



HELENE WEBB/Los Angeles Times

They can't stop publishing: (clockwise from below) V.C. Andrews, Henry Miller, Thomas Wolfe, Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald, L. Ron Hubbard and Ernest Hemingway.

Another Meeting of the Dead Writers Society

By LEAH ROZEN

Setting: Yaddo-Way-North, an artists and writers colony for the deceased. Folding chairs are arranged in a circle in a church basement. A coffeepot is perking away on a dilapidated metal table in the far corner. Slowly, one by one, the authors enter. They shuffle over to the coffeepot and pour themselves a paper cup of java. Each has a book tucked under his or her free arm.

Ernest Hemingway (clearing his throat): Will everyone please take a seat? Anywhere you want will be good and right and true. We don't stand on ceremony up here.

(The authors take their seats. They are a good-looking bunch since no matter at what age you die, in Yaddo-Way-North you always appear as you did in the photo on the book jacket of your first published novel.)

Hemingway: Welcome to another meeting of the Dead Writers Society. We're all here because we're necrofictionists. We have a need, a compulsive need, to continue to publish even though we're no longer down there on Earth cashing those advances or toting up royalty checks or trying to shoot just one elephant clean between the eyes.

Rozen, when not communing with the dead, is an associate editor at *People* magazine.

THE GREAT GATSBY
By F. Scott Fitzgerald
(Cambridge University Press: \$27.95)

THE COLLECTED WRITINGS
By Zelda Fitzgerald
(Charles Scribner's Sons: \$24.95)

CRAZY COCK
By Henry Miller
(Grove Weidenfeld: \$18.95)

THE GOOD CHILD'S RIVER
By Thomas Wolfe
(University of North Carolina Press:
\$21.95)

FINAL BLACKOUT
By L. Ron Hubbard
(Bridge Publications: \$4.95, paper)

SECRETS OF THE MORNING
By V. C. Andrews
(Pocket Books: \$5.95, paper)

Papa here is as guilty as any of you. I think I even may have started the trend by allowing "Islands in the Stream" and "The Garden of Eden" to be published posthumously. Like I used to say to Mary, it is nearly impossible to cut the line once you've hooked the fish with a lure that is true. Scott, old buddy, let's start with you.

F. Scott Fitzgerald: My name is F. Scott Fitzgerald—Scotty to my friends—and I'm a necrofictionist. This year, I allowed Cambridge University Press to put out a new edition of "The Great Gatsby," an edition that comes the closest to the way I actually wrote the book. To be honest, the only people who need to read this new "Gatsby" are those nit-picking Fitzgerald scholars who would pore over my room-service bills from Paris if only I had saved them.

Zelda Fitzgerald: I always hated that title, "The Great Gatsby." Hated it.

Scott: Well, as a point of fact, so did I. At first, I told Max Perkins to call it "Among the Ash Heaps and Millionaires." He objected. I tried "Trimalchio in West Egg," but everybody told me no one would know how to pronounce it, or who Trimalchio was.

Zelda: Who was he?

Hemingway: Well, this is good and fine, Scott, but could we please stick to the topic on the table. Why did you

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'Dead Writer's Society'

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think the world needed yet another edition of "The Great Gatsby"?"

Scott: What can I say? I'm a necrofictionist. At first I thought no, "Gatsby" is done and finished, but like a boat against the current, I was borne back ceaselessly into the past. This was my last chance to put punctuation back in the way I wanted it originally and not the way some anonymous copy editor did it in 1925. To be honest, though, the real reason is that I got sick of seeing Jay McInerney, Bret Easton Ellis and now this new "Generation X" fellow quoted in every magazine I picked up. My ego got tender in the night and I wanted to be out on the playing field among the golden youth again. Does that make sense?

Henry Miller: You said it. Those dirty little bastards! Always gunning for us old billy goats.

Hemingway: Hank, you have something to say?

Miller: You bet. My name is Henry Miller and I too am a necrofictionist. I just let Grove Weidenfeld publish my second novel, "Crazy Cock," about how my wife started two-timing me with another woman. Nobody, but nobody, wanted to publish it when I first wrote it back in the late '20s. Now, though, since I'm dead and buried and famous, they figure it'll sell. The title alone ought to move a couple hundred copies. It's so much more graphic, don't you think, than "The Tropic of Cancer"? No one is going to mistake this one for a medical book.

Hemingway: But will the review-

ers say it is a good and fine novel, Hank, or will they say it stinks worse than a fish left to rot in the African sun?

Miller: Nice image, Papa. I'm guessing those critical coots will say "Crazy Cock" shows flashes of the writer I became, but that it's overwrought and the dirty parts aren't dirty enough. Actually, anyone who rents "Henry & June" from the video store will get the drift of the novel, because it's the same story.

Zelda: May I speak? My name is Zelda Fitzgerald—yes, I was married to Scott. I'm a necrofictionist too, which is a damn sight better than the author's wife, amateur ballerina and crazy woman I was during my lifetime. This fall, I finally got Scribner's, the same house that put out all of Scott's books, to republish my only novel, "Save Me the Waltz," and some short stories under the title "The Collected Writings." I'm just hoping it'll show everybody that Scott wasn't the only one who could write.

Scott: It's swell stuff, Zelda. A mite overwritten and impressionistic, but swell.

Zelda: Thanks, Scott, a little late, though, don't you think?

Hemingway: Writers, writers, please, we're gathered here to help each other, to say things that are fine and good to each other, not to snipe.

Thomas Wolfe: I believe it is my turn to lend my voice and my story to this august group of necrofiction-

ists. I am called Thomas Wolfe and I am here because I heeded my own titular advice and looked homeward, angel. I allowed the University of North Carolina Press to publish "The Good Child's River," a sprawling work of fiction upon which I was toiling at the time of my death in 1938. I had already filled three 500-page notebooks and, I must say, I do pity the poor scholar who had to decipher my handwriting.

L. Ron Hubbard: Oh, you're all so pathetic. Who gives a hoot, other than some measly whining academics, about all these failed manuscripts of yours?

Hemingway: I see the scum also rises. Heh, heh, heh. Please, my fine and good friend, introduce yourself.

Hubbard: Sorry. I'm L. Ron Hubbard—you may have heard of me—and I'm proud to be a necrofictionist, and a damned good one, even though for a while there I wasn't real big on admitting I was dead. My followers—you know, I'm the

founder of Scientology—didn't think it would be real good for the movement.

Hemingway: Well, Ron, what exactly do you publish now that you've joined our side?

Hubbard: Manly stuff, mostly about the future and wars and science fiction. I wrote more than 100 novels in my time, you know. Not one of you can beat that, I'll wager.

(The authors all shake their heads mournfully.)

Didn't think so. My latest is "Final Blackout," which first ran in a science-fiction magazine back in 1940. It's all about a big nuclear blow-out and is chock-full of military-action scenes. I think John Travolta will be perfect to play my hero, The Lieutenant, in the movie version. John's a Scientologist, you know.

V.C. Andrews: Uh, excuse me. My name is V.C. Andrews and I don't mean to brag, but I'm the most hard-bitten necrofictionist

here. At least you all are publishing books that you wrote yourself. I'm so out-of-control with my necrofictionism that I have let Pocket Books put *my name* on new novels—"Secrets of the Morning" is the latest—that other people write. Pocket Books covers its posterior by saying the books are "inspired by Andrews' wonderful storytelling talent." I'm so ashamed. I mean, the heirs to the Margaret Mitchell estate let Alexandra Ripley sign her own name on that "Gone With the Wind" sequel.

Hemingway: Speaking of "Scarlett," maybe there's a lesson in there somewhere for all of us. Just think how well a sequel to "The Sun Also Rises" might do if Jake could get his magic wand to work again . . . But it's getting late. We have to turn this basement over to the next group, the support group for dead sitcom stars who can't get Nick at Nite to carry their shows. And we thought we had it bad! ■