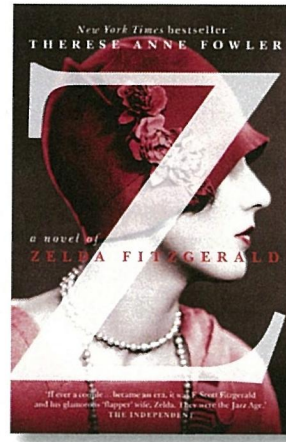


*Narrating the Nation* is an exciting and thoughtful rumination on problems of identity in a nationalistic sense and how all genres of representation can contribute to and argue against master narratives. It is at times philosophical, frequently textured, and diverse. Its power is most obvious, despite its divergent parts, when read as a whole. The multifaceted chapters in unison are a reminder that this is capturing only a fraction of the discussion that exists around representation and history. Berger, aware of its limitations, argues the chapters in *Narrating the Nation* “problematise the narration of the nation in different genres and thus contribute to more self-reflective approaches to national histories” (14). In this claim, the collection certainly establishes groundwork for further investigation into the representation of collective histories in communities.



## Z: A NOVEL OF ZELDA FITZGERALD

Reviewed by Jilly Lippmann

Fowler, Therese Anne. *Z: A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald*. London: Two Roads Publishing, 2013. ISBN 9781444761405. RRP \$17.99. pp.384.

The novel *Z*, by Therese Anne Fowler, is an imaginative re-telling of the life of the infamous 1920s couple Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald. Fowler’s research is extensive (as shown in her acknowledgements), and her descriptions of the 1920s milieu and her sense of place in both America and Paris are authentic and align with historical records of the Fitzgerald’s life. Consequently, I felt that I had intimately delved into Zelda’s often-neglected perspective of her life with Scott. Fowler’s novel implies that there is more to the reckless and self-indulgent image of Zelda Fitzgerald than what our popular cultural imagination presents, and serves as a reminder that the decadence and glamour of the Twenties (especially fuelled by the current interest in the glitzy Gatsby-

inspired movie) had a domestic aspect that has been shadowed by all that jazz.

The novel is written from Zelda's point of view, and Fowler takes you on a journey from the couple's first meeting to Zelda's emotive goodbye to her beloved husband. At the beginning of the book, Fowler includes a comment from Zelda: "Look closer and you'll see something extraordinary, mystifying, something real and true. We have never been what we seemed" (5). Yet, this comment seems to contradict the fact that the book isn't "true history". However, Fowler's engagement with actual historical accounts of the couple's life, together with her inclusion of many instances and circumstances from Zelda's diary, suggest that Fowler is trying to provocatively provide a different perspective of the iconic, "cat's pyjamas" pair, and even perhaps "re-write" a more serious and intelligent Zelda Fitzgerald into our cultural memory. Indeed, Sara Gruen's reviews on the back of the book states that Fowler "shines a light on Zelda instead of her more famous husband, providing both justice and the voice she struggled to have heard in her lifetime", showing that readers have responded to the text as history. Yet, in the acknowledgments Fowler stresses, "this book... is not a biography but a novelist's attempt to imagine what it was like to be Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald" (374), and, as readers, we do need to be reminded that imaginative licence has been used, and the text is not all based on fact.

Fowler begins her tale at the end of World War I with Zelda as a headstrong teenager living with her parents in the American provincial town of Montgomery. Through

Fowler's use of language I could almost hear the Southern American drawl while the personal interactions of family and friends take place. This setting also provides a distinct contrast for the entry of Scott, the charming and cultured pretty boy from New York. Even though, from the start, Zelda attracts attention in her small town with her beauty and wit, she is depicted as an intelligent and deep thinker, a perfect match for the budding writer. After their marriage in New York, the couple begins to acquire celebrity status, and Scott subtly puts pressure on Zelda to become zany and edgy to fuel their recalcitrant reputation and to mould Zelda into being Scott's very own flapper. But, despite Zelda's initial resistance to portraying something she feels she's not, Scott insists that his success is dependent upon her reputation as an infamous flapper, to which Zelda asks, "If I go along with this scheme, we'll be playing parts, that's what you're saying". Scott then hands her a glass of champagne and replies, "Only this time, we're writing the parts ourselves" (87). Through these private conversations and Zelda's thoughts and internal struggles, Fowler's novel insinuates that Zelda became infamous, danced on table-tops, swam fully clothed in New York fountains, threw underwear at distinguished guests and birthday boys, and became addicted to notoriety and fame to keep her husband happy and producing books, and not because it was what she necessarily wanted.

The book's main theme is Zelda's struggle for her own identity in a relationship where Scott was considered the artistic and intelligent one, and Zelda just the infamous and crazy muse who informed

most of the female characters of Scott's writing. Fowler's suggestion that Scott manipulated and shaped Zelda's behaviour reveals a very different side of this golden couple's relationship. The Roaring Twenties is often depicted as a time when women were considered free from their oppressive Victorian corsets, and Zelda has often been this era's exemplar, but Fowler implies that this was only on a superficial level. Behind the façade, Zelda was still bound by her husband's whims, and this puts a shadow over the predominantly positive depiction many writers paint of Scott. In Fowler's novel, Scott is shown as an intense and fundamentally selfish artist who puts his art above all, including his wife and child. Because of this, Zelda struggles to come to terms with the lack of agency in her life and her own identity formation, and she tries to immerse herself in her own pursuit of artistic fulfilment. Yet, at every turn, Scott seems to ambush her dreams fuelled by a jealousy of her talents. Thus, Fowler is also asking readers to question popular depictions of the 1920s and their more-often-than-not representations of an era of freedom and Gatsby glitziness.

The novel, on the whole, is an engrossing read, despite becoming a little slow and repetitive towards the end, and will leave the reader with more questions than answers about the infamous Fitzgerald couple.