1944, in which she discovered that "certain shamanistic phenomena correspond to the modern definition of certain mental disorders" (p. 8).

<sup>20</sup>In my use of the term "modern", I follow Eliade, who means by it "a certain state of mind which has been formed by successive deposits ever since the Renaissance and the Reformation" (Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries, p. 25, n. 1).



CHAPTER II  
ARTISTIC AND LITERARY THEORY

As a young girl, Alabama creeps into her older sister's bed during a violent thunderstorm, hoping to offer mute protection and reassurance. She wants to say, "'And, Joey, if you ever want to know about the japonicas and the daisy fields it will be all right that you have forgotten because I will be able to tell you about how it felt to be feeling that way that you cannot quite remember'" (p. 24; emphasis mine). The words proved prophetic in terms of the author's personal history. One of her sisters admitted that although a great deal of Save Me the Waltz was pure invention, there was enough evocative emotional truth in the description of the home life modeled on their own to move her deeply whenever she read it.<sup>1</sup>

Zelda Fitzgerald once wrote that "'the chief function of the artist is to inspire feeling.'"<sup>2</sup> But the quality of feeling she was ultimately concerned with was actually quite different from the romantic nostalgia that characterized her husband's work. She was concerned with the entire world of feeling usually forgotten by the civilized consciousness, the range of emotion denied or inhibited by the rational intellect on the grounds of reason and order--which she believed it was the function of art to express.

Zelda also wrote of Save Me the Waltz that although it was much like Scott's work, it was "'more ecstatic'"--perhaps "'too much so,'" she worried.<sup>3</sup> Her desire to achieve ecstatic effects through her writing is another aspect of her affinity with the Symbolist poets, particularly

Rimbaud. In his famous "lettre du voyant," Rimbaud proclaimed the role of the artist as visionary or seer: the poet must engage in a "'long, immense and reasoned deranging of all his senses'" in order to achieve his vision, and "'although, crazed, he would end up by losing his understanding of his visions,'" it would not matter, for "'he has seen them!'" He also expressed his faith in the potential of women to become artists/seers, in similar violently euphoric terms: "'When the endless servitude of woman will be overthrown, when she will live for herself and by herself, man,--hitherto abominable,--having given her her release, she will be a poet, she also! Woman will discover some of the unknown! Will her worlds of ideas differ from ours?--She will discover strange, unfathomable, repellent delicious things; we shall take them, we shall comprehend them.'"<sup>4</sup>

Rimbaud is one of the artists discussed by James Baird in his study of primitivism in literature. Baird argues that Rimbaud's poetry expresses "the pre-symbolic condition of the European mind in its characteristic act of sloughing off Western symbols,"<sup>5</sup> and that the primitivist impulse in general reflects the artist's compulsion to find a vital and meaningful symbolism which will compensate for the decadence of traditional religious symbolism in our culture. Although Baird believes this search leads the artist to the Orient, it has been demonstrated elsewhere<sup>6</sup> that the journey is actually a psychological one, leading through feeling and emotion to the source of the human symbol-making activity, the unconscious mind.

Zelda and Scott arrived in France just after the crest of the first great wave of intense activity directed toward the breaking down of traditional artistic and literary forms in the search for new ones. The revolution was being felt only slightly in America, primarily in the realm

of music, where jazz and blues, with their improvisational approach, were becoming more popular. Much of this movement is duly recorded and introduced organically throughout Save Me the Waltz, reflecting the author's dissatisfaction with conventional literary forms and her concern with creating one more capable of expressing the emotional/ecstatic quality of experience she wished to communicate.

The most consistent feature of the then recent art movements of impressionism, post-impressionism, expressionism, symbolism and (to some extent) cubism, was the rejection of naturalistic mimesis in favor of the recording of subjective impression. Representative and influential artists mentioned in Save Me the Waltz include Rimbaud (p. 84), Verlaine (p. 130), Picasso (p. 57), Gauguin (p. 78), Van Gogh (p. 139), as well as the American Georgia O'Keefe (p. 171). Reference is also made to cubism, but I would suggest that Zelda was somewhat skeptical of this school (with which Gertrude Stein was connected), with its deliberately experimental approach, for it is described in terms of obscurity, as semaphore and camouflage (pp. 109, 201). Although she evidently considered it relevant, perhaps because it captured the modern sense of fragmentation of reality that she also evokes in her novel (through the prose rhythm and disjunction of metaphor already discussed), she felt a deeper response to the more spontaneous and inspired art of Van Gogh and O'Keefe.

Both Van Gogh and O'Keefe can also be considered primitivists, if the true primitivist as Baird asserts is one who "will entertain the idea of God in every form."<sup>7</sup> As was demonstrated in the preceding chapter, Zelda's literary style has its correlative in the rhythmic, pulsating animism of Van Gogh's work. She also responded intensely to O'Keefe's paintings, which she found "'lonely and magnificent and heart-breaking,'" adding that

"they inspire a desire to communicate which is perhaps the highest function of anything creative."<sup>8</sup> Like Rimbaud's poetry, their work has a passionate yet impersonal visionary quality. Van Gogh once wrote of his own art that "'in a picture I should like to say something as consoling as music. I should like to paint men or women with that suggestion of the eternal which used to be symbolized by the halo, and which we seek to achieve by the radiance and vibration of color itself'"<sup>9</sup> (emphasis mine). Again, we find a similar desire to suggest the numinous in Save Me the Waltz, as for example in the description of Joan: "When you saw Joan directly under a light, she seemed like a ghost of her finest points awaiting inhabitation. Transparent blue halos shone around the edge of her teeth; her hair was smooth to a colorless reflection" (p. 19).

Zelda Fitzgerald seems to have grasped the distinction between what Jung has termed psychological and visionary art, between that which deals with conscious day-to-day experience, and that which delves into the unfamiliar, unconscious, primordial depths of the human mind, providing a compensatory response to the culture's conscious attitude and helping to bring a "one-sided, unadapted, or dangerous state of consciousness back into equilibrium."<sup>10</sup> When Alabama is bored and restless on the Riviera, she reads the psychological novelists, James, Wharton, and Dickens, during the long afternoons (p. 90), but they fail to alleviate her sense of ennui. A similar but more detailed critique is also made of the artistic motivation of two relatively uninspired but self-proclaimed artists described in Save Me the Waltz--Alabama's husband David and the ballet dancer Arienne.

David is presented as being highly dependent on external stimulus for his art, often blaming the weakness of his inner drive on outer

distractions, such as Alabama's failure to provide a smoothly running home environment. This critique is muted somewhat in the revised version, two rather pointed references in the original galley version having been deleted from Book II. One occurs when Alabama, visiting her family, goes out gallivanting with her friend Phil (also excised in the revision), and the family phones David at three a.m.. He arrives, "playing the outraged husband and bemoaning his chances for a special destiny being lost by this interruption" (apparently oblivious to the contradiction in his claim). The other scene occurs when David, with a black eye acquired in a drunken brawl the night before, laments that "'the doctor says I can't paint for a month!'" and accuses Alabama of being pleased about it.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps the rationale for cutting these two incidents lay in Zelda's desire to make her criticism appear less as a personal defence against the charge that she had interfered with Scott's work, and more as an impersonal statement about a certain type of art--although David's complaint of domestic distraction is not completely eliminated. In one passage he is described as raving and ranting and swearing that it ruins his talent to have his buttons torn off in the laundry (p. 50). In another he is glad that Alabama is occupied and "making fewer demands on his time," but two pages later we discover that he is spending his time drinking with crowds of people in the Ritz bar (pp. 124, 126). This particular excuse is balanced, however, by other factors that have nothing to do with Alabama.

For one thing, David cannot paint when it rains (p. 58). His art derives from naturalistic phenomena and not from inner vision. His paintings are exercises in light and colour. They enjoy popular success, but are described as "lullabies of recapitulation" (p. 99). In other words, his work is neither particularly disturbing to the public taste, nor

authentic, in the sense of arising from a deep inner conviction about the nature of reality. The point is underscored when David tells Alabama that his work is getting stale and he needs "'new emotional stimulus'" (p. 101). In this scene the couple is ostensibly discussing the possibility of David's having an affair, but the question of whether he is "serious" or not concerns not merely his sexual intentions, but his artistic intentions as well. Ironically, it is David who makes the rather smug distinction between the amateur and the professional in the arts, forgetting that etymologically ama-teur implies lover, and that to earn one's living through art is not necessarily to love it (p. 147).

David, of course, is also a plagiarist. He eventually appropriates Alabama's art for his own purposes. In America, he takes to painting the ballet with great success.

"We loved those last pictures," they said. "Nobody has ever handled the ballet with any vitality since -----"

"I thought," said David, "that rhythm, being a purely physical exercise of the eyeball, that the waltz picture would actually give you, by leading the eye in pictorial choreography, the same sensation as following the measure with your feet."

"Oh, Mr. Knight," said the women, "what a wonderful idea!"

The men had been saying "Attaboy," and "Twenty-three skidoo," since the depression. (p. 209)

Even disregarding the obvious autobiographical reference made by a wife who donated her diaries to her husband's best-selling books, we can discern here as well a pertinent distinction that is being made between two very different approaches to art. Jaqueline Tavernier-Courbin has noted the similarity between David's description of his painting and what Zelda Fitzgerald accomplishes in her writing,<sup>12</sup> but there is also a basic

difference. David treats Alabama's art with a cerebral detachment, whereas for her the dance involved her entire being, body and spirit. To say that rhythm is purely an exercise of the eyeball is in a sense to deny body knowledge, to close off the possibility that one might also learn to listen with the arms and see with the feet, as Alabama once aspired to do (p. 143). And this closure, the author seems to suggest, both demonstrates and perpetuates the lack of sensual vitality that actually characterizes David's work, notwithstanding popular opinion.

Arienne is considerably more determined than David in the exercise of her art, but she too is limited. She is passionate in her insistence that "I am an artist" (p. 155)--as the more artistic Madame is not. Yet although she is "powerful," she is nevertheless "uninspired" (p. 127). Her mistaken belief that through sheer effort of will she can become a great "danseuse" is carefully detailed in Save Me the Waltz. "She was almost an elf, but her stockings were always wrinkled and she talked in sermons" (p. 131); "the points of her toe shoes sliced the air like a sculptor's scalpel, but her arms were stubby and she could not reach the infinite" (p. 152); "subduing a technical maze of insolent turns and arrogant twists, . . . she tenaciously gripped the superhuman exigencies of her role. The workman underneath the artist ground out her difficult interpretation" (p. 185; emphasis mine).

Like David, Arienne achieves a measure of public success, of which she is as inordinately proud as she is of the Patou suit which is its proof (p. 186). In both cases, a degree of technical mastery creates the illusion of art. But when David and the children ride home from Arienne's performance in "the glittering car . . . the mystery-car, the Rajah's car, the death-car, the first-prize, puffing the power of money out of the summer

air like a seigneur distributing largesse" (a clear allusion to The Great Gatsby) that is David's proof of professional success, the little boy makes a revealing comment: "'I would not like to be an artist . . . unless I could be a trained seal'" (p. 187). In the market place of art, it seems, the well-trained seals can sometimes command the highest prices.

Accompanying Arienne, however, is another well-trained dancer who nevertheless creates the effect of effortless inspiration: "From a whirl of revolving legs Lorenz collected his brown magnificence, clenching his fists in the air and chinning the mystery of the mountain sky" (p. 185). Lorenz is earlier described as one of those rare individuals who have "perceived the madnesses against which the consciousness of the race sets up an early vaccine for those intended to deal in reality" (p. 152); "[he] had the face of an eighteenth-century faun; his muscles billowed with proud perfection. To watch his brown body ladling out the measures of a Chopin mazurka was to feel yourself anointed with whatever meaning you may have found in life. He was shy and gentle, though the finest dancer in the world" (p. 151).

The description of Lorenz as a faun is probably an indirect reference to Vaslav Nijinsky, who choreographed and performed Debussy's "l'apres-midi d'un faun" for Diaghilev's company in Paris in 1912, shocking and transforming the world of ballet. Later in his life Nijinsky spent many years in mental asylums, mostly in Switzerland; he was probably there at the same time Zelda was a patient at Prangins. He played as intrinsic a role in the upheaval of artistic expression in his time as did the poets and painters just discussed. It was not only the stylized movements of his performance of "l'apres-midi d'un faun" which were considered novel; it was also his portrayal of a Pan-like character demonstrating a fairly explicit sexuality, which was upsetting to the current conventions of ballet.<sup>13</sup>



Ballet is of course the art which is treated most exhaustively in Save Me the Waltz, but within this treatment lies a serious examination of the literary art as well. The ballet becomes a metaphor for both life and writing. One of its primary aims is to attain elevation. Alabama's "first glimpse of ballet as an art opened up a world. 'Sacrilege!' she felt like crying out to the posturing abandon of the past as she thought ignominiously of The Ballet of the Hours that she had danced ten years before. She remembered unexpectedly the exaltation of swinging sideways down the pavements as a child and clapping her heels in the air. This was close to that old forgotten feeling that she couldn't stay on the earth another minute" (p. 123). As we know from the scene in which Alabama crawls into bed with Joan, writing as well as ballet has the power to stimulate such "old forgotten feelings."

The ability to sustain elevation requires intense training in technique (p. 141), but it also requires a certain self-abandonment, a giving up of the self, of personal control, to the natural momentum of the thing itself. Arienne instructs her that she must not rest when she comes down after the spring, but "'must depart again immediately, so that the impetus of the first leap carries you through the others like the bouncing of a ball'" (p. 132). The process is analogous to the act of writing, in which the artist must allow the impersonal creative energy of the unconscious to flow freely. The necessity of the abandonment of strict egotistical control is reiterated when Alabama tries to explain to Stella what she is trying to accomplish: "'Can't you understand that I am not trying to get anything . . . but to get rid of some of myself?'" (p. 141).

Art is presented as being both a container and a channel for emotion, through which chaos comes into form. Alabama wanted to be able, "through

the medium of the dance, to command her emotions, to summon love or pity or happiness at will, having provided a channel through which they might flow" (p. 124). But the type of command to which she aspires is different from the tenacious wilfulness of Arienne, for it involves a transcendence of the personal self, of which Arienne seems incapable.

The channel is the overall structure, the design of which both the dancer and the writer must be aware. The connection between the two arts is explicitly drawn when Madame instructs Alabama: "'Well pay attention to the design. You do well the steps, but you never follow the configuration: without that, you cannot speak'" (p. 150; emphasis mine). The advice also suggests the value of obtaining an uninvolved perspective on the overall pattern of one's own life.

The question of fate, and the artist's feeling of being the instrument of a larger force, is raised when Alabama asks Madame on two different occasions about how one becomes a dancer. When she first meets the aging ballerina she naively inquires, "'How did you get in the ballet? And get to be important?'" The woman looks at her "with velvety bootblack's eyes" and answers "'But I was born in the ballet.'" Alabama accept[s] the remark as if it were an explanation of life" (p. 112). She nevertheless goes on to fantasize romantically about fame and success, picturing herself "as an amorphous cloud in a dressing-room mirror which would be framed with cards and papers, telegrams and pictures," with a "stencilled star" on her dressing room door (p. 114; emphasis mine).

Her narcissistic attitude gradually gives way to a more comprehensive understanding of what is involved in her study of the dance. Madame tells her that she must work to become a fine dancer, but that the four hours a day she spends training is too much. Alabama asks, "'Then how can I be a

dancer?' / 'I do not know how anybody can be anything,' [says] the Russian. / 'I will burn candles to St. Joseph.' / 'Perhaps that will help, a Russian saint would be better'" (p. 128). The drily humorous, paradoxical and enigmatic responses of her teacher seem to offer greater insight into the nature of art and life than do any of David's more self-assured proclamations.

The idea of the god-like nature of artistic creation is also suggested in Save Me the Waltz. On the boat to France, Alabama playfully informs her English companion that "'I am only really myself when I'm somebody else whom I have endowed with these wonderful qualities from my imagination,'" and goes on to tell him that she is a book--"'Pure fiction.'" When he asks who invented her, she invents a flippanant reply--"'The teller of the First National Bank.'" Shortly after this exchange she tells him that her favorite part of the Bible is the book of Genesis; "'I love the part about God's being so pleased with everything. I like to think that God is happy'"--although they both agree that it is hard to see how he could be (pp. 70-71). That there may be a similarity between the imaginative impulse for self-creation and the imagined impulse to generate an entire cosmos seems fairly clear to Alabama, though to her somewhat obtuse companion it all sounds like whimsical nonsense.

Their conversation also contains a swift critique of the limitations of a strictly autobiographical approach to writing. The Englishman muses that he would like to write about his travels, especially New York, apparently having missed the shaft of Alabama's previous remark that "'when you have recovered from your trip . . . you will have something that had so much better be left unsaid that you will try to get it published.'" She then transposes his wish into a larger framework, by suggesting that New York is

like a Bible illustration (leaving the reader to wonder which one--perhaps Sodom and Gomorrha?). The Englishman again fails to perceive the implications that no story is entirely unique, and that any literary effort which lacks the element of divine inspiration is probably not worth the trouble.

When Alabama's desire for self-creation develops into a desire for the creation of art, she encounters the dilemma of artistic renunciation. She begins to see that the belief "in the possibility of both living and dancing" is a naive illusion (p. 151). As theorists such as Jung and Rank have demonstrated, the commitment to the artistic endeavour almost always involves the willingness to sacrifice to some degree the actual life and the possibilities of ordinary human happiness. In Jung's words, the life of the artist who feels driven to create "cannot be otherwise than full of conflicts, for two forces are at war within him: on the one hand, the justified longing of the ordinary [person] for happiness, satisfaction, and security, and on the other a ruthless passion for creation which may go so far as to override every personal desire."<sup>14</sup> In the woman artist, this conflict is intensified, partly because of her more intimate biological connection with procreation, and partly because the relative isolation necessary for creation seems a greater sin against her (generally) more highly-developed sense of human relatedness. Cultural conditioning only compounds the predicament experienced by so many women artists, as the guilt for creating.<sup>15</sup>

In Alabama's case, the conflict primarily manifests itself in her relation to her daughter, Bonnie. Alabama already feels somewhat dispossessed of her own child, even before she develops artistic ambitions. In New York, the world into which Bonnie is born, there seems to be no

place for children, and none of David's and Alabama's friends know anything about having babies (p. 46). The news of her conception and birth is squeezed in between descriptions of New York life and Vincent Youmans' music (pp. 45, 46, 56, 60). When they are in Europe, Bonnie is cared for by the ever-present Nannies and Mademoiselles, for whom her mother feels a uniformly ill-concealed resentment and dislike.

Alabama is by no means deficient in maternal affection, however, despite her relative incompetence in maternal functions (she forgets, for example, to buy the emetic the doctor prescribes when Bonnie is sick in Naples). Her attachment to the child is evident in the humour, insight, and attentiveness with which Bonnie is portrayed throughout Save Me the Waltz. The range of verbs describing Bonnie's vocalizations and her developing facility in the English language provides perhaps the best illustration of this: Bonnie "pronounced ponderously, pushing the words between her teeth like a cook straining a puree;" she "chanted tolerantly," "bawled," "screamed," "droned," "sang exultantly," her "babbling rose to an exultant yell;" and she "howled . . . lustily" (to quote a few; p. 73, 75, 78, 79, 89). Of course it is also appropriate that in a work concerned with artistic expression, the child's language development should be of particular interest.

Just before Alabama makes her decision to pursue the offer to dance in a professional ballet company in Naples, which means virtually giving up her daughter and leaving her in the father's hands, three things occur: the fight with Arienne, which intensifies Alabama's desire to break out of the closed circle of the dance school; the news that Diaghilev has died and his devotees scattered to eke out whatever livings they can; and Alabama's recognition of how severely she has neglected her own daughter. She finds

in Bonnie's room "a botched attempt at a doll's tutu" and a drawing of "a clumsy militant figure with mops of yellow hair" with the legend "'My mother is the most beautiful lady in the world.'" Alabama realizes that she has "almost forgotten about Bonnie's mind going on and on, growing." She reproaches herself bitterly for the distance she has imposed between them and falls into an exhausted sleep; "out of her subconscious [comes] the feeling of a beaten child" (p. 161).

Obviously this recognition plays a large part in Alabama's considerations about whether or not to leave, occurring as it does just before her decision. But it seems that it is too painful for her to recognize consciously as a factor in the decision. An equally significant factor, however, is Diaghliev's death: "the stuff of the great movement of the Ballet Russe lay rotting in a French law court--he had never been able to make money" (p. 162). In the light of the impresario's profound fidelity to his own artistic vision, Alabama's sacrifice comes to seem to her both necessary and inevitable.

Yet she also realizes that she is forfeiting a measure of not only her own personal happiness, but her daughter's as well. This understanding lends a special poignancy to their reunion in Naples: "'Mummy', the child cried excitedly, 'Mummy!' She clung about Alabama's knees adoringly; a soft wind swept her bangs back in little gusts" (p. 174). It is the empathetic bond of motherhood which intensifies the guilt of a woman like Alabama, who cannot accommodate the demands of both procreation and creation within her life, and feels compelled to choose the latter.

Although Alabama's greatest allegiance lies with the creative act which transcends the biological life cycle, she appreciates the fact that analogies exist between the two. The dance at times is described in

suppressed metaphors of birth, as in the passage comparing it to a channel through which emotional energies might flow. Madame is also described in this way, and is associated with the elements of water and earth from which all life begins: "Looking into her eyes was like walking into a long stone tunnel with a gray light shining at the other end, sloshing blindly through dank dripping earth over a moist curving bottom" (pp. 121-22); her "brown eyes were like the purple bronze footpaths through an autumn beech wood where the mold is drenched with mist, and clear fresh lakes spurt up about your feet from the loam" (p. 148).

The ballet teacher epitomizes the dual nature of the artist who destroys as well as creates, and Alabama, struggling to develop her own creativity, experiences this darker aspect through her as well. In her first lesson she feels as though her instructor is "literally stripping the muscles of her thighs." Left to do the "fiendish exercise alone, she sees Madame as "cruel," "hateful and malicious," with her "smoky eyes" and "the red gash of her mouth" (p. 122), like the primeval devouring mother.<sup>16</sup>

The ever-recurring cycles of destruction and creation, the breaking of old forms and the making of new ones to express the conviction that nothing exists which is absolutely new or unique, are major concerns of the various arts examined in Save Me the Waltz that have relevance to Zelda Fitzgerald's literary theory. The carnivorous flowers of Van Gogh, the extravagant iconoclasm of Rimbaud, the pagan inspiration of Nijinsky, and the solitary grandeur of O'Keefe, all arose in a particular cultural epoch, yet all address the timeless concern of the human relationship to the divine. Each artist became a renegade, relying on inward vision to create outward forms that could express the vital truths no longer found in traditional religion or more conventional art. Rejecting the options of

either romantic or realistic fiction, Zelda turned to these artists rather than to any of her compeers in American literature (excepting James Branch Cabell, who will be discussed later), in her effort to create a literary work that would be more than just another numbing "lullaby of recapitulation."



CHAPTER TWO

NOTES

- <sup>1</sup>See Mayfield, p. 188.
- <sup>2</sup>Letter from Zelda to Scott (n.d.), in Milford, p. 352.
- <sup>3</sup>Letter from Zelda to Scott (ca. February/March, 1932), in Milford, p. 261.
- <sup>4</sup>Arthur Rimbaud, letter to Paul Demeny (15 May 1871), in his A Season in Hell: The Illuminations, trans. Enid Rhodes Peschel (New York and London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), pp. 7-8, 9.
- <sup>5</sup>James Baird, Ishmael: A Study of the Symbolic Mode in Primitivism (1956; rpt. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960), p. 164.
- <sup>6</sup>See Evelyn J. Hinz, "The Masculine/Femine Psychology of American/Canadian Primitivism: Deliverance and Surfacing," in Other Voices, Other Views: An International Collection of Essays from the Bicentennial, ed. Robin Winks (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1978), pp. 88-89.
- <sup>7</sup>Baird, p. 33.
- <sup>8</sup>Letter from Zelda to Dr. Thomas Rennie (ca. April 1934), in Milford, p. 351.
- <sup>9</sup>Vincent Van Gogh, quoted in The Encyclopedia of World Art, (1958; trans. rpt. New York, Toronto, London: McGraw-Hill, 1967), XIV, p. 700.
- <sup>10</sup>C. G. Jung, The Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), pp. 89-91, 97-98.
- <sup>11</sup>Original galley version of Save Me the Waltz, in Crosscurrents/Modern Fiction edition (1932; rpt. 1967), pp. 231-32, 234.
- <sup>12</sup>Tavernier-Courbin, p. 39.
- <sup>13</sup>From The Dance Encyclopedia, eds. Anatole Chujoy and P. W. Manchester (1949; rev. rpt. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1967), and The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Ballet, ed. Horst Koegler (1972; trans. rpt. London and New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977).
- <sup>14</sup>Jung, The Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature, p. 102. Also see Otto Rank, Art and Artist (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1932), esp. p. 203.
- <sup>15</sup>See Nin in A Woman Speaks for a discussion of the guilt for both

creating and not creating (p. 37), as well as Susan Cubar, "'The Blank Page' and the Issues of Female Creativity," in Writing and Sexual Difference, ed. Elizabeth Abel (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 73-93. Gubar demonstrates some ways in which twentieth-century women artists use the experience of menstruation as a theme in exploring the nature and dilemmas of women's creativity, suggesting, for example, that the woman writer feels that her own self "bleeds into print", which is one reason why she tends to "dread the emergence of [her] own talents" (pp. 85, 86).

<sup>16</sup>See Erich Neumann, The Great Mother, 2nd ed., trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1963).

CHAPTER III

THE QUESTION OF IDENTITY

Alabama's first words in Save Me the Waltz are "'Tell me about myself,'" as she "presses against her mother in an effort to realize some proper relationship" (p. 5). The question of identity is, in fact, largely one of proper relationship, of discovering her place in the scheme of things. Even as a young girl, Alabama has a presentiment of destiny. She feels encouraged when she learns that her maternal grandfather was thrown from a race cart at the age of eighty-three in Kentucky: it meant that "there was a show to join. Time would take care of that, and she would have a place, inevitably--somewhere to enact the story of her life" (p. 20). Part of her difficulty lies in understanding which "show" she will be joining, for the setting of Save Me the Waltz resembles a set of Chinese boxes, offering the simultaneous frames of personal, social/historical, and mythic contexts for the performance of Alabama's life.

As her name indicates, Alabama's story is more than simply that of an individual personality. The social and historical situation of which she is representative is clearly established at the outset of the novel, with its background of the Civil War (pp. 6, 12) and Declaration of Independence (p. 10), and the outbreak of World War I during her debutante period (pp. 28, 32). The connection between the young girl and her Southern American heritage is made fairly explicitly. She rehearses for her first ballet performance in the old auditorium from which "the first Alabama regiment had left for the Civil War" (p. 12). After World War I breaks out, the soldiers stationed at the nearby base spend their free time in town, "to

seek what explanation of the world war this little Alabama town had to offer" (p. 32).

Alabama's personality shares some basic characteristics with her own culture. She comes by her rebellious nature honestly, in the sense that she is a child of the United States which was born of rebellion, as well as a Southerner and therefore identified with the Rebel cause. As the youngest in a family of girls, she also experiences first-hand the suppression of the feminine principle in the logos-oriented society that both her father and husband (to varying degrees) represent. In the pre-World War period of Alabama's youth, the matriarchal element is still strong in the South, with its Negro mammies (p. 5) and its history of grandmothers who "'always have their way'" (p. 6), but its influence is covert, against the overt control of a masculine culture. As a grown woman, Alabama comes to feel a strong sense of inner conflict or lack of integration that is reflected in the cultural context as the continued division between the "progressive," acquisitive North and the more traditional South. Additionally, the collapse she eventually suffers as the culmination of this unresolved logos/eros tension finds its correlative in the First World War, which signified a widespread breakdown in traditional values.

In the personal sphere, Alabama's parents demonstrate an almost classic masculine/feminine polarity. Because of their symbiotic relationship, neither has had to develop the complementary sides of their own individual personalities. Growing up with such "either/or" role models makes it all the more difficult for Alabama to reconcile the masculine and feminine elements within herself.

Her father epitomizes all the basic values of patriarchy; he is

intellectual, cerebral, and methodical, disapproves of excessive emotion, and seems compelled to impose his own desire for order on the life around him. His alliance with a long cultural tradition is suggested in the first chapter of Save Me the Waltz, in which the description of his nature and influence is accompanied by the inclusion of various formal legalistic codes, besides the Declaration of Independence: the Napoleonic code, the Athenian assembly, and the Annals of British Law (pp. 4, 10-11). The reference to the Athenian assembly occurs in a school textbook over which Alabama is daydreaming (about her sister's beau, whom the Judge disapproves of), and it reads, "'All the men were put to death and the women and children sold into slavery'" (p. 10). That women of her time are still expected to occupy a position of servitude which is fundamentally antagonistic to Alabama's own passionate and willful nature is a major issue in her life, as is the ambivalence of her desire to both resist and adapt to this norm.

Alabama's mother, on the other hand, represents not only the protective/nuturing aspects of the feminine principle, but also its regressive tendency, having developed her role as primarily that of the "feeling" element in the family in reaction to the Judge's over-reliance on logic and rationality. When Dixie and Randolph want to meet against the Judge's wishes, Millie advises her daughter to go ahead without telling the father:

"Why do you bother your father? You could make your arrangements outside," she said placatingly. The wide and lawless generosity of their mother was nourished from many years of living with the irrefutable logic of the Judge's fine mind. An existence where feminine tolerance plays no role being insupportable to her motherly temperament, Millie Beggs, by the time she was forty-five, had become an emotional anarchist. It was her way of proving to herself the individual necessity of survival. Her

inconsistencies seemed to assert her dominance over the scheme had she so desired. (p. 11)

Her emotional anarchy is demonstrated by the way she continually deflects her husband's judgements in what seems to have become a habitual response (just as feeling will often exert its devious power over reason). But despite her subversive influence she too, as Alabama later recognizes, has been absorbed into a "masculine tradition." "Millie did not seem to notice about her own life, that there would be nothing left when her husband died. He was the father of her children, who were girls, and who had left her for the families of other men" (p. 201).

Her social milieu leads Alabama to interpret her sense of inner tension and duality as a conflict between assertion and passivity, rather than as a need to balance conscious discipline with relatedness and intuitive creativity. She first expresses her problem to David as an active/passive dilemma: "Yes--but David, it's very difficult to be two simple people at once, one who wants to have a law to itself and the other who wants to keep all the nice old things and be loved and safe and protected'" (p. 56).<sup>1</sup>

She repeats the problem again in a little ditty she composes on the boat to Europe: "'Why I am I this way, why am I that? / Why do myself and I constantly spat? / Which is the reasonable, logical me? / Which is the one who must will it to be? (p. 69). And when the Knight family is at play in the Mediterranean, her feeling of inner division is expressed once more, in terms of a somewhat schizophrenic adaptation to patriarchy. To Bonnie's question about how she can be two things at once, Alabama answers, "'Because, my daughter, I am so outrageously clever that I believe I could be a whole world to myself if I didn't like living in Daddy's better'" (p. 82).

Throughout Save Me the Waltz, there is a strong critique of "Daddy's world," particularly of its legal and economic customs which define a woman's social identity almost exclusively in terms of her relationship to the male. Both Austin and David are called "Daddy;" but this continuity of parental authority is not suggested between the women's generations, for Alabama calls her own mother "Mamma," while Bonnie uses "Mummy." The social expectation that the woman should function in a relationship of child-like dependence on the male is suggested by the fact that both Alabama and Bonnie are referred to as "Baby." When Austin is dying, he uses the affectionate diminutive for both his granddaughter and his grown daughter (pp. 198-99).

Both the father and husband constitute a restrictive yet apparently protective force in Alabama's life, which is often conveyed in terms of feudal imagery. The extended metaphor in the opening passage of the book, describing the father as a "living fortress" (p. 3), is echoed again when David, the "Knight" in shining armor, repeatedly writes in his letters to Alabama that she is his princess and he would like to keep her shut forever in an ivory tower for his "private delectation." Although Alabama finally asks him not to mention the tower again (p. 40), later, of course, she does become the proverbial princess in the tower, on the Riviera. She begins to feel increasingly restless and useless; even the child-caring duties have been taken over by a nanny. But David assures her that she is occupying her proper place in their family scheme: "'A woman's place is with the wine.'" When he tells her that he intends to work most of the time, she sighs that "'It's a man's world,'" and turning her attention to the feel of the "'lascivious'" air, resigns herself for the time being to the sensual torpor of her existence (p. 80). The point that this existence is simply

another form of imprisonment is underscored later when David is addressed as "'Prince'" by a hotel man when he and Bonnie are on vacation alone together (p. 181).

When she is told by a male acquaintance that she is "'a man's woman and need[s] to be bossed,'" Alabama laughs (p. 115); but she also recognizes that legally and economically she is a man's woman, as is almost any woman of her time who marries. Women's financial dependence in marriage is emphasized in the first anecdotes of both Millie's and Alabama's marriages, which both have to do with money. The heartbroken Judge throws the bills for their son's funeral into Millie's lap, crying, "'How in God's name do you expect me to pay for that?'" (p. 4; emphasis mine). And when Alabama reads contentedly in their honeymoon suite, happy that David "couldn't possibly make her turn out the light till she got good and ready," she is unaware that he has bought the book with the last actual cash they have in the world (p. 42).<sup>2</sup>

Additionally, the issue of the wife's taking on the husband's name, and the implicit social/psychological appropriation entailed in that traditional practice, is raised at significant junctures throughout Save Me the Waltz. At the beginning of the novel, Judge Beggs explodes at the thought that his daughter Dixie is seeing a "'moral scapegoat;'" "'My children have got to respect my name. It is all they will have in the world.' . . . It was the most Alabama had ever heard her father say about what he expected of them" (p. 14). Shortly after this incident comes the infamous scene in which David carves on a door post, "'David . . . David, David, Knight, Knight, Knight, and Miss Alabama Nobody.'" Alabama feels "a little angry" about the names but does not admit it to David (p. 37). The message seems to be very clear that in this world a woman without a man's



name has nothing and is nothing.

Alabama is rarely subsumed under David's full name in Save Me the Waltz; she is presented throughout as a distinct character in her own right, and not a mere appendage of her husband. The occasions on which she is subsumed under his name are, however, significant. Immediately after their marriage, the New York gossips refer to them as "the Knights" three times in two pages (pp. 46-47); publicly, she has become identified exclusively through him. Then during the period in France, when Alabama begins to realize the extent of her own ineffectuality, there are three more references to "the David Knights": when Alabama imagines Nanny discussing her time with them (p. 74), when she explains to Bonnie her preference for living in Daddy's world (p. 82), and when they become a "rising vogue" in Paris after David's successful exhibit (p. 100).

When she studies the ballet, in contrast, she is referred to as Mrs. David Knight only once, when Hastings calls to see her at the studio and Stella responds, "'Our Alabama!'" (p. 135). By this time it seems that Alabama has finally secured some social recognition of her individuality, at least in one area of her life. But after the collapse of her professional ambitions, when the family returns to America to be with her dying father, they are again referred to as "[t]he David Knights" (p. 195). It seems reasonable to interpret this sequence of references to "the Knights" as a sustained and deliberate comment on the customs of patriarchal tradition that have handicapped Alabama's efforts to establish an independent public identity, while maintaining a socially legitimate status.

Alabama begins to realize at a fairly early age that the necessity of masking oneself for the sake of appearing appropriate poses a particular

difficulty for a woman who is concerned with self-discovery. She notes the dissembling that is involved in her sister Joan's meekness, watching her "change into a more fluctuating, more ingratiating person, as she confided herself to the man;" and she reflects that it is similar to what happens to herself in the presence of her father--"the necessity of being something that you weren't was the same" (p. 21).

The cultural critique that is offered in this examination of the specific social conditions that impede Alabama's development must not, however, be mistaken for an explanation of her situation. Alabama always understands herself as something more than simply the product of her environment. Neither is she solely the result of her heredity, although she does look to her family history to discover facets of her own character that will offer indications of her fate--her "inevitable place."

When Alabama hears her parents discussing Joan, she feels that they are also delving into "the substance of herself." She enjoys hearing about others' family characteristics that she feels she too must share: "[i]t was nice to have indications of yourself to go on" (p. 19). She has a strong sense that she is part of a clan, something larger than her individual self. She also sees glimpses of herself in both her father and mother. Like her father, she takes pleasure in "concision and completion," and from him, she wonders "why that brisk important sense of being a contributory factor in static moments [cannot] last" (pp. 27, 26). From her mother, with her stoic, oblivious optimism, she inherits the habit of convincing herself that she is happy, even when happiness or lack of it no longer seems to be the main issue of life (p. 60). As Alabama's self-awareness develops, she abandons her earlier attitude of willfulness and romantic optimism, but continues to rely on the enduring stoicism that she shares

with her mother.

The mirror is another central motif in Alabama's quest for self-knowledge. Initially, it reflects only her schoolgirl vanity and narcissism, but even then there is a suggestion of undefined possibilities. When her father teases her about "'always looking in the glass at herself,'" Alabama admits (to herself) that she looks "more frequently than her satisfaction in her appearance justifie[s] in the hope of finding something more than she expected" (p. 27). Alabama's first encounters with both David and Jacques also involve mirror imagery, which suggests either that they exhibit certain unacted-out qualities of herself, or that she has projected those qualities on to them (pp. 38, 82).<sup>3</sup> And much later, in a rare moment of quietude and suspension in time, she and her teacher smile at each other in the studio mirror: "Her eyes caught the white transparent face in the glass. The two smiles met and splintered" (p. 151). It is perhaps the first time Alabama sees herself as a participant in the transcendence she is always imputing to others.

Alabama looks to her body as well for signs about who she is, in much the same way that she looks in the mirror. Initially she sees it in terms of her attractiveness to men, as when after her first performance in the community hall Randolph catches her "long arms and [sweeps] her lips with his as a sailor might search the horizons of the sea for other masts." Alabama wears this sign that she is growing up as a "decoration for valor" (p. 13). Later, she comes to see her body as a resource of knowledge, a means of expanding her apprehension of reality (pp. 124, 143), and something to be disciplined as an instrument of art. But finally she realizes that the body, subject as it is to the power of time, is ultimately an insufficient resource in the search for that which is "'more

permanent than us'" (p. 211).

Her view of her body generally provides a good indication of her psychological condition as well. Initially, it is frequently compared to something solid and solitary: a lighthouse (p. 114), a quill, the silver triangles in an orchestra (p. 121), and even a Siberian branch railroad (p. 106). But with her growing isolation, as she comes closer to breaking down, the discrepancy between the physical condition of Alabama's well-trained body and her psychological condition becomes increasingly apparent; "her sparse frame glowed with the gathering despair of fatigue that lit her interiorly" (p. 147). Near the end of her training the schism between self-perception and outward appearance becomes even more marked: "In the mazes of the masterful fouette her legs felt like dangling hams; . . . she thought her breasts hung like old English dugs. It did not show in the mirror. She was nothing but sinew" (p. 154).

But if the body is subject to inevitable decay despite all human effort to ward it off, the skeleton, in contrast, is not. And the skeleton provides yet another significant motif in Alabama's search for identity. According to Mircea Eliade, contemplation of one's own skeleton is an important exercise in shamanism: "The ability to see oneself as a skeleton implies . . . the symbolism of death and resurrection; for . . . the 'reduction to a skelton' constitutes . . . a symbolico-ritual complex centered in the notion of life as perceptual renewal." This exercise also involves the "'exit from time,'" for as the essence of life the bone has an eternal or non-temporal nature.<sup>4</sup>

Alabama frequently contemplates the skeleton--not only her own, but her father's and daughter's as well--in an effort to understand its meaning. Although initially she only approaches, and never reaches, its deeper

meaning, she does know, however, that it is inextricably connected with an identity that extends beyond her personal life. When she pesters her mother to tell her something about herself when she was little, she "wants to be told what she is like, being too young to know that she is like nothing at all and will fill out her skeleton with what she gives off. . . . She does not know that what effort she makes will become herself. It was much later that the child, Alabama, came to realize that the bones of her father could indicate only her limitations" (pp. 5-6).

On other occasions when her bone structure is mentioned, it is usually in association with an ancient or mythic image. The adolescent Alabama appears as a youthful Ceres, goddess of the grain and harvest: "Her high cheek bones carved the moonlight like a scythe in a ripe wheat field" (p. 34). In another passage her legs stretch "long and thin as prehistoric drawings" (p. 37). And in another, her face flattens "to a stone carving" in the mirror of a train compartment that is lit dimly, "like a spiritualist's seance" (p. 165). One can see in these images the repeated gesture toward the "exit from time" of which Eliade speaks. But the gesture is never completed, and in fact is often immediately undercut by a more contemporary allusion. In the last passage for instance, Alabama switches from contemplating the stone carving of her face to worrying that her suit is inappropriate for second class (p. 165), and in the one comparing her legs to prehistoric drawings, she also sees herself as a rather innocuous "advertisement of a pretty girl drinking a strawberry sundae in June" (wondering, rather humorously, if David knows how conceited she is; p. 37). It is as though she cannot quite transcend the limitations of her social conditioning in picturesque ineffectuality, to realize the strength and power inherent in the more ancient images of herself.

The skeleton as a representation of the continuity of generations, and particularly of the impress of the father upon the daughter, appears again in Bonnie, when she visits her mother in Naples and Alabama sees that she is growing into David's likeness: "The bones had begun to come up in her nose; her hands were forming. She was going to have those wide-ended fingers of a Spanish primitive like David. She was very like her father" (p. 174).

It is after Alabama's sickness, when her father is dying, that the deeper implications of the skeleton motif emerge. The bony hands of both Alabama and her father are likened to birds' legs and claws, suggesting a sense of clan totemism. Both daughter and father are connected not only to each other but also to the bird, which is a relatively frail creature, as well as a symbol of spiritual transcendence.

In the hospital, Alabama becomes very thin; "her hands looked like bird claws. They clung to the air like claws to a perch, hooking the firmament as her right to a foot rest. Her hands were long and frail and blue over the knuckles like an unfeathered bird" (p. 194). Her father also becomes extremely thin as his body wastes away, and when Alabama sees that his wrists are "no bigger than a bird's," she wonders how he ever fed them all. Bonnie too is included in the image, when her grandfather tells her that she is a little bird, and that she and her mother "'are as pretty as two little birds.'" It is in this scene that Alabama asks her tortured questions about the relationship between the body and the soul, and although the father cannot respond, the implicit idea of life as a perpetual process of dying and renewal that is conveyed in the totemic symbolism seems to offer the answer her father cannot give (p. 199).

It seems that Alabama's illness and breakdown have been a necessary

stage in her process of self-discovery. As discussed previously, her training in the ballet teaches her the necessity of abandoning an egotistic orientation for the sake of artistic creation. But it is not always simply a matter of discarding the ego; where ego control has become excessively rigid, a virtual shattering of this control may be required, in order for the creative energy of the unconscious to find its release. The author makes clear that at the outset of their marriage Alabama and David possess together a "rapacious, engulfing ego" (p. 48). But Alabama gradually becomes increasingly fragile and vulnerable, fulfilling her own unwitting prophecy made as a teenager dressing for a dance: "'I will all come to pieces long before then'" (p. 27).

The light imagery in Save Me the Waltz corresponds to this theme of disintegration. After the Knights' marriage, it begins to be described as chipping, splintering, and breaking into prisms: the "spring moonlight chipped the pavement like an ice pick" (p. 60); the "water, chipped by the sun, spread like a floor of luminous shavings in a workshop of light" (p. 77); a man "vanished in splinters on the sparkle of the morning" (p. 81); the corners of a room "carved the light to a diamond's facets" (p. 150). Of course this apparent breaking down of perception is at the same time an opening up, to an impressionistic sensitivity to the beauty of refracted light. And light, as we know, is another universal symbol for spirit.

As Jungian therapy recognizes, in the collapse of ego-consciousness lies the possibility of expanded awareness, the recognition of one's collective as opposed to individual identity through the emergence of archetypes. This is probably also the reason that Save Me the Waltz, written while the author was trying to recover from her own mental and emotional breakdown, is so imbued with archetypal images. None of Zelda's

earlier fiction has this quality.<sup>5</sup>

The essential problem for Alabama comes down to a question of mythic identity. One of the first mythic allusions in Save Me the Waltz occurs in the description of the Beggs' family life, in which the mother provided a "shady protective grove" where the girls could hide from the father's "blinding glare" (p. 5). Mythological lore is full of stories of nymphs and goddesses who were ravished by gods in their wooded retreats, but the Callisto myth seems particularly fitting here, for in it Jupiter approached the nymph disguised in female form as the goddess Diana.<sup>6</sup> This parallels Alabama's penchant for viewing her male lovers initially as reflections of herself, and for attributing god-like qualities to them as well. The "glaring light" signifies the light of consciousness, and also of spiritual awareness--the emergence from the darkness of instinctual life.

Various goddesses also make their appearance in Save Me the Waltz: specifically Venus, Diana, and Athene, each of whom represent different dimensions of the feminine nature. The adolescent Alabama envisions herself as the "Venus de Milo" when she tries on her dress for a dance, preoccupied with the power of her sexual attraction (p. 27). When the Knights are in New York, it is the goddesses of independent womanhood, Athene and Diana, who are mentioned, as Alabama grows increasingly uncomfortable with her socially subordinate relationship to David (p. 57). When they are on the boat to Europe, a shooting star trails a path from "Venus to Mars to Neptune," recalling the story of Venus' and Mars' illicit love affair, when the two were trapped in a net forged by Venus' jealous husband Vulcan, and freed by the influence of Neptune, who had also become infatuated with the goddess of love and desire (p. 68).<sup>7</sup> The story provides a mythic foreshadowing of the love triangle that develops in



Provence.

After Alabama's successful ballet performance in Naples, she rests on the base of a statue of the "Venus de Milo," and "Pallas Athene stare[s] at her across the musty hall" (p. 171). By this point in time, lonely and weary from her prolonged and solitary struggle, she has come to see the duality of her desire for both loving relatedness and creative self-sufficiency as impossible to reconcile. She is on her way to becoming a "star" (like Callisto, who was transformed into a bear by the jealous Juno and finally after long suffering elevated to the heavens by Jupiter); Madame Sirgeva promises that she will have "'the stellar role'" in the upcoming program (p. 172). But to the exhausted Alabama it no longer seems to matter.

Significantly, however, the two mythological figures who function as the most basic prototypes for Alabama are male--Oedipus and Prometheus.<sup>8</sup> That such an identification should occur in a woman's text might at first seem startling, for it runs counter to the traditional notion that life myths of this nature can only be embodied by men. But if one accepts the premise that myths refer to the dynamics of the human psyche, which, regardless of a person's sex, contains both masculine and feminine qualities, the implications of the Oedipal/Promethean motif in Save Me the Waltz become more readily apparent.

The opening epigram of Save Me the Waltz refers to Oedipus, King of Thebes:

We saw of old blue skies and summer seas  
When Thebes in the storm and rain  
Reeled, like to die.  
O, if thou canst again,<sup>9</sup>  
Blue sky--blue sky!

The hero's sense of irrevocable loss corresponds to, and helps set the tone for, Alabama's story. The Oedipus myth, as is generally known, was adapted--or perhaps more precisely, maladapted--by Freud into the incest theory that has become a commonplace of twentieth-century psychoanalysis. The aspects of the myth that concern Alabama, however, lie quite apart from this motif. As part of the issue of personal identity, the story involves a philosophical questioning of the nature of human life and the inevitability of aging, in the riddle of the Sphinx solved by Oedipus: "What being, with only one voice, has sometimes two feet, sometimes three, sometimes four, and is weakest when it has the most?" The answer of course is man, who crawls in infancy, walks in maturity, and leans on a staff in old age.

As well, Oedipus, despite his intense and masterful nature (or perhaps because of it), is nevertheless also a victim of fate, of forces outside his control. Additionally, there is the foot motif which connects him with Alabama, for his name means "swollen-footed;" his ankles had been pinned together when he was an infant.

The first explicit Promethean allusion echoes the opening epigram from Oedipus. When Alabama dances she sometimes visualizes herself as "a lone statue to forgotten gods washed by the waves on a desolate coast--a statue of Prometheus" (p. 156). The allusion is repeated again when David tries to tell Bonnie and her friends the story, after they have watched a ballet performance of Prometheus (mirroring an earlier scene in which Alabama unsuccessfully tries to tell the children at Bonnie's birthday party about the fading of the Greek temples from bright colors to white; p. 179). David only gets as far as explaining that Prometheus was tied to a rock and "'writhed there for years and years'"; he does not finish the tale because

he cannot remember any ending (p. 186). In fact the story has no actual ending, but David does not seem to be aware of this.

Alabama has the Promethean qualities of cleverness, ambition, and arrogance. Like him, she wishes to defy the gods, in the sense of defying time, by entering the ballet at such a late stage in life. And like him she is also felled by the gods, (and by her own heedlessness) through an attack on the body. But the spirit of the heroic Aeschylean Prometheus (as opposed to the Hesiodic trickster)<sup>10</sup> remains indomitable--for he knows that Zeus will one day be overthrown and that eventually he will be released from his bondage. And it seems that it is the Aeschylean rather than the Hesiodic prototype with whom Alabama identifies, the one who, like Oedipus who was finally apotheosized, could foresee an end to his sufferings.

It was Prometheus ("foresight") who was supposed to have formed the human race out of clay (Alabama playfully speculates that she thinks she could make a crab if she had the material; p. 25), and under Athene's instruction introduced many of the civilized arts and sciences, in addition to stealing the fire of the gods. He was the bringer of consciousness, the bridge between the human and the divine, but he was also a warning against attempting to pit the human will and intellect, however clever, against divine powers. Alabama wanted to believe that life held more for her than just "'waiting around eternally'" (p. 118), and that her passionate desire for the infinite must have some fruition in this life. But after her illness she recognizes that she too will be "writhing for years and years," chained to the earth and longing for release, and that her inevitable place is not quite the show she had once hoped for. Her condition of bondage is mythologically evoked again at the end of Save Me the Waltz, in a witty allusion to Prometheus' less intelligent brother Atlas, who was condemned

by Zeus to support Heaven on his shoulders for all eternity: "'there's a chip off the globe teetering on our shoulders'" (p. 209).

On occasion, however, the image of the faun is juxtaposed with that of Prometheus, in a manner which suggests the possible redemptive value of the creature's unselfconscious instinctual grace. Alabama's alternative fantasy to the desolate Promethean statue is to be "a faun in twilight spaces unpenetrated by any living soul save herself" (p. 156). And when David and Bonnie attend the Prometheus ballet, the lead dancer is Lorenz, who as we have seen earlier, has been described as a faun (p. 151).

It is a basic precept of Jungian psychology that the instinctual unconscious life is also a source of spiritual knowledge, of that which transcends the individual ego. But whereas the goal of Jungian therapy is to heal the breach between the conscious and unconscious contents of the mind, the Promethean Alabama tends to view the duality as an essentially unalterable opposition. For her, consciousness remains primarily an impediment. In learning ballet, her biggest problem is that her comprehension moves faster than her feet, throwing her off balance. Arienne screeches at her that she is impossible; "'You wish to understand it before you can do it'" (p. 127). But Alabama cannot resist speculating and intellectualizing about consciousness and individual will. At one point she considers that "'[s]election . . . is the privilege for which we suffer in life'" (p. 71). At another she makes the wry observation that none of her theories seem to work (p. 70). In a conversation with David she asserts that consciousness is the goal of life (p. 67). She reverses her position later, when seeing Bonnie's difficulties complying with adult demands; "'Consciousness . . . is an ultimate betrayal, I suppose'" (p. 207).

Yet paradoxically, it is in her sense of mythic identity that Alabama finds her assurance of eternal return, that although the gods may be forgotten and their temples faded, "the mythologems are still fresh and living."<sup>11</sup> It also gives her a confirmation that she is the channel for a larger, autonomous life force. The older Alabama realizes what the young Alabama never envisaged, that "love might roll on using the bodies of its dead to fill up its craters in its path to its line of action. It took her a long time to think of life unromantically" (p. 23). The point is made again in an overheard conversation on the boat to Europe: "'men don't know as much as they think they do. . . . Nature certainly looks after itself. You can't kill anything that's going to live'" (p. 65; one can't help wondering if this insight wasn't an especially poignant one for Zelda, who had attempted suicide more than once before she came to writing Save Me the Waltz.)<sup>12</sup>

The danger inherent in the human desire to assert mastery over life is also suggested in the names of Alabama's first and last ballet performances: Ballet of the Hours and Faust. Faust is also mentioned when David and Alabama are in Provence, where "the village band play[s] 'Faust' and merry-go-round waltzes" (p. 89).<sup>13</sup> Moreover, that the American psyche, with its sturdy, naive, arrogant optimism, also suffers from the Faustian delusion, is emphasized at the end of Save Me the Waltz in what is probably one of the first warnings in American literature about that uniquely twentieth-century phenomenon, advertising: "'By the time a person has achieved years adequate for choosing a direction, the die is cast, and the moment has long since passed which determined the future. We grew up founding our dreams on the infinite promise of American advertising. I still believe that one can learn to play the piano by mail and that mud

will give you a perfect complexion" (p. 210). The complexion unmarked by time, the artistic facility that is a choice rather than a gift, the illusion of control over time, and fate, are marks of the particular obliviousness of the American character to the possibility that the universe might contain energies that are stronger than its own desires.

Save Me the Waltz was written during a period in literary history that was marked by a mood of romantic disillusion. The loss of faith in traditional ideals after World War I led most writers into the realms of either existential absurdity (Hemingway),<sup>14</sup> social/political criticism (H. L. Mencken), or romantic nostalgia (Scott Fitzgerald). This is one reason why the question of literary genre that accompanies Alabama's problem of personal identity is so pressing in Save Me the Waltz--for the text as well sought to establish its "place" in literary art, but at a time when the religious impulse in literature was considered rather passe. This was particularly so in the case of a woman writer, if the portraits of women offered in Scott Fitzgerald's books are to be taken as any indication of contemporary ideas about the nature of the female psyche.<sup>15</sup>

The rejection of the romantic approach in Save Me the Waltz is conveyed through both the development in Alabama's awareness, and the abandonment of the romantic tone in which the text begins. The atmosphere of Alabama's childhood, with its courtship customs, swing chains on the front porch, its air of "Cherokee roses and harbors at twilight" (describing Alabama's scent; p. 33), cannot be sustained throughout the work, if it is to move beyond the romantic mode and address the author's more serious concerns, which lie beyond the themes of "flowers and deserts, love and excitement, and passion and fame!" (p. 111) that the dissatisfied Alabama comes to identify with David. By this time, of course, she has already discarded

her own youthful desire for "life to be easy and full of pleasant reminiscences" (p. 7).

The allegorical heroics of the chivalric mode are similarly regarded as inadequate for the author's purposes, for like the insular integrity of the Judge, they tend to neglect the invisible "portion of life's mosaic" (p. 24). Social/political analysis, though relevant to the author's humanistic concerns, is insufficient for the same reason. Placed within a strictly materialistic frame of reference, it only perpetuates the cultural disease it aims to alleviate.

The genre to which Save Me the Waltz adheres most closely is one which may be termed the Romance (as distinct from medieval or harlequin romance). Two allusions are made to Romance writers in Save Me the Waltz, to the Southerner James Branch Cabell (p. 46),<sup>16</sup> and to Emily Bronte (in a somewhat muddled reference to Wuthering Heights: "'Sometimes . . . your face looks like a soul lost in the mist on a Scotch moor;" p. 101). The Wuthering Heights allusion is relevant to the conversation about David's seriousness in which it occurs (discussed here in Chapter II), for the reclusive genius of Bronte provides a pertinent contrast to David's claim that he needs new stimulus for his art.

Generally, the Romance may be classified more readily by the impulse behind it than by geographical or historical considerations. It is formed on a conviction of the duality of existence, and a desire to bridge that duality by straining toward the numenal world, while remaining within the phenomenal one. Like all visionary art, it relies on inner psychic experience in a way that more realistic or naturalistic art does not. As a prose narrative, it invariably involves a mythic component, as well as a self-reflexive tendency, and aims for emotional over intellectual

effects.<sup>17</sup> One can see such principles operating in Zelda Fitzgerald's expressed ambition to achieve ecstatic effects, in Alabama's desire to discover her cosmic identity, and in the various themes and techniques that have been examined here thus far.

The era in which Zelda was writing was not, as we have seen, particularly receptive to the Romance. Cabell's strategy was to camouflage his Romances under a veil of satire. Although Zelda indulged in, and enjoyed, an element of humor in Save Me the Waltz, she chose not to follow the satirical route--which may be yet another reason for its poor reception, in a time when readers generally were not seeking ecstatic effects through fiction, and did not entertain the possibility that (to paraphrase Cabell) art may perform what religion only promises.<sup>18</sup>

Just after her marriage, Alabama is frightened to think that "[n]o power on earth could make her do anything . . . except herself" (p. 42; emphasis mine). In the course of discovering who she is, she outgrows this essentially existential delusion and comes to recognize the mysterious force of a wholly other power, like D. H. Lawrence's Ursula Brangwen, who finally is glad to accept "that vaster power in which she [can rest] at last."<sup>19</sup> It is this power which Save Me the Waltz addresses as its primary concern, and which, for the receptive reader, the story evokes.



CHAPTER III

NOTES

<sup>1</sup>It is interesting and probably not insignificant that with Scott's "assitance," this passage was revised from a more actively phrased original which read, "'one who wants to impose itself and have a law unto itself and one who wants to keep up all the nice old things and be loved and safe'" (Crosscurrents/Modern Fiction edition, p. 225; emphasis mine).

<sup>2</sup>Apparently Scott persuaded Zelda to mute the financial grievance in her revision as well. Chapter II originally opened with an impatient bank teller informing David that their account is overdrawn, and a subsequent argument between David and Alabama about money. See Crosscurrents/Modern Fiction edition, pp. 215-16.

<sup>3</sup>For a discussion of the phenomenon of projection, whereby "an emotionally charged content [lies] ready in the unconscious and springs into projection at a certain moment," see C. G. Jung, The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious, trans. R. F. C. Hull (1959; rpt. Princeton, Princeton Univ. Press, 1980); p. 65.

<sup>4</sup>Eliade, Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries, p. 169.

<sup>5</sup>See W. R. Anderson, "Rivalry and Partnership: The Short Fiction of Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald," in Fitzgerald/Hemingway Annual 1977, eds. Margaret M. Duggan and Richard Layman (Detroit, Book Tower, 1977), pp. 19-42, for a description of Zelda's development in the craft of short story writing.

<sup>6</sup>An account of the myth can be found in Ovid's Metamorphoses, trans. Mary M. Innis (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1979), pp. 61-64.

<sup>7</sup>See Robert Graves, The Greek Myths: 1 (London: Penguin Books, 1983), pp. 67-68.

<sup>8</sup>Jacqueline Tavernier-Courbin mentions Alabama's promethean disposition, but as her treatment focuses on social/political issues she does not examine the mythical implications of this association; p. 36.

<sup>9</sup>I was unable to locate the source of this quotation in the various translations of Sophocles' Oedipus the King and Oedipus at Colonus that I examined. It is possible that it comes from some other play or poem. Primary texts used here are A Treasury of the Theatre, I, ed. John Gassner (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967); Sophocles: The Three Theban Plays, trans. Robert Fagles, intro. and notes Bernard Knox (New York: The Viking Press, 1982); and Graves, The Greek Myths: 2, 9-15.

<sup>10</sup>See Aeschylus, Prometheus Bound, trans. Janet Case (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1922), and Hesiod, Theogony, trans. Norman O. Brown

(Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1980). Also see Graves, pp. 143-45.

<sup>11</sup>Jung, The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious, p. 189.

<sup>12</sup>See Milford, pp. 144, 193.

<sup>13</sup>Grace Stewart, in A New Mythos: The Novel of the Artist as Heroine. 1877-1977 (St. Aban's, Vermont: Eden Press Women's Publications, Inc., 1979) deals rather sketchily with the Faustian theme in Save Me the Waltz, arriving at somewhat moralistic conclusions, such as that Alabama sells her "soul to the devil" if she settles for "the traditional role of woman, dependent upon the artistry of her man" (p. 33).

<sup>14</sup>More recently, however, the ritualistic element in Hemingway's fiction has become more widely recognized.

<sup>15</sup>For discussions of Scott's fictional treatment of women, see Leslie A. Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel (1960; rpt. Cleveland and New York: Meridian Books, 1962); as well as Judith Fetterley, The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction (Bloomington and London: Indiana Univ. Press, 1978), and "Who Killed Dick Diver? The Sexual Politics of Tender is the Night," Mosaic, 17 (Winter 1984), 111-28.

<sup>16</sup>That Zelda was an enthusiastic reader of Cabell is testified by the fact that she once wrote him a letter declaring that she would "grow this thin " if she could not complete her collection of his works. See Evelyn J. Hinz and John J. Teunissen, "Life Beyond Life: Cabell's Theory and Practice of Romance," Genre, 10 (Fall 1977), 299-327. This article also provides a seminal discussion about the nature of the Romance.

<sup>17</sup>This theory of Romance derives largely from a class in Romance theory held by Evelyn J. Hinz at the University of Manitoba, 1984-85.

<sup>18</sup>James Branch Cabell, The Cream of the Jest, ed. Joseph M. Flora (New Haven, Conn.: College & University Press, 1975), p. 121.

<sup>19</sup>D. H. Lawrence, The Rainbow (1915; rpt. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1975), p. 494. Lawrence was perhaps the first twentieth-century author to deal with the relationship between religious decadence and the modern woman's search for identity. Also see Evelyn J. Hinz, "The Rainbow: Ursula's 'Liberation,'" Contemporary Literature, 17 (1976), 24-43.

CHAPTER IV

AFTER GOD THE FATHER

As at the end of Save Me the Waltz, as the guests are leaving one of the Knight's parties, Alabama reflects that we will always "have to seek some perspective on ourselves, some link between ourselves and the values more permanent than us of which we have felt the existence by placing ourselves in our father's setting" (p. 211; emphasis mine). Similarly at the outset of the work, when the "father's setting" is described, there is a reference to both the "lord" (Austin) and "the devil" (pp. 3, 4). That there is a religious yearning in both instances seems fairly evident, but it is a frustrated desire in the sense that it is couched in religious terms which no longer command a strong emotional response.

Throughout Save Me the Waltz, the number of expletives referring to God, Christ, the Lord, Jesus, the Devil, etc., is considerable. But to Alabama, the Savior's appearance in the dialogue indicates the very reverse of salvation; it only means that "something unpleasant [is] bound to happen" (p. 15). Just as feudal and patriarchal premises lose their relevance in the social sphere of Alabama's world, so as symbols in the religious sphere have they lost their power to elicit reverence. The social world in Save Me the Waltz is largely devoid of any sense of the sacred; the materialism and hedonism that are portrayed in Book II particularly, are expressions of the age's spiritual bankruptcy. Thus we find such conjunctions as "'O Lord! Why can't I make money?'" and the inebriated Gabrielle Gibbs mumbling over the toilet bowl that "'Christ

. . . etait ne en quatre cent Anno Domini. C'etait vraiment tres dommage'" (pp. 22, 107).

The waning power of patriarchy, which is concomitant with the waning power of its religious symbolism, is demonstrated in part by the contrast between Judge Beggs and David. Judge Beggs is still part of an order which has not only a constraining, but also a sustaining influence. Millie, despite having given up much of her life to her husband, nevertheless enjoys a sense of place, or social function, that Alabama does not have with David. The idea that the influence the Judge exerts cannot be extended to the next generation is suggested by the death of his only son in infancy. The absence of a son in the Beggs family was a fictional transposition from the Sayre family upon which it was modelled, for Zelda actually did have an older brother who died after Save Me the Waltz was published. There was also a brother who died in childhood, but before Zelda was born.<sup>1</sup> It therefore seems possible that the exclusion of a son may have been presented intentionally to suggest the degeneration of the patriarchy.

When Alabama is undergoing her dance training in Paris, she remembers her childhood faith in her now-absent father in a way that suggests the nostalgia for a former faith in a vanished god. The family has moved to an apartment across from St. Sulpice cathedral, where "the bells [toll] incessantly for funerals." "Alabama sat in the night breezes, holding her face to the succulent heavens, brooding. . . . She thought of the time when she had been little and had been near her father--by his aloof distance he had presented himself as an infallible source of wisdom, a bed of sureness. She could trust her father" (p. 129).

But the Judge is not the source of god-like wisdom Alabama wishes him

to be, as one of the most crucial and moving scenes in Save Me the Waltz reveals. At her dying father's bedside, tormented by her own sense of failure, loss, and estrangement, Alabama asks him for an answer to her pain, her feeling of disunity between body and soul, and her agonizing need to find some resolve or relief:

She sat there a long time. She hated the way the nurse moved about the room as if her father were a child. Her father knew everything. Her heart was sobbing, and sobbing.

The old man opened his eyes proudly, as was his wont. "Did you say you wanted to ask me something?"

"I thought you could tell me if our bodies are given to us as counter-irritants to the soul. I thought you'd know why when our bodies ought to bring surcease from our tortured minds, they fail and collapse; and why, when we are tortured in our bodies, does our soul desert us as a refuge?"

The old man lay silent.

"Why do we spend years using up our bodies to nurture our minds with experience and find our minds turning then to our exhausted bodies for solace? Why, Daddy?"

"Ask me something easy," the old man answered very weak and far away (p. 199).

It becomes quickly apparent, however, that in contrast to her father, Alabama's husband does not even begin to approach the illusion of a god-like surety. Unlike the biblical David, David Knight is no king. Neither is he a maker of psalms, or songs to God, in his art. And he is certainly not a giant-killer (although as we know from the first draft, he does indulge in bar-room brawls). Compared to the Judge, he is a faithless husband; even his young daughter Bonnie feels compelled to remind him when Alabama is in Naples that he is "'supposed to be sad and homesick for [his] wife'" (p. 190). But here again, the marital infidelity is only another

indication of a larger spiritual faith-lessness.

It takes Alabama some time, however, to see past her own projections to David's human weaknesses (self-indulgence, self-deception, and self-justification, to name a few). With her strong religious yearnings she is continually projecting god-like qualities onto the men she encounters, with the result that her love relationships are inevitably disappointing.<sup>2</sup> Randolph, for example, who is somewhat inattentive to Dixie's admonitions, is imagined by the young Alabama as "always listening for something-- perhaps some elfin serenade he expected, or some fantastic supernatural hint about his social position in the solar system" (p. 12). When David appears on Alabama's steps, he seems to have "some heavenly support beneath his shoulder blades that [lifts] his feet from the ground in ecstatic suspension, as if he secretly enjoy[s] the ability to fly but [is] walking as a compromise to convention" (p. 35). Jacques has "the head of the gold of a Christmas coin" (p. 82), is described in colors of bronze and gold and white, and inspires Alabama to wonder if "he actually is a god'" (p. 84). Kissing Jacques, "the white linen stranger," is like "embracing a lost religious rite" (p. 89). Although Alabama sees Jacques as a sun god (p. 84; or son god/Christ figure), David associates him with the pagan god Dionysus (p. 85).

As this example also illustrates, one of the ways in which the author responds to the impoverishment of traditional Christian symbolism is to infuse it with the energy of pagan myth. It was Pan, the god of instinct, whom Christianity appropriated for its personification of the Devil--he who exists outside the domain of the sky God, the Lord in Heaven. But Pan, like Christ, was also a shepherd, and Zelda Fitzgerald develops this connection on two occasions in Save Me the Waltz, suggesting implications

of the Christian myth that have been excluded from the traditional interpretations, wherein Christ, the "good shepherd," was only so in a metaphorical and moral sense. Pan, in contrast, was half goat, and was believed to be an actual shepherd--out there with the flock, so to speak.

As a foreshadowing of the affair with Jacques, the hotel proprietor appears on the beach where the Knights are sunning themselves. Alabama first notices his beard, and then sees him as "a lean burned figure in duck trousers with shiny ribs like an ivory Christ and faunlike eyes beckoning in obscene fantasy." His voice "swell[s] with the confidence of a gentleman" (p. 81). Perhaps the obvious phallic overtones of the beard and the confident, swelling, masculine voice do not need to be pointed out here; but what may be less obvious is that the ivory Christ should be visualized on a cross, pale, gaunt, and emaciated, after the usual Christian icon. In the conflation of the two images, then, the god who is dying on the cross is revitalized by the beckoning, obscene, and faunlike creature.

After her aborted love affair, Alabama goes for a walk with Nanny and Bonnie, which is described in a mixture of Christian and pagan imagery similar to the previous passage:

The jade porcelain gods in front of the heathen cemetery seemed very indoor gods and out of place on the bauxite terrace. . . . The sun bled to death in a red and purple hemorrhage--dark arterial blood dying the grape leaves. The clouds were black and twisted horizontally and the land spread biblical in the prophetic light.

"No Frenchman ever kisses his wife on the mouth," said Nanny confidentially. "He has too much respect for her."  
. . . .

A peasant in the hot fields gestured lasciviously and beckoned to the women. Nanny was frightened.

"Can you imagine that, Madam, and we with a little

child? I shall certainly speak to Mr. Knight. The world is not safe since the war."

At sundown the tom-toms beat in the Senegalese camp--rites they performed for the dead in their monster-guarded burial ground.

A lone shepherd, brown and handsome, herded a thick drove of sheep along the stubbly tracks leading to the villa. They swept around Alabama and the nurse and child, whirling up the dust with the pattering feet.

"J'ai peur," she called to the man.

"Oui," he said gently, "vous avez peur! Gi--o." He clucked the sheep on down the road (pp. 97-98).

In addition to revitalizing the pagan elements of Christian theology, the entire passage presents a distinctively feminine rendering of the Christian sacrifice of blood,<sup>3</sup> with the seemingly bloodless Nanny and her aversion to the peasant in the hot fields as the perfect foil to the vision. Alabama understands as Nanny does not that the world never has been and never will be "safe;" for to live in the flesh is to be always vulnerable, to submit to the cycles of increase and decrease, of dying and becoming. The lone shepherd, with his comprehension of her fear, and even it seems of the larger reason for her fear, is no emasculated "limp and shepherdly"<sup>4</sup> Christ, but a brown and handsome man, whose gentleness is the expression of a full life of feeling, and not its denial.

The suggestion that to seek safety through religion is a mistake is made elsewhere in Save Me the Waltz. As we have seen, art is presented as serving a religious function, but it is one of stimulation and consolation, rather than protection. For Alabama, the illusory "hope of entering Diaghilev's ballet loom[s] before her like a protecting cathedral" (p. 147), before he dies and she is struck down by illness. The notion of God as a sheltering, beneficent deity, preserving stasis, is questioned again



in the section on David's and Bonnie's time in Switzerland: "Lake Geneva, pounded for so many summers by the cruel brightness, lay shaking its fist at the high heavens swearing up at God from the security of the Swiss republic" (p. 181; emphasis mine).

This desire for stasis contributes to the cultural and religious decadence which is the author's concern. With its historical premises, the Christian tradition presents the myth of the dying and re-born god as a single, unique event, rather than as, in primitive myth and ritual, a sacrifice which must be periodically repeated for the sake of re-vitalizing the human community and affirming the original identity of all dead and living things. Without this sacrifice, the community suffers entropy; it "runs down."<sup>5</sup>

The sense of entropy is pervasive in Alabama's world, ruled by as it is by an "exhausted god of creation" (p. 196). At Dickie's dinner party, veiled allusions are made to the wasteland poetry of T. S. Eliot: "the people, intent on themselves . . . moved about like officials under masks in an operating room" (p. 110); "the spring sniggered quietly to itself on the street corners" (p. 111).<sup>6</sup> Alabama notices that everyone in the group is grumpy: "It must be nerves and having nothing to do but write home for money" (p. 114). Nervousness is associated on several occasions in Save Me the Waltz with the exclamation, "'I can't stand it!'" (pp. 65, 117, 156; and on the last occasion preceded by an unwitting plea; "'My God!'")--and it seems that the social world in general has also reached the limits of its own psychic resources.

In Provence, "it was as if the sun had absorbed the coloring of the countryside to brew its sunset mixtures . . . while the land lay white and devitalized awaiting the lavish mixture that would be spread to cool

through the vines and stones in the late afternoon" (p. 85; emphasis mine). When we recall the metaphor of blood in which the sunset is later described, it becomes more clear that what the devitalized land requires is yet another sacrifice of blood.

In Save Me the Waltz, it is Alabama's struggle and failure to establish a career in dance which is presented as the ritual re-enactment of the suffering of Christ--again, in language and imagery that is (pointedly) unobtrusive, but unmistakably related to the sequence of agony, sacrifice, entombment, and transcendence. The scene is set in the time frame established when Alabama is in training, from Christmas to Easter. David and Alabama debate about when they will go home to visit her parents, agreeing to postpone the promised Christmas visit until Easter. And in case the reader misses the point, Christmas is mentioned eight more times within the next two pages (pp. 132-34). Alabama arrives in Naples during the Lenten season (pp. 174, 176), and her "death" as a ballerina occurs at the end of this time.

As well, before Alabama commences her study of ballet, Dickie's dinner party and its aftermath are presented as a decadent version of the Last Supper, when the apostles symbolically shared in the blood and body of Christ. Gabrielle helps to set the tone with her drunken comment about Christ, and her habit of addressing her audience as "angels." Hastings invokes the communal nature of the ritual by demanding, "'Just who is this hypothetical we?'" He also complains that the food is like a "'geologist's excavation,'" which leads Alabama to decide that she can count on his being cross at the right point; he was always a little bit cross." Then he snorts that the blue ice cream is probably "'frozen New England blood extracted from the world by the pressure of modern civilization on

inherited concepts and acquired traditions.'"

There are references to cannibalism, carnivorism, carcasses, cadavers, and corpses. Dickie expostulates that she wishes "'people would not flagellate themselves with the food when they're dining with me.'" The party "[loses] body with the end of dinner" and someone later comments that "'What we need is new blood in the party.'" The main function of the sacrificial ritual was to restore the sense of the eternal, and Dickie unwittingly also brings this element in (emphasizing thereby its absence from their existence) when she comments that the party "'has been going on forever.'"

The Judas theme of betrayal and the connection between sexual and spiritual frustration is also played out in this section. When Alabama returns home at dawn to discover that David is still out with Gabrielle, Hastings mockingly exclaims, "'For I, thy God, am a Jewish god, Baptist God, Catholic God--.'"

It is Alabama who "'certainly [has] the body'" for the sacrifice. She is warned about what will be involved by Madame: "'It is a hard life. One suffers.'" And Dickie cautions her that "'the gold streets of heaven are hard on the feet.'" But Alabama begins to recognize, as she says to Hastings in what is more than an admission of mere neurotic masochism, that martyrdom may in fact be her role (pp. 107-18; emphasis mine).

During the party Alabama hums to herself "Horses, Horses, Horses" (p. 115), in another "animal sacrifice" motif which ultimately supports this theme. At the beginning of Save Me the Waltz she is compared to a thoroughbred who always gives a good show (p. 29). After she foregoes the affair with Jacques, however, she begins to feel like "'an old tired horse with hoof and mouth disease'" (p. 97). Then in training for ballet, she

starts to feel that she may be recovering the possibilities, learning to draw her spine tightly, "like the reins of a race horse" (p. 124). But she drives herself so unremittingly that near the end of her training she feels "like a gored horse in the bull ring, dragging its entrails" (p. 154, also connecting back to the dinner party, when she mockingly calls Hastings a matador, p. 115).

A second animal motif with which Alabama is identified is the dying swan, from Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake. The performance she is scheduled to give when she incurs the foot infection in Naples is the leading role in "Le lac des Cygnes" (p. 174). Earlier, she practices the adagio from that ballet (which would be the scene of the dying swan) with her teacher: "Alabama yielded herself to the slow dignity of the selfless ritual, the voluptuous flagellation of the russian minors. Slowly she moved to the protestations of the adagio from 'Le Lac des Cygnes.'" In this scene an indirect allusion is also made to Christ carrying the cross: "the back of her shoulders was strong and thick, lying over her thin arms like a massive yoke" (p. 150-51; emphasis mine). As anyone who has seen Swan Lake will know, the choreography of the dying swan involves the representation of a crucifix, with the outstretched arms as the wings which can no longer fly.

In both the bull ring and the ballet of Swan Lake one can discern the vestiges of ancient sacrificial ritual. In the bullfight, a remnant of the stage when animals were substituted for humans, it is the ritual of atonement, in which victor and victim become one (as Hemingway has described), which is emphasized. In the ballet, it is transcendence, or re-birth through death. In the "slow dignity" of the "selfless ritual," Zelda Fitzgerald suggests a similar explanation for what Otto Rank has

called "the strange institution of the ritual murder of kings" that has been documented in the ancient cultures of Babylon and India: the "cosmic role of the king as vessel of immortality" makes his sacrifice "the only logical conclusion of his whole supernatural existence, the passing ordained for him because of his role," which does not allow him a natural death. His sacrifice is "his privilege."<sup>7</sup>

The theme of "voluptuous flagellation" is consistent throughout Alabama's engagement in the ballet, with its torn muscles (p. 124), agony (p. 127), conjunctions of feet and nails (p. 127) and thorns and blood (p. 141), blisters (p. 137), blistering pebbles (p. 159), blistering flesh (p. 161), and bleeding feet (p. 171).

When her teacher leaves for a month, Alabama feels "great hot tears rolling inexplicably down her face" (p. 125). The identification with Christ's suffering is made some time later, when she arrives in Rome. The station is "full of palms," there are "sprays of sunshine" from the reflections of the fountain; and Alabama's "spirits [rise]." "The signs pronounced a litany: Asti Spumante, Lagrima Christi, Spumoni, Tortoni. She didn't know what it was she had lost--" (p. 167). "Lacrima Christi" is a Neapolitan wine; its literal translation means "tears of Christ."

The burial motif is equally evoked just before Alabama decides to go to Naples, when Diaghilev dies, and the props from his company's performances are stored in a warehouse by the Seine, described in tomb imagery that echoes the womb imagery used for Madame (pp. 121-22; p. 48 in this paper). They lie "locked in a stone tunnel where a grey light from the river sloshes over the dark, dripping earth and over the moist, curving bottom" (p. 162). And on the same page, the "intermittent sun disappear[s] from the skylight over her last lesson," like the disappearance from the earth

of the son of the sky god.

When she is sick in the hospital, Alabama spits red mucous and begs for water. But during her hallucinations, apparently in an oxygen tent, she undergoes an experience of transcendence that echoes Christ's rising from the tomb. "The windows opened like blinding white caverns, entrances to white tunnels that fitted over the bed like tents. It was too easy to breathe inside that tented radiance--she couldn't feel her body, the air was so light" (p. 193).

The "tented radiance" also recalls an earlier description of Madame. When Alabama examines a photograph of the teacher before she meets her, she is reminded of her sister Joan: "there was the same transparence about her sister that shone through the face in the picture like the blinding glow of a Russian winter. It was perhaps a kindred intensity of heat that had worn Joan to that thin external radiance" (p. 121). Here again, it seems we have a feminine rendering of the Christian myth, wherein the transcendent identity in the duality of the Father and Son becomes that of the Mother and Daughter.

Throughtout Save Me the Waltz there is a strong impulse toward the restoration of the feminine as a principle of divinity. It is not only the men who are attributed god-like qualities by Alabama, but also the women--particularly Joan, Millie (with her "white hair . . . done in a crown around her head like a Florentine saint;" p. 201), and of course Madame. In the tale of thwarted maternal love in Bonnie's visit to Naples, there is a background of expletives which differs sharply from that of the rest of the book--for the devout Italians continually refer to the Mother of God, whereas everywhere else the characters, especially David and Alabama, refer to the masculine deities. In Naples the mother goddess is constantly

invoked as "Mother Maria," "Sanctified Mary," "Holy Mother," "Mother of God," and "Mother of Women" (pp. 169, 170, 176, 179), as if to suggest that weakening of the mother/daughter bond demonstrated by Alabama and Bonnie arises not simply from personal failure, but from the failure of a larger cultural and religious tradition which no longer recognizes the significance of the feminine principle.

The Catholic church maintains not only a stronger connection with the ancient mother goddess, but also a richer symbolic tradition. As Jung has noted, the impoverishment of our religious symbolic life is related to the increasing value placed on rationality and individual will that accompanied the growth of Protestantism.<sup>8</sup> But even in the Catholic Christmas Mass Alabama attends in Naples, she is only momentarily moved by its rituals, "the chants that [rise] and [fall] like the tides on amorphous shores before the birth of man," for there is a distinctly totalitarian quality to its effect: "Alabama absorbed a sense of elation as if she marched to the righteous tune of spiritual organization." During the service she day-dreams of "Bourbon princes and hemophilia, papal courts and maraschino cherries." Her Russian friend tells her an amusing story about a priest she once knew, "who became so aroused by the tales he heard in the Confessional that he got drunk on the Holy Sacrament. He drank so much during the week that there wasn't any communion to give to the penitents on Sunday, who had also been drinking during the week and needed a pick-me-up. His church became known as a lousy dump that borrowed its blood of Christ from the synagogue . . . and lost many customers, amongst them herself" (pp. 173-74; emphasis mine). The tale seems to suggest in part that the church, in assuming the role of moral arbiter, has lost its former capacity to arouse genuine spiritual intoxication in the Holy Sacrament.

The psychic suffocation of the totalitarian element in Italy is also noted in Save Me the Waltz. That it will become an increasingly prevalent phenomenon of twentieth-century life is subtly suggested when Alabama boards "the new train" in Rome. It is filthy, without carpets, and it "smell[s] of the Fascisti, of guns" (p. 167). The "fat mothers" of the young ballerinas in Alabama's company complain when she is given the starring role; "'but the Americans grab everything. But Mussolini will show them, Holy Sacrament!'" (p. 174). The reminder that fascism is not an entirely novel event in human history, and has been associated before with the Catholic church, is made in references to the Inquisition and to the medieval rack (pp. 191, 192, 194).

One last alternative religious tradition that is explored in Save Me the Waltz is that of Black Afro-American culture, which, despite having absorbed Christianity, still maintains a primitive vitality. After training in ballet throughout the winter, Alabama becomes "gladly, savagely proud of her Negroid hips, convex as boats in a wood carving" (p. 134). When the family travels to the American South, Nanny asks her if the Negroes have missionaries, and she replies. "'Their religion is very satisfactory, they sing a lot. . . . I went to a Negro baptism in that river at five o'clock on a Fourth of July morning. They were dressed in white robes and the red sun slanted down over the muddy water's edge, and I felt very rapturous and wanted to join their church" (p. 196). Perhaps it was this ritual Alabama was remembering when she compared kissing Jacques, "the white-linen stranger," to "embracing a lost religious rite" (p. 89; p. 79 in this paper).

But in general, the options of conventional religion seem limited, and "our father's setting" no longer sufficient for evoking deep religious



response. For Alabama the psychic (if not physical) recovery lies in her personal re-enactment of Christ's death and resurrection, which thereby takes on a feminine rather than a masculine emphasis, and regenerates an awareness of the eternal, in a world which has not seemed to notice its lack.

CHAPTER IV

NOTES

<sup>1</sup>See Mayfield, pp. 8, 205.

<sup>2</sup>Also see Simone de Beauvoir's chapter on "The Woman in Love," in her The Second Sex, trans. H. M. Parshley (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), for a discussion of some of the ways in which women are encouraged to seek through romantic love an outlet for unsatisfied spiritual yearnings.

<sup>3</sup>Sandra Gubar cites a commentary by Charles Williams related to this idea: "'that other great natural bloodshed common to half the human race--menstruation . . . . is an image . . . of the great bloodshed on Calvary;" women are "witnesses, in the body, to the suffering of the body, and the method of Redemption." From his The Forgiveness of Sins (London, 1950), p. 138. In Gubar, p. 84, n. 35.

<sup>4</sup>From Alice Munro's short story, "Age of Faith," in her collection, Lives of Girls and Women (1971; rpt. New York: Signet, 1974), p. 82.

<sup>5</sup>See Eliade, The Myth of the Eternal Return, p. 88, and Rank, pp. 199, 202-03, 294.

<sup>6</sup>From Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock: "Let us go then, you and I, / When the evening is spread out against the sky / Like a patient etherized upon a table; / Let us go, through a certain half-deserted streets," (ll. 1-4); "And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker, / And in short, I was afraid." (ll. 85-86). In Collected Poems 1909-1935 (London: Faber & Faber, 1947).

<sup>7</sup>Rank, p. 127.

<sup>8</sup>See Jung, The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious, p. 29.

## CONCLUSION

In the light of the previous discussion, there are three remaining issues which deserve some brief consideration here.

One is the way in which Save Me the Waltz anticipates and/or throws into question the responses of contemporary women artists and feminist theorists with regard to the problem of women's liberation in the twentieth century.

It is clear that Zelda Fitzgerald's manner of dealing with the Christian myth does not follow the polemical call of Mary Daly, from whose book Beyond God the Father the title of the fourth chapter of this thesis was adapted. Daly dictates that a "logical consequence of the liberation of women will be a loss of plausibility of Christological formulas which reflect and encourage idolatry in relation to the person of Jesus."<sup>1</sup> In accepting the premise that women must be excluded from the myth, Daly stays firmly entrenched within the system she claims to be attacking. Her logos-oriented approach sounds suspiciously like that of America's more intolerant Puritan forefathers, and demonstrates little confidence in the subtle yet irrepressible feminine power of transformation.

Zelda's treatment of Alabama's problems does, however, bear remarkable similarity to that of two recent women authors, in works which deal with archetypal recovery through a breakdown in ordinary consciousness. In Doris Lessing's The Four-Gated City Martha Quest undergoes a revelatory descent into madness, in which she is conducted through the Stations of the

Cross by the Devil and is bound on the Cross, "whipped through the ritual by the hating scourging tongue of the Devil."<sup>2</sup> The heroine of Margaret Atwood's Surfacing also undergoes a psychological breakdown, in which she recognizes the implications of a drawing of God she had made as a child: "if the Devil was allowed a tail and horns, God needed them also, they were advantages."<sup>3</sup> Additionally, Save Me the Waltz anticipates Surfacing, and also James Dickey's Deliverance,<sup>4</sup> in its extensive use of unobtrusive religious language.

Linda W. Wagner sees Save Me the Waltz as "an ironic fiction which paints the disspirited modern woman as vividly as Eliot's The Wasteland did the modern temper."<sup>5</sup> But she fails to note the difference between the despair that infuses Eliot's work and the ritualistic nature of Save Me the Waltz, which provides a compensatory response to the modern malaise and allies it with such works as The Four-Gated City, Surfacing, and Deliverance.

A second matter worth speculating about is the actual reasons for Scott's resistance to his wife's book. After he read the original version of Save Me the Waltz, he complained in a vehement letter (apparently to Zelda's psychiatrist) that whereas his books had made her "a legend," her "single intention" in this work was to make him a "non-entity."<sup>6</sup> Unwittingly, Scott was addressing what were perhaps for him the two most disturbing facts about Save Me the Waltz--facts which he was evidently unwilling to admit. It is true that David is, relatively speaking, a non-entity; but this is because the focus is on Alabama, on her growth and self-discovery, not because it was Zelda's "single intent" to reduce Scott's stature. Perhaps it was easier for him to assign ill intent to Zelda than to acknowledge her ultimate independence of him, to admit that

his was not the lens through which she viewed the world. As well, Scott must have experienced some discomfort to realize, however dimly, that the legendary figure he created in his fiction had almost nothing to do with the spiritual yearning and the passionate, comprehensive intelligence that find their expression in Save Me the Waltz.

A last factor to consider is the problem of editing. It is certainly true that many complaints about turgidity and obscurity were to some extent valid, and that too frequently the intention of this novel is muddled by its execution. But the problem of clarifying the prose style is actually a fairly simple matter, as the following revision may illustrate. The paragraph describing the atmosphere in which the girls were raised is somewhat confused.

Original version:

Incubated in the mystic pungence of Negro mummies, the family hatched into girls. From the personification of an extra penny, a street-car ride to whitewashed picnic grounds, a pocketful of peppermints, the Judge became, with their matured perceptions, a retributory organ, an inexorable fate, the force of law, order, and established discipline. Youth and age: a hydraulic funicular, and age, having less of the waters of conviction in its carriage, insistent on equalizing the ballast of youth. The girls, then, grew into the attributes of femininity, seeking respite in their mother from the exposition of their young-lady years as they would have haunted a shady protective grove to escape a blinding glare (p. 5; emphases mine).

Possible revision:

Incubated in the mystic pungence of Negro mummies, the family hatched into girls. As their perceptions matured, the Judge, formerly a mere dispenser of extra pennies and pocketsful of peppermints, became to them a retributory organ, an inexorable fate, the force of law, order, and established discipline. The girls, then, grew into the attributes of femininity, seeking respite in their mother in their young-lady years as they would have haunted a shady protective grove to escape a blinding glare.

The metaphor of the hydraulic funicular can be discarded here not only because it is obscure and over-elaborate, but also because it breaks up the unifying metaphor of the paragraph, that of the distinction between the nurturing, restful, maternal darkness and the civilizing yet glaring paternal light.

One would of course have to be extremely cautious if one were to attempt to re-edit Save Me the Waltz, because its metaphoric style, as we have seen, is so distinct. It nevertheless seems possible that some careful revision could make the text more accessible to readers, without sacrificing the technical originality.

One can see that although Save Me the Waltz suffers from technical defects, a close examination nevertheless reveals unexpected riches. In its intricate inter-connection of style and theme, it addresses the twentieth-century phenomenon of widespread cultural/religious failure and the implications of that failure for artistic and literary expression, as well as for the modern woman's search for identity. I once argued that Zelda Fitzgerald had failed to find her own voice,<sup>7</sup> but it is clear I was wrong; perhaps at the present time it is one which people may be more prepared to hear.

CONCLUSION

NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Mary Daly, Beyond God the Father (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), p. 69.

<sup>2</sup>Doris Lessing, The Four-Gated City (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), pp. 550-51.

<sup>3</sup>Margaret Atwood, Surfacing, (1972; rpt. Markham, Ont.: PaperJacks, 1980), p. 169.

<sup>4</sup>See James Dickey, Deliverance (New York: Dell, 1971). Also see Hinz, "The Masculine/Feminine Psychology of American/Canadian Primitivism: Deliverance and Surfacing," pp. 75-96.

<sup>5</sup>Wagner, p. 206.

<sup>6</sup>Letter from Scott, quoted in Matthew Bruccoli's "Note on the Text," Crosscurrents/Modern Fiction edition, p. 240.

<sup>7</sup>See my "Zelda Fitzgerald: An Unromantic Revision," Dalhousie Review, 62 (1982), p. 211.

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