

# Fictional Appropriation of Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald

Marija Krsteva

Ernest Hemingway's and F. Scott Fitzgerald's figures have been used as fictional characters in a number of books. Their life stories serve as motivations for plot lines, character presentation and image creation of a specific postmodern type of the biographee. This paper analyses some of the most notable examples of fictional appropriations of Hemingway and Fitzgerald's lives. The novels presented here exhibit extensive play combining fact and fiction thus creating a unique genre which uses postmodern narrative techniques underling the relation between past and present in order to create specific images of the biographees, the times when they lived and their families and friends. In this respect, these works often involve overlapping biographical data that include both the biographies and fictional people and events. In this way, the novels offer different interpretations of real events and the biographees' lives in general. This paper makes an attempt to critically assess these fictional representations of Hemingway and Fitzgerald, their wives and their friendship from the point of the new genre of biofiction focusing both on the thematic concerns of these works and the postmodern techniques used by the biofiction writers these days.

Ernest Hemingway has become a fictional character in more than 30 novels, several short stories, graphic novels, plays and poems according to one of the most recent studies, McFarland's 2014 *Appropriating Hemingway: Using him as a Fictional Character*. In organizing his work, McFarland presents texts (mostly novels) in which Hemingway acquires considerable attention as character as opposed to those in which he makes only cameo appearance. The large amount of texts appropriating Hemingway as a fictional character includes those which present him either as a protagonist or as perceived through an obsessed character

who is not always ‘favorably’ minded. McFarland enumerates six novels concerned with 1920s Paris featuring Hemingway prominently: Vincent Cosgrove’s *The Hemingway Papers* (1983), Howard Engel’s *Murder in Montparnasse* (1992), Tony Hays’ *Murder in the Latin Quarter* (1993), Clancy Carlile’s *The Paris Pilgrims* (1999), Craig McDonald’s *One True Sentence* (2011), and Paula McLain’s *The Paris Wife* (2011). Moreover, Hemingway’s figure is portrayed as seen by an obsessed character: Michael Palin’s *Hemingway’s Chair* (1995) and Gerhard Köpf’s *Papa’s Suitcase* (1994). Hemingway is idolized, at least by the protagonist, who may himself be treated at times as a bit of a buffoon. Furthermore, Karl Alexander’s *Papa and Fidel* (1989) and Dan Simmons’ *The Crook Factory* (2000), feature Hemingway as an action-hero. Writers of mysteries and crime novels appear to have been especially drawn to Hemingway, often to assist their protagonist and other times to behave as a sort of foil (McFarland 2014:25-55).

As this initial list shows Hemingway’s appropriation as a character in biographical fictions varies widely. In most of the books mentioned above his fictional character is the hero, but in a few of them he fails to become one. There is a group of books, however, in which Hemingway is represented in a such a pejorative way that their authors can rightly be called “fanemies” as McFarland (p.149) suggests. One such example is Marty Beckerman’s satire, very tellingly entitled *The Heming Way: How to Unleash the Booze-Inhaling, Animal-Slaughtering, War-Glorifying, Hairy-Chested Retro-Sexual Legend Within, Just Like Papa!* (2012). Hemingway’s image acquires even greater diversity in the so called “speculative” fictions such as Joe Haldeman’s *Hemingway Hoax* (1990), Tom Winton’s *Hemingway’s Ghost* (2011), Craig McDonald’s *Print the Legend* (2010) etc. In these books, Hemingway is given unrealistic characteristics, often to achieve a comical effect.

Another group of biographical fictions about Hemingway are those in which he appears indirectly or as seen by the others. The influence his image has on the rest of the characters, is often vital for their actions or the development of the story. Such novels include Bill Granger's *Hemingway's Notebook* (1986) and Edmundo Desnoes *Memories of Underdevelopment* (2004).

This paper tries to show is that the image Hemingway created of himself during his life time continues to be re-created today. In an attempt to understand this global development in the literary, cultural and everyday life of people, McFarland offers the concepts of "fandom" and "pop fiction". He insists that because the author's works can hardly be separated from their personal life stories, people who become fans of a story, a character or an idea, idolize the whole concept and work towards the creation of a particular public image. The aspect of fandom or of "how we make sense of the world, in relation to mass media, and in relation to our historical, social, cultural location" (McFarland 2014:11), is closely related to the rising popularity of biographical fiction, which gives ground to classifying it as a pop fiction. For McFarland, it can also fall into the realm of popular reading, to the world of escapist and formulaic fiction, of detective or spy novels, thrillers and pulp fiction. And of course, "best sellers". Still, new collections continue to be published. For example, the works published by Hemingway's friend A.E Hotchner that appeared shortly after Hemingway's death continue to spawn until today.

Hemingway was nearly fifty when he met Ed Hotchner ('Hotch,' as he often called him), who was born in St. Louis in 1920, graduated from Washington University Law School in 1941, and served as a military journalist in the Air Force during World War II. Hotchner adapted several of Hemingway's works for the stage and television, and he later developed a close friendship with the actor Paul Newman. In his foreword, Hotchner celebrates Hemingway's 'courageous exploits' but draws attention to his 'shy and

gentle' side and to his boundless generosity, 'charismatic personality,' and 'genius for friendship.' But he does observe that 'Ernest's standards of friendship were very high and difficult to define' and that he demanded those friends to 'measure up,' that they be 'straight and unphony and formed in their own image' (10). (McFarland 2014:21)

The author and the reader of a biographical fiction would most probably be "the faithful fans" of the famous protagonists, but I also believe that the idea of creating a new image or re-confirming an old idea about the lives of these figures is what triggers the wish to write or read biofiction.

In this sense, Hemingway's appropriations as a fictional character can be seen as having many purposes. They either resolve, praise or criticize his public or private figure. Such appropriations include presentation or re-representation of Hemingway as America's modern idol, a "clumsy womanizing drunk" or a charismatic man of sports and courage but also the opposite of these traits. For example, the books Paula McLain's *The Paris Wife*, Erika Robuck's *Hemingway's Girl* and Martha Gellhorn's *Travel's with Myself and Another* give a different perspective of not only Hemingway's life and works, but also of his wives' lives. Working to foreward certain parts of his life and discard others, both McLain and Robuck have accessed a large body of biographies and documents about Ernest Hemingway's life and especially about Hadley Richardson Hemingway. First, there is Hemingway's memoir *A Moveable Feast* (1964), in which he makes a special tribute to Hadley, then her interviews for Denis Brian for *The True Gen* (1988) and Berenice Kert's *The Hemingway Women* (1983). There are also the two biographies about Hadley: Alice Hunt Sokoloff's *Hadley: The First Mrs. Hemingway* (1971) and Gioia Diliberto's *Paris Without End: The True Story of Hemingway's First Wife* (1992,2011) as well as *the Cambridge Edition of the Letters of Ernest Hemingway (Book 1)* published in September 2011.

More specifically, Hemingway's character is refracted in three distinctly different narratives that can be group together and raise rich discussion on genre play. They involve a story about Hemingway fictionally told by his first wife Hadley Richardson, a story told by his third wife Martha Gellhorn in her own memoir as well as a story told by a fictional female character of Hemingway's servant during his second marriage to Pauline. The more recent publication *Mrs. Hemingway* (2014) by Naomi Woods in which Hemingway's life is presented through the eyes of all four of his wives is not put in the above group as it does tackle only one single story. Hemingway's first two wives unlike Martha Gellhorn and Mary Welsh did not pursue writing careers despite Pauline's journalistic career, and therefore there are not first-person biographical accounts of their life with Hemingway. The only biography about Pauline revealing an unseen side of her, *Unbelievable Happiness and Final Sorrow: The Hemingway-Pfeiffer Marriage* by Ruth Hawkins, was published considerably late, in 2012. I have chosen Gellhorn's story for this study rather than that of Hemingway's last wife Mary Welsh presented in her book *How it Was* (1976) because of its more postmodernist approach to dealing with fact and fiction. According to many critics, Welsh's book on the other hand, has a more realistic approach in portraying her life with Hemingway. While taking on a unique genre play interweaving fact and fiction, the three stories told by the three female characters both question and confirm "a truth" about their character's lives and are a very good example of how the process of fact and fiction blending works and initiates genre play.

Similar to Hemingway's appropriation as a fictional character is that of F. Scott Fitzgerald and his wife Zelda Fitzgerald. Numerous biographies, collection of letters and biographical fictions have appeared about their lives too. The list of literary biographies and biographical fictions about F. Scott Fitzgerald is long and diverse. Many of them can fall into the group of literary biographies about F.

Scott Fitzgerald that Joyce Carol Oates designates as “pathographies”, (in Kakutani: 1999) i.e. emphasizing the vice, evil or illness of the author.

The existing documentation about the Fitzgeralds is essential in the creation of their biographies. The first substantial publishing of their letters was made by Matthew J. Bruccoli in *F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Life in Letters (1994)* and in *The Collected Works of Zelda Fitzgerald (1992)*. In 2002, the first collection of Scott and Zelda’s letters in one volume *Dear Scott, Dearest Zelda: The Love Letters of F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald* was published by Jackson R. Bryer and Cathy W. Barks.

Lists of novels trying to uncover the enigmatic parts of their lives continuously spring up. Only in 2013 six biographical fictions were released about Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald. Therese Ann Fowler’s *Z: A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald*, Erika Robuck’s *Call me Zelda*, R. Clifton Spargo’s *Beautiful Fools: The Last Affair of Zelda and Scott Fitzgerald* feature Zelda as one of the main characters. In *Careless People: Murder, Mayhem and the Invention of Great Gatsby* by Sarah Churchwell, *Guests on Earth: A Novel* by Lee Smith and *Flappers: Six Women of a Dangerous Generation* by Judith Mackrell her life story is presented alongside other people’s life stories and plot lines. The novels take the task of revising the treatment of Scott and Zelda as public figures while addressing the established facts in their standard biographies. In “Z” Therese Ann Fowler writes about what Fischer calls “Zelda’s self-help epiphanies” (Fischer: 2013). It is about “Zelda’s grand romance and its ugly conflicts as well as the hopeful suggestion of Zelda’s emergence as a self-actualized woman.” (Fischer: 2013).

In *Call me Zelda* both Zelda and Anna adopt the language of therapy to alleviate and cure their pain. Robuck introduces the character of Anna, a nurse in Baltimore psychiatric hospital who befriends Zelda and the two manage to help each other go through difficult periods in their lives. Anna tells Zelda’s stories

based on what Zelda writes and while helping Zelda, she finds a friend to whom she can confess all her troubles (a dead husband and child, abandoned musical pursuits). Anna continues to tend to Zelda even after she's left the hospital while also joining the Fitzgeralds on a trip to Bermuda eventually becoming Zelda's true friend.

Spargo's *Beautiful Fools* tells a story of the last trip of the couple to Cuba which is the last trip they take together and the last time they see each other. The story includes local scenes and character, including a Cuban playboy, a night club stabbing and an aged fortune teller. The story encompasses one of the less known stories about the couple's life and therefore makes it a lot more successful as a biographical fiction. Churchwell's *Careless People: Murder, Mayhem and the Invention of Great Gatsby* traces the couple's life story at the very beginning of their marriage in America. Their stay in New York at that time coincided with some bizarre crime events in the autumn of 1922 involving a double murder in New Jersey. These developments eventually led to the conception of Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. Guest's *on Earth: A Novel* and *Flappers: Six Women of a Dangerous Generation* portray Zelda alongside other people's stories. The former deals with the events taking place in 1936 in Highland Hospital in Asheville, North Carolina. A thirteen – year old orphaned Evalina Toussaint admitted to this institution is under Zelda's protection. She witnesses a number of events including the 1948 tragic fire killing nine women in a lock ward, one of which is Zelda. The latter tells the stories of six notable women of the Jazz Age their struggles and triumph. These stories, including that of Zelda are often intertwined and compared give a richer perspective of the times and the people of the period.

Another group of, just as is the case with those of Hemingway's life casts the Fitzgeralds as secondary characters. *Gatsby's Girl* (2006) by Caroline Preston traces the life of Scott's first love, Ginevra. From their first meeting to her marital

life, the book concentrates on her happy and sad moments. *Villa America* (2015) by Liza Klausmann is another story about love and marriage in the Jazz age expat community of young Americans in France. The golden age of the main protagonists Sarah and Gerald Murphy sadly does not last. The story features the Fitzgeralds, Hemingway, Picasso, Dos Passos and many other writers and artists attending the parties at the French Riviera. Prior to that, the life of the Murphy family was classically portrayed in *Living Well is the Best Revenge* (1971) by Calvin Tomkins. A. Scott Borg's *Maxwell Perkins: Editor of Genius* (1978) is a book about the life of Maxwell Perkins, the editor of Fitzgerald, Hemingway's and Thomas Wolfe's work. He plays crucial role in the authors' lives and careers dealing with all their personal and professional struggles.

Furthermore, Scott's last years in Hollywood and his love affair with the columnist Sheila Graham, is presented in Sheila's own autobiographical novel *Beloved Infidel* (1958) and in *Intimate Lies: F. Scott Fitzgerald and Sheila Graham: Her Son's Story* (1995) by Robert T. Westbrook. Stewart O'Nan's *West of Sunset* (2015) is another biographical fiction about that period of Fitzgerald's life. It is a story told by a third person narrator, set in Hollywood intensely portraying Fitzgerald's last years during the glamorous Golden Years of Hollywood. The story delivers Fitzgerald's inner portrait, his thoughts and emotions. The book encloses episode of his love affair with Sheila Graham and ends with his death and his imagined last thoughts before his death.

All these novels show a very specific process of sieving through the fact and fiction of Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald's lives and trying to portray what appears important to the writers. In most of the cases it is a process based on existing factual accounts of their lives. It is interesting that the first lengthy biography about any of the two is about Zelda Fitzgerald, published by Nancy Milford in 1970 called *Zelda: A Biography*. A year later, another memoir is published by Zelda's friend Sara Mayfield called *Exiles from Paradise: Zelda*



*and Scott Fitzgerald*. These books made the definitive biographies about the couple's lives trying to present a balanced approach in not taking sides with any of the two.

In 1991, two decades after the publication of Mayfield's book, another biography about Zelda Fitzgerald was published, Koula Svokos Hartnett's *Zelda Fitzgerald and the Failure of the American Dream for Women*, as the first biographer to try to prove Zelda's misdiagnosis as a mental patient was being the result of a doctor's mistaken judgement. A decade later, another two biographies about Zelda were published aiming at distinguishing reality from legend. These include Kendall Taylor's *Sometimes Madness is Wisdom, Zelda and Scott Fitzgerald: A Marriage* (2001) and *Zelda Fitzgerald: Her Voice in Paradise* (2002) and its second edition entitled *Zelda Fitzgerald, The Tragic, Meticulously Researched Biography of the Jazz Age High Priestess* (2011) by Sally Cline. These two biographies openly discuss Zelda's position in her life and marriage. Cline's book especially deals with Zelda's misdiagnosis. In 2004, another biography of Zelda, *Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald: An American Woman's Life* by Linda Wagner Martin was published. Here, Zelda's position is once again revisited her central place as a cultural figure reappraising the cultural world as well as the role of women in cast in twentieth century America.

A crucial role in presenting a real picture about the Fitzgeralds are their personal letters. The same year as Mayfield's biography, 1971, a biography of Fitzgerald was also published, called *Crazy Sundays: F. Scott Fitzgerald in Hollywood* (1971) by Aaron Latham. The book offers a detailed account of Fitzgerald's life especially of his last years, although due to some fictional elements it is not considered a standard biography. Ten years later, Matthew J. Bruccoli published Fitzgerald's standard biography *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur* (1981).

In 2007 the first biographical fiction dealing primarily with the Fitzgerald's marital life called *Alabama Song* was published in French by Gilles Leroy. The same year the book won the highest literary award in France, Prix Goncourt. This seems to have spawned the subsequent avalanche of biofictions about Fitzgerald.

The rich list of books published about Hemingway's and Fitzgerald's figures attest to the intensive postmodern practice of genre blending and the creation of the new genre of biofiction. The stories however diverse, allow for certain chronological and thematic grouping. In this way they show the never ending potential of genre play in developing new meanings while textually weaving biographical facts and fiction.

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