

Motherhood vs. Artistry: the Dichotomy of Womanhood in Edith Wharton's

Twilight Sleep and Zelda Fitzgerald's Save Me the Waltz

by

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I dedicate this research to the strong women in my life: my mother, Arlette Postma, to my grandmother, Elizabeth Englebert, and to my daughter, Eleanor Elizabeth Chessor.

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ABSTRACT

Literature has historically been shaped by patriarchal ideals and values. Indeed, the term “Jazz Age” and the ideal of the flapper were molded by none other than F. Scott Fitzgerald, whose wife served as the model for this ideal. The labels of “flapper,” “New Woman,” and “Southern Belle” are all boxes within which women -- both literary creations and real persons-- have been supposed to neatly fit, yet a look at women’s literature of the early twentieth century tells us otherwise. This thesis explores issues of motherhood, artistry, and identity in the Jazz Age by examining representations of women, particularly flappers and mothers, in the work of two authors who themselves wrestled with issues of womanhood, motherhood, and identity: Edith Wharton and Zelda Fitzgerald. With the strong (and problematic) female characters that they have created, Zelda Fitzgerald and Edith Wharton are demonstrating the impossible dichotomies that women at the turn of the twentieth century were faced with. In particular, these characters deal with the dichotomy of motherhood versus artistry. In their fictional characters of Lita Manford and Alabama Beggs, both Wharton and Fitzgerald demonstrate a struggle that they faced in their own lives: the fact that it was next to impossible for them as women to occupy multiple roles successfully, despite the supposed strides that women had made. This thesis examines the parallels between the lives of these authors and their fictional characters, who struggle to reconcile their identities as flappers alongside their roles as mothers and their dreams of artistry, reflecting their authors’ persistent and progressive belief that, despite the ideologies upheld by their contemporary society, embodying more than one role as women was not, in fact, the downfall of the American family or the degradation of ideal womanhood. Rather, Wharton and Fitzgerald use their

written work to express the idea that the roles of mother and artist do not have to represent an impossible double bind, but instead can and should exist alongside one another, a concept which, even today, women are still fighting to prove.

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INTRODUCTION

In her 1927 novel *Twilight Sleep*, Edith Wharton presents a dichotomy in the character of Lita Manford. Lita's boredom with what she refers to as “the same old everything” is the crux around which the novel revolves, as each member of the Manford family attempts to keep Lita contained in a life which she finds tedious (194). In Wharton’s personal journal, she noted that, “Lita is -- jazz,” identifying her as the embodiment of flapper culture¹. Wharton encapsulates the culture of the 1920s at the beginning of *Twilight Sleep* when she writes, “They belonged to another generation: to the bewildered disenchanted young people who had grown up since the Great War, whose energies were more spasmodic and less definitely directed, and who, above all, wanted a more personal outlet for them” (12). It is this “personal outlet” which Lita craves; a life outside of her husband’s house, where she can express herself creatively.

However, while Lita does reject social norms and desires a life outside her husband’s home, per flapper standards, there is one facet of her life of which she never seems to tire and consistently regards as sacred: her role as mother. Even when she is ready to divorce her husband and pursue a career in Hollywood, Lita cannot conceive of why she should be compelled to give up motherhood. When questioned by her mother-in-law about how she can possibly comprehend giving up her child in the event of divorce, Lita responds with, “You don’t suppose I’d ever give up my baby?” (Wharton 195). For Lita, motherhood can (and should) exist right alongside the other aspects of her

¹ This Wharton quote is referenced by Jean C. Griffith in her essay “‘Lita is -- jazz’: the Harlem Renaissance, Cabaret Culture, and Racial Amalgamation in Edith Wharton’s *Twilight Sleep*.”

unconventional life. This is quite unexpected behavior for a traditional flapper character, and this curious choice to complicate Lita's flapper status with a reverence for motherhood invites the reader to consider a new perspective: flappers not just as young, untethered creative spirits, but as mothers. This thesis will explore issues of motherhood, artistry, and identity in the Jazz Age by examining representations of women, particularly flappers who are mothers, in two neglected novels by authors who themselves wrestled with issues of womanhood, motherhood, artistry, and identity: Edith Wharton and Zelda Fitzgerald.

To understand Wharton's complicated representation of Lita as both flapper and mother, it is important to consider Wharton's perspective on womanhood and identity as it was shaped by her historical and cultural moment. Though a member of upper-class Old New York society by birth, Edith Wharton was in many regards a New Woman: she was an educated, independent woman with a successful career as a bestselling writer, who eventually divorced her husband and embarked on several extramarital affairs throughout her lifetime. It is unwise to divorce Wharton's writing from the details of her biographical life, particularly when it comes to the issue of motherhood. Wharton had a complicated, distant relationship with her mother, and never had children of her own, although whether by choice or otherwise, it is impossible to tell. Wharton, who was very fond of her father George, felt that her mother, Lucretia, was responsible for stifling her father's potential. Wharton herself wrote, "I imagine there was a time when his rather rudimentary love might have been developed had he had any one with whom to share it. But my mother's matter-of-factness must have shrivelled up any such buds of fancy. . ."

(Lewis 24)². Lewis went on to theorize about the influence that her parents' marriage likely had on Edith's own views towards marriage. Lewis writes:

What one comes to feel about Lucretia Jones, indeed, is a sort of absence, an emptiness, gaps of character filled in by artifice and trivia. . . The relationship between George Frederic and Lucretia, in their daughter's version of it, provided Edith Wharton with the first and most compelling instance of what would become one of her central themes: the larger spirit subdued and defeated by the smaller one. (24)

Other Wharton scholars generally hold similar views to those of Lewis, including Cynthia Griffin Wolff, whose psychoanalytic approach to Wharton's later life and work in light of the emotional turmoil of her childhood. Wharton's obviously troubled relationship with her mother undoubtedly resulted in complex feelings about motherhood, as evidenced by the ways in which it is portrayed in (or omitted from) her work. Her complicated feelings on motherhood, entwined with issues of marriage, sexuality, and identity, begin to figure heavily in her later works, coming to a head in her Jazz Age novel, *Twilight Sleep*, published in 1927.

Dale M. Bauer notes that in *Twilight Sleep*, Wharton pits the quintessential New Woman character, Pauline Manford, against Lita Manford's flapper character; however, this divide into either/or seems unnecessary, and potentially even dangerous, particularly when one considers the origins of both the New Woman and flapper ideals. In her introduction to *The American New Woman Revisited*, Martha H. Patterson emphasizes

² This quote from Wharton can be found in R.W.B. Lewis's biography entitled *Edith Wharton: a Biography*.

that it is difficult to fit women into categories such as “New Woman” or “flapper,” especially because the New Woman and the flapper are merely gradations on the same spectrum of femininity. As Patterson notes, perhaps the most well-known visual associated with the idea of the American New Woman is the Gibson Girl. Patterson expounds, “Tall, distinct, elegant, and white, with a pert nose, voluminous upswept hair, corseted waist, and large bust, the Gibson Girl offered a popular version of the New Woman that both sanctioned and undermined women’s desires for progressive sociopolitical change and personal freedom at the turn of the century” (Patterson 3). However, as Patterson emphasizes, “The story of the New Woman’s emergence is far more complex, varying according to region, class, politics, race, and ethnicity, while changing through time and depending greatly on historical conditions” (2). While the Gibson Girl represents the ideal New Woman at the turn of the twentieth century, the close of the First World War saw this particular type of New Woman give way to the flapper. The “New Woman of the 1920s,” as she is named by Joshua Zeitz, pushed social and sexual norms to their breaking point, challenging traditional notions of femininity even more so than her more staid predecessors. Zeitz defines the flapper as “distinctly real . . . Gainfully employed and earning her own keep, free from family and community surveillance, a participant in a burgeoning consumer culture that counseled indulgence and pleasure over restraint and asceticism” (8). This definition, while mostly accurate, does not succeed in fully encapsulating the complexity of the flapper, as this thesis will later prove.

Perhaps the most well-known literary flapper figure exists in the wife of novelist F. Scott Fitzgerald: Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald. Zelda³, who served as the inspiration and model for many, if not all, of her husband's well-known flapper heroines, made headlines in her own right. Her scandalous behavior was plastered across the front pages of New York newspapers; even as a young girl growing up in Montgomery, Alabama, she was well-known for her less-than-ladylike behavior. Although parts of Zelda's life remain quite elusive and cause her biographers to disagree, all are able to find anecdote after anecdote concerning Zelda's freewheeling, fun-loving, and often scandalous behavior. In her 1973 biography *Zelda*, Nancy Milford summarizes Zelda's teen years in Montgomery, Alabama. Milford explains, "She [Zelda] danced cheek to cheek, which was considered improper . . . she smoked, and she drank gin. . ." (16). Milford also recounts the memories of one of Zelda's high school sweethearts (which were many) in her biography. One beau recounts, "There were two kinds of girls, those who would ride with you in your automobile at night and the nice girls who wouldn't. But Zelda didn't seem to give a damn" (16-17). Zelda's utter unwillingness to give a damn was undoubtedly one of the qualities which attracted Scott Fitzgerald to her and which would later become one of the defining characteristics of the literary flappers whom he would create in Zelda's image.

Like Wharton scholars, Fitzgerald biographers such as Nancy Milford and Kendall Taylor have speculated about the relationship Zelda had with her parents and to what extent it affected her later life. Yet, even amongst Zelda's biographers, there is

³ In order to distinguish her from her more well-known husband, who will be referred to by his last name throughout this thesis, Zelda Fitzgerald will be referred to solely by her first name.

controversy about whether or not Zelda's upbringing empowered or hindered her.

Taylor's approach is a positive one. She writes, "Encouraged by a mother who believed she could master anything, Zelda grew fearless in her approach to life, tackling even the most dangerous feats without hesitation" (18). Nancy Milford, on the other hand, while also speculating on Zelda's earliest beginnings, takes a more ominous tone. Milford notes, "Treasuring the baby who would undoubtedly be her last, Mrs. Sayre nursed Zelda until she was four years old. She showered her with attention and praise; her faults were quickly excused" (7). Zelda's upbringing, while questionable or worrisome to some (including her husband), was fairly typical for a child of her social class in the Deep South. Zelda's life would prove to be an attempt to blend traditional, feminine qualities with progressive modern ideals, potentially as a way of reconciling her Deep South upbringing with the fast and loose lifestyle of her eventual husband. Zelda chose to be a wife and eventually a mother, yet these roles alone could not satisfy her; she craved a creative outlet, and throughout her life she tried her hand at various arts: writing, dancing, and painting. As her husband devoted himself to drink, other women, and the production of his novels, Zelda became increasingly more fanatical about the pursuit of her passions. Zelda herself later explained the motivation behind the frenzy when she wrote, "I was determined to find an impersonal escape, a world in which I could express myself and walk without the help of someone who was always far from me" (Taylor 209). It could be argued that Zelda, who battled mental illness throughout the latter half of her life, was driven to mental illness by the impossible double-bind created by the society she lived in, a society which could not comprehend a woman who was both mother and artist.

In an attempt to carve out an understanding of where she fit in a world which rejected her pursuit to be both mother and artist, Zelda wrote her heavily-autobiographical novel *Save Me the Waltz* (1932), creating an alter-ego of herself in the main character, Alabama Beggs. Alabama is a Southern girl from a small, sleepy town who falls for a famous painter named David Knight. As the Knights' whirlwind marriage begins to crumble, Alabama eventually finds happiness and fulfillment in the study of dance, much to the resentment of her husband. In Zelda's novel, her fictional counterpart is able to pursue both motherhood and artistry, at least for a time - an opportunity which Zelda herself was denied. According to Taylor, "Writing *Save Me the Waltz* was a cathartic experience for Zelda because her protagonist, Alabama, emerges as a new breed of female protagonist who establishes her identity by taking responsibility for her life, and who searches for happiness outside the confines of traditional marriage" (263). It seems probable that *Save Me the Waltz*, a novel which boasts a lurid, dreamlike style as different from F. Scott Fitzgerald's as it is possible to be, served as an alternate reality for Zelda; a place, unlike the world she lived in, where she was not forced to choose between roles.

In her essay "What Became of the Flappers?," Zelda Fitzgerald writes, "I believe in the flapper as an artist in her particular field, the art of being -- being young, being lovely, being an object" (398). Edith Wharton's quintessential flapper character Lita is torn between two conflicting desires: the desire for motherhood, and the desire for selfhood (specifically, an artistic self in the same style as the one mentioned in Fitzgerald's essay). Lita, like Zelda's Alabama Beggs, is an artist and, like both Zelda and her fictional counterpart, Lita is villainized by her family for her desire to fulfill her

dreams of pursuing her art. We do not know what eventually happens to Lita's desires for selfhood; in the wake of the disastrous ending of *Twilight Sleep*, all the reader knows is that Lita has forsaken her dreams of creative freedom and gone abroad with her husband, reminiscent of F. Scott Fitzgerald's Daisy at the close of *The Great Gatsby*. We can read a potential ending for Lita's story in the life of Zelda Fitzgerald, who was unable to fully form an identity as an artist and as a result slipped into a psychosis from which she never fully recovered. When selfhood is stifled, motherhood cannot flourish, and few options remain available save for resignation, madness, and despair.

Through a close reading of both Edith Wharton's *Twilight Sleep* and Zelda Fitzgerald's novel *Save Me the Waltz*, a framework for understanding womanhood, motherhood, and ultimately selfhood at the beginning of the twentieth century appears. By combining these close readings with biographical knowledge of both Edith Wharton and Zelda Fitzgerald, figureheads of opposing cultural moments, it becomes evident that the unrealistic expectations about both motherhood and womanhood set forth by both early-twentieth century society and the modernist ideology which authors like F. Scott Fitzgerald perpetuated created an ideology that haunted women well into the twentieth century and which some might argue still exists to this very day: one cannot wholeheartedly be both artist and mother. Lita in Wharton's *Twilight Sleep* and Alabama in Fitzgerald's *Save Me the Waltz* struggle to reconcile their identities as flappers alongside their roles as mothers and their dreams of artistry, reflecting their authors' persistent and progressive belief that, despite the ideologies upheld by their contemporary society, embodying more than one role as women was not, in fact, the downfall of the American family or the degradation of ideal womanhood. Rather, Wharton and Fitzgerald

use their written work to express the idea that the roles of mother and artist do not have to represent an impossible double bind, but instead can and should exist alongside one another. When women are forced to choose, disaster follows, as demonstrated by the events of *Twilight Sleep*, *Save Me the Waltz*, and the events of the latter half of Zelda Fitzgerald's life.

This thesis will consist of three chapters, each examining a different facet of this argument. The first chapter will examine the historical and cultural moment which both Edith Wharton and Zelda Fitzgerald were influenced by and responding to in their writing. This chapter will look at the shift into the Jazz Age and what that shift entailed for women, as well as what motherhood looked like around the turn of the twentieth century. This chapter will also briefly examine the different prototypes of idealized women, beginning with the Victorian "angel in the house," followed by the New Woman and finally giving way to the Jazz Age's flapper. The second chapter will offer a close reading of *Twilight Sleep*, contextualized with biographical elements from the life of author Edith Wharton and examining the complexities of the two main female characters in the novel: Lita and Pauline Manford, each of whom represents a different cultural ideal of womanhood. The third chapter will consist of a close reading of Zelda Fitzgerald's *Save Me the Waltz*, focusing particularly on the mother-daughter relationship portrayed in the text and how Zelda uses her autobiographical novel to convey both the necessity of creative pursuits for women and the damage that can be done by restricting women to a single role.

A close examination of these two overlooked works from the same period by two female authors will ultimately provide a closer look into the complexities of womanhood

at the turn of the twentieth century that simply cannot be matched by those better-known works by male authors of the same period. Though Wharton's more acclaimed novels, such as *The Age of Innocence* and *The House of Mirth*, are often studied by scholars, *Twilight Sleep* is without a doubt one of her most under-appreciated works. Even those novels which have been the subject of scholarly attention have rarely been examined specifically in terms of how they approach the subject of motherhood, perhaps because Wharton herself was not a mother and a focus on maternity and children does not emerge prominently until her later works. Even then, it is a controversial subject, and scholars are divided on their interpretations of Wharton's portrayal of motherhood in works such as *Summer* and *Custom of the Country*. Zelda Fitzgerald is an undervalued female author in the American tradition; although in recent years she has been the subject of several biographers' attention, the volume of information available on the events of her life and the details of her work is positively underwhelming, especially when compared with the sheer volume of criticism and scholarship devoted to her husband's life and work. At first glance, Wharton and Fitzgerald seem to represent two entirely irreconcilable worlds: Wharton standing as a pillar of Old New York, and Fitzgerald blazing the way into the self-absorbed and short-lived Jazz Age. Yet each of these women produced work within only a few years of each other which ultimately sheds a knowing light on the liminality of woman's place in society and in the home, presenting a more accurate picture of what it meant to be a woman in early twentieth-century America.

CHAPTER ONE: THE EVOLUTION OF THE NEW WOMAN

“*The bird that would soar above the level plain of tradition and prejudice must have strong wings.*” - Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* (96)

In 1899, two years before the birth of Zelda Fitzgerald and six years before the publication of Edith Wharton's first novel, *The House of Mirth*, Kate Chopin's fictional creation, Edna Pontellier, walked into the sea. The aftershock of this radical act -- a wife and mother killing herself rather than remaining bound to a life which offers her no fulfillment -- can be observed not only in the literature of the time period, but also in the shift of cultural ideals regarding women which accompanied the onset of the twentieth century. However, in order to better understand what would drive a woman like Edna Pontellier to take her own life, one must note the realities of the status of married women leading up to the twentieth century. Women had little economic or political power compared to men until the twentieth century, regardless of their class. In America, women could not own property until 1848, and only then if they were married; indeed, the concept of “marital unity” was one which bound up women's legal rights within their marital status (Basch 346). As Norma Basch discusses in her essay “Invisible Women: the Legal Fiction of Marital Unity in Nineteenth-Century America,” this concept took for granted that husbands and wives would stand on equal footing within their marriage, an idealistic notion which ultimately robbed many women of what little legal rights they had. As Basch puts it, “the legal inferiority of nineteenth-century American wives reflected their real economic dependence on the male head of the household, their

position in a family structure that was still more patriarchal than companionate, and the domestic role to which the dominant culture assigned them” (359). Ultimately, women were dependent on men for their rights, and for married women, that meant dependence on and deference to their husbands.

However, it was not only in terms of legal rights that women were impossibly bound. Beginning in the early 1800s, many impossibly high standards were set for women. The ideal wife belonged at home, in submission to her husband, not only in sexual matters, but also in economic and political matters. According to Carroll Smith Rosenberg, “The ideal female in nineteenth-century America was expected to be gentle and refined, sensitive and loving. She was the guardian of religion and the spokeswoman for morality” (655). This ideal woman, who came to be known as the “angel in the house,” eventually evolved into an archetype, which was perpetuated particularly by male writers during the nineteenth century (Lundie 11). These ideas about women in turn gave birth to the concept of the “Ideal Mother,” who takes care of the household with grace and raises her children to be moral, upstanding citizens. Rosenberg describes the ideal mother as “strong, self-reliant, protective, an effective caretaker in relation to children and home” (656). In *Mothers and Daughters in 19th-Century America*, Nancy M. Theriot discusses how motherhood came to be viewed in the 1800s, stating that “the mother-role contained a promise of fulfillment by associating womanhood with maternity, thus claiming that physical mothering was essential to feminine happiness” (18). Motherhood, then, would mean total fulfillment and contentment for women - at least, supposedly.

In her essay entitled “A Daughter’s Sacrifice: Saving the ‘Good-Enough Mother’ from the Good Mother Fantasy,” Alexandra Kotanko examines mothers in literature,

stating that “a good mother, as she is often portrayed in Western culture at large, is the embodiment of sacrifice. She navigates - and perhaps struggles - within the idea that she must sacrifice her own individuality, sexuality, personal ambitions, and childhood in order to nurture these same qualities in her child” (170). The struggle and sacrifice that Kotanko observes in both early twentieth- and late twentieth-century literature have their roots planted in an earlier day and age. Nancy M. Theriot notes that in the early nineteenth century, “domesticity and child-centered motherhood [was considered] the apex of womanly fulfillment” (17). She continues by saying, “The maternal experience . . . was one of total self-abandonment and child-centeredness. Women were told that their maternal joy would come through suffering, just as birth itself involved happiness in pain” (23). These angels in the house were aptly described by Chopin in *The Awakening* as “mother-women.” Chopin writes:

It was easy to know them, fluttering about with extended, protecting wings when any harm, real or imaginary, threatened their precious brood. They were women who idolized their children, worshiped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grows wings as ministering angels. (11)

As Chopin suggests, these “angels” are defined by their domestic virtues. Women, however, had begun to chafe against the standards which had created this ideal mother-woman, and fictional women like Edna Pontellier were merely a reflection of their real-life counterparts and their dissatisfaction with these cultural expectations. One cannot blame Edna, a woman of the leisure class given no opportunity to learn how to provide for herself, for seeing no way out of her situation except death. It was not until a few

years prior to the publication of Chopin's novel, in 1894, when a new term was popularized for the progression of womanhood that had begun to sweep the continents of Europe and North America⁴. Had she chosen life, Edna Pontellier could very well have been one of literature's first examples of what was beginning to be known as the "New Woman."

THE NEW WOMAN

If there is one thing scholars can agree upon, it is that the New Woman is notoriously difficult to define. Rather than labeling her with certain unchanging characteristics, the New Woman should instead be considered on an evolving spectrum, varying according to geographical location, race, and socioeconomic standing. Just as she was given her name by the periodical press in the late nineteenth century, the New Woman was also brought to life by magazine and newspaper illustrators, such as Charles Dana Gibson. The "Gibson Girl," named for the aforementioned artist who first popularized her image, was the first representation of the American New Woman, who represented "women's legal, social, mental, and physical progress" (Patterson 3). Charlotte Perkins Gilman, arguably one of the most influential feminist intellectuals, writers, and advocate for women's rights at the turn of the century, celebrated the Gibson Girl as "a symbol of their [women's] growing freedom from what she termed the 'sexuo-economic' relationship with men" (Patterson 3). In Gilman's words,

⁴ In the introduction to *The American New Woman Revisited: a Reader, 1894-1930*, Martha H. Patterson notes the exchange between British writers Sarah Grand and Ouida in 1894 in the *North American Review* which brought the term "New Woman" into the vocabulary of the general public.

The heroines of romance and drama to-day are of a different sort from the Evelin
 as and Arabellas of the last century . . . the false sentimentality, the false delicacy,
 the false modesty, the utter falseness of elaborate compliment and servile
 gallantry which went with the other falsehoods -- all these are disappearing.
 Women are growing honester, braver, stronger, more healthful and skillful and
 able and free, more human in all ways. (*Women and Economics* 148-149)

Gilman was one of the first to point out the (rather obvious) fact that women cannot
 possibly be expected to be satisfied with the identity and role of mother and nothing else
 without both they and society suffering as a result. In her essay entitled "The New
 Womanhood," published in *Forerunner* in 1910, Gilman discusses the reasons why it is
 essential for women to be allowed to pursue their own identity apart from simply wife
 and mother:

But we have now reached a stage of social development when this grade of
 nurture is no longer sufficient, and no longer found satisfying by either mother or
 child. On the one hand, women are differentiating as human beings: they are no
 longer all one thing-- females, mothers, and *nothing else*. They are still females,
 and will remain so; still mothers, and will remain so: but they are also Persons of
 widely varying sorts, with interests and capacities which fit them for social ser-
 vice in many lines. (148)

Gilman was a fervent advocate of what she termed "New Motherhood." The
 standards of New Motherhood as Gilman defined them, demanded "the fullest
 development of the woman, in all her powers, that she may be the better qualified for her
 duties of transmission by inheritance" ("The New Womanhood" 148). New Motherhood

also noted the essentiality of “the fullest education of the woman” with regard to the intricacies of motherhood, as well as the importance of selecting a “fit” mate to accompany her into parenthood. According to Gilman,

Such standards as these recognize the individual woman’s place as a human being, her economic independence, her special social service, and hold her a far more valuable mother for such development, able to give her children a richer gift by inheritance than the mothers of the past -- all too much in femininity and too little in humanity (“The New Womanhood” 149).

The importance that Gilman placed on the education and personal fulfillment of the mother was undoubtedly progress from the restrictive Victorian ideal of the “angel in the house.” Yet, it is important to note that Gilman’s views stem not from concern for the wellbeing of womankind, but rather from concern for the children they were raising.

Gilman made this concern explicit when she wrote,

A mother who is something more -- who is also a social servant -- is a nobler being for a child to love and follow than a mother who is nothing more -- except a home servant. She is wiser, stronger, happier, jollier, a better comrade, a more satisfying and contented wife; the whole atmosphere around the child at home is improved by a fully human mother (“The New Womanhood” 149).

In other words, a woman’s happiness and fulfillment -- while important -- is only important for the ways in which it makes a woman better suited for her inherent roles: wife and mother.

While this attitude is progress, this Gibson Girl-era viewpoint still assumes that motherhood (and, by association, wifedom) is a role inherently suited for all women, and

that it is a woman's duty to fulfill this call to motherhood. Patterson comments in the introduction to *The American New Woman Revisited*, "Most white feminists' arguments of the period, by contrast, emphasized women's need to be economically independent and their right to be fulfilled as individuals, even as they stressed women's duties to the race as mothers" (9). The idea of motherhood as a duty to the human race persisted far longer than one might think; the following was included in the *Ladies' Home Journal* essay entitled "What the Newest New Woman Is" by Harriet Abbott in 1920, the month following the legalization of women's right to vote.

Each woman enjoys the creative world of business, but to each the creative work of child-rearing is the greater obligation and opportunity . . . Every girl who shirks marriage because its homely duties are irksome, every woman who refuses to have children, every mother who needlessly delivers her home and her children into the care of a servant is using her saw-toothed ax on progress. And in selfishly seeking her own comfort or satisfying her personal ambitions, she smothers her womanhood (222-223).

Regardless, there is no denying that the advent of the New Woman brought progress for most white American women. "Companionate marriage"⁵ was now something a woman could expect from her husband; though motherhood was an assumed role for her, the responsibilities of the household were now expected to be more equally distributed. More equal standing in family life was undoubtedly a step towards greater equality between the sexes outside the home (Fass 82). Though it was assumed that a woman would eventually

⁵ The term "companionate marriage" as it is used here refers to a marriage which embraces the use of contraceptives and sanctions the possibility of divorce. This definition has been taken from Paula Fass's discussion of the term in *The Damned and the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920s* (39).

give up work for marriage and motherhood, it was her right to work in professions that were previously male-dominated (Rich 1). Although the roles of wife and mother were now much more grounded in choice than they had been in previous decades, the fact remained that women were, for the most part, restricted to home and family life once they chose it (Fass 82). In *The Damned and the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920s*, Paula S. Fass discusses the double-sided coin of progress and restriction that women faced as the new decade dawned. Fass states:

A new kind of marriage was envisioned in the twenties, one which promised greater openness and equality, but it was still for women a total commitment made at a cost. Women in the twenties considered marriage to be the primary vehicle of expression and satisfaction. Work and career were for most merely a stop-gap between school and marriage, now considered a normal part of a woman's life, but neither the ultimate nor even a necessary part of her life (Fass 82).

Progress had been made, to be sure -- but what would become of the woman who simply did not want to pursue marriage or motherhood? Or, even more confusingly, who desired marriage and motherhood, but also wanted to retain her career or creative pursuits? It is difficult to believe that all women would find total satisfaction in two very demanding, self-sacrificial roles. The role of old-fashioned New Woman simply was not sufficient for those women who could not bear to define themselves as wives and mothers only; progress demanded the evolution of the New Woman into something far more controversial, something that would turn American traditions and morals upside down: the flapper.

THE FLAPPER

In *Flapper: a Madcap Story of Sex, Style, Celebrity, and the Women Who Made America Modern*, Joshua Zeitz discusses the origins of the term “flapper.” Although it likely began in pre-World War 1 England as a mere descriptor for the awkward, lanky girls who favored a loose-fitting style of dress, the term eventually referred to those young women who adopted the principles popularized in writing by authors such as F. Scott Fitzgerald (Zeitz 5). However, Zeitz makes an apt observation when he wryly points out, “It was never clear whether Scott Fitzgerald ‘invented’ the flapper, ‘discovered’ her, or exploited her” (290). Whichever of these verbs is the most accurate is ultimately irrelevant, as Scott Fitzgerald is undoubtedly most responsible for immortalizing the flapper in literature. Zeitz describes the flapper as she existed in literature, on the screen, and in life:

. . . the notorious character type who bobbed her hair, smoked cigarettes, drank gin, sported short skirts, and passed her evenings in steamy jazz clubs, where she danced in a shockingly immodest fashion with a revolving cast of male characters. She was the envy of teenage girls everywhere and the scourge of good character and morals (6).

This character type is easily recognizable for modern consumers of popular culture, for whom this description brings to mind such women as Daisy Buchanan, Josephine Baker, Coco Chanel -- flappers both real and imagined. In the wake of the First World War, personal liberty was at the forefront of everyone’s mind, and nobody embodied the essence of personal liberty quite like the flapper did. American had gone to war to defend democracy, but democracy did not operate solely in terms of government; it applied also

to free choice in personal governance, and flappers were exercising their right to govern themselves, regardless of what anyone else thought (Zeitz 69).

It is easy to write the flapper off as frivolous, selfish, and uncaring, precisely because of some of the characters who have come to represent flapperdom as a whole. Representations of the flapper by writers like Scott Fitzgerald ultimately did a disservice to flappers and the root of their discontent. By reducing them to one-dimensional figures like Daisy Buchanan, whose selfishness and lack of care has fatal results, Fitzgerald and other purveyors of the flapper image actually diminished the importance of the flapper movement. Some of the flapper's fiercest opposition came from among the ranks of notable feminists of the day, such as the aforementioned Charlotte Perkins Gilman (Zeitz 105). New Woman feminists such as Gilman and Lillian Symes scorned the younger women as "apolitical creatures interested only in romantic and sexual frivolities" (Zeitz 105). Indeed, this was the general public's view of the flapper, and it was an overall unflattering one. However, there is a reason why the flapper has been referred to as the "New Woman of the 1920s (Zeitz 8):" her agenda, while certainly making time for the pursuit of pleasure, was ultimately concerned with her right to make her own choices. With her fashion, her antics, and the scandals that ensued, the flapper was merely asserting that right (Zeitz 69). Not all feminists were opposed to flappers; one of their most notable defenders. Zeitz notes, was journalist and feminist Dorothy Dunbar Bromley. Bromley argued that the either/or battle between the New Woman feminists of the late 1800s and early 1900s and the flappers of the 1920s was unnecessary and, indeed, counterproductive. In fact, Bromley noted, flappers actually had *more* of a grasp on what feminism truly meant by not sacrificing pleasure for the sake of politics. She

stated that the flapper “knows that it is her American, her twentieth-century birthright to emerge from a creature of instinct into a full-fledged individual who is capable of molding her own life. And in this respect she holds that she is becoming man’s equal” (552). Zeitz muses that perhaps “the personal was political. Maybe the flapper was pioneering a distinct brand of individualist feminism” (113). If this is indeed the case, then it makes far more sense to listen to what a true flapper has to say, rather than to rely on a secondhand interpretation of her motives, such as those fictionalized by Scott Fitzgerald. For this kind of firsthand account, we need look no further than the woman who is considered America’s premiere flapper: Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald.

Although Scott Fitzgerald’s portrayal of the flapper is familiar to most, Zelda’s take on the flapper’s actions and feelings is not nearly as well known, yet ultimately much more realistic and reliable given her status as “the embodiment of the new modern woman,” as she is called by Kelly Sagert in her work *Flappers: A Guide to an American Subculture* (24). Between 1922 and 1925, Zelda penned two essays on the flapper. In “What Became of the Flappers?,” written for *McCall’s* in 1925, Zelda negates the notion that flappers are doing anything inherently evil or drastically different from their New Woman predecessors in their fight for equality. Zelda’s proposition was simple: “They [flappers] are not originating new ideas or new customs or new moral standards. They are simply endowing the old ones that we are used to with a vitality that we are not used to” (397). She forecasts this sentiment in her 1922 essay “Eulogy on the Flapper” when she says of the flapper, “She was conscious that the things she did were the things she had always wanted to do” (391). Women had always wanted more, Zelda argues; it was only at that moment, in the wake of the worldwide battle for democracy and personal freedom,

that they were bold enough to take what they had always wanted: a life beyond hearth and home.

In fact, Zelda writes, the flapper's behavior is actually beneficial, not harmful, because allowing herself to pursue pleasure in youth will allow her to one day settle down and be a more contented mother and wife. She concludes by stating, "And I should think that fully airing the desire for unadulterated gaiety, for romances that she knows will not last, and for dramatizing herself would make her more inclined to favor the 'back to the fireside' movement than if she were repressed until age gives her those rights that only youth has the right to give" ("Eulogy on the Flapper" 392). Zelda's prediction for what would eventually become of the flapper was matter-of-fact. "She has come to none of the predicted 'bad ends,' but has gone at last, where all good flappers go -- into the young married set, into boredom and gathering conventions and the pleasure of having children, having lent a while splendor and courageousness and brightness to life, as all good flappers should" ("What Became of the Flappers?" 399). With these words, Zelda spoke from personal experience. After being married in 1920, the Fitzgeralds soaked up the excesses of the Roaring Twenties for a little over a year before the birth of their first and only child, Scottie. Yet while Zelda's summation of the flapper's fate was quite satisfactory, it was not entirely reflective of her own life. Zelda would prove unsatisfied by "gathering conventions and the pleasure of having children," and the latter half of her life would be marked by her intense struggle to define herself, not as wife and mother, but as an artist in her own right. While Zelda, as she wrote of the flappers, had "crystallize[d] [her] ambitious desires" along with her fellow flappers, this had not enabled her to "come home and live happily ever afterwards" ("Eulogy" 392). Rather, it

had awakened her discontent and complicated the character type first made popular by her own husband.

It is essential to note that the flapper, while undoubtedly representing a vast number of young women who simply could not bear the repression forced upon them, was also a “character type,” as Joshua Zeitz points out (8). During the 1920s, flappers dictated fashion trends, music taste, liquor preference -- even body shape (Zeitz 8). They were powerful in ways often ignored by those New Woman feminists like Charlotte Perkins Gilman, who focused instead on the deterioration of home and family and the flapper’s role in said deterioration. Yet their power was only in part their own, the other part owned by the operators of consumer culture. Fashion designers, media outlets, and even writers like Scott Fitzgerald -- “merchants of cool,” as Zeitz calls them -- used the flapper to achieve their own ends. According to Zeitz, “The pioneer merchants of cool invented the flapper for fun, for profit, and for fame. In branding and selling her, they inaugurated that curious, modern cycle by which popular culture imitates life and life imitates popular culture” (9). Zeitz claims that these “merchants of cool” -- “artists, advertisers, writers, designers, film starlets, and media gurus” -- were able to appeal to a vast number of discontented young girls by understanding how various media outlets could manipulate the psyche of a generation of young women. This generation, from which sprang the likes of famous flappers such as Zelda Fitzgerald herself, was made vulnerable by a longing for independence which was somewhat negated by an innate craving (leftover from the days of the Gibson Girl, perhaps) for the approval of what Zeitz terms “cultural authorities” (8). This conflict, in essence, was the issue which would haunt Zelda Fitzgerald her whole life. When she was ready to abandon the mantle of

flapper and be taken seriously as an artist, it was too late -- she had already been painted so perfectly by her husband into the annals of literature and popular culture as the paragon of flapperdom that she would never be able to reinvent herself. In a 1921 interview, Scott claimed, "Indeed, I married the heroine of my stories. I would not be interested in any other sort of woman" (Milford 77). However, Scott was not solely responsible for Zelda's unshakable flapper image; she, too, had played right into the hands of those who so desperately wanted to believe that she was the real-life inspiration behind her husband's famous heroines. Following the publication of *This Side of Paradise*, Zelda told a journalist, "I love Scott's books and heroines. I like the ones that are like me! That's why I love Rosalind in *This Side of Paradise* . . . I like girls like that" (Zeit 62)⁶. At least in the beginning of their relationship, Zelda delighted in being her husband's muse and the subject of media attention.

Earlier in this chapter, a closer look at the so-called "progress" of the New Woman revealed that despite the numerous strides accomplished by and for women, there were still restrictions and expectations imposed on womanhood at the turn of the twentieth century. The evolution of the Gibson Girl New Woman into the New Woman of the 1920s, the flapper, was merely the natural next step for women longing for their voices to be heard. Writing for *Atlantic Monthly*, G. Stanley Hall, one of the foundational figures in American psychology, stated the following concerning the flapper.

. . . if she seems to know, or pretends to know, all that she needs, to become captain of her own soul, these are really only the gestures of shaking off old fetters.

⁶ This quote from Zelda originally appeared in September 1923 in a *Louisville Courier-Journal* article titled "What a 'Flapper Novelist' Thinks of His Wife."

Perhaps her soul has long been ripening for such a revolt, and anxious to dissipate the mystery which seemed to others to envelop it. . . . So it is 'high time' to be serious, and to realize that all the above are only surface phenomena, and that the real girl beneath them is, after all, but little changed; or that, if she is changed, it is, on the whole, for the better. Beneath all this new self-revelation, she still remains a mystery (294).

Hall was, I believe, right on two counts. The souls of women were, without a doubt, ripe for revolt, as they have been and will be for as long as there are restrictions imposed upon them. He was also correct in assuming that the change brought about by flapper culture was on the whole positive, but actually not as dramatic on an individual level as it was on a collective level. The flapper initiated great change for scores of women, change which we are still feeling the reverberations of in our modern age. Yet on an individual basis, flappers were less likely to be true revolutionaries than they were to meet with a tame ending of the sort hypothesized by Zelda Fitzgerald: a retreat into the ranks of married couples with children. Most women had actually not entirely abandoned the destinies and aspirations of their Victorian and New Woman/Gibson Girl foremothers: life as wife and mother remained the ultimate outcome for most white American women. Why? It could be due to the lack of gender equality outside the home that made it next to impossible for most women to truly succeed in their outside endeavors, as Fass hypothesizes in *The Damned and the Beautiful* (81-82). It could be, hearkening back to this pivotal and previously noted quote from Charlotte Perkins Gilman, that

On the one hand, women are differentiating as human beings: they are no longer all one thing -- females, mothers, and nothing else. They are still females, and will

remain so; still mothers, and will remain so: but they are also Persons of widely varying sorts, with interests and capacities which fit them for social service in many lines" ("The New Womanhood 148).

The emphasis Gilman places here on women as not only wives and mothers, but also as unique individuals with varying wants and desires, would be just the encouragement necessary for women to take their next steps on the spectrum of New Womanhood.

Although the term "flapper" was first coined by the journalistic world, the idea of the flapper would eventually be molded and commercialized by those who would stand to make a living off of her. Journalists who made a living by painting a threatening portrait of the havoc the flapper would wreak on the American dream, writers like Scott Fitzgerald who sought to secure a place for themselves amongst the pantheon of twentieth century writers -- all fall under the heading of "merchants of cool" that made the flapper into what we know her as today. But given the complexity of womanhood and identity, it seems obvious that these purveyors of social ideals simplified the flapper far too much, making her into a one-dimensional character who is ultimately unrealistic. Women writers like Edith Wharton and Zelda Fitzgerald, who experienced the Jazz Age as women firsthand, were able to observe and record the flapper as she really was -- a complex individual with what could potentially be viewed as "conflicting" desires. However, just as it was impossible to definitively categorize the New Woman as *only* a mother, it is equally impossible to define the flapper as *never* a mother. As we will learn in the next two chapters of this thesis, both Wharton and Zelda Fitzgerald created flapper characters who adhere to, yet also surpass, the defining characteristics of the flapper as dictated by the era's misguided merchants of cool. These characters are complicated by

their motherhood; their love for their children prevents them from being counted amongst the ranks of flappers like Daisy Buchanan, who utters her child's name only once throughout the entire course of the novel in which she stars. However, there is very little scholarly commentary on the idea of flappers as mothers. This idea of flappers as mothers is different from the earlier Gibson Girl New Woman, for whom motherhood is viewed as an integral part of her identity. Yet despite the fact that the flapper is merely the 1920s manifestation of the New Woman, motherhood is viewed as a pursuit which is totally unsuitable for the likes of the flapper.

So what became of those women like Zelda Fitzgerald, the quintessential flapper who was also a devoted wife and loving mother, the New Woman who did not want to choose between home and career, between love and a life outside it? She is not singular by any means; we see this same kind of woman represented by Lita Manford in Edith Wharton's *Twilight Sleep* (1927). Zelda's autobiographical account of her life and the various directions in which she felt herself pulled can shed light on the fate of the woman who does not fit neatly into the categories of old-fashioned New Woman or flapper, wife and mother or artist. Her autobiographical counterpart, Alabama Beggs, can be examined alongside Wharton's Lita Manford in order to better understand the dichotomy of what it meant to be a woman in 1920s America. With this background in place, the next two chapters will examine the aforementioned flappers created by Edith Wharton and Zelda Fitzgerald and attempt to understand them more fully in light of the established complexity of motherhood and womanhood at the turn of the twentieth century.

CHAPTER TWO: THE ARTIST & THE MOTHER IN EDITH WHARTON'S

TWILIGHT SLEEP

“Thus exposed, with gaze extinct and loosened muscles, she seemed a mere bundle of contradictory whims tied together by a frail thread of beauty. The hand of the downward arm hung open, palm up. In its little hollow lay the fate of three lives. What would she do with them?” - Edith Wharton, *Twilight Sleep* (240)

In 1921, Edith Wharton was the first woman to be awarded the Pulitzer Prize for her novel *Age of Innocence*. Wharton is undoubtedly one of America's most prolific authors, with more than a dozen bestselling works of fiction and countless short stories. While she is particularly well-known for her impeccably-crafted novels examining the world of Old New York (*The House of Mirth* and *Age of Innocence*, two of her most memorable works), Wharton's work reaches far deeper and wider than just 1870s New York City. Wharton's later works in particular deal with the same issues of motherhood and identity which have been discussed in the previous chapter. Her 1927 novel entitled *Twilight Sleep*, while engaging with the topics of motherhood and selfhood, also demonstrates Wharton's growth as a writer and woman herself.

In the introduction to her psychoanalytic biography of Wharton entitled *A Feast of Words*, Cynthia Griffin Wolff states, “From the beginning, Edith Wharton failed to fit the desired stereotype [for women of her time], and her own chronicle of early life reports a painful ordeal of humiliation and ridicule for her unconventional ways” (xiv).

Throughout her biography of Wharton, Wolff traces the issues that Edith Wharton

struggled with from a young age: physical insecurity, an overbearing and often cruel mother, and unconventional desires which would ultimately set her apart from the society into which she was born. As she grew older, Wharton would pour herself into work; indeed, it is possible to pick out echoes of her life and herself in every novel she ever published. Wolff hypothesizes, “Wharton did more than struggle for her own independence; she also used her fiction to scrutinize the problems that so many women face, and then she castigated the folly of a society that relegated half of its members to a merely ornamental role. In short, she fashioned a map to guide women out of the wilderness of enforced helplessness” (xv). Wharton knew better than most the dangers associated with putting women in the boxes deemed acceptable by society at large. As Wolff points out, “In such a world of inherited wealth and ease, living in a society that did not encourage men to work and that positively discouraged women from any occupation save having babies and being a good hostess, Edith Wharton became a novelist” (5). Wharton’s career as a novelist is an accomplished one, but perhaps her greatest achievement is what Wolff refers to as “her comprehensive understanding of women’s nature and their dilemmas” (xv). Wharton’s stories, even those which feature male main characters (such as *The Age of Innocence*), are ultimately a commentary on the development of the self as it is inevitably influenced by social, political, and gender ideologies. With such a long and illustrious career spent examining the virtues and flaws of American society, as well as a life spent in the liminal space of what society deemed acceptable, Edith Wharton is more than capable of offering commentary on the dichotomy of what it was to be a woman in 1920s America: specifically, the divide

between choosing the traditionally acceptable roles of wife and mother, and embracing an identity outside of marital status and number of children at home.

In order to better understand both the complexity of *Twilight Sleep*, the novel which is the focus of this chapter, as well as the intricacy of womanhood which is portrayed in the novel, it is essential to examine Wharton's earlier works for key patterns or relevant themes. Among these, the most critical to the analysis of *Twilight Sleep* are *The Custom of the Country* (1913), *Summer* (1917), and *The Age of Innocence* (1920). These novels reveal not only Wharton's personal struggles with various complicated issues; they also demonstrate Wharton's growth as woman and novelist (two very contradictory roles) living at the turn of the twentieth century. By the time she was writing *The Custom of the Country* and *Summer*, Wharton's work was beginning to deal with an issue previously untouched, perhaps due to its intensely personal connection to Wharton's own life: motherhood. A trend began with Wharton's earliest work and continued through to the very end of her life; that is, that the novels which she produced reflected the issues with which she was personally struggling during the time she was writing. For example, *The Custom of the Country*, Wharton's sprawling novel which follows the various marriages and divorces of the indefatigable Undine Spragg, was published in 1913, immediately following Wharton's divorce from her ailing and demanding husband, Teddy Wharton. However, as Wolff points out, Wharton goes far beyond merely dealing with the single issue of divorce (an issue which, it must be said, troubled Wharton immensely and with which she wrestled for many years). Instead, *Custom* "[is] a poignant reiteration of the desolate rage at what it meant -- in this society - - to be 'only a girl'" (246). Though Wharton would eventually become a Pulitzer Prize-

winning author, a woman whose work would be praised by the likes of Henry James, Sinclair Lewis, and F. Scott Fitzgerald, she felt this selfsame sting of being “only a girl” well into her adulthood. Indeed, according to Wolff, it is this deficiency which Wharton felt so sharply from all sides -- her mother, her peers, her extended family -- and which would spur her to work out her complex feelings about love, sex, parenting, and relationships in her novels.

As previously noted, *Custom* is the novel born of the period during which Wharton was pursuing a divorce. However, perhaps more important than Wharton’s obvious wrestling with the issue of divorce is that *Custom* is the novel in which Wharton really begins to incorporate motherhood into her work. In *Undine Spragg*, Wharton creates her first fully fleshed out mother character, as opposed to the half-drawn, shadowy background figures that exist in the majority of her prior works. However, Wharton’s first foray into creating fictional motherhood seems to be influenced by her own less than ideal mother, as it is impossible to characterize Undine as a good mother, let alone someone who embraces or even likes motherhood. She breaks the news of her impending motherhood to her husband Ralph Marvell amidst hysterical sobs, and Wharton makes it quite clear that Undine’s reaction is more than the understandable nerves of a first-time mother. The loss of control -- over one’s time, body, and future -- clearly weigh heavily on Undine as she responds to her husband’s joy. “‘It takes a *year* -- a whole year out of life! What do I care how I shall feel in a year?’ The chill of her tone struck in. This was more than a revolt of the nerves: it was a settled, a reasoned resentment” (*Custom* 112). However, it would truly have been out of place with Undine’s well-established selfish nature for Wharton to have made her a nurturing, selfless mother,

as well as rather out of step with the overall suppressed rage that bubbles beneath the surface of both *Undine* and the novel itself. As Wolff puts it, “[*Custom*] is a novel infused with the woman’s outrage and the long-suppressed fury of the girl whose deepest instinct has been engulfed by guilt. The object of that fury is a society . . . whose ‘best’ people have been frozen into stupefaction by the niceties of ‘propriety’” (222). This protestation against the injustice of American society would manifest in Wharton’s next two novels, albeit in slightly different forms. Wharton would also continue to explore motherhood, manifesting it in vastly different characters and situations in each of her subsequent novels.

Summer, known as the “hot” companion to Wharton’s earlier novella *Ethan Frome*, tells the story of young Charity Royall, an orphan living in rural New England who embarks on a passionate affair and falls pregnant as a result. It is not difficult to see the connections to Wharton’s life in *Summer*; by the time of this novel’s publication, Wharton’s passionate affair with Morton Fullerton had sparked and faded away, leaving her with an acute need to express the sexual passion that had finally been awakened in her after years of a mostly sexless marriage. Wharton had evolved from a woman who longed for a “simple” love to a woman who had come “to recognize that a genuine sensual awakening is none of these things: only the dream of love can be simple” (Wolff 260). Indeed, in the novel, Charity must make the hard choice to give up her relationship with her lover, and she instead chooses marriage to a man who can provide for her and her unborn child. Thus, *Summer* is not merely a novel about sex or passion; it is also a story about motherhood and maturity, and it the first novel in which Wharton conducts an extended examination into the responsibilities of mothering. *Summer* continues

Wharton's theme of protestation against the unfair strictures of society, which indicates to the reader the way that we are meant to read Charity's fate. Although many scholars tend to read Charity's unplanned pregnancy as Wharton's condemnation for her actions, Wolff argues that condemnation is too simple a response. She states, "Pregnancy is not the inevitable 'punishment' for sexual indulgence; it is an opportunity to participate in the social and Natural continuum that informs our lives with meaning" (285). Instead, Wharton includes Charity's pregnancy as part "of a search for autonomous adult identity" (Wolff 286). The theme of searching for identity is one that comes to a head in Wharton's next, and arguably best, novel, *The Age of Innocence*.

Wolff calls *Innocence* a "novel of maturity -- acceptance and not submission."

The story revolves around Newland Archer, who must come to terms with his place in the society of Old New York and with his feelings for the two women in his life: his wife May and the object of his passionate desires, Ellen Olenska. Ultimately, this novel is a novel about tradition; though Newland rages against the society and traditions which have molded him and shaped his destiny, by the end of the novel, he has come to accept what Wolff theorizes Wharton herself was working out in this novel. In her biography of Wharton entitled *A Feast of Words*, Wolff writes, "[C]hildren of that time and place [old New York] must forever bear its mark, cherish its values, and suffer in some degree for its inadequacies. Growth, then, must proceed from an understanding of one's background -- a coming to terms with one's past, not a flight from it" (305). While Charity Royall and Newland Archer learn this lesson, the characters of Wharton's 1927 novel *Twilight Sleep* do not.

By 1927, when her novel *Twilight Sleep* was published, Wharton was in a much different headspace than she was during the composition of her earlier works. Her earlier works follow Wharton's journey to come to terms with her own sexuality, to reconcile her feelings on marriage and divorce, and to better understand the ups and downs of passion and love. According to Wolff, Wharton's 1920s novels -- *A Son at the Front*, *The Mother's Recompense*, *The Children*, and *Twilight Sleep* -- "are novels about families -- about parents and children, youth and age" (330). It is interesting that in her twilight years, Wharton's work would turn to the aspect of her life which was perhaps the most troublesome and unfulfilled for her: family. Wolff speculates about the reasons why Wharton's later works might have dealt with topics so far from Wharton's reality, yet obviously so near to her heart. Wolff ventures:

She [Wharton] may have felt driven to write repeatedly about the feelings of parents toward their children; however, she could only infer the nature of such feelings. She may have longed for family (the tone in fiction after fiction suggests as much), but she had none. In fact, although she made wholehearted efforts to get to know 'les jeunes,' she was more and more alone, and she felt increasingly alienated from the manners and practices of the younger generation (331).

Though Wharton's feelings of alienation from the younger generation are likely genuine, it would not prevent her from continuing to speculate on the peculiarities of the Jazz Age and its young disciples. Cynthia Griffin Wolff noted proof of these feelings of alienation by including in her biography of Wharton a letter from Edith Wharton to F. Scott Fitzgerald (whose *Gatsby* Wharton very much admired), in which Wharton confirmed her growing feeling of being out of touch with modernity: "I am touched at your sending me

a copy [of *Gatsby*], for I feel that to your generation, which has taken such a flying leap into the future, I must represent the literary equivalent of tufted furniture and gas chandeliers” (qtd. in Wolff 467). However, as we have already established, Wharton had come to terms with her place in the world; just as Newland Archer accepts the best and worst characteristics of the society which produced him, so did Edith Wharton accept her place as a product of the old New York society. By the 1920s, however, the world was changing with rapid speed, and much of what Wharton observed of American society (albeit from a distance, as by this time she had embraced the expatriate lifestyle and was living fulltime in France) troubled her immensely.

Wolff draws attention to the “tone of righteousness and a too-prompt condemnation of the modern world” which is evident in most of Wharton’s 1920s novels and which dominates *Twilight Sleep*. With the end of the first World War, the traditions and values which previously defined old New York (and America as a whole) seemed to be totally put to rest, and Wharton felt that now the dominant attitude was merely to “achieve perfect freedom from pain” (Wolff 362). The dawn of the Jazz Age, with all of its lighthearted, mind numbing, and often self-centered pursuits, only bolstered Wharton’s belief. Yet as already established earlier, the Jazz Age (and its famous flappers) are not as simple and self-centered as they are often depicted, and despite Wharton’s obvious disdain for the pursuits of 1920s youth, her analysis of the problem with American society in the 1920s is not quite as damning as scholars examining *Twilight Sleep* would have one believe. Most modern-day scholars are not kind with regard to Wharton’s later works, *Twilight Sleep* often being foremost amongst those most

criticized. In his biography of Wharton, R. W. B. Lewis refers to it as “overplotted” and “melodramatic” (474). Cynthia Griffin Wolff is similarly harsh, stating:

The book is strident with protest, but it sputters instead of dealing death blows; and underneath, never honestly brought into focus, are the problems that occupy so much of Wharton’s late fiction. How does one come to terms with the pain of advancing age? When old age comes and one has never experienced the rewards of family, what happiness can life offer? (365)

I believe one aspect of Wolff’s analysis to be particularly spot-on. It is true that this novel “sputters;” it lacks the sharp focus of many of Wharton’s earlier novels. However, I believe this lack of focus is due not to Wharton’s aging mind or feverish attempt to address the wrongs of the world, but rather to her acknowledgement (whether conscious or not) that the reality of the Jazz Age was not as uncomplicated and easily condemnable as an aging and world-weary Wharton might have liked it to be. Wharton spent most of her life coming to a better understanding and, ultimately, to peace with the society of old New York which made her into what she was. *The Age of Innocence* was written fifty years after the time during which it was set; it is Wharton’s journey back into her own past, her literary reconciliation with the world which created her. It is no coincidence, as Wolff points out, that Newland Archer is the exact same age as Edith Wharton when she wrote the novel (204). With *Innocence*, Wharton was coming to terms with what she had learned about the individual’s journey from the past into the future. Wolff sums this lesson up nicely:

The growth of any society depends upon the growth of the individuals who comprise it. Thus, since social change is inevitably tied to the individual struggle to

achieve maturity, social change is, ironically, always rooted in the past; no man can achieve maturity until he has accepted the particular conventions and traditions that have shaped him.

Edith Wharton was a stranger to the world of 1920s New York. She had not lived full-time in America since 1906. In her expatriate lifestyle, she continued to interact with Americans, but she was no longer able to offer the sharp commentary that could result only from a lifetime of painful immersion in a world which did not always accept her. In *Twilight Sleep*, Wharton does exactly what she does in earlier works such as *The Custom of the Country*, *Summer*, and *The Age of Innocence*; she presents the reader with characters who are seriously flawed, prompting the reader to look more closely and critically at the society which has produced and influenced these characters. Wharton struggled with the ideologies of the Jazz Age, and as she was no longer living in nor personally involved in American society by the time she was writing her 1920s novels, the flaw lies in Wharton's lack of immersion in the world which she is attempting to depict and criticize.

Twilight Sleep's flaws are, ironically, also its strengths. Dale Bauer draws attention to the fact that "One reason *Twilight Sleep* has been dismissed as chaotic and anarchic is that it does so much 'cultural work'" (59). This cultural work is precisely what makes the novel invaluable for the purposes of this thesis, as our understanding of women's roles at this time in American history is intrinsically bound up with cultural and social ideologies of the time. Millicent Bell calls the novel "a medium of ironic social observation" in *Edith Wharton and Henry James: a Story of Their Friendship*. Similarly, in her book *Gender and the Writer's Imagination*, Mary Suzanne Schriber refers to

Twilight Sleep as both satirizing and critiquing women's limited sphere (169). Wharton presents the reader with the stories of three women: Pauline Manford, her daughter Nona Manford, and her daughter-in-law Lita Manford. What unfolds is the story of the various members of the Manford clan attempting to dull whatever internal ache plagues them, through whatever means necessary. The three Manford women are the crux of the novel, and they are inextricably linked with the double meaning of the novel's title.

"Twilight sleep" was a method of pain management for women in childbirth, wherein the woman in labor was administered a powerful anesthetic which would put her into unconsciousness for the birth of her baby. This method is described in the novel as a method which is embraced by Lita Manford as she prepares to give birth to her son:

All she asked was that nothing should 'hurt' her: she had the blind dread of physical pain common also to most young women of her set. But all that was so easily managed nowadays: Mrs Manford . . . of course knew the most perfect 'Twilight Sleep' establishment in the country, installed Lita in its most luxurious suite . . . and Lita drifted into motherhood as lightly and unperceivingly as if the wax doll which suddenly appeared in the cradle at her bedside had been brought there in one of the big bunches of hothouse roses that she found every morning on her pillow (Wharton 18).

As the events of the novel will show, this title is significant not only in its literal sense as a reference to childbirth and motherhood, but also in a deeper sense which has its roots in the cultural climate of the 1920s. Twilight sleep was not available to women of lower classes; it was a luxury available only to those who could afford it, like the Manfords (Bauer 57). Twilight sleep gave women the luxury of choosing a painless birth; however,

as Bauer puts it, “They lose power over their bodies in sleeping through childbirth” (57). Although it did cause women to lose that control over their own bodies, the fact remains that it still “allowed them some element of choice,” where before they had none (Bauer 58). Thus, the method of twilight sleep is complicated, and the fact that Edith Wharton chose it as the title for her novel points to her critique of the limited scope and troublesome nature of the choices offered to women concerning matters of their bodies, their sexuality, and their lives in general.

With Pauline and Lita Manford standing in apparent opposition to each other for much of the novel, Wharton creates an interesting juxtaposition between the New Woman and the flapper. At first glance, Pauline and Lita each seem to perfectly embody these easily-identifiable character types. The first introduction we have to Pauline is through the perspective of her daughter Nona, who cannot even be seen by her mother due to the crowded schedule to which Pauline religiously adheres. Pauline, like the prototypical New Woman, can do it all and have it all; both family and social activism are well within her scope. In Pauline, however, Wharton has created a laughable exaggeration of Gilman’s definition of the New Woman. According to Gilman, “A mother who is something more -- who is also a social servant . . . is wiser, stronger, happier, jollier, a better comrade, a more satisfying and contented wife. . .” (“The New Womanhood” 149). None of those adjectives remotely describes Pauline, whose social service and political engagement only serve as an escape to keep her so busy that she can forget that her life is insufficient and unsatisfactory to her. Pauline is trying to be far more than just a New Woman -- she needs to be the *best* New Woman, and ultimately in

trying to do too much, ends up failing to uphold that most important role at the heart of New Womanhood: motherhood.

On the surface, Pauline is a good mother -- certainly better than what we know of Wharton's own mother. The first description we are given of Pauline is both a compliment and a condemnation: "When Mrs. Manford did see her children she was perfect to them; but in this killing New York life, with its ever-multiplying duties and responsibilities, if her family had been allowed to tumble in at all hours and devour her time, her nervous system simply couldn't have stood it -- and how many duties would have been left undone!" (10) Pauline does make time for her children, but they must be penciled into her schedule before she can see them. Pauline's chosen method of "twilight sleep" is, ironically, the right to social activism that women such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman fought for decades before; however, Gilman would be appalled by the way in which Pauline allows her social engagements to dictate her life and take precedence over the wellbeing of her family. Indeed, Pauline refuses to see anything which will ultimately end up complicating her life and cause her to lose control, thus leading to what many see as the battle between the New Woman and the flapper that takes place between Pauline and her daughter-in-law Lita.

Although she has little dialogue in the novel (she is more often talked *about* than talked *to*), the central conflict of *Twilight Sleep* revolves around Lita Manford. Though it is tempting to write Lita off as merely a shallow flapper character who exists to spur on the melodramatic events of the plot, it stands to reason that Wharton would take advantage of the opportunity to turn a seemingly uncomplicated character into a much more complex study of 1920s womanhood. According to Nona Manford, "Lita was made

to be worshipped” (Wharton 16). Both Lita’s looks and choice of daily activities are described in stereotypical terms of the Jazz Age flapper: “Between her hours of lolling, and smoking amber-scented cigarettes, every moment of her life was crammed with dancing, riding or games” (Wharton 17). The problem with Lita is that she is no longer interested in keeping up the facade of her marriage to Jim, Nona’s brother and Pauline’s son. According to Jennifer Haytock in her essay, “Marriage and Modernism in Edith Wharton’s *Twilight Sleep*,” “Lita embodies the ‘fastness’ of the times; she is the symbol of all that is shallow and lazy in the post-war generation” (220). Most scholars note that criticizing this shallow post-war generation is Wharton’s main objective in the writing of *Twilight Sleep* and are content to let the argument rest there. However, I am more of a mind to agree with Haytock, who points out that seeing Lita only through the perspectives of Nona and Pauline severely limits one’s view of her character and can potentially cause the reader to miss some of Wharton’s biggest clues that Lita is a far more important character than she first seems. Just as we have examined the whole of *Twilight Sleep* in the greater context of Wharton’s life and previous works, so we must also consider Lita as a character in the context of Wharton’s other novels. When we do this, according to Haytock, “she [Lita] becomes a more complex and disturbing character. Lita wants to be free of her marriage because she feels stifled -- just as Newland Archer [does]” (220). We are given verbal hints of this over and over again.

The first time Lita speaks in the novel, it is to remark to Nona about her home: “I’d like to throw everything in it into the street. I’ve been so bored here” (Wharton 34). This remark in isolation speaks for itself -- Lita is bored with her life and will selfishly allow her boredom to destroy her marriage and, with it, her husband’s happiness.

However, when she is further probed by her mother-in-law, she reveals that it is not boredom, but rather a lack of belonging that causes Lita to want to escape from a life that feels false. The narrator reveals early on that Lita's upbringing was somewhat less than respectable; as an orphan brought up by a flighty aunt who associates with disreputable people, Lita's chances of landing a good husband should have been small. Lita's questionable upbringing is often referred to as one of the potential sources for her flightiness; it is certainly one of the reasons why Lita feels that she does not belong within the Manford clan. Pauline calls it a "miracle" that a girl like Lita wound up with someone like Jim Manford (Wharton 30). Dexter Manford is even less forgiving in his assessment of Lita's state, as demonstrated by the line of his thinking as he ponders what to do about his daughter-in-law: "Lita must be made to understand what a treasure she possessed, and how easily she might lose it. Lita Cliffe -- Mrs. Percy Landish's niece -- to have had the luck to marry Jim Wyant, and to risk estranging him! What fools women were!" (Wharton 107). The Manfords will never let Lita forget that she is less than they because of her upbringing. In the eyes of the Manford family, Lita is lucky to have snagged a respectable husband and a place within their social circle, and thus their displeasure and disbelief at her desire to break free is all the more pronounced. Despite the so-called modernity of the age, and no matter how modern some of the characters consider themselves to be, they cannot shake the last remnants of old New York that exist deep within their consciousness.

Yet, despite the displeasure of her in-laws, Lita still insists that she needs a "new deal" (Wharton 195). When Pauline questions what Lita will do if she leaves Jim, Lita responds, "Do? Be myself, I suppose! I can't be, here. I'm a sort of all-round fake"

(Wharton 195). As Haytock points out, this feeling of inauthenticity is the same feeling that Newland Archer has: “Lita lives in a time when she has an acceptable alternative [to remaining trapped in marriage]. Unlike Newland. . . Lita does not risk her reputation or even financial hardship; her devoted husband Jim agrees to support her and their baby if she leaves him” (220). Unlike Newland Archer, Lita has the support of her husband to pursue a more authentic life; he is not forcing her to choose between a domestic life and a creative one. This brings us to another part of Lita’s character that is usually overlooked in scholarly discussion, yet which is undeniably present throughout the novel: her devotion to her child and her role as mother.

Lita embraces pregnancy and motherhood, much to Nona’s surprise, given what she knows and has observed of Lita’s temperament and chosen pastimes. As she thinks back on Lita’s pregnancy, Nona remembers:

Nona had rather feared that her [Lita’s] perpetual craving for new ‘thrills’ might lead to some insidious form of time-killing -- some of the drinking or drugging that went on among the young women of their set; but Lita had sunk into a state of smiling animal patience, as if the mysterious work going on in her tender young body had a sacred significance for her, and it was enough to lie still and let it happen (Wharton 18).

While Lita may not regard much as “sacred,” her baby is perhaps the one thing which she cherishes above all else, including her home and her husband. Though Lita has little regard for her other family ties, her relationship with her baby is the exception to this rule. Several times throughout the novel, Lita’s intentions to leave Jim and thus give up her baby are questioned. Nona is the first to question if, along with her home, Lita would

throw her baby into the street. Lita's response is heated, more heated than she gets in any other part of the novel: "Lita's eyes woke to fire. 'Don't be an idiot! You know I adore my baby.'" (Wharton 34). Pauline's query as to whether Lita can "face" giving up her baby is met with a similar response: "'Baby? Why should I? You don't suppose I'd ever give up my baby?'" (Wharton 195). Indeed, as Haytock points out, Lita does *not* have to give up her baby. By the 1920s, divorce was common enough, and though custody battles could certainly ensue, Lita's husband agrees that she can have their child if they separate. He tells Nona, "'What I'd honestly like, if she [Lita] wants her freedom, is to give it to her, and yet be able to go on looking after her. But I don't see how that can be worked out'" (Wharton 185). However, Jim's support of Lita's wishes is simply unacceptable to Pauline, who holds hard and fast to the old-fashioned New Woman ideal: the woman who is both wife and mother, who holds her household together and does not venture further from her home than the call of social activism beckons. However, in the words of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "the whole atmosphere around the child at home is improved by a fully human mother" ("The New Womanhood" 149). Gilman does not say "a fully self-actualized mother" or "a selfless and servant-hearted mother"; her use of the adjective "human" to describe the ideal New Woman bears noting in this instance. Gilman calls for "the fullest development of the woman, in all her powers, that she may be the better qualified for her duties of transmission by inheritance" ("The New Womanhood" 148). This call implies that each woman's New Womanhood (and by extension her approach to mothering) will be somewhat different in application to the differences in her personal development. Pauline gives so much of herself to so many different people, charities, and organizations that it would be impossible to feel strongly

or passionately about anything in particular; she has *overdeveloped* and cannot be a good mother to them because of her lack of personal conviction, as well as the lack of time she devotes to them. The revelation that Pauline is far from the ideal wife and mother herself should cause the reader to pause and consider how hypocritical Pauline's attitude towards Lita really is.

In Lita, Wharton creates a flapper who transcends even the boldest of all flappers, for Lita is both artist and mother, and she cannot conceive of why she shouldn't be both. Indeed, as she has the support of her husband, the father of her child, there is no legitimate reason why she *should not* be both. Pauline and Nona, however, cannot bear for Lita's actions, however they are intended and for however noble a cause, to disrupt their family dynamic, or to affect the way others see them or, most importantly, the way they see themselves. Nona tells her mother about Lita, "She says the life she's leading prevents her expressing her personality. . . Lita says she's got to express her personality, or she'll do something dreadful" (Wharton 128). Pauline and Nona both imagine this "something dreadful" to be divorce; for them, the worst thing would be for their family to be torn apart and consequently forced to consider where they fit in the world and whether or not *they* are truly happy. Yet it is not hard to imagine someone like Lita, trapped in an unhappy marriage and a life which is false, to seek some other, more permanent, means of escape if she is thwarted in her quest to express herself. Haytock characterizes Lita as a "frustrated artist," something with which Wharton herself could sympathize (220). Haytock concludes her analysis of Lita with this statement:

Whether Lita pursues her dreams of dancing and film, it seems unlikely that any amount of pressure from the Manfords will keep her in a marriage she no longer

finds amusing. Wharton suggests that the family machine that effectively kept Newland Archer in his marriage no longer has the same power, and, through the viewpoints of the conventional characters, she shows a modernist respect for an unconventional individual (221).

It is possible, then, to read a potential future for Lita in the life of her creator, Edith Wharton, for whom artistry and personal fulfillment were one and the same. Just as the old New York marriage machine lost its power over Newland Archer and Edith Wharton, it is likely that it was even less effective for a modern artist like Lita. Haytock indicates that Lita is likely “an artist ahead of her time” (221). Lita’s artistry goes unappreciated by most of the major characters in *Twilight Sleep*, who simply cannot comprehend a woman desiring a life outside the conventional bounds of the household. Perhaps the most hypocritical of these characters is Pauline Manford, who claims to be able to see the benefits of modern approaches to femininity, such as birth control, as well as the benefits of choosing the more traditional path of stay-at-home wife and mother. To that end, Pauline is the head of two committees which express very conflicting points of view: the Birth Control committee and the Mothers meetings. The extent of Pauline’s hypocrisy is addressed by the narrator and infused with Wharton’s scorn:

Whatever the question dealt with, these ladies always seemed to be the same, and always advocated with equal zeal Birth Control and unlimited maternity, free love or the return to the traditions of the American home; and neither they nor Mrs. Manford seemed aware that there was anything contradictory in these doctrines. All they knew was that they were determined to force certain persons to do things that those persons preferred not to do (Wharton 11).

If anyone should be able to sympathize with Lita, -- or, at the very least, understand and tolerate her desire for a more modern lifestyle -- it is Pauline. Yet Pauline's desperation to keep Lita contained within the family unit indicates that there is a limit on what she deems acceptable, that, ultimately, selfhood must be sacrificed for the sake of the traditional family unit.

But how happy -- or indeed, even functional -- is the traditional family unit so glorified by Pauline? Though other Wharton novels demonstrate a "conflicting attitude" towards divorce, *Twilight Sleep* is not one of them. As Haytock puts it, "[*Twilight Sleep*] suggests that rather than traumatizing the children, divorce creates a loving and supportive extended family" (225). Nona and Jim have the support of Jim's biological father, Arthur Wyant, as well as that of Nona's father, Dexter Manford. Similarly, Jim's aforementioned statement that he will continue to care for Lita and his child even after a divorce indicates that a similar future is possible for his child with Lita. When one considers the disaster that ensues during the climax of the novel as a direct result of the Manfords' attempt to keep Lita in her marriage, it seems much more logical that divorce would be a less stressful, happier option for everyone involved. Though the reader does not get to see through the perspective of Lita's child, we do get a glimpse of Nona's mindset following the shooting. She is disillusioned and greatly disappointed by her family; she is left without hope of happiness, with no example of a happy marriage before her. When Pauline ventures that she wishes to see Nona happy and married, Nona's retort is vicious. "Married? Do you suppose being married would make me happy? I wonder why you should! . . . Marry! I'd a thousand times rather go into a convent and have done with it,' she exclaimed" (Wharton 315). Nona is jaded as a result of what she has seen

and what has been done to her, and it is not unlikely that Lita and Jim's child will suffer a similar fate.

At the close of the novel, Lita and Jim have gone away on a trip to Europe together, quite reminiscent of the ending of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, in which the Buchanans flee the country following the fatal shooting of Daisy's lover, Jay Gatsby. We are not privy to the workings of Lita's mind following the accident which very well could have taken her life; all we know is that she remains married -- for now. Though it seems she has submitted to the wishes of her family, there seem to be two likely outcomes for Lita's life. One is that she remains in her marriage: trapped, unhappy, and raising a child who will never know a functional family unit. According to Haytock, though, this ending is unlikely, due to the failure of that well-oiled marriage machine of old New York. Perhaps Mrs. Landish, Lita's aunt who raised her, puts Lita's character best into perspective.

Such absolute reliability, such complete devotion, were sometimes more of a strain to the artistic temperament than scenes and infidelities. And Lita was first and foremost an artist, born to live in the world of art -- in quite other values -- a fourth-dimensional world, as it were. It wasn't fair to judge her in her present surroundings, ideal as they were in one way -- a way that unfortunately didn't happen to be hers (Wharton 165).

Though Lita can certainly be perceived as selfish and unappreciative of her "ideal" surroundings, *Twilight Sleep* presents two indisputable facts about her: she is a mother who adores her child and an artist who feels that her current existence is spurious and stifling. Though she initially appears to be just another flapper whose actions result in the

dismantling of a family's happiness, it is impossible for Wharton to present a narrative that so cleanly adheres to the troubling assumptions that it is the sole responsibility of women to uphold the family unit, and that any venture of a woman into a life considered atypical is inherently problematic. As a woman whose life was the very definition of atypical, Wharton presents the reader of *Twilight Sleep* with both a cautionary tale and an admirable figure in the character of Lita. She is a flapper who is also a mother; she is a mother who desires and fights for a sense of self. *Twilight Sleep* is not the story of one woman's selfishness leading to the destruction of a family. Rather, *Twilight Sleep* is the story of a family's attempts to stifle a woman's creative self, to restrict her to the categories of wife and mother and nothing else. The ending of *Twilight Sleep* demonstrates both the disastrousness and futility of such limitations; the life of Zelda Fitzgerald and the events of her semi-autobiographical novel, *Save Me the Waltz* (1932), which will be examined in Chapter Three, will indicate similar findings and their implications for women.

CHAPTER THREE: THE ARTIST MOTHER'S RESPONSE AND SEARCH IN
 ZELDA FITZGERALD'S *SAVE ME THE WALTZ*

"It seemed to Alabama that, reaching her goal, she would drive the devils that had driven her -- that, in proving herself, she would achieve that peace which she imagined went only in surety of one's self. . . ." - Zelda Fitzgerald, Save Me the Waltz (118)

Unlike Edith Wharton, Zelda Fitzgerald's name is far less recognizable than that of her more widely celebrated husband, American writer F. Scott Fitzgerald. Her merits as writer, artist, and dancer usually lie unnoticed in the shadow of her role as Jazz Age icon; indeed, it is fair to say that without Zelda, Scott Fitzgerald's writing (and, in turn, the Jazz Age itself) would be quite different, and perhaps, far less compelling. In her biography of the Fitzgeralds' marriage entitled *Sometimes Madness is Wisdom*, Kendall Taylor states:

Every decade has a writer who emerges as spokesperson for his or her age . . . F. Scott Fitzgerald briefly held that exalted position in the twenties, capturing the tenor and tempo of his time in a series of stories and novels about brash, independent, self-centered young women called flappers. They were girls whose personalities all were based on his highly original wife, Zelda Sayre. (1)

In Zelda Fitzgerald, history has perhaps one of its most compelling and complex female figures. While her role as muse for Scott Fitzgerald's literary heroines is a critical one, it is one that I feel should take a backseat to her many personal accomplishments. In light of the discussion of previous chapters, there are far more compelling facets of Zelda's life

and work that demand to be recognized and analyzed and important questions that must be asked. Perhaps the most crucial question is one that can also be asked of Wharton's flapper character Lita Manford: can a woman be both mother and artist? In Lita's case, the question goes unanswered and the reader is left to wonder at her fate. For Zelda, the answer is yes, but not without great cost. The tragic details of her life speak to the enormous price which both motherhood and the pursuit of artistry cost her.

Scott Fitzgerald's female characters are some of the most iconic figures in literature: Daisy Buchanan, Gloria Patch, and Nicole Diver are just a few of his notable creations. Yet his flappers -- for example, Bernice of his short story "Bernice Bobs Her Hair" and Daisy from his most celebrated novel *The Great Gatsby* -- are, for the most part, remarkably shallow, hollow creatures. They are difficult to understand and lacking in the emotion that would make them relatable characters. In his literary creations, Scott Fitzgerald --who can and should be counted among the ranks of those "merchants of cool" who sought to profit off the flapper ideal -- both created and reinforced what I have already established to be the troublesome stereotype of the "typical" flapper: jazzy, self-absorbed girls who have little interest in anything that falls outside the scope of their own rebelliousness. It is ironic that Zelda, an immensely complicated and emotional woman, served as inspiration for some of the coldest, most one-dimensional women in literary history. Yet the events of their life together make it clear that Scott was wont to pick and choose in order to best suit his purposes, and this selectiveness was particularly true when it came to incorporating parts of Zelda into his literature: her mannerisms, scenes from their life together, even words from her private journals and letters. From Fitzgerald's amalgamation the flapper was born, and Zelda Fitzgerald is forever known as her

inspiration, no matter how ill-suited the label of flapper actually was for her. As Jacqueline Tavernier-Courbin puts it in her essay, “Art as Woman’s Response and Search: Zelda Fitzgerald’s *Save Me the Waltz*,” “He [Scott] made her [Zelda] a creation of his -- the flapper -- and she was left with the task of living up to the picture of herself perpetuated in his stories and his novels” (26). It was not until she penned her own novel, *Save Me the Waltz*, that a literary flapper would be created in Zelda’s own complex image.

If Edith Wharton was born into the upper-crust of Old New York society, then Zelda Fitzgerald was born into the equally stifling environment of a well-to-do family in the Old South. The youngest of six children born to Anthony D. Sayre, a Montgomery, Alabama judge, and Minnie Machen Sayre, Zelda was born on July 24, 1900, fittingly poised on the cusp of the twentieth century. However, while much of the world was embracing the steady march of progress in attitudes towards gender roles, the South that Zelda grew up in remained firmly entrenched in the patriarchal traditions of the past. Zelda’s mother, Minnie, who had nursed dreams of pursuing a career on the stage in her youth, broke with prevailing Southern tradition by encouraging her girls, particularly her youngest, Zelda, to pursue their ambitions, however unconventional they might have been. According to Kendall Taylor, Zelda’s sister Clothilde “raised eyebrows by working as a teller in the First National Bank, where men lined up outside to stare at her” (19). Zelda would prove to be even more daring than Clothilde. In her biography entitled simply *Zelda*, Nancy Milford describes the accepted expectations for a young lady of Zelda’s time living in Montgomery:

The young ladies of these families were expected to behave themselves, to be decorative and charming. One was taught to sit without letting one's back touch the chair, to cross one's ankles, but not one's legs. White gloves were buttoned before one left the house and remained immaculate in the warmest weather. Zelda must have chafed under these restrictions. She was too full of life and devilry to follow the rules for long, or to be throttled by them (10).

The combination of a lenient mother plus Zelda's natural inclination towards causing a stir led her to "consciously . . . rebel against custom -- refusing to cross her legs at the ankle, revealing her developing bosom, and saying whatever came to mind" (Taylor 23). Zelda became infamous in Montgomery and its surrounding areas for her teenage antics, which included diving stark naked into the town swimming pool, reading cheeky poems aloud in her English class, and sneaking away from country club dances to drink gin and "neck" with Montgomery society boys. How could she have failed to catch the eye of a strapping young soldier named Scott Fitzgerald, who just happened to be stationed in Montgomery on his way to fight in World War One?

However, this is where the fairy tale must grind to a screeching halt, for even in the earliest days of their courtship it was evident that Scott and Zelda had some very troubling issues at the heart of their relationship. When they met, Scott was merely an aspiring novelist, yet he was assured of his own greatness and certain that he would be a famous writer someday. In the words of Linda Wagner-Martin, "In Scott's imagination, the Fitzgeralds would be the pair of beautiful people who made everyone else envious of their great love, the idealization of the very myth Fitzgerald was writing about -- the flapper and her handsome escort" (35). The truth of the matter was, however, that Scott

Fitzgerald was not nearly as modern as one might think for one of the foremost writers of the Jazz Age. Though Scott professed to have “married the heroine of his stories,” the truth was that he expected Zelda to conform more to the ideals of the Southern belle than to those of the flapper. Taylor states:

Scott welcomed Zelda’s dependency, telling one reporter: ‘I think just being in love -- doing it well, you know -- is work enough for a woman. If she keeps her house the way it should be kept, and makes herself look pretty when her husband comes home in the evening, and loves him and helps him with his work and encourages him -- oh, I think that’s the sort of work that will save her’ (65).

In this, however, Scott could not have been more wrong, for it was this very limiting perspective on what kind of work women should engage in that led to his own wife’s mental undoing.

Likewise, Zelda was, as Kendall Taylor puts it, “somewhat of a contradiction” (12). Though Zelda, like her mother, dreamed of life on the stage while growing up in sleepy south Alabama, she quickly found herself overwhelmed by the fast life that she and Scott lived once they were married and moved to New York City in April 1919. Yet marry she must; being raised in the deep South and being a debutante taught Zelda that marriage, while perhaps not the most exciting or fulfilling goal, was the only realistic goal for women of her class. As Milford puts it, “For Zelda marriage was the only means of altering the scope of her life” (52). Though she was undoubtedly glad to be free from some of the more stifling restrictions that existed for women in southern towns like Montgomery, the truth was that Zelda was more infused with the mindset of the Southern belle than perhaps even she realized. The role of the southern belle was a confusing one.

In her biography of Zelda's life, Nancy Milford comments on the impact that the contradictory nature of the Southern belle role might have had on Zelda:

The tensions inherent in the charade of Southern womanhood were to drive Zelda one day to write: . . . 'it's very difficult to be two simple people at once, one who wants to have a law to itself and the other who wants to keep all the nice old things and be loved and safe and protected.' It was not only difficult; it called upon contradicting definitions of herself. The ideal was perverse, but she [Zelda] had not yet realized its ability to damage. (21)

In so many words, Milford sums up the problem that lay at the heart of the Fitzgerald marriage and which would eventually lead to Zelda's mental instability. In the beginning of their relationship, Zelda professed comfort with both the belle and flapper ideals. In one of her letters to Scott, she wrote, "It's funny, but I like being 'pink and helpless'" (qtd. in Milford 49). In another letter, she concluded by writing:

And so you see, Scott, I'll never be able to do anything because I'm much too lazy to care whether it's done or not -- And I don't want to be famous and feted -- all I want is to be very young always and very irresponsible and to feel that my life is my own -- to live and be happy and die in my own way to please myself. (qtd. in Milford 59)

How could someone as daring, bold, and outspoken as Zelda feel so negatively about her own ability and talent? Likely, this attitude stemmed from a combination of factors: a traditional Southern upbringing, a natural inclination towards insecurity (which would later manifest itself in the hysterical jealous spells directed towards her husband when she feared his unfaithfulness to her), and a famous husband whose talents she was

continuously exposed to and reminded of. Surely anyone living in the shadow of F. Scott Fitzgerald would feel the tiniest bit of doubt when it came to their own abilities as an artist, particularly when it came to working in the very medium -- novel writing -- in which Fitzgerald himself was celebrated. However, Zelda was not content to live life in Scott's shadow forever.

Though she began writing "fluff" pieces (mostly directed towards promoting her husband's newest novels) early in their marriage, Zelda's yearning to express herself artistically began in earnest following the birth of her daughter Scottie in October, 1921. Zelda's relationship with her daughter is one which is either mostly overlooked by those who study her life (as most tend to focus on the tumultuous nature of the Fitzgerald marriage) or which is written off due to the way Zelda "neglected" Scottie as she pursued her artistic dreams. However, this notion is one that I am challenging, as the complicated nature of Zelda's relationship with her daughter is depicted in the expression of both her artistic wrestling and her mental anguish, her novel, *Save Me the Waltz*. Later in life, Zelda would speak bitterly to Scott of the way she felt living in the shadow of his fame, as evidenced by the following portion from one of her letters to Scott. Zelda wrote:

I have often told you that I am like that little fish who swims about under a shark and, I believe, lives indelicately on its offal. Anyway, that is the way I am. Life moves over me in a vast, black shadow and I swallow whatever it drops with relish, having learned in a very hard school that one cannot be both a parasite and enjoy self-nourishment without moving in worlds too fatalistic for even my disordered imagination to people with meaning (Taylor 193).

Pursuing her art, even at the cost of abandoning a traditional motherly role in the domestic sphere, would therefore be worth it to Zelda if it meant that her daughter would never have to live on the aforementioned “offal” of a man; thus, she incorporates this theme into her only novel as a testament to what she believed she had done for her daughter. In discovering herself through her art, she was simultaneously attempting to give herself an identity while also providing a future in which her daughter would be free to do so as well.

In the early 1930s, Zelda would take up painting as a means of expressing herself outside of ballet, which she was forbidden from practicing by both her psychiatrists and her husband following her mental breakdown. Two of the paintings Zelda produced during this time were mirror images of each other, one done in shades of red and the other in shades of blue. The titles of these two pieces are, fittingly, “Nursing Mother with Red Blanket” and “Nursing Mother with Blue Blanket.” Linda Wagner-Martin references these paintings specifically in order to comment, “Given the evident passion -- even if ambivalent -- inscribed in these paintings, Zelda’s relationship with her child is clearly much more important than most biographical accounts make it” (61). In 1926, Zelda was quoted by a newspaper as saying, “I’m raising my girl to be a flapper. I like the jazz generation, and I hope my daughter’s generation will be jazzier. I want my girl to do what she pleases” (qtd. in Milford 125). Yet, as Milford points out:

There was something a little desperate in these plans for the child who was just five, and much as she loved Scottie and very much wanted and needed to draw closer to her, Zelda quite clearly saw in Scottie’s future only the mirroring of her own best dreams: ‘I think a woman gets more happiness out of being gay, light-

hearted, unconventional, mistress of her own fate, than out of a career that calls for hard work, intellectual pessimism and loneliness. I don't want Pat⁷ to be a genius. I want her to be a flapper, because flappers are brave and gay and beautiful' (125-126).

It is clear that Zelda wanted more for Scottie than she herself felt capable of accomplishing, yet her words in the previous quote, indicating that she wanted a frivolous, carefree life for Scottie, contradict this. Why? Perhaps it was due to the fact that Zelda, herself raised as a Southern belle, never quite felt comfortable fitting into the flapper role and wished for her daughter to fit more easily than she herself did into one of the few roles offered her by society at the time. Perhaps she wished for Scottie to forsake the desire for a career and the pursuit of something that would call for her to work hard because Zelda herself already had some inkling of what the longing for an art to call her own would do to her. Perhaps she did not want Scottie to have to choose, as so many women -- including herself -- would have to, between life at home with a family and life spent in pursuit of one's art. However, all of this is simply conjecture. The best indicator we have of what Zelda truly wished for her daughter is present in Zelda's heavily autobiographical novel, *Save Me the Waltz*.

Save Me the Waltz tells the story of Alabama Beggs, a daughter of the sleepy South, who meets and falls in love with a famous painter named David Knight. The couple have a daughter together named Bonnie and eventually travel to Europe in pursuit of furthering David's career. However, Alabama grows tired of living in David's shadow

⁷ Though her daughter's name was actually Frances Scott (after her father), Zelda had wanted to name her Patricia and insisted on calling her "Pat" until she was around five or six years old.

and, in search of something to call her own, falls in love with the study and practice of ballet. She goes on to become an accomplished ballerina before landing a coveted spot in an Italian dance company. As the result of a foolish foot injury and subsequent neglect of said injury, Alabama's career as a ballerina is lost to her forever, and she returns to America to cope with the death of her father, the imposing but beloved Judge Beggs. In her essay "Art as Woman's Response and Search: Zelda Fitzgerald's *Save Me the Waltz*," Jacqueline Tavernier-Courbin makes the argument that while Zelda's novel is often read for the wrong reasons -- the most common being simply because she was the wife of F. Scott Fitzgerald -- it has so many elements that cause it to stand out as so much more than just the product of a famous author's wife's dabbling in literature. As Tavernier-Courbin puts it:

Among the claims to excellence of Zelda's novel are its searching portrayal of a woman's soul and of that complex tangle of selves within wedlock, its remarkable revelation of a gifted woman's struggle to fulfill herself in a traditional, male-dominated society . . . and its outstanding portrayal of the world of the ballet (23-24).

It is by no means a stretch of the imagination to call this novel heavily autobiographical; the parallels between the novel and the events of Zelda's own life are obvious. While the novel does serve as a firsthand account of Zelda's perspective on the events of her life (which have been the subject of much speculation by biographers), I am more interested in its double role as "response and search," to borrow Tavernier-Courbin's vocabulary.

Tavernier-Courbin's description of the novel's purpose is the basis for my own conjecture of why the novel is so important to analyze in terms of twentieth-century motherhood and artistry. Tavernier-Courbin argues:

It [*Save Me the Waltz*] is simultaneously a response and a search: a response to a personal situation (an unhappy marriage), to the social role its author was expected to play as a famous writer's wife and as the model for his heroines, and to the universal condition that comes from simply being a woman. It is a search for identity, a justification of the self, and an affirmation of it. It is finally the *cri du coeur* of a woman who wants to exist on her own terms and who is claiming back her life experience as her own material (24).

It is critical to remember that, while the novel is indeed highly autobiographical, it is more accurate to describe it in a twofold manner: it is both a response and a search.

However, the novel goes beyond even what Tavernier-Courbin hypothesizes; while it is a response and search in the manner which she indicates in the previous quote, it is also so much more. It is Zelda's response to the events of her life which she felt she had little to no control over and a search for how best to weave artistry into the fabric of womanhood and motherhood. *Save Me the Waltz* is invaluable for what Zelda attempts to do: namely, as Rickie-Ann Legleitner in her essay "The Cult of Artistry in Zelda Fitzgerald's *Save Me the Waltz*" states, "Fitzgerald similarly attempts to bridge the gap between nineteenth- and twentieth-century ideas of the female artist by depicting the continuing struggles of the mother/artist figure" (125). Though the relationship between Bonnie and Alabama is often as overlooked as Zelda's relationship with Scottie was, it is ultimately the crux of the novel. Legleitner draws attention to Helene Cixous's theory of the link between

motherhood and creation and Alabama's struggle to balance the roles of artist and mother. Cixous's belief that the female artist is inextricably connected to the "cult" of motherhood -- the ultimate act of creation, the creation of new life -- is ultimately the reason why Alabama (as well as Lita Manford and likely countless other women of this confusing time period) cannot bring herself to completely abandon either the domestic or creative spheres. In fact, it is the domestic which strengthens the artistic, as Legleitner states, and vice versa; one cannot fully exist without the other (131).

Ballet is Alabama's art of choice, and though she comes to it relatively late in life, she is determined to be successful. When Alabama first approaches the ballet teacher, known simply as "Madame" throughout the novel, about beginning dance lessons, Madame questions her motives when she asks, "'So my friend tells me you want to dance? Why? You have friends and money already.'" Alabama's response is telling. "'I have been to the Russian ballet,' Alabama tried to explain herself, 'and it seemed to me -- Oh, I don't know! As if it held all the things I've always tried to find in everything else'" (115). It seems highly possible that Alabama might have pursued motherhood (and probably also marriage) in the hopes that it would hold answers to the questions within her. Ultimately, however, I do not believe that her motives for childbearing matter much in the long run, as one could ask the same question of Lita Manford's motives and receive nothing but speculation on both counts. What ultimately matters is how these women manage -- or fail -- to bridge the gap between being mothers and being artists, and why. Legleitner states that Alabama cannot entirely forsake a relationship with Bonnie because "Bonnie comes to represent Alabama's hope for future female artists who would join this emergent cult of artistry" (136). This is yet another connection back

to Cixous's theory of the cult of womanhood; Alabama is inherently linked to a larger tribe of women who are also artists and mothers, and it is this connection that causes her to consider the future of all womanhood as it is represented in her young daughter.

Legleitner states, "Alabama wants to be a positive influence for her daughter, and she wants Bonnie to witness her artistic achievement so she might emulate it" (136). When Alabama achieves her dream of becoming a recognized ballerina for the brief period of time before she is injured, she realizes her dreams are lessened simply because Bonnie is not there with her; instead, she is being cared for by a nanny while Alabama trains for the ballet. Alabama reflects upon her loneliness: "She sat alone that night without Bonnie. She hadn't realized how much fuller life was with Bonnie there. She was sorry she hadn't sat more with her child when she was sick in bed. Maybe she could have missed rehearsals. She had wanted her child to see her dance the ballet" (*Waltz* 167). Alabama is determined that her daughter should have something more than just marriage or passing trifles to occupy her time; notably, she is adamant that her daughter learn the value of artistic work.

Alabama attempts to enforce her point -- that working to fine-tune one's art is the only thing that will allow Bonnie to develop any sort of purpose or self-worth -- both through her actions and her words. Towards the end of the novel, Bonnie tells Alabama that when she grows up, she "shall be very rich" (163). Alabama responds emphatically, "My God, no! You must get things like that out of your head. You will have to work hard to get what you want -- that's why I wanted you to dance" (163). This is the lesson, hard-won through backbreaking physical endurance and the disintegration of her marriage, which Alabama learns from the pursuit of her art. Yet, despite her hard work, Alabama

does not see her dream through to completion. Much like Lita Manford, she is yanked back into the domestic sphere, forced to confront what is left to her of life. When her husband tells her that she will never dance again, Alabama begins to sob. "Oh, my body. And all that work for nothing!" Her husband responds, "Poor, my dear one -- but it has brought us together again. We have each other, dear." Alabama's response to this is a chilling one: "'Yes -- what's left,' she sobbed. She lay there, thinking that she had always meant to take what she wanted from life. Well -- she hadn't wanted this. This was a stone that would need a good deal of salt and pepper" (181). It is difficult to know what exactly the "this" is that Alabama is referring to here, but it likely has something to do with the fact that, now that she has lost her status as artist, she has also lost any chance she had at independence.

This novel is a telling and damning examination of marriage in the early years of the twentieth century, and David and Alabama's marriage is a particularly chilling example of what can unfold as a result of two spouses battling for power. Though the turn of the century claimed to be a time of progression and forward movement, it was still a time when women were shackled, although in a less overt way than in previous centuries. Jacqueline Tavernier-Courbin argues:

Women were probably the greatest victims of the 1920s, which brought them to a superficial form of emancipation -- bobbing their hair, smoking, 'Saying damn without a blush,' flirting -- but it locked them into the role of a "mental baby vamp," completely dependent on husbands who felt that they no longer needed to protect their wives since they were "emancipated" (33-34).

This “deceptive emancipation,” then, is the crux of both Lita Manford’s and Alabama’s problem with their respective family units. Though there is a surface-level acceptance of women pursuing their own ends (only to a degree, of course), this acceptance actually ends up making their husbands (or in Lita’s case, her husband and the rest of her immediate family) *more* protective of them. Alabama recognizes early on that marriage is not and should not be the end goal for anyone, especially herself, as her husband David represents this same “deceptive emancipation” that Tavernier-Courbin mentions (34). David’s behavior early on in the novel is an indicator of how he will react later as Alabama becomes more and more independent. In a letter to Alabama, he writes, ““The tops of the buildings shine like crowns of gold-leaf kings in conference -- and oh, my dear, you are my princess, and I’d like to keep you shut forever in an ivory tower for my private delectation”” (41-42). Later, when Alabama shows distaste for that “ivory tower” and begins spending more and more time at the ballet studio, they have a heated exchange, in which David’s jealousy borders on cruelty. ““Why will you never come out with me?” he said. ‘Because I can’t work next day if I do.’ ‘Are you under the illusion that you’ll ever be any good at that stuff?’ ‘I suppose not, but there’s only one way to try”” (119). David’s cruelty is an attempt to keep Alabama where he thinks she belongs: in their home. He goes on to say, ““What’s the use of having a wife? If a woman’s only to sleep with there are plenty available for that --”” (120). For her part, Alabama continues to fight while she is still able and retorts, ““What’s the use of having a husband or anything else? You suddenly find you have them all the same, and there you are”” (120). As evidenced by this retort, David’s attempts to keep Alabama confined to that ivory tower are for naught, as long as she is instilled with the confidence which her art gives

her. Marriage consigns Alabama to being a “backseat driver about life” (183), something against which she rebels by pursuing an art that is purely for her own pleasure and self-fulfillment.

Though she is dealt a bitter blow in the loss of her physical acuity, Alabama is able to take comfort in the fact that her daughter has indeed absorbed the perspective that Alabama was hoping for all along. This is demonstrated by a conversation that Bonnie has with Millie Beggs, Alabama’s mother, towards the end of the novel. She tells her grandmother, “I shall be different. Mummy says I shall be an actress if I want, and go to school in Europe . . . And I shall be a great lady and wear fine clothes” (192). We do not know what the future holds for Bonnie, but we can hypothesize that she will strive towards the success that has been demonstrated for her. With not one, but two parents who are successful artists (at least for a time) and a mother who, while perhaps not the ideal “angel in the house” mother figure, demonstrates the results of hard work and perseverance, it is likely that Bonnie has as good a chance as any young man to be successful in the pursuit of her *cri du coeur*. Bonnie’s chances at success are ultimately higher as a result of Alabama’s painful decision to abandon traditional, stay-at-home mothering in order to demonstrate to her child the results of chasing one’s dreams. As Legleitner states:

Her [Alabama’s] decisive choice to place her career before her daughter and home -- a troubling decision for an early twentieth-century woman who was expected to place the needs of her home, husband, and children first -- reveals that she has yet to discover a method that would enable her to balance or merge her differing roles as a mother and a modernist artist (136).

Save Me the Waltz is Zelda Fitzgerald's written defense of her pursuit to be both mother and artist, while also functioning as a testament in which she acknowledges her simultaneous failure and success in this venture. A conventional reading of the novel points towards failure for Alabama as an artist: she does not succeed in the long-term as a ballerina, perhaps even due to her own self-sabotage as a result of lingering doubts about her own creative abilities. Alabama can also be seen as a failure in terms of the roles in which she occupies throughout the novel. She cannot be called a true helpless Southern belle, nor can she be called a stereotypically selfish flapper. She is certainly no "angel in the house," nor the "Ideal Mother" of Lundie's essay discussed in Chapter One of this thesis. Rather, it seems that if Alabama fails at being or becoming any of these various archetypes, she succeeds in drawing attention to the fact that it is impossible to fully succeed at truly embodying any of them.

Alabama's greatest accomplishment is the fact that she insists on her right to be a "Person," to borrow terminology from Charlotte Perkins Gilman. As neither just mother nor artist, she has a right to have interests of "widely varying sorts," and by pursuing this right, she reaches her goal of creating a world of possibility for her daughter Bonnie, in which Bonnie might pursue her artistic self without the trauma of choosing between two spheres ("The New Womanhood" 148). Towards the end of the novel, Bonnie declares her own wish to become an artist one day. "'I would not like to be an artist,' said the little boy sleepily. 'I would,' said Bonnie" (*Waltz* 173). This exchange between Bonnie and her young friend occurs directly after Bonnie's trip to visit her mother in Italy, right after she has witnessed firsthand the fruits of her mother's sacrifices for her.

Thus, it would seem that Alabama's sacrifices pave the way for something new; it is not a hopeless ending, after all. This hopefulness is a luxury not afforded to Lita Manford's child, and it is one that comes to Bonnie at a high price: the price of Alabama's future for the sake of her daughter's, that her daughter might pursue artistry in the modern fashion, outside the bounds of traditional domesticity. In *Save Me the Waltz*, Zelda Fitzgerald's fictional counterpart is paving the way for her daughter to no longer be, as Charlotte Perkins Gilman would say, "all one thing" ("The New Womanhood" 148). However, the strivings of both the fictional Alabama and her real-life counterpart Zelda Fitzgerald are not merely for the purpose of expanding the borders of New Womanhood or flapperdom in order to allow room for artistry alongside motherhood and marriage. Rather, the fictional and factual lives of the women examined in these chapters are a call, not for expansion of the boxes into which women have been placed for centuries, but for the abolishment of them.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have examined two notable women living at the advent of the twentieth century. Edith Wharton and Zelda Fitzgerald belonged to vastly different social classes in different areas of the United States, and, frankly, did not have much in common. One was a product of old New York, a New Woman who was happily divorced, an insider who remained an outsider. The other was a daughter of the Deep South who fled her Southern roots as soon as possible, yet carried them with her as she became the ultimate icon of the Jazz Age: the flapper. Despite being born in different centuries and nearly forty years apart, Wharton and Zelda's lives overlapped in critical ways, as they died just a decade shy of one another. In their lifetimes, both of these women felt the ramifications of the actions of those New Women who had come before them. Both Wharton and Zelda lived in a world where women were no longer forced into marriage and motherhood, a world where opportunities for women were slowly but surely expanding. Yet neither of them lived in to experience a world where women were welcome to push the borders of themselves outward to simultaneously encompass the creation of art *and* the creation of life.

The dawn of the twentieth century heard the lofty proclamations of New Women such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman's assertion that women needed "interests and capacities" in order to become better mothers; however, these proclamations were apparently never intended to mean that women should turn their interests into a career or all-consuming creative passion. Instead, labels were created for women according to the things they prioritized in life. Though categorizing and limiting women by use of labels has existed for centuries, this paper touches primarily on the two which personally

affected both Wharton and Zelda: the New Woman and the Jazz Age flapper. The lives and work of these two female authors demonstrate that each of these labels is only a means of further dichotomizing critical areas of women's lives. Their respective novels, *Twilight Sleep* (1927) and *Save Me the Waltz* (1932), indicate both the futility and danger of preventing women from wholly embracing both the pursuit of motherhood and artistry, should they so choose. Wharton's Lita and Zelda's Alabama each attempt to demonstrate through the events of their stories that allowing -- even *encouraging* -- women to embody more than one role is both empowering for womanhood as a whole and necessary for the family to not only survive but also to thrive.

This thesis begins with a reference to Kate Chopin's literary creation Edna Pontellier, who herself felt trapped by the strictures of marriage and motherhood and who was unlucky enough to live in a time before and belong to a social class wherein women did not have options for respectable livelihood beyond marriage and motherhood. The lingering question of the facets and limits of womanhood reverberates through literature since then. In order to examine this issue more fully, I would first examine the full scope of both Edith Wharton and Zelda Fitzgerald's respective literary canons. Wharton's growth as an author, her changing perspective on the world, and her role in it as a woman can be tracked through close examination of the novels she wrote over course of her career. A detailed study of her female protagonists who are also mothers, specifically beginning with some of her earliest creations such as Bessy from *The Fruit of the Tree* and developing throughout the years to produce such characters as Undine Spragg in *The Custom of the Country*, would likely reveal the subtle nuances of the role of women and mothers in a changing world. An expansion into the rest of Wharton's work would also

allow me to examine the evolution of her portrayal of mothers throughout her career. Though Zelda Fitzgerald produced only one novel during her literary career, her short stories and essays feature numerous female characters; while their stories lack significant length, thus making character development hard to track, it would be of great import to examine each of these characters side by side, noting similarities and changes over time as Zelda's life progressed.

If I were to truly do justice to this project, it would require me to research further into the origins of this topic. While I reference Kate Chopin and *The Awakening* as a predecessor to the work of Edith Wharton and Zelda Fitzgerald, there are surely many others who came even before Chopin with the beginnings of this pushback against labeling and restricting women's roles. It would also be necessary to look forward, past the time of Wharton and Zelda and into the latter half of the twentieth century, as well as the beginning of the twenty-first century. This would necessitate including more of the feminist theorists than this thesis does, including Helene Cixous and Judith Butler. It would also be necessary to refine the borders of my research; a project examining just North American female authors would be of far less magnitude than one including European authors, and it would be a much richer and broader project if the borders were widened to include female authors of different cultures and ethnicities, such as African American and Latin American female authors. Hence, there is still much work to be done in order to pursue this project to its fullest potential and completion.

At the end of the first chapter of this thesis, I pose the question of what happened to women like Lita Manford and Zelda Fitzgerald -- women who did not neatly fit into the boxes assigned to them. The endings of their respective stories leave much to

be desired by way of closure; we as readers can only surmise what might become of them based on what we know of the time period and what we have gleaned of their character development over the course of the novels. However, as this thesis indicates, I believe that we can look to the lives of their authors for some sort of clue as to the answer to the aforementioned question. Wharton died childless in 1937, ten years after the publication of *Twilight Sleep*, and the ambivalent ending of the novel indicates that Wharton did not (or could not) anticipate a brighter future for a woman like Lita Manford. By extension, I believe that she was also unable to imagine a more accepting world for someone like herself: a woman who defied social class and custom in order to devote herself to her artistic career. Perhaps this inability was due to the narrowmindedness of the members of her social class with whom she was unable to sever ties, or perhaps it was due to the fact that she herself did not live to see a daughter of her own succeed in the world. Whatever the reason, Wharton's outlook seems more hopeless than Zelda Fitzgerald's.

While Zelda died a mere decade after Wharton and thus did not see much more of the future than Wharton did, she *did* live long enough to witness her daughter Scottie go on to become a successful student, a mother herself, and eventually, a journalist for *The Washington Post*, among other publications (Taylor 361). The ending of *Save Me the Waltz*, wherein Alabama's daughter Bonnie indicates that she *would* like to be an artist, speaks volumes of the hope which Zelda Fitzgerald held for women like herself who were both mothers and artists. While Zelda herself did not live long enough to reap the rewards of the sacrifices made by women such as Wharton and herself, her daughter did, and thus her novel ends with hope, however overshadowed by her own personal artistic defeat.

As I write this, it is 2018, and there are still areas in which the United States is direly in need of improvement: specifically, in matters of mothers who also hold down a job. The United States is woefully behind the rest of the Western world in terms of making life easier for women who choose both work and motherhood. While the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) allows employees twelve weeks of leave from work due to any medical or family-related reason (including the birth or adoption of a child), no policy requires the federal government to pay for all -- or indeed, for any portion -- of those twelve weeks (Neckermann 37). Unlike other countries, such as Spain, Denmark, and Norway, the United States has no nationwide policy regarding maternity leave. Many mothers are forced to return to work well before twelve weeks postpartum due to financial constraints; others choose not to return to the workplace and accept the nosedive in their family income. Mothers who manage to make it back into the workplace are faced with even more challenges: the ever-rising cost of daycare, the lack of adequate facilities and breaks during the workday that are necessary for breastfeeding or pumping and storing breastmilk, and the inflexibility of work schedules to accommodate working parents, just to name a few.

In 2018, ninety-one and eighty-six years after the publication of *Twilight Sleep* and *Save Me the Waltz* respectively, women are still being forced to choose between labels, boxes, and categories: stay-at-home mom or working mother, nursing mother or formula-feeding mother. These labels are loaded with insinuations of “good mother” or “bad mother” depending on who is doing the labeling, just as over a century ago, women who were considered flighty flappers could not possibly be good mothers. We have made progress, just as opening up women to the possibility of career and social activism was

considered progress during the era of the New Woman; yet there is still work to be done. We must continue to read these stories; not just those of Edith Wharton and Zelda Fitzgerald, but of other women whose narratives speak to the necessity of a wider world that allows women to be People, with many different interests, passions, and pursuits. We must continue the work of abolishing those boxes that served to trap Lita Manford and Alabama Beggs, boxes which now bear different labels but which still exist and continue to frustrate and hold women back from the fullness of their potential.

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