The Princeton University Library has had more than its share of anniversary celebrations during the past year: the 250th anniversary of the University, the 150th anniversary of Charles Scribner’s Sons, and the centenary of its most famous non-graduate, F. Scott Fitzgerald. In honor of the latter occasion, the Library produced “F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Centennial Exhibition in Celebration of F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896–1940), Class of 1917.” It was only right and fitting that the Library should mount this exhibition, since it is the repository of the major Fitzgerald archive, given by his daughter, Scottie Fitzgerald Lanahan, in 1950. It is even more appropriate at a time when his reputation and influence seem to be eclipsing those of Hemingway and Faulkner.

One case in the exhibition pinpointed the beginning of the resuscitation of his reputation, eleven years after his death, in 1951: Malcolm Cowley brought out, with Scribner’s, *The Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Selection of 28 Stories*, with an Introduction by Malcolm Cowley and Alfred Kazin; brought out his *F. Scott Fitzgerald: The Man & His Work*; and most important of all Arthur Mizener produced his biography, *The Far Side of Paradise*. In an earlier piece in this journal I credited Mizener alone for the resuscitation,¹ but the convergence of Malcolm Cowley, who was also responsible for the resuscitation of Faulkner in his *Viking Portable Faulkner* (1946), and Alfred Kazin — still alive, still writing his trenchant insights — along with Mizener points clearly to a larger intellectual reawakening

to the genuine literary merits of Fitzgerald. Another exhibition case further confirmed my revelation about the year 1951: it contained the 1951 Malcolm Cowley edition of *Tender Is the Night*. Such sudden clarifications of one’s cherished and inadequate opinions is one of the most important reasons for library exhibitions of this sort. Without the wealth of material in the Fitzgerald archives I would not have seen the greater importance of that year 1951.

Fitzgerald must have had a galaxy of guardian angels hovering over him to guide him to Scribner’s and to their premier literary editor, Maxwell Perkins, and at least one to lead him to his benevolent agent, Harold Ober. These were the sustaining forces of his early career. That same galaxy was also hard at work in getting Edmund Wilson, his friend from Princeton days, to produce his unfinished final novel, *The Last Tycoon*, after his death, and to turn the attentions of Cowley, Kazin, and Mizener to the all-but-forgotten and dead author. A more secular view of the matter might suggest merely that they all had good taste.


It was all there, including his Princeton pennant and his beer mug. How many of us have saved such relics? Well, for one, Charles “Sap” Donohue was given by Fitzgerald a hand-corrected version of five chapters of a novel called “The Romantic Egoist,” which thirty years later the recipient sent to Arthur Mizener; it is the first version of *This Side of Paradise*. Or why did Paul Elmer More — the great man of letters, editor, philosopher, and theologian of the early part of this century — send his copy of *The Vegetable* (1923), Fitzgerald’s only post-Princeton play, as a gift to the University library? Even more to the point why did he buy it and why did he keep it? The answer is simply that even at the lowest point of Fitzgerald’s literary reputation there was a coterie of admirers.

Fitzgerald himself was an inveterate collector of his own story,
and in the case entitled “Telling His Own Story,” there are six scrapbooks shored away by Fitzgerald himself and transcribed by his secretaries in the 1930s with intriguing titles like “Baby Book,” “A Short Autobiography,” and my favorite, “A Scrapbook Record Compiled from Many Sources of Interest to and Concerning One F. Scott Fitzgerald,” an authorial title if ever I read one. Much of this material was incorporated into The Romantic Egoists: A Pictorial Autobiography from the Scrapbooks and Albums of Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald, edited by Matthew J. Bruccoli, Scottie Fitzgerald Smith, and Joan P. Kerr, but much of the story still lies in these original scrapbooks.

For all his literary genius Fitzgerald was not much of a poet; like Thomas Wolfe he ran to prose rhythms. Nonetheless, some of his poems were published in a curious volume, A Book of Princeton Verse II 1919. The volume was edited by Henry Van Dyke (1852–1933), the most luminary Presbyterian preacher of his time, who had given up his pulpit at the Brick Presbyterian Church in New York City to become the first incumbent of the Murray Chair of English Literature at the University. That Chair had been established in 1899 to honor the memory of Robert Ormsbee Murray, the first Dean of the Faculty and former rector of that same Presbyterian Church, and the $100,000 raised by alumni came with the proviso that the chair be given to Van Dyke. To this day Van Dyke is the only member of the Department of English to have a Collected Works — and he was prolific (18 volumes). He was aided, or rather subvented, in the enterprise under discussion by three co-editors: Morris William Croll, Maxwell Struthers Burt, and James Creese, Jr., the first, a brilliant member of the Department of English, the second a sometime member of the department, and the third an alumnus of the Class of 1918. The first volume of this series was published in 1916, the editorial work of the poet Alfred Noyes, the successor to Van Dyke, who had resigned the chair in 1911, one of the three times he did so. In his preface to the 1919 volume Van Dyke, who has been described to me as “the only man who could strut sitting down,” points out with something of a strut that the Noyes volume was not indeed the first book of Princeton verse,

preceded as it was by his own *Book of Princeton Verse* published in 1904.

The contents of the volume in the exhibition are unremittingly Romantic poetry, Swinburnian decadence but decorously Princetonian, with large doses of Kiplingesque jingoism. The editors and the poets are deeply concerned with the effects of the War on the estate of poetry. Fitzgerald’s contributions are unabashedly Romantic and (for what reason we know not) are signed “T. Scott Fitzgerald, 18” (the Class to which Fitzgerald advanced on his return from his first leave of absence). The first is a war poem called “Marching Streets” of thirty-two somber and undistinguished lines, the third stanza of which will give some indication of its slight merits:

Ears full of throbbing, a babe awakens startled,
   Sends a tiny whisper to the still gaunt room.
Arms of the mother tighten round it gently,
   Deaf to the patter in the far-flung gloom.

The second, titled “The Pope at Confession,” is a feeble attempt at a Browningesque moment (alas) and begins with the unfortunate line, “The gorgeous Vatican was steeped in light.” The third, “My First Love,” with apologies to Keats’s “La Belle Dame sans Merci,” concludes with this third stanza:

Once she kissed me very long,
   Tip-toed out the door,
Left me, took her light along,
   Faded as a music fades . . .
Then I saw the changing shades,
   Color-blind no more.

Why did they choose it? I am reminded of a poem that a student handed me in the 1960s, which began: “Do I dare to eat an apple?” The student denied that he had ever read T. S. Eliot. Unfortunately, it is all there, and it is nothing. But what can one expect except that students will be influenced by the tastes and rhetoric of their teachers? Noyes and Van Dyke derived their taste in poetry from the Romantics and especially from their descendant, Alfred
Lord Tennyson. In a newspaper clipping in the faculty files of the Princeton University Archives, Noyes is credited with having taught Fitzgerald, John Peele Bishop, and Edmund Wilson in a preceptorial. I have not been able to verify this allegation against the three young men from their University records. It may be true, but it may be hindsight on Noyes’s part. If it is true, then we had better accept the combined distrust of the Department of English by these three young men. Again from the Archives there is a blurb attached to a ceremonial lecture given by Noyes, signed “R.K.R.,” — Robert Kilbourn Root, Professor of English and later Dean of the Faculty — which clearly states the literary prejudices of the period. Speaking of Noyes’s literary taste, the blurb reads:

For the anarchy of form and of thought which calls itself “free verse” he [Noyes] has small sympathy. He has still less patience with the attitude of contemptuous condescension assumed by a certain school of present-day critics toward everything Victorian. He confidently asserts the enduring greatness of the Victorian laureate Alfred Tennyson.

What could one do at age 19 or 20 against such certitude — except to get into poetic line emotionally?

Fitzgerald’s taste had not radically changed when he made the only recording we have of his voice, reading from John Masefield’s “On Growing Old,” from Keats’s “Ode to the Nightingale,” and Shakespeare’s Othello. One might expect Keats in view of Tender is The Night, one might even expect that new poet John Masefield, but Othello is proleptic omniscience if one considers the disastrous cost of Fitzgerald’s marriage both to himself and to Zelda.

Princeton has always had a love-hate relationship with Fitzgerald, and it must be admitted that he absorbed only what he wanted of the intellectual life of the University, devoting most of his energies to the Triangle Club and other extra-curricular activities. But willy-nilly the myth of Fitzgerald the writer has been superimposed on the myth of the University. I can think of no other American author so closely associated with his grudging alma mater. My colleague, Walt Litz, assures me that both he and his classmate, the late Walter Clemons, came to Princeton as undergraduates because
it was Fitzgerald’s university, and that magical allure exists even today. Scratch a Princetonian and you will find a Fitzgerald fan. On the other hand, one has to acknowledge the initial reluctance of Julian Boyd, Librarian of the University, to accept the gift offered by Scottie Lanahan because Boyd did not want to have his library space taken up by popular modern authors. The fact that the Fitzgerald collection is the most frequently used of all the manuscript collections today should not cancel out Boyd’s initial concern; after all, he was a scholar and the editor of *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*.

The impact of the exhibition was too thorough to require minute enumeration on my part, although it is a shame that there was no catalogue. Two other presences in the exhibition require more credit. Fitzgerald could not have been himself without Zelda. He would have been the first to admit this. The recently acquired letters of Fitzgerald to Dr. Jonathan Slocum at Craig House, Beacon, New York, where Zelda spent nine weeks in 1930, and the stenographic transcript of the conversation of Dr. Thomas A. C. Rennie and the Fitzercials while Zelda was resident in Craig House, Maryland, in 1933, read like a Harold Pinter play, in which Scott defends his rights as an author against the claims of a sad Zelda defending her rights as an author. The transcript is heart-rending because it shows even in the bewildered anger of the participants the love they had for one another, and that love, even with all the flummery of the Jazz Age and the rest of the ideology of the Lost Generation, cannot be ignored or forgotten. Neither of them did.

I wish that it had been made possible to show the currently touring exhibition of Zelda’s art work, now available in a remarkable book edited by her granddaughter, Eleanor Lanahan. The vitality and energy of Zelda’s imagination about her husband, herself, and her daughter come through with a sanity that would have enriched the visual aspects of this exhibition. Unfortunately the University Committee for the 250th Celebration was not willing to subsidize the distaff side of its most renowned novelist — even in his centenary year.

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4 Confirmation of the appeal of this correspondence is the article by Peter D. Kramer, “How Crazy Was Zelda?” (*New York Times Sunday Magazine*, 1 December 1996, pp. 106–109) in which Kramer, a medical writer, writes a short assessment of the case and reprints six of Fitzgerald’s letters to Dr. Slocum.

A second presence is evident in the exhibition, although never highlighted: Matthew Bruccoli, one of the original trustees of the Fitzgerald Trust, a friend and encourager of Scottie in her mission of enshrining her parents’ memory, and a former editor of the Cambridge University Press’s new edition of the works of Fitzgerald. His energy and even sometimes over-zealous advocacy of Fitzgerald’s claims on our imaginations should not be forgotten; he is the single most important champion of Fitzgerald’s reputation in this latter half of the twentieth century. His contributions from his own collection of Fitzgeraldiana enriched the exhibition at Princeton.

— THOMAS P. ROCHE, JR.
Murray Professor of English Literature
and Clerk of the Faculty

THE ELMER ADLER BOOK COLLECTING PRIZE


MY SECOND MEANS OF EGRESS

I do not own any first-edition Shakespeare folios, I do not own any priceless Americana, any abnormally old texts, any particularly rare texts, or any books autographed by the author. I don’t think that the majority of the books that I own are even in hard cover. I know very little about the history of publishing, even less about book sales, and almost nothing about the proper way of assessing a book’s condition. My parents have never encouraged me to collect books; my father encourages me to return all of my texts to the University Store at the end of each semester for a cash rebate. I am not even an English major; I plan to concentrate in biology or geology. I can offer you very little that explains why a science-oriented Canadian like myself suspects that he has an addiction to African-American literature, satisfying my craving only by accumulating more and more books as I get older.