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Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald: An American Woman's Life

Linda Wagner-Martin

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Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald was born at the dawn of the twentieth century, destined for celebrity as one half of the infamous darlings of the Jazz Age literary world.

A southern belle from Montgomery, Alabama, Fitzgerald epitomized the “New Woman” of the modern era in New York and Paris, all the while living on the edge of a nervous breakdown.

Linda Wagner-Martin has created a cultural biography, told from Zelda’s perspective instead of from her famous spouse, F Scott Fitzgerald.

Using previously neglected information from the Princeton archives, Wagner-Martin vividly illustrates Zelda’s psychological landscape, from the roots of her alcoholism to her enviable artistic gifts and achievements: novels, essays, short stories, ballet and even painting.

This is a riveting and provocative portrayal of a talented woman’s professional and emotional conflicts, as relevant today as half a century ago.

“Wagner-Martin has done more research into the life of Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald and brought greater intelligence to its interpretation than anyone else. … in an excellent and sensitive reading of voluminous correspondence, some of it available for the first time here, she effectively challenged the easy conclusion that Zelda was a victim of ‘madness’, a word often used to undermine her value as a human being. Anyone who wants to understand how it was with Zelda and Scott Fitzgerald will learn a great deal from this book’ - Scott Donaldson, author of ‘Hemingway vs Fitzgerald’

“Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald wanted it all: husband, family, work — along with glamour, fame and creative success. In the psychiatric terms of her time, she as a woman who did not know her place. And she paid an awful price. The question is . . . would things have been any easier for her today? Linda Wagner-Martin maps the ups and downs of a woman's life in thought provoking and illuminating ways” - Dale Spender, author of ‘Man Made Language’

“Linda Wagner-Martin changes our image of Zelda from devil-may-care flapper to Southern Belle, from lunatic to professional woman, from hysteric to talented writer. Ballerina, author, mother, and wife, Zelda was the product of a specific time and place. This cultural biography at long last helps us to locate Zelda within an unfolding history of American women's social, sexual, and artistic practices.” Cathy N. Davidson, Duke University

Linda Wagner-Martin has won teaching awards at Michigan State University and UNC. She is currently the president of the Ernest Hemingway Foundation. Among her fifty edited and written books are biographies of Sylvia Plath, Gertrude Stein, Ellen Glasgow, Barbara Kingsolver, and Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald.

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