

Lanahan Eleanor. *Scottie: The Daughter of ...: The Life of Frances Scott Fitzgerald Lanahan Smith.* New York: HarperCollins, 1995. 624 pp. \$30.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-06-017179-7.

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Seldom do literary reputation, social history, and popular culture coalesce so completely as with F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald. Firmly enshrined as one of this nation's greatest authors, F. Scott Fitzgerald still embodies, in the popular consciousness, the decade known as the Jazz Age. Even the term "The Jazz Age" is usually attributed to Fitzgerald, who expressed, along with his beautiful and talented wife, the youth, creativity, exuberance, and reckless abandon of their generation. Writing after the Great Depression had permanently laid the Jazz Age to rest, Fitzgerald caught the sense of emotional displacement of those who had lived through that period. In a 1931 essay, "Echoes of the Jazz Age," he wrote: "Now once more the belt is tight and we summon the proper expression of horror as we look back at our wasted youth. Sometimes, though, there is a ghostly rumble among the drums, an asthmatic whisper in the trombones that swings me back into the early twenties when we drank wood alcohol and every day in every way grew better and better, and there was a first abortive shortening of the skirts ... and it all seems so rosy and romantic to us who were young then, because we will never feel quite so intensely about our surroundings any more."

A phrase such as "wasted youth" resonates powerfully and tragically in connection with the Fitzgeralds, for their names, as even casual students of literature know, are forever linked with

alcoholism, mental illness, early death, and great talent only partially realized. From time to time, however, very practical and mundane matters creep into one's consideration of these enormously gifted individuals. This reviewer, for example, regularly teaches a course about Fitzgerald and Hemingway to adult students. And because most of these adult students have children, they ask about the child of Scott and Zelda: "How did this child turn out?"

The answer to that question is found in *Scottie: The Daughter of ...*, a biographical study of Frances Scott Fitzgerald written by her daughter Eleanor Lanahan. The classroom answer usually given by this reviewer is "Quite well, considering ..." Lanahan's book makes a strong case that the "considering" probably should be dropped, for it inevitably leads the focus back to the parents. Frances Scott, almost always known as Scottie, was a person who achieved a great deal in her own right. Of course, she never escaped the "daughter of" tag. In fact, she supported Fitzgerald scholarship, most noticeably by collaborating with Professor Matthew Bruccoli on such publications as *Bits of Paradise*, a collection of twenty-one previously uncollected stories by her parents; and *The Romantic Egoists*, essentially a scrapbook chronicling the lives of Scott and Zelda.

The relationship between Scottie and her parents certainly is an aspect of this book that will interest many readers. There is the strictness of the

father attempting to keep Scottie from repeating his mistakes. Much of his advice Scottie resented (or at least did not appreciate), and she endured many embarrassing situations. Lanahan quotes Scottie: "I was busy surviving, and what I couldn't ignore in the way of objectionable behavior, such as an ink-well flying past my ear, I would put up in the emotional attic as soon as possible." As an adult Scottie worried about how to share her parents with the public while maintaining their privacy. That she felt a responsibility toward them is clear, and she retained that sense of responsibility throughout her life, even arranging for her parents' remains to be moved to the St. Mary's Catholic cemetery in Rockville and re-buried near the grave of Scott's father.

Nonetheless, Scottie also was an individual of considerable accomplishments and an enduring sense of service. A founding member of the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Washington, D.C., Scottie, for more than a decade, wrote and produced an annual MS musical comedy benefit. Her propensity for helping others assisted such diverse individuals as her Aunt Rosalind (Zelda's sister), a former husband, and assorted friends, especially the elderly and lonely. A lifelong Democrat, Scottie worked hard for politicians such as Adlai Stevenson and Indiana Congressman John Brademas who represented ideals that Scottie shared; and for years she attended the national Democratic convention.

Scottie worked periodically on a never-completed novel but demonstrated her writing heritage through stories for the *New Yorker*, Democratic party newsletters, articles for the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, a book about the women's press corps (*Don't Quote Me!*) co-written with Winnie McLendon, genealogies of her ancestors, and plays unsuccessfully submitted to New York producers. Scottie did all of this while being a loving if imperfect mother and wife, surviving the suicide of a son, and combating an extended drinking problem.

Dying from esophageal cancer, Scottie faced her end with courage and acceptance. She set about putting her affairs in order and writing a seventy-four-page memoir that served as the basis for much of her daughter's biography. During Eleanor Lanahan's final visit with her dying mother, in 1986, Scottie responded to her daughter's desire to write a book about her: "She said that she hadn't focused enough or taken herself seriously enough. She insisted that her life wasn't worth writing about, that her goals weren't met, that the sum total of her life wasn't much."

Eleanor Lanahan's book is not great biography. It moves steadily but sometimes ploddingly through the subject's life. There is not much profound analysis. Yet the biography succeeds despite—perhaps even because of—the straightforward simplicity of the approach. Scottie was wrong about her own life, even as she recognized the value of her parents' lives. Scottie was a remarkable woman with many talents, a great capacity for caring about others, and an impressive collection of accomplishments. Eleanor Lanahan shows that. A better scholar or writer might have shown it with greater psychological depth or stylistic felicity. The daughter, however, shows it as a daughter, and the mother appears, not as a legend, tragic figure, or giant of literature, but as a significant person who led a valuable life. Scottie deserved this book, and she is well served by it.

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