ABSTRACT

Women in Community: The Influence of Sorority on Eudora Welty and Zelda Fitzgerald

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Eudora Welty's carefully cultivated community of literary mentors and contemporaries has been well documented. Not only do these relationships garner Welty a wide array of literary comparisons, they show that she as a writer and reader made it a priority to build long lasting relationships with other writers, critics, editors, and literary minds.

Another woman that will go down in literary history, not for what she wrote but for what was written about her, is Zelda Fitzgerald. Historians, biographers, and critics have long mined the figure of Fitzgerald in the service of understanding the life of her glamorous literary husband, F. Scott Fitzgerald. Even though Fitzgerald had access to some of the most outstanding literary minds of her time, by the end of her life her literary aspirations had gone largely unrealized and she died isolated. The distance of time, age, style, personality,

marital status, and geography may seem to separate these two women. Yet, reading Zelda Fitzgerald's *Save Me the Waltz* together with Eudora Welty's *Losing Battles* a pattern of identity and community emerges.

This project examines the effect of feminine community in four different contexts. First, I look at the presence of feminine community in *Losing Battles* and explore its effects on individual characters as well as its overall beneficial function in the context of the novel. In contrast to this depiction of dynamic feminine community, I assess the negative effect that community absence has on the main female character of *Save Me the Waltz*, Alabama Beggs. I pair the examinations of these fictional communities with an inspection of the corresponding role of community in the life of both authors. I argue that the constructive presence of community in Eudora Welty's professional and personal life directly contrasts with the deleterious effects of isolation and negligence in the creative life of Zelda Fitzgerald. By drawing a correlation between the effects of supportive community in the individual lives of these two women authors and the depiction of community in their fiction, I explore the positive role of community in the development of a vibrant canon of women writers.

Women in Community:The Influence of Sorority on Eudora Welty and Zelda Fitzgerald

by

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perspective, thanks gals. To my husband, thank you, thank you, thank you, for all of it.

DEDICATION

To Ava Rose, our century plant blossom

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

In an interview with Charles Bunting shortly after the release of her penultimate novel, *Losing Battles*, Eudora Welty says that the journey of the novel's female protagonist, Gloria Short Renfro, "involves both a submerging and a triumph of the individual, because you can't really conceive of the whole unless you are an identity. Unless you are very real in yourself, you don't know what it means to support others or to join with them or to help them" (qtd. in *Conversations* 49). In the novel, Gloria is conflicted about her role in the boisterous, rowdy, and terrifically interdependent Beecham Renfro family clan, to put it mildly. Yet, her hesitancy to commit herself entirely to the forces of Banner's familial dynamics does not stem from a convoluted personal identity. Born an orphan, Gloria is raised to be fiercely independent by the town's female anomaly, the self-governing school teacher Miss Julia Mortimer. Still, when Gloria marries the oldest Renfro son and Banner golden boy, Jack Renfro, she moves from an identity that is completely self-determined to one that understands the function and necessity of matriarchal community in the life of an individual. In fact, by the end of the novel Gloria is even complicit in the perpetuation of the community that she once viewed "with a mixture of jealousy

and revulsion" (Prenshaw, "Women's World, Men's Place" 67). The formula for Gloria's integration into communal life that Eudora Welty describes in the Bunting interview not only illuminates what it takes for this fictional young woman to synthesize self and community, but also what it takes for Welty as a woman writer to navigate successfully her own professional career and personal life. In her quote Welty recognizes that the self and the community are not only unavoidably intertwined, but that the health of one depends on the existence and health of the other.

Almost forty years before Welty makes this discovery, Zelda Fitzgerald explored the same cross-section of identity and community in her own fiction and personal life from a different angle of approach. Whereas Welty's life and fiction are a testament to the benefits one gains from frequent interaction between self and community, Fitzgerald demonstrates in her novel *Save Me the* Waltz, as well as in her personal life, how detrimental it can be for a woman with a fractured sense of identity to live in isolation from supportive community. This project examines the effect of feminine community in four different contexts. First, I look at the presence of feminine community in Eudora Welty's *Losing Battles* and explore the effects it has on the female characters in the text, as well as its overall beneficial function in the context of the novel. In contrast to this depiction of dynamic feminine community, I assess the negative effect that

community absence has on the main female character of Zelda Fitzgerald's *Save Me the Waltz*, Alabama Beggs. I will then pair the examinations of these fictional communities with an inspection of the corresponding role of community in the life of both authors. I will argue that the constructive presence of community in Eudora Welty's professional and personal life directly contrasts with the deleterious effects of isolation and negligence in the creative life of Zelda Fitzgerald. The purpose of this study is to draw a correlation between the effects of supportive community in the individual lives of these two women authors and the depiction of community in their fiction. By doing so, I lay the foundation for the positive legacy of female community in the development of a vibrant canon of women writers.

Critical Reception of Welty and Fitzgerald

Among critics, the discussion of how to categorize Eudora Welty's fiction correctly is on-going. For example, in the volume edited by Laurie Champion, *The Critical Response to Eudora Welty's Fiction,* Welty's fiction is compared to writers of the Gothic South, regionalists, classicists, modernists, and even in one mixed review, a surrealist painter, along with other categorizations. Feminists have claimed her as first and foremost a woman writer, joining a small group of canonized female American writers, alongside Willa Cather, Flannery O'Connor,

Joyce Carol Oates, and Katherine Anne Porter.[1] Thematic approaches to her work focus on everything from womanhood to Southerness, from race to class, and beyond.[2] She is situated in time as an American modernist, but reviewers draw parallels from her work to the theories of Bahktin, Lacan, and Judith Butler. Eudora Welty was a lover of letters, an avid reader, writer, and faithful

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[1] Parallels have been drawn to Flannery O'Connor for the elements of Welty's fiction that depict what John Lane calls, "a strong taste for melodrama, and is preoccupied with the demented, the deformed, the queer, the highly spiced". Lane considers this a shortcoming in the fiction, whereas Marianne Hauser and Arthur J. Carr see these attributes as strengths, "the grotesque as one element in Welty's multidimensional theme of moral paradox". (Champion 2) Faulkner is a favorite comparison. Hamilton Basso for the New Yorker is one of many who pick up on Welty's Morgana resembling the verisimilitude of Yoknapatawpha County (Champion 11). However, Nikolai Gogol is another common comparison, "The characters are Southern just as the characters in Gogol's 'Dead Souls' are Russian," and several critics note both authors' "penchant for detail" (Louise Bogan qtd in Champion 3). Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* also cited as a model for the *Losing Battles* humorous tone (Champion 17). References to Welty's preoccupation with myth-making and figures from Celtic and Greek Mythology are brought up in reviews of *The Wide Net and The Golden Apples* (Champion 6, 10). Virginia Woolf is brought up in many critical comparisons but perhaps one of the first to do it was John Crow Ransom's review of *Delta Wedding* in 1946. Diana Trilling, never one to give Welty too shining a review calls *The Wide Net* a "book of ballets" that like Salvador Dali's paintings, participate in the creation of "a myth of modern femininity" (Trilling qtd in Champion 6). She is also compared notably to Isak Dinesen, Emily Dickinson, Katherine Anne Porter, William Shakespeare, Anton Chekov, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and John Cheever amongst others (Champion 25-30).

[2] Prenshaw notes that "questions about women's issues, and about being a female writer, do not especially interest Welty, but she answers them tactfully and in good faith" to such questions in interviews with Barbaralee Diamondstein and Martha van Noppen (Prenshaw x). Of the many sources referencing this topic it is most helpful to hear Welty discuss what she deems the "Southern literary tradition"," storytelling tradition," and the "Southern literary imagination" in the collected interviews compiled in Peggy Whitman Prenshaw's *Conversations with Eudora Welty.* There are also essays dealing with minority voice in Welty's work; most notably the essays collected in Harriet Pollack's volume, *Reading Welty on Whiteness and Race*, as well as additional essays on race by Alfred Appel, Kenneth Bearden, Linda Kuehl, Barbara Ladd, Dean Flower, John Hardy and Suzanne Marrs (Pollack 21-22).

correspondent.[3] The list of writers that she read and admired was lengthy. Many of those writers, such as William Faulkner, Ford Maddox Ford, Katherine Anne Porter, and Robert Penn Warren, are people she cites as having bestowed upon her "acts of generosity" in their kindness or guidance of her work (Prenshaw viii). She corresponded with these writers, and in some cases had close personal relationships with them. They reviewed and responded to her writing and in doing so helped shape the writer and create a space for her among their company. She also enjoyed a great many "friends and mentors" in the publishing world, such as her agent and long-time friend, Diarmuid Russell,[4] her editor at the *New Yorker* and dearly loved correspondent, William Maxwell,[5] and her fellow author Kenneth Millar (Prenshaw). These men and women also had a hand in shaping Welty's reception in American letters.

Though Welty was, in the words of her biographer, Suzanne Marrs, "widely recognized during her lifetime," many reviewers attempted to pigeonhole "Miss Eudora" with their own perceptions and comparisons of her

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[3] Welty wrote the introduction to the *Norton Book of Friendship* and in it she says, "*All* letters old and new, are still-existing parts of a life. To read them now is to be present when some discovery of truth—or perhaps untruth, some flash of light—is just occurring." (Welty, *Norton Book of Friendship*, 37).

[4] I will draw from Michael Kreyling's *Author and Agent: Eudora Welty and Diarmuid Russell* as the authoritative text on this relationship.

[5] The relationship and correspondence between the two friends is explored thoroughly in Suzanne Marrs', *What There is to Say We Have Said*.

character (Marrs x). Few could, without knowing her personally, imagine how rich a life the writer lived. Since Welty never attained those elements that so many people need to embellish and define their lives—namely, a spouse, children, personal property or extensive world travel—some have made the mistake of considering her cloistered and her writing as an attempt to escape the mundanity of her life. It is a matter of fact that Eudora Welty lived the majority of her life in her childhood home in Jackson, Mississippi, except for the time she spent away for college and brief periods visiting abroad and living in San Francisco. She never married, nor did she have any children. However, far from the secluded life depicted by friends and foes, Welty lived a life enriched by family, friends, readers, lovers, and words. In an attempt to correct her image and pre-empt scholarly interest in her biography, Welty published *One Writer's Beginnings*, an autobiography that concentrates on her childhood spent growing up in Jackson. Unfortunately, this autobiography can be just as reductive as the one-dimensional portraits of Welty that were already in circulation. In 1998 Doubleday published Ann Waldron's biography of the writer, *Eudora*. Undertaken without Welty's cooperation, Waldron's book further dilutes a vibrant writer's portrait into a snapshot of a "charming and successful ugly duckling" who succeeds in the world despite being physically unattractive and

shy (9-14).[6] After Welty's death in 2001, her friend and scholar Suzanne Marrs published the definitive Welty biography in 2005.[7] The substantial scholarship that has been produced that deals with Welty's biography, epistolary relationships, essays, and personal interviews is a testament to the interest in and significance of her carefully cultivated community of literary mentors and contemporaries. In the body of my analysis, I will rely on these resources to establish that Welty intentionally fashioned this diverse community as a means of assuring that she received the necessary support and guidance she would require as a woman writer.

Zelda Fitzgerald lived in contrast to Eudora Welty in almost every way. The immortalized vision of the Jazz Age, the original model of the 'flapper girl,' one half of the most glamourous power couple of the 1920s, and a founding

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[6]Waldron carefully collects testimony from hometown neighbors and acquaintances to bolster this fact. She begins the first chapter of her biography, "The Teenager," by saying "By all rights, Eudora Welty should have been miserable every minute of the day when she was growing up" (9). And continues along this line of thought by supplying the aforementioned testimonies that speak to how unattractive Welty was. This is a small selection: "It wasn't that Eudora was plain. She was ugly to the point of being grotesque" (9) "She was not good-looking, that's the only reason I knew who she was—because she was . . . well, different-looking" (10). Sarah Gordon Hicks, has the most pleasant reaction, though it is still dismissive: "She was not pretty, but everybody loved her. They thought the world of her" (10).

[7] In her introduction to *Eudora Welty: A Biography*, Marrs acknowledges that no biographer can hope to achieve an 'objective biography' but that her aim in completing the biography that Welty approved of and collaborated on was and is to correct the misperceptions of Welty; "She was not the contentedly cloistered, "Miss Eudora" in whom so many believed or wanted to believe, but was someone far more passionate and compelling; a woman and a writer with a 'triumphant vulnerability…to this mortal world'" (Marrs xix).

member of the 'glitterati,'[8] Zelda Fitzgerald was no stranger to celebrity. However, unlike Welty, the degree of control she exercised over the publicity she received and the image she projected is one of the most hotly contested elements of the controversial figure that is Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald. A late-comer to fiction, Fitzgerald's writings are one of the least well-known aspects of an otherwise intimately recorded life. Wife to one of the most widely-read American authors of the 20th century, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Zelda Fitzgerald is of interest primarily as it relates to the life of her famous literary husband. Scott Fitzgerald admittedly modeled the women in his fiction off of his charismatic and unconventional wife, but more recently scholars have brought to light that it was not only Fitzgerald's physical characteristics that her husband mined for material. Fitzgerald's diaries, correspondence, background, preferences, sayings, and psychological instability are all incorporated freely and liberally into her husband's fiction. Scott Fitzgerald does admit to, and perhaps even boasts about, incorporating his wife directly into some of his most recognizable heroines,[9] and for her part Zelda

[8] The exaltation of what was then the population of famed writers and people of letters, or the literati, to the status of celebrities, followed as much for their literary output as for their social antics.

[9] Fitzgerald makes many references to this throughout his career. Zelda biographer, Kendall Taylor remarks, "Encouraging her daring antics and clever chatter, he scribbled down her spontaneous witticisms and incorporated her mannerisms into his fiction, telling one reporter, 'I married the heroines of my stories'" (Taylor 11).

Fitzgerald does not seem to object to the similarities between fiction and reality.[10] However, Scott Fitzgerald does not admit to commandeering entirely autobiographical material from his wife's novel, *Save Me the Waltz,* and their life together and using it for his novel, *Tender is the Night.*[11] This restriction on her art not only upsets Zelda Fitzgerald but highlights the pattern of destructive community she will suffer from throughout her life.[12] Though he did not receive any major literary awards during his lifetime, public and scholarly opinion has since corrected this perception of Scott Fitzgerald's contributions to twentieth century American literature. His novel *The Great Gatsby* is widely read in English classrooms at the high school and collegiate level, his short stories are

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[10] Admitted by Fitzgerald and commented on by Zelda who said in an interview with a reporter from the Louisville Courier-Journal, "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. I like their courage, their recklessness and spendthriftiness" (Taylor 11).

[11] Scott Fitzgerald famously objected to Zelda Fitzgerald's publishing of her novel *Save Me the Waltz.* In 1932, Scott was working on his own manuscript and Zelda was institutionalized. In a three-way conversation with Zelda Fitzgerald's psychiatrist, Scott forbade Zelda under the pretense of protecting her mental well-being from writing on anything else that drew on their shared autobiographical experiences (Cline 5).

[12] Fitzgerald's frustration with her husband's continued plagiarism of her intellectual property can be seen in one of her first published pieces, a review of Scott's second novel, *The Beautiful and the Damned,* for the *New York Tribune*'s book critical column titled, "Friend Husband's Latest." In her review, Fitzgerald makes a point of Scott's plagiarism with her signature wit, she remarks, "On one page I recognized a portion of an old diary of mine which mysteriously disappeared shortly after my marriage, and also scraps of letters, which, though considerably edited, sound to me vaguely familiar," she then concludes that her husband "seems to believe that plagiarism begins at home" (qtd. in Cline 122-123).

anthologized frequently, and he remains the source of abundant criticism and scholarly interest.[13]

The same critical and literary charity has not been extended to Zelda Fitzgerald. Without a community of figures, like those that surrounded Eudora Welty during her writing career, Fitzgerald's gruesome death during a fire at the Highland Hospital in Asheville, North Carolina, made the jazz age's golden girl into a tragic, cautionary tale of artistic potential neglected. By the time of her death in 1948, Fitzgerald had only published one novel and suffered to accomplish even that.[14] The handful of short stories Fitzgerald wrote were mostly undertaken under her husband's direction and were published under his name to increase their marketability.[15] Repeatedly pressured by Scott Fitzgerald and her doctors to abandon her artistic efforts, Zelda Fitzgerald felt like a definitive

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[13] A quick MLA bibliography search returns 2,466 hits for "Scott Fitzgerald." A search for "Zelda Fitzgerald" returns only 99. Of these 99 titles, if you eliminate "Scott" from the search function, there are only 38 titles available on Zelda Fitzgerald independent of her husband. Of these remaining 38 titles, only 31 deal with critical responses to Zelda Fitzgerald's works.

[14] At the time of her death, Fitzgerald was working on her second novel-length story, *Caesar's Things* but much of the novel drafts are lost in the fire and the remaining manuscript copy of the novel is not in publishable condition. In his introduction to the edition of Zelda's Collected Works, Matthew J. Bruccoli calls *Caesar's Things,* a combination of hallucinations or fantasy with narrative; there is also a strain of religiosity. As a work in progress it is incoherent" (Bruccoli xiii).

[15] We now know that the stories in question, known as "the Girl" series, were in fact written by Zelda. F. Scott kept meticulous records of what he and his wife were working on and when those works were published. His records indicate that Zelda wrote the majority, if not the entirety, of said short stories. Furthermore, Scott's letters back and forth with Harold Ober also attest to this fact (Cline 238-240).

failure as an artist at the time of her death. Fitzgerald biographer Sally Cline attributes critical disinterest in Zelda Fitzgerald's work to this earlier suppression of her literary efforts by Scott Fitzgerald and his accomplices.[16] Cline states, "Scott and subsequent biographers have suggested that, because Scott was the 'professional' and Zelda the 'amateur,' the interests of professionalism can be used to legitimate Scott's actions," or what he seemed to feel was "his artistic right to silence Zelda's voice" (Cline 6). Though her husband's hostile attitude towards her literary endeavors caused Fitzgerald noticeable discomfort, she still persisted in her efforts to achieve a sense of identity through artistic expression by pursuing ballet, painting, and writing, but at each turn her attempts to fortify her individual identity with healthful community were denied.[17] Though many

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[16] Here I am referring to Harold Ober and Maxwell Perkins who act as editor and literary agent for both Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald and who under pressure from Scott neglect, in part or in full, to give Zelda Fitzgerald's work the professional attention they would give another author's work. I will explore this toxic group relationship further in my fifth chapter.

[17] Undoubtedly Zelda suffered anxiety over this accusation. Readers can notice her concern on the matter in a diary entry cataloguing her descent into madness, "I am lost about anything with him, with his life in which there is nothing for me except the physical comfort….I must add another thing: this story is the fault of nobody but me. I believed I was a Salamander and it seems that I am nothing but an impediment" (Taylor 5). The reference to the Salamander is from Owen Johnson's 1914 wildly popular novel of the same title in which he describes the kind of girl that is wild, daring, and eschews inhibition in a way that is inspiring to the male object of her affections. A hit with young women and eventually adapted to the screen, Johnson's novel created a whole generation of women who believed that being a Salamander would enable them to lead an extraordinary life full of adventures and stimulation outside of the droll domestic realm (Taylor 7). Her adult career in ballet has been made much of in *Save Me the Waltz* and *Tender is the Night;* a dancer from a young age she apparently showed a great deal of promise as a young child (Taylor 17) but abandoned the practice as a teenager in pursuit of other interests. She resumed ballet at the advanced (for a ballerina) age of 27 and though she was awarded a principal position in an Italian dance company the toll it took on her mentally and physically

scholars and biographers have undertaken projects that have attempted to chronicle the individual lives of each Fitzgerald as they pertain to Scott Fitzgerald's fiction, as well as many critical readings of his work, there is a deplorable lack of scholarship dealing with Zelda Fitzgerald's writing. In my analysis, though I will utilize biographical materials in an effort to establish the absence of supportive community in her professional and personal life, I will also apply a close reading of *Save Me the Waltz* to see how Fitzgerald fictionalizes the absence of community in the life of a young female artist.

Welty and Fitzgerald: Personal and Textual Similarities

Though Eudora Welty and Zelda Fitzgerald have been considered, independently, as the subjects of a number of different critical approaches, there is not a single critical approach in the existing scholarship that examines these two writers together. My project looks to examine the similarities of these two writers while also exploring how community effects the outcome of their personal and professional careers. I will not engage in hypothetical postulation on the career or life of either woman. I will refrain from making any claims that would posit how one woman's fiction would have critically suffered without

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motivated Scott to insist she give it up. The only artistic pursuit Zelda produced consistently from 1925 on, Cline avows that of over the one hundred paintings of Zelda's existent in public and private collections they represent only a part of her total production; other paintings having been lost, misused or completely destroyed ("The Catalogue of Zelda Fitzgerald's Paintings"). I will explore this further in my fifth chapter.

community, whereas the other may have gained more critical acclaim with the support of community. I will also not reduce the complicated personal and professional elements that comprise the different outcomes of these two women's lives to this single critical element. However, I am interested in exploring the existing effects of community on the lives and fiction of these women as displayed in their novels and in the existing critical and biographical information about them. In this section I will outline the similarities between the work of Eudora Welty and Zelda Fitzgerald that initially drew me to this project. First, I will outline how each writer originated from a Southern background to later reject regionalist qualifiers. Next, I will look at how each woman's fiction intersects with modernist concerns. Then, I will explore how Fitzgerald and Welty, though they each reject the categorization to some extent, operate in a feminist context in their literature. Ultimately, I will argue that when framed by this lens of likeness, it makes sense to teach Eudora Welty and Zelda Fitzgerald in coordination with one another in American literature curriculums, as well as women's literature curriculums.

As we look at these two women together it is helpful to include some pertinent chronological and geographic details regarding their writing careers. Zelda Fitzgerald was born in 1900 in Montgomery, Alabama. She moved to Paris with her husband in 1924 and began writing experimentally as early as 1922. She

continued sporadically through the mid-1930s and up until she died tragically in a fire at the North Carolina mental institution where she lived in 1948. Eudora Welty, born in Jackson, Mississippi in the year 1909 enjoyed a long writing career beginning with her first published short story "Death of a Traveling Salesman" in 1936 and culminating in her novel *The Optimist's Daughter*, for which she won the Pulitzer Prize, in 1972.[18] One can quickly see how geographically and chronologically, Zelda Fitzgerald is related to Eudora Welty. Fitzgerald was born ten years before Welty. She occupied both the modernist Europe that influenced the rise of modernism, as well as the foundational South that Welty so frequently draws from in her fiction. I contend that these biographical overlaps foreground the similarities we will explore in this section.

We have already seen that correctly categorizing the work of Eudora Welty has served as fodder for many critical analyses. Numerous excellent approaches to her work envision Welty as a primarily southern writer and compare her writing to the writing of other regionalist authors.[19] Admittedly, my

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[18] Eudora Welty would live to the age of 92 and pass away in 2001. However, she did not publish any other works of fiction after *The Optimist's Daughter*. Her book of autobiographical essays, *One Writer's Beginnings*, was published in 1984, and her collection of essays on writing, aptly titled *On Writing*, was published posthumously in 2002.

[19] My own analysis has looked at Welty in comparison to Katherine Anne Porter and Willa Cather. Other frequent comparisons include: Walker Percy, Flannery O'Connor, and of course, William Faulkner. A sample of critical works that deal with Welty's regionalism include: Louis D. Ruben, Jr's *A Gallery of Southerners*, Albert J. Devlin's *Eudora Welty's Chronicle: A Story of Mississippi Life*, Louise Westling's "Fathers and Daughter in Welty and O'Connor" and Peggy Whitman Prenshaw's "Southern Ladies and the Southern Literary Renaissance" both in *The*

own interest in Welty and Fitzgerald was born from a recognition of each writer's similar narrative treatment of their southern home states in their fiction. Yet, Suzan Harrison is quick to clarify that when critics discuss the influence of one writer on another it is not to imply that either's work is derivative, but that often this association is misconstrued as just that because "the term *influence* is read as synonymous with *imitation* and is used to slight an author's originality and creative powers" (6). Therefore, the resistance Eudora Welty makes to this categorization of her writing as purely regional is important to acknowledge. Again, Harrison speaks to this irksome intimation saying

> Like every contemporary southern novelist, Welty has been asked time and time again about Faulkner's influence upon her writing. While acknowledging that she learned from Faulkner "that a writer did not have to represent a dialect orthographically in order to create the sound of the dialect of a character's speech" and asserting that "his existence and his works mean a great deal to me," Welty resists the suggestion that her fiction is in any way indebted to his example (Interviews in *Conversations*; qtd. in Harrison 7).

Where Welty knowingly resists being reduced to a single moniker for her fiction, Zelda Fitzgerald also resisted adopting her regional identity as an artistic identity. Sally Cline says that "Zelda never labelled herself a Southern writer in the way that she felt she was a Southern painter, yet in both arts her intensely

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Female Tradition in Southern Literature ed. By Carol S. Manning. Westling's *Sacred Groves and Ravaged Gardens,* Manning's With *Ears Opening Like Morning Glories: Eudora Welty and the Love of Storytelling.*

Southern temperament focused on the dissolution of form into colour and the representation of emotion through colour" (230). Cline even goes so far as to attribute the Southern tone in some of Fitzgerald's early short stories to her re-reading of Faulkner (truly the benchmark by which all other Southern prose is evaluated): "Though she set only two tales in the Deep South—locating the rest in the smart societies of Europe and New York—the sexual frustrations, violence and aberrations which accompanied her car crashes, shootings and attempted incest had a passionate macabre Southern feel. Reading Faulkner had intensified the heat of her prose" (296). Though both artists give readers ample cause to evaluate them on the grounds of their Southern-ness, neither wants to produce fiction that is thought of as notable for its imitative quality or limited to its provincial appeal.

Yet, once Welty escapes the parameters of regionalism her fiction still troubles readers. One only has to look at the many ways scholars react to and categorize *Losing Battles* to see this confusion first hand

> Mary Anne Ferguson argues that "*Losing Battles* has been underestimated primarily because of indecision about its genre". Her summary of the generic labels applied to Welty's novel includes a "six-act grand old opry," "a melancholy idyll," a "bucolic ballad," and a combination of "folk tale, a metaphor, and a realistic novel." Using Northrop Frye's terminology, Ferguson ultimately suggests that *Losing Battles* be seen as a "satiric or ironic epic." (Ferguson qtd. in Harrison 87).

Similarly, Fitzgerald's texts are said to contain "the material of myth," the stuff of archetypal "fairy tale," as well as bizarre experiments that combine surrealism and abstraction (Cline 313; Milford 242). Here again, neither Welty nor Fitzgerald are dedicated to the exploration of a specific genre. These two American writers are more interested in using conventions as they suit their artistic needs, rather than allowing those conventions to dictate the art. Welty and Fitzgerald are doing away with the trademarks of easily identifiable fictional types in favor of focusing on their characters' psychological and emotional response to and perception of their fictional world.

Take, for example, each writer's use of narrative voice in their novels.[20] Each writer includes a cacophony of voices in their fiction. They do not limit the narrative to the single perspective of their female protagonist, but compile an entire jumble of dialogue, inner monologue, and narrative description to create their fictional worlds. In order for their fiction to transcend these superficial critical boundaries both of these female authors discover that they must experiment with modernism in order to find a mode that best fits their literary idea.

[20] I am restricting my examination of the novels to the ones we will cover in our analysis, namely Welty's *Losing Battles*, and Fitzgerald's *Save Me the Waltz*.

Charles E. Eisinger gives readers a good framework for thinking about these two women authors and modernism in his article, "Traditionalism and Modernism in Eudora Welty". He identifies Welty's fiction as traditional in the sense that it, like the fiction of Tolstoy and Austen, is interested in "the accurate or lifelike transcription of people acting in society" (4). Moreover, by depicting this realistic imitation of life the author "seeks to capture a culture's hum and buzz of implication, . . . and to deal with the way in which manners, marriage, money, and morals work in the society of his [or her] fiction" (ibid). Welty's interest in depicting three-dimensional characters existing and interacting in a realistic space is well documented throughout *Losing Battles*, if a little absurd at times (Mr. Renfro's use of dynamite to free the Moody car comes to mind). Fitzgerald, too, is compelled in her fiction to show men and women (though it is more often women) in realistic situations reacting within the accepted bounds of behavior for the culture's time and place. One thinks of Alabama trying to navigate social niceties when introduced to her husband's unlikable friends in *Save Me the Waltz*. However, Eisinger points out that what separates Welty, and by the same consideration, Fitzgerald, from other traditionalists is both their conception of linear time and their inability to work towards a single teleological end. Though the fiction of these women certainly "has a goal," that goal is not disseminated in a neat, singular "message, or a moral" or "[one] form of

knowledge" (4). Instead truth and knowing are matters of experience that the authors transmit to the readers through both the content and format of their novels, specifically narratives styles. Eisinger says Welty "is obviously not purely an experimental modernist writer. But she is an uncommon combination of the two [traditionalist and modernist], and that makes her, in the history of twentieth century American fiction, a transition figure, a writer who looks both backwards and forwards" (3). It is Welty's ability to act as this transitional figure that makes her a perfect fit for our analysis. In connecting to Fitzgerald through her modernism, Welty is able to act as a conduit to bring two otherwise dissimilar authors into conversation with one another. Next, we will examine how Welty's transitional status and their common narrative element helps categorize both of these women as modernists, though they each fall at different points along modernism's chronological timeline.

Eudora Welty comes latest on modernism's chronology. Her modernism is also more like other American modernists working in the post-World War II period such as "Vladimir Nabokov, William Gass, Donald Barthelme, Stanley Elkin, John Barth, Thomas Pynchon, and William Burroughs," rather than the European modernism that shaped Virginia Woolf in the early 1910s and 20s as part of the Bloomsbury group, or its modernist cousin that Fitzgerald experienced in Paris in the mid-1920s (Eisinger 5). Though he is dealing

specifically with Welty, Eisinger frames his argument about her experimental modernism by using the theory of Ortega y Gasset as expressed in his influential essay "The Dehumanization of Art" positing that though a traditionalist is invested in recreating life as closely as possible, a modernist understands that "Aesthetic distance is necessary, since we can see a thing only when it ceases to form a living part of our being. Dehumanizing art creates distance between us and art. The road to art is the will to style; style involves dehumanization; to stylize is to deform reality" (4). In order to do this an artist must be willing to reject time and space as they are categorized in Newtonian terms, reject empiricism and construct their own reality from the materials leftover (5). In Welty's fiction though she never entirely parts with linear conceptions of time and space, her "pure talk story," as she described *Losing Battles* in an interview with Charles Bunting, is an attempt to transmit "every thought and feeling into action and speech, speech being another form of action—to bring the whole life of it off through the completed gesture" (Bunting 54; Kuehl qtd. in Prenshaw 71). Eisinger says that making the novel about "talk and gesture" brings *Losing Battles* very "close to being a modernist fiction which has as its subject the ways in which it is made" "despite its thematic content" (23). The way in which Welty's narrative style connects her to modernism is something we will see repeat with Fitzgerald.

While she is living in Paris in the mid-to-late 1920s, Zelda Fitzgerald is perfectly positioned to experience modernism as it is maturing and spreading to different art forms. While both her husband, Scott Fitzgerald, and his close circle of literary friends, like Gertrude Stein and Ernest Hemingway are on the cutting edge of modernism in fiction, it is actually the depiction of modernism through a different venue of artistic expression that most affects Fitzgerald's modernist leanings in her prose, Pablo Picasso's painting style. Fitzgerald had the opportunity to meet some of the pioneers of modernism in their heyday; however, as we will examine in the fifth chapter, her relationship with other writers was strained by the dynamics of her home and professional life.[21] Even once the Fitzgeralds are separated, Zelda Fitzgerald seems to have permanently soured on modernist writers.[22] Yet, her relationship with other painters was extremely positive. She met Pablo Picasso through mutual friends, Sara and

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[21] Scott Fitzgerald was smitten with the writing of James Joyce and the Fitzgeralds got the opportunity to meet Joyce and his wife Nora, at a dinner hosted by Sylvia Beach in the summer of 1928. Apparently, Zelda "did not share her husband's adulation for Joyce" and even though the Fitzgeralds would host the Joyces for dinner at their apartment after this initial run-in they would not become close friends and Zelda's indifference towards Joyce and his prose "drove another wedge between them" (Cline 223).

[22] When Zelda is hospitalized for the second time in 1930 she asks Scott to bring her some reading materials, but inserts the caveat that in her frayed mental and physical state reading James Joyce has been "a night-mare in my present condition"(Cline 270).Fitzgerald adds to the list of prohibited authors saying " and not Lawrence and Virginia Woolf or anybody who writes by dipping the broken threads of their heads into the ink of literary history" (271). Woolf feels that her already over-taxed psyche cannot contend with fractured narrative style and that her "sub-conscious, or whatever it is" needed to "be left in peace" (ibid).

Gerald Murphy, and got to watch him work as he designed sets and costumes, with his artist colleague Mikhail Larionov, for Diaghilev's Russian ballet.[23] At this time in Paris, Picasso was "still creating multiple perspectives that challenged the idea of coherent space" (Cline 162). Fitzgerald, primarily painting at the time, is influenced by this and other pictorial adaptations of modernism. When she switches modes of artistic expression from painting to writing she transfers many of her characteristics from one style of art to the other. Cline says that "an undue emphasis has been placed on the influence on Zelda's art of the Parisian Modernists she knew personally," yet she still admits that "Zelda also adapted the lustrous energy and colours which Picasso used" for the Ballet Russes" in her own paintings (ibid). It is this same aesthetic distance, present in Fitzgerald's paintings and in the description of modernist concerns that Eisinger mentioned, that Fitzgerald brings to her prose. This "lush and associative" quality that Fitzgerald initially uses in her paintings is brought to bear on Alabama's surroundings in *Save Me the Waltz*. It also allows us to enter spaces, like the hills and valleys of David's mind, that would otherwise be off-limits to the reader, Cline says we "reach into the unconscious" through these elements in Fitzgerald's prose and it is when "Zelda points to her stylistic intention: to

[23] Picasso's first wife Olga is a '*deuxiéme ballerina*' in the Ballet Russes, Fitzgerald is working with former Russian prima ballerina Mme. Egorova, a former student of Diaghilev and all parties interacted on several occasions (Cline 162).

express what cannot be expressed" through color and experimental narrative that her prose "read[s] like a distinctly Modernist novel" (Cline 313). Modernism is not the only thing these two women grapple with in their work. They also must each navigate their own unique approach to what it means to live and write as a female author.

As we will see in my fourth chapter, Eudora Welty may not conceive of herself as a crusading feminist writer, but she definitively participates in the feminization of her texts by incorporating choral narrative multiplicity. This can clearly be seen in the narrative structure and content of *Losing Battles*. Welty's penultimate novel, as we will see in my second chapter, does not prioritize a single narrator's perception of events, nor does it preference a solitary storyteller, rather it is a joint effort to restore Jack Renfro to his rightful place on the Vaughn family plot by talking him home, an effort led primarily by the women in the family. In addition to her incorporation of feminist dialogic, Welty's use of intertextuality as we explored above is, what Harrison calls, "another strategy that women writers use to appropriate and revise cultural narratives that seek to marginalize and silence women" (19). It should come as no surprise then that Zelda Fitzgerald is also participating in this disruption of the patriarchal narrative with the narrative style, format, and content of *Save Me the Waltz.* Fitzgerald's frequent forays into extended metaphor, her interest in and

emphasis on experiencing the text rather than imparting a teleological moral of the story places her firmly in the company of Welty. A future project would look to conduct a close reading of texts from both authors to chart the similarities in their feminized narratives; however, for the immediate purpose of this project it is enough to establish that similarities exist and thus Eudora Welty and Zelda Fitzgerald should be considered together as an acknowledgement of the community of female voices they represent in 20th century literature. Now that I have explored why Zelda Fitzgerald should be discussed, analyzed, and taught in contention with Eudora Welty I will look at community as a multi-faceted organism. In order to situate the argument I put forth in this project correctly, I need to first outline several critical approaches to community that shape my analysis of both the kind of community Welty and Fitzgerald are interacting with and the purpose of that community as it relates to the influence and support it offers participants.

Defining Community

I begin my analysis of community by examining what it means for women to contend with a lack of literary influence. I rely upon Harold Bloom's seminal work (in reference both to its impact on later literary theoretical approaches and its specifically male perspective), *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, to sketch the parameters of influence for an author. Though it may seem an odd fit

for our subject matter (a man writing about other men's embattled preoccupations with their patriarchal poetic lineage has a noticeable lack of y chromosome), Bloom's theory expertly identifies why my project is so necessary while also giving us a precedent and reference point from which to begin our discussion. In the introduction to his book Bloom states that his

> concern is only with strong poets, major figures with the persistence to wrestle with their strong precursors, even to the death. Weaker talents idealize; figures of capable imagination appropriate for themselves. But nothing is got for nothing, and self-appropriation involves the immense anxieties of indebtedness, for what strong maker desires the realization that he has failed to create himself? (5)

Both of the women writers we will examine in the course of this project are what Bloom would categorize as "strong" because they have the "persistence" to wrestle with strong precursors, many of which are male. As far as women writers contending with the influence of their male predecessors Elaine Showalter contradicts the impression held by the majority of male critics in the era of Bloomian theory saying,

> Women have generally been regarded as "sociological chameleons," taking on the class, lifestyle, and culture of their male relatives. It can, however, be argued that women themselves have constituted a subculture within the framework of a larger society, and have been unified by values, conventions, experiences, and behaviors impinging on each individual. It is important to see the female literary tradition in these broad terms, in relation to the wider evolution of women's self-awareness and to the ways in which any minority group finds its direction of self-expression

> relative to a dominant society, because we cannot show a pattern of deliberate progress and accumulation (Showalter, *A Literature,* 11).

Above, Showalter claims a space for a female tradition in literature while rejecting the notion forwarded by John Stuart Mill and George Henry Lewes that it would take complete isolation for the woman writer "to overcome the influence of male literary tradition, and to create an original, primary, and independent art," to break the curse of "always be[ing] imitators and never innovators" (Showalter, *A Literature,* 3). Showalter testifies that male influence can be overcome by a woman writer as long as female influence can be built upon.[24]

Thus, the difference, and wherein I depart from Bloom's theory, is that the two women authors I contend with realize that it is not the task of a female writer to end the legacy of influence in an act of destruction, they need not "wrestle…even to the death" with the figures that have come before them, not even if those figures are male (ibid). To struggle with the existent social opposition proves itself catalyst enough to spur on the act of creation, and for these women writers, it is creation, not destruction, that is the goal. Welty and Fitzgerald both recognized that a piece of work does not arrive fully formed, but

[24] Further discussion of the beneficial influence of a female literary tradition on aspiring women writers and readers can be found in Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Imagination.*

instead undergoes a process of gestation. Hélène Cixous reminds us in "The Laugh of the Medusa," that:

> There is hidden and always ready in woman the source; the locus for the other. The mother, too, is a metaphor. It is necessary and sufficient that the best of herself be given to woman by another woman for her to be able to love herself and return in love the body that was 'born' to her. Touch me, caress me, you the living no-name, give me my self as myself. The relation to the "mother," in terms of intense pleasure and violence, is curtailed no more than the relation to childhood (the child that she was, that she is, that makes, remakes, un: my body—shot through with streams of song; I don't mean the overbearing, clutchy "mother" but, rather, what touches you, the equivoice that affects you, fills your breast with an urge to come to language and launches your force; the rhythm that laughs you; the intimate recipient who makes all metaphors possible and desirable; body (body? bodies?), no more describable than god, the soul, or the Other; that part of you that leave a space between yourself and urges you to inscribe in language you woman's style. In women there is always more or less of the mother who makes everything all right, who nourishes, and who stands up against separation; a force that will not be cut off but will knock the wind out of the codes. We will rethink womankind beginning with every form and every period of her body (882).

Cixous explores the fact that for a woman writer a period of gestation has already occurred that optimally involved surrounding the writer during this formative period with outside influences that positively shaped her, and consequentially her nascent project. Yet, once born the offspring does not necessarily have to "idealize" or "appropriate" the parent.[25] In the context of

[25] Here I use offspring to refer to the body of work produced by a writer under the direct or indirect influence of a separate literary figure, or parent.

female influence, offspring and parent can and should co-exist in order to allay the anxiety of influence.

Therefore, it is in the tradition of Cixous, Showalter, and their fellow feminist theorists that I argue that a mature woman writer should incorporate the influences of the predecessor and grow from the parent-figure, existing and co-existing to promote deeper understanding of the many possible ways one can experience and enact what it is to be a woman in community. Incorporating a piece of glass from a pre-existing fixture into a mosaic does not make the composite piece derivative of the original source of the glass, but rather brings part of the old image into the new compound image.

Bloom, in part, supports the original genesis of this idea by saying, "But poetic influence need not make poets less original; as often it makes them more original, though not therefore necessarily better" (Bloom 7). Bloom gives an example of Milton having to contend with Spenser's legacy and states that the influence of the older generation on the newer both "forms and malforms" whatever product the younger man might bring forth. As we will see in chapter two, Welty's fictional female characters must struggle with influences that both seek to break and make them. Similarly, in chapter four we will examine the strong influence of female literary figures in Welty's personal and professional life and discover how the author must navigate these relationships deflty in

order to preserve the presence of the mother and still maintain room for growth in the daughter. In chapters three and five, Zelda Fitzgerald will struggle and fail to find a female model of prose to wrestle with that she could call her own. Yet it is important to note that this absence is just as harmful as to Zelda Fitzgerald's writing as Spenser's presence is to Milton's. Bloom states that male writers must contend with the presence and legacy of the Father. It is my contention that female writers have a doubly troublesome anxiety of influence in that they have to deal with the presence of the Father in literature as well as and the occasional absence of a suitable Mother. It is the effect of this literary influence that we will examine when we look at communities in this project.

In her analysis of women and fiction in *A Room of One's Own*, Viriginia Woolf supports my reading above that women writers' missing inheritance, both literary and monetary, from their figurative mothers has a detrimental effect on their ability to counteract misrepresentations of women in fiction. Instead of writing "a few remarks about Fanny Burney; a few more about Jane Austen; a tribute to the Brontës and a sketch of Haworth Parsonage under snow" Woolf settles in to address why parsing the title "women and fiction" plagued her with unforeseen complications and setbacks (3). She explains that when exploring a topic that requires one to analyze a legacy of "women and the fiction that they write" versus "women and the fiction that is written about them" one comes up

against a sizeable obstacle. The obstruction Woolf faces is not a sensationally ugly or inaccurate depiction of the female sex in fiction, though she acknowledges that they exist and that they are not helping the cause of the woman writer (26). Nor does she locate the problem in a lack of interest or desire on the part of female authors to apply corrective fiction to reductive portrayals of women in literature (48-53)[26]. Woolf declares that discussing women and fiction is problematic primarily because in order for women to participate in the act of fiction (notably the reading and writing of prose, but in a less tangible sense also inspiring future prose) social, economic, and literary barriers to their success must be overcome. Woolf avers that in order for women to be successful in creating fiction they must first contend with why "one sex [was] so prosperous and the other so poor." Women have to defeat the effects of their gendered "poverty on fiction" (25). I use the phrase "gendered poverty" to refer both to the financial dependence that makes the pursuit of fiction impossible for many women in this time as well as to the impoverished state of women's contributions to fiction in this time. Woolf says most aspiring women writers do not have the luxury of independently wealthy mothers to fund their literary

[26] In these pages Woolf discusses the possibility of Shakespeare having a gifted literary sister who wants to pursue play-writing as her brother did. Woolf explains that the conditions of life in the Elizabethan age (indeed, the social, historical, and financial conditions of every age preceding Woolf's own age of women's emancipation in the early twentieth century) would have made this an impossible, and even deadly goal to pursue.

studies, nor will these women inherit a literary legacy from their mothers (a legacy that would allow them to establish their own identity in response to the identity of their predecessors, like Bloom's poetic fathers and sons) because, simply, they do not exist.[27] In light of these social and financial restraints, Woolf's prescription for the future success of a woman writing fiction is for her to procure "money and a room of her own" (4). However, I would like to add to this recipe one additional ingredient that Woolf, though she discusses it at length in her essays, omits in her remedy. That additional ingredient needed for women to participate successfully in the world of fiction is a community of women around them. We have explored how that community often originates with a literary mother, but Woolf helps the reader expand the definition of community by saying feminine relationships encompass so much more than just "mothers and daughters" (86). Female communities include other women, sisters if you will, that help the woman author explore an expressly feminine identity in a conducive space. This community of women is and should be diverse, Woolf tell us, and these additional female influences must be present, along with money and space, in order for women in fiction to achieve identities "much more

[27] Of course, there are notable exceptions to this statement. Women like Phillis Wheatley, Emily Dickinson, and the phenomenal female authors Woolf mentions at the beginning of her examination; however, Woolf and I, by extension, are arguing that these literary women are the exception not the rule.

various and complicated" than the inadequate representatives of the past. In my third chapter, I explore how Woolf's framework helps us assess the hunt Alabama Beggs undertakes for feminine community in Fitzgerald's *Save Me the Waltz.* Woolf's exploration of women and fiction points out the insufficient representation of female communities in our history and calls for reparations to be undertaken. The next theorist that influences my project similarly recognizes this historical lapse and explains the conditions that undergird it while advocating for the same solution: increased depiction of complex female communities in literature.

Nina Auerbach sets the stage for our consideration of the purpose of feminine community by first juxtaposing sorority with its more popularly fictionalized brother, fraternity. Auerbach explains that in much of fiction "initiation into a band of brothers is a traditional privilege symbolized by uniforms, rituals, and fiercely shared loyalties" (3). In these brotherhoods, individual men are often referred to by titles that denote respect for their shared station among their equals, words like *knights*, *battalions*, *squadron*, *soldiers*, *reinforcements* (Auerbach 7). Similarly, the possessions of these groups of men and their actions when they are in these groups are referred to by language that many readers would interpret positively or honorably, such as *kingdom*, *field of combat*, *conquest*, *victory*, and *domain* (ibid). In contrast, "sisterhood . . . looks

often like a blank exclusion. A community of women may suggest less the honor of fellowship than an antisociety, an austere banishment from both social power and biological rewards" (3). Whereas groups of men are referred to with language that often shows respect or value for their association with homogenous community, groups of women operating together are typically labeled with negative language that points towards the objectionable nature of the individuals that comprise an all-female unit. Auerbach gives the example of several words that historically refer to these undesirable female communities: *brothel*, *harem*, *bordello*, *whores*, *widows* (7).

As a result of this skewed perception of gendered communities, all female groups, or sororities as I will refer to them throughout the project, must endeavor to expand the societal understanding of how communities of women have a contribution to the cultural milieu beyond the legacy of ostracization. Auerbach avers:

> communities of women growing in time constitute a drama of widening cultural consciousness, finally taking shape as an evolving literary myth that sweeps across official cultural images of female submission, subservience, and fulfillment in a bounded world. As this myth takes shape as part of our imaginative inheritance, so does the fictional reality of women's autonomy: for though the communities gain substance and stature as we proceed, their isolation has had from the first the self-sustaining power to repel or incorporate the male-defined reality that excludes them (8).

All female communities function, then, as both refuge and restorative to their members as well as the larger heterogeneous populations they operate within. Rather than be restricted by a patriarchal interpretation of their limitations, sororities in their many manifestations can use the very definitions that are employed to separate and disgrace them as a vehicle of retaliatory inclusion and healing. Auerbach gives the example of the mythical maimed sisterhood of the Fates and says that though they are initially exiled for their deformities over time "as a recurrent literary image, a community of women" comes to symbolize

> a rebuke to the conventional ideal of a solitary woman living for and through men, attaining citizenship in the community of adulthood through masculine approval alone. The communities of women which have haunted our literary imagination from the beginning are emblems of female self-sufficiency which create their own corporate reality, evoking both wishes and fears (5).

In the particular case of the fates, "a triad of sisters begins as an image of maimed and outcast pathos and ends as a unity of force neither god nor hero dare invade" (ibid). This description of the emancipatory powers of female community is foundational for my analysis of my two authors and their texts. I will argue that by willingly participating in sorority women who would otherwise be marginalized are made powerful.

Though I will argue that these female communities can and should act as sites of female empowerment for women authors and fictional women, additional conditions must be applied to sorority in order to make it an effective

term for our analysis. I begin my second chapter by looking at the concept of sorority as it is described by Helen Michie in *Sororophobia,* Like Bloom's interest in the textual father figure for male artists, Michie examines a tradition of feminist inquiry into locating a mother figure for female artists. These literary mothers model "likeness" for the women that read them, and it is the act of witnessing matriarchal example that allows future female artists to conceive of themselves as part of a literary tradition. However, Michie points out that this hunt for a source or origin for certain characteristics in the text, a mother figure, and consequently, an inheritor or recipient of those characteristics, a daughter figure, who will mimic the source and carry on their original purpose and agenda into the future often results in an one-dimensional reading of feminine community that inhibits comprehensive understanding of female bodies operating outside the idioms of the domestic sphere. By continuing to "locate power" in the domestic language that has been utilized since Bloom's consideration of the literary father and has been so central to the discussion of these machinations in feminist terms, the family then becomes the "scene, if not the source, of women's oppression" (7). Furthermore, Michie explains that locating power in these metaphorical paternal units gives rise to a troubling pattern of "othering" women who do not necessarily fit into either mother or daughter roles. This 'other' is then attacked as a villainous seductress, sexually

and therefore selfishly motivated, who seeks to corrupt the family unit. The obvious patriarchal tones of this line of discourse are reason enough to expand the conversation of women's differing roles in community to include female figures that co-exist outside the immediate family lineage as healthy and necessary figures. In light of these considerations, an alternative is to consider women as members of 'sisterhoods' or sororities rather than restricted to mother-daughter relationships.

Sisterhoods, however, are not without their problems. "Sororophobia," as defined by Michie, is the fear of allowing a sisterhood to operate in ways that depart from nurturing spaces that reward and reinforce sameness. Michie explains that within feminist rhetoric, "sisterhoods" have been seen as sites "distressingly utopian" but with the power "to disrupt the symmetry of familial relations, and even of Oedipality, by evoking the struggle of *many* sisters" against a single enemy (8). Though sisterhoods are often born out of similarities in temperament, biology, and ideology, Michie tells us they are just as likely to result from a proximity to one another and capitalize on an abusive "system of sexual contrast," wherein one sister is upheld as the chaste paragon of socially acceptable femininity and the other sister is derided for her sexually liberal behavior and punished by society (18). In contrast to this toxic model of sisterhood that has echoes of the historically negative language Auerbach

warned readers about, sorority, a coalition of women that has the "dimension of dignity and choice" makes room for "the expression of female difference" (21).

Thus, sorority is a condition just as likely to occur in female societies as matriarchy, but it is much less likely to be examined. Sorority also comes with fewer of the poisonous social dichotomies that sisterhoods often carry with them. By advocating for sorority, Michie encourages the reader to go beyond outdated versions of sisterhood to include a dystopian view of women in an elective community that would allow for a more "inclusive emotional lexicon" (9). Thus in my examination I will use this more accurate terminology in recognition of the fact that female communities have transitioned from the language of the family unit into something more readily recognizable as a social choice, an elected group of sisters rather than a genetically predetermined one. This element of choice has made sororities into a much more dynamic space for female communities. Instead of a restrictive body that reinforced patriarchal domestic expectations, sororities now can partake in some of the liberty their male counterparts have historically enjoyed.

Conclusion

This project does not seek to outline a recipe for indisputable critical and popular success for the ambitious woman writer. Nor do I claim in the limited scope of this project to analyze and subsequently prioritize the myriad elements

that contribute to the formation of exceptional authorial talent. However, it is my aim to explore how supportive communities of women, and in some cases an integrated community of men and women, positively affect the formation, sustained presence, and reception of Eudora Welty's fiction in the canon of American Literature and use this example to explore the negative ramifications of the absence of community in the life and work of Zelda Fitzgerald. Through the combination of critical review, close readings, and biographical examinations I will conclude that in the case of these two women writers dynamic supportive community is integral to their creative success.

CHAPTER TWO

"Now are we a circle?": The Function of Dynamic Female Community in Eudora Welty's *Losing Battles*

As the family reunion draws to a close towards the end of *Losing Battles,* Miss Beulah, family enforcer and organizer, cries, "Everybody stand! It's time for the joining-of-hands!" (Welty 789). From hither and yon, all Beechams and Renfros, Granny Vaughn, two Moodys, and Brother Bethune gather together to join hands and sing "Blest Be the Tie" (789). The circle extends down from Granny's place at the head of the gathering so that

> as many of the reunion as could worked themselves into a circle in the expanded space of the porch. The rest of them carried the circle down the steps and along the flower rows and around from tree to tree, taking in the well-piece and the log seat and the althea bush and the post with the Wayfarer's Bell on it, encompassing the tables and the bois d'arc tree. (Welty 789)

The ground encircled by the reunion is worth noticing because it represents the reunion circle itself. Within the circle are odds and ends that comprise the terrain, such as "the althea bush," the "well-piece" and the "log seat." These local fixtures represent those colorful Banner figures that are a constant in the life of the Vaughn/Beecham/Renfro clan though they are outside the family, such as Brother Bethune and Miss Julia Mortimer. Then there is "the post with the

Wayfarer's Bell on it," a symbol of those members of the circle that have been drawn in from the outside, brought into community from the wilderness, and in one sense or another saved from a dire fate, such as Judge and Mrs. Moody. Then, of course, there is the "bois d'arc tree," the tree that grew up from the planting of Grandpa Vaughn's switch, under which the entire reunion gathers to dine. It metaphorically represents the family, nuclear and extended, that is brought together by the same binding ties being sung about in the hymn. Granny Vaughn is the matriarch and figurehead of the family standing at its center, like the great aged tree, serving as the catalyst for this year's reunion. Just as the ground around which the community gathers holds many composite parts, the circle itself is made up of various pieces of community. Sheila Stroup explains that "we see that the strength of these simple people lies in their sense of identity, which comes most importantly from the family, but also from their land, their history, and their community" (44). In *Losing Battles*, every character has a place in the circle of community, and every character has a role to play. Still, community is complicated in Banner, Mississippi. The ties to community do not move in linear, easily accessible, or readily discernible patterns but are rather linked together in overlapping circles.[1] Therefore, we will examine throughout

[1] It is important to note that throughout this analysis I will focus on communities of white women and men. Of course, that means that there is also a group in the community that exists as a vacuole, or a space that indicates something important by signifying its absence. Perhaps

this chapter how strong women are the organizing element at each of the levels of community. These women will vary in age, education, and approach to community, making their interactions with other members of community, especially other female members, Gordian in their complexity. Through these analyses, I will show that Eudora Welty intentionally structures *Losing Battles* around dynamic feminine communities that encourage the reader to eschew the roles/portrayals of traditional gender-normative communities in favor of exploring a new multi-dimensional community of white women. First, I will set up my framework for analysis, which is built from Helen Michie's instructive terminology defining what it means for women to take part in sororities and sisterhoods. Next, I will look at some of the critical resources that have shaped my reading of *Losing Battles.* Then, I will begin my textual examination with a reading of male impotence in Welty's novel, which will in turn position my analysis to transition into the reading of empowered female communities in the text.

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unsurprisingly, this group is made up of the minority voice. The black population, which accounts for more than sixty percent of the citizens of Mississippi, is rarely mentioned with two notable exceptions: the hanging of the black sawmill worker and the mention of black male employees that are brought in by Dearman when he comes to Banner. American Indians are also a presence that is largely elided in the story with the exception of some glancing references contained within larger stories, such as the story of the settling of the Vaughn family plot, and how Banner Top, also known as Lover's Leap, earned its name.

Sisterhood as a lens for Welty's Female Communities: A Framework

In order to explore gendered communities thoroughly in Eudora Welty's complex novel, it is necessary to first establish what it means to be in a dynamic gendered community, specifically a community of white women. This foundation will allow the reader to grasp how Welty is redefining female fellowship in her text. In *Sororophobia,* Helen Michie charts a trajectory in feminist textual inquiry from a hunt for the literary mother to a hunt for literary images that show "likeness" for women. Criticism that focuses on communities of women often gets carried away with identifying a source or origin for certain characteristics in the text, who becomes a mother figure, and consequently, an inheritor or recipient of those characteristics, who acts as a daughter figure, who will mimic the source and carry on her original purpose and agenda into the future. Of course, in any community deemed a matriarchy, there is usually at least one of these relationships readily available for consideration. Yet, Michie points out that this one-dimensional reading of feminine community inhibits comprehensive understanding of female bodies operating outside the idioms of the domestic sphere. By continuing to "locate power" in literal and metaphorical fatherhood and motherhood, so central to the discussion of these machinations in feminist terms, the family then becomes the "scene, if not the source, of women's oppression" (7). Furthermore, locating power in these metaphorical paternal

units gives rise to a troubling pattern of "othering" women who do not necessarily fit into either mother or daughter roles. This 'other' is then attacked as a villainous seductress, sexually and therefore selfishly motivated, who seeks to corrupt the family unit. The obvious patriarchal tones of this line of discourse are reason enough to expand the conversation of women's differing roles in community to include female figures that co-exist outside the immediate family lineage as healthy and necessary figures. In light of these considerations, an alternative is to consider women as members of 'sisterhoods' or sororities rather than restricted to mother-daughter relationships.

Sisterhoods, however, are not without their problems. "Sororophobia," as defined by Michie, is the fear of allowing a sisterhood to operate in ways that depart from nurturing spaces that reward and reinforce sameness. Michie explains that within feminist rhetoric, "sisterhoods" have been seen as sites "distressingly utopian" but with the power "to disrupt the symmetry of familial relations, and even of Oedipality, by evoking the struggle of *many* sisters" against a single enemy (8). In Michie's example this single enemy is the father figure; however, in my reading I expand this idea of father figures to include any male figures who willfully embody ignorance in the text. Michie accuses feminist discourse of lifting up sisterhoods as idyllic sites of consistent meaningful exchange between members with identical aims. The reality, in theory and

practice, is, of course, much more complicated. Though sisterhoods are often born out of similarities in temperament, biology, and ideology, Michie tells us they are just as likely to result from a proximity to one another and capitalize on an abusive "system of sexual contrast" as seen in many Victorian representations, such as Christina Rossetti's "sister" poems, George Eliot's *Middlemarch,* and Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (18). Though some feminists have rejected the Victorian representation of sisterhoods typified by "competitive, problematic, and theatrical" behavior between sisters, Michie explains that these depictions of complicated sisterhood "enrich and complicate feminist notions of sisterhood, as they undermine our most dearly cherished tropes of female unity" (21). Michie cites Christine Downing as she explains, "sisters do not have to choose to be 'utterly dependent' or 'utterly free' of each other as daughters might have to do with respect to mothers" (Downing; qtd. in Michie 20). Rather this vibrant relationship between equals can be both separate and together, allowing women the room they desperately need for "the expression of female difference" which "should not, must not, undo the work of centuries of feminists who have struggled to maintain that relations between women are primary and vital connections" (21) In making this necessary space for dissension in the ranks, so to speak, Michie contends that readers allow for a

"dimension of dignity and choice" in the coalitions between and among women (21).

Thus, sorority is a condition just as likely to occur in female societies as matriarchy, but it is much less likely to be examined. Advocating for sororities and sisterhoods to be fictionally portrayed and critically examined is still problematic because both female communities still operate within the language of the family unit. However, Michie contends that historically social mores and critical responses to female communities are often conflated with families simply because the terminologies used to discuss each grouping are similar, often synonymous. Yet, it is important to note that in contemporary parlance sororities have transitioned from the language of the family unit into something more readily recognizable as a social choice, an elected group of sisters rather than a genetically predetermined one. This element of choice has made sororities into a much more dynamic space for female communities. Instead of a restrictive body that reinforced patriarchal domestic expectations, sororities now enjoy some of the liberty their male counterparts, fraternities, have historically enjoyed.

While sororities have long been reduced to bloodless caricatures of female society, the conditions and functions of fraternities have long been the site of much academic study and inquiry. The assumption that these men are not biological brothers, but rather connected through the ties of ideology or

temperament is axiomatic. The same approach, then, should be extended to sorority. Michie encourages the reader to go beyond outdated versions of sisterhood to include a dystopian view of sisters that would allow for a more "inclusive emotional lexicon" (9). This lens would attempt to "describe the negotiation of sameness and difference, identity and separation, between women of the same generation, and is meant to encompass both the desire for and the recoil from identification with other women" (9). She calls these sororities "corrective" as they are amending the reductive representation of idyllic sisterhoods held up by previous feminist scholars as the standard by which communities of women should be judged. Applying this expanded concept of feminine community to *Losing Battles* saves the text from critical relegation to the category of one more matrilineal narrative.

By interpreting Welty's text as a matrilineal narrative, the reader loses those fiery outsiders like Julia Mortimer and Gloria Short because they would be excluded from the nuclear family structure and thereby forbidden to enter into female community. Similarly, if one interprets the text to treat difference and dissonance between women with violence and rebuke, then Welty's clever instructive on female community becomes rather a two-dimensional re-enforcement of the patriarchal perspective on women and their interactions. However, when we read Welty's characters as members of a diverse, corrective

sorority, we realize her text extends to include 'others,' navigate quarrels and differences, and results in a dynamic female community that is well-equipped to face any battles that come its way.

With Michie's terminology as a framework I will briefly establish the readings of *Losing Battles* that have affected my own interpretation of the text. In the following section I will give the reader a clear background into the critical voices surrounding Welty's novel and chart how my interpretation builds from critical examples to explore two areas of the text that work in coordination with one another but that have largely been considered individually in scholarship.

Critical Voices on Women and Community in Losing Battles

Banner, Mississippi, is by all indications a typical Southern locale of the 1930s in terms of its social order. In other words, when a reader initially encounters the world of *Losing Battles*, it seems that Welty is depicting a society run by white men: men hold public office, provide funds and means of sustenance for the family, and seemingly make and enforce decisions. Yet, under this façade of patriarchy, the reader discovers that it is actually an interconnected community of women that is directing the affairs of Banner and its inhabitants. Though I see the gender dynamics of *Losing Battles* functioning as a fascinating social subversion, the topic of gendered relations and community space is at the

heart of many critical examinations in Welty scholarship with varying perspectives.

Some critics acknowledge the prominence and importance of women in Welty's novel but cannot help but to put those same women at odds with one another by placing them in the traditional restrictive roles of the mother/daughter or within the Victorian sisterhoods discussed by Michie. For example, in his article "Marrying Down in Eudora Welty's Novels" John Edward Hardy places the sibylline Granny Vaughn at one of end of a social value spectrum and Julia Mortimer at the other, with both parties squabbling over Gloria stuck somewhere in between them. For Hardy, Granny Vaughn represents the social outcome of 'marrying up.' On the other end of the spectrum Hardy places Julia Mortimer whom he depicts as "the obvious principal champion of the dedicated single life" (104). In Hardy's reading of the text, these two women's respective events, Miss Julia's funeral and Granny's family reunion, "compete in ceremonial interest" for the attention of the townsfolk of Banner. Hardy sees these two women as representative of the two sides "in the war of the married and the not-married" whose "final battle" will culminate in possession of Gloria once and for all (104). Rather than view these two matriarchs on a continuum of influential women in the life of the orphaned Gloria, Hardy places them in opposition to one another, which means, according

to his logic, that only one can be successful. In other words, Gloria can have only one socially acceptable mother figure. As Michie points out in her theory and as I will explore in later sections, this way of thinking about female interactions in the text limits Gloria's story and personal development in a way that is unnecessary and reductive.

Other critical examinations focus less on individual female characters in the text and more on what could be considered feminine communities in the text, namely family dynamics. For example, Seymour Gross, Jane L. Hinton, Louise Gossett, and Robert B. Heilman acknowledge that at its center *Losing Battles* is a story about family, specifically a family under the domain of women. Gross and Hinton see these family dynamics as a positive thing resulting from the influence of Jane Austen on Welty's fiction; Gossett sees it as a potentially restrictive social ordeal (she classifies the novel tellingly as "a comedy of loss") that through the redemptive action of festival narrowly escapes tragedy, and Heilman sees it as a largely neutral component, something that acts as a grounding element for everything else in the novel to circle around (Gossett; qtd. in Gross 325). Each of these writers hits on an element that is worth noting in the text and by discussing them in coordination with one another I will establish a firmer foundation for my own examination of female communities.

Gross sees Welty's cast of characters imitating "Jane Austen's 'comic masterpieces'" giving the audience a story that is "'wholly affirmative'" with their family antics (326). Gross attributes the "'noise'" and "'commotion'" in Welty's pages to the Austenian "'tireless relish of life,'" "which is a rejoicing in the 'clamorous joys and griefs' of her characters" (Welty; qtd. in Gross 327). Though we will explore the influence Austen had on Eudora Welty's fiction at length in my fourth chapter, it is a notable characteristic of the prose formation in *Losing Battles.* While many critics struggle with those elements listed above and therefore struggle to categorize Welty's novel as comedic, Gross avers, and I agree, that just like the family in *Losing Battles* is held together through love, it is "Welty['s] love" for "all of her characters" that binds the novels familial elements into a positive and affirming story. Though Welty is not opposed to tragedy and dark comedy, ultimately her abiding love for her characters, like the universal force that is averse to "a fall," allows the people of the text the small kindnesses that keep their worlds in balance (Gross 328).

In a similarly affirmative reading of family community, Hinton also establishes a connection between "the framework of complex family relationship and rituals and the deep knowledge of place" she sees in Eudora Welty's writing and the influence of Jane Austen's fiction. Hinton states that "the exploration of family lies at the heart" of many of Welty's novels, but especially *Losing Battles*

(120). For Hinton, it becomes imperative that characters depicted as outside family lines be "initiated into the family" (125). Ergo, Gloria is initiated into the family with the watermelon baptism and Judge Oscar Moody is subjected to trial by car. Yet, because Hinton, like Gross, is still operating within the terminology of strict family dynamics, Miss Julia Mortimer is forever relegated to the position of outsider "whose life and death stand in absolute opposition to all that is symbolized by family" (125). I will explore however, that though Miss Julia is on the outskirts of feminine community, the concept of sorority allows her to maintain her independence while still acknowledging the influence and power she exerts in Banner and within the Beecham/Renfro families.

For Gossett and Heilman, family functions and rituals are an ordering element in the text that take Welty's large cast of characters and rambling events and turn them into something that imbues the text with greater meaning. Gossett explains that the family reunion begins as "formal festival" where women preside over events, but by the end of the novel the Beecham/Renfro clan (with the help of neighbors, spectators, and outsiders) have taken a somewhat somber ritual of reunion and turned into "a tall tale, an outburst of Southwest humor of hyperbole" that involves a misadventure with dynamite, a machine's rescue, and "a final triumphal procession of broken chariots" into the center of Banner, all orchestrated by the men in the family (350). Gossett claims family community for

men and women and asserts that their roles are different but that ultimately this festival is a demonstration of how "enduring and surviving are joys," a celebration "of the hardihood and the transience of life," as well as a celebration of "the human genius for inventing meaning through form" (350).

Similarly, Heilman charts a course through the many twists and turns of the narrative and arrives at the conclusion that "many tones, often side by side unexpectedly, emerge in this presentation of community: community with a time-created coherence that satisfies but constrains" (304). By arguing that the novel is ordered by community events as they are experienced by Jack and Gloria Renfro, Heilman navigates the reader to an understanding that *Losing Battles* is "*comedie humaine*" necessarily involving "a wide spectrum of the laughable" which itself "contains bits of the pitiable and the admirable" (304). I will be incorporating elements of these readings to show how community is both the center for social exchange and the site of meaning while also making my own examination more specific to the functions of female leaders in the novel.

Elizabeth Kerr evaluates the impact William Faulkner's tales of young men "growing up, journey[ing] from innocence to experience" had on Eudora Welty's fiction, specifically on what Kerr defines as Welty's exploration of "this crucial stage of initiation in the lives of girls and young women" (133). Like Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County, Welty creates a detailed fictional world that

serves as the stage for her young women to encounter and react to those "factors shaping the growth of young people to maturity, self-realization, adult responsibilities" as "determined by the family and the community" (133). Kerr states that Welty adheres to the same social mores governing the behavior of women that Faulkner depicts in his novels, namely that "women without independent means and with no family able and willing to support them" are doomed to suffer "the stigma of spinsterhood" that "cannot be removed by a respectable occupation or even by a successful career" (134). Thus Miss Eckhart, the spinster piano teacher of Morgana in Welty's *Golden Apples,* and Miss Julia Mortimer in *Losing Battles* are characters who are pitied and ostracized in their respective communities. Though I will explore the challenges faced by female characters outside the protection of family in *Losing Battles*, I will show how, through the lens of sorority, Welty has given young women like Gloria the ability to benefit from multiple perspectives on "such essential aspects" of "future life" without the added burden of operating within a single confined community.

One of the few critics that looks specifically at communities of women is Margaret Jones Bolsterli. She views Welty's novels as operating within the "universe of Southern women" (149). An aspect that is particularly appealing in

Bolsterli's treatment of this topic is that she is very cognizant of the subtleties of Welty's fiction, she states,

> As explorations of the sensibility of women, these novels have taken on new importance with the growing interest in feminist criticism. But Welty's explorations of the experience of women proceed so naturally they hardly seem to issue from a 'woman's point of view.' There are not any female heroes doing society-defying acts to free themselves for self-realization. There are no women who throw down the gauntlet at the feet of the male oppressor and fight him to defeat. Instead, there is a careful and serious depiction of some of the systems which are run by women. (149)

In other words, Welty's women are real-to-life, believable, relatable female characters. Bolsterli looks at "grand gathering[s]" of women in all roles from all walks of life throughout Welty's fiction and concludes that "it is the interaction of these women, their relationship with each other, and their visions of life which form the fabric of the novels" (149). It is these interactions that most interest me in my examination. Though I will work my way through some of the pertinent male/female interactions in *Losing Battles*, it is ultimately in a service of clearing space for this more specified consideration. Bolsterli correctly observes that just because the novels focus on women, "this is not to say that these novels present only half of the world which most of us consider real, for men are always there, frequently important, frequently even serving as pivots for the story" (149). Thus, in order to move into an examination of female community in Welty's novel, I will first look at how male characters are represented in the text.

Finally, two critics that help the reader think about male presence in Welty's fiction in helpful ways are Lois Welch and Rebecca Mark.[2] Welch examines what makes the plots of Welty's novels so amusing to the reader. She identifies the genesis of this comedy in two Aristotelian principles. The first is, "nothing is inherently funny"; the second principle, alike in shape but different in function, is, "nothing is inherently funny, BUT pain and harm *must* be excluded or comedy expires" (150, capitalization mine, italics Welch's). Operating within Welch's second principle is the concept of "bisociation," alternately described as "plain old incongruity" (151). According to bisociation things are funny when the actions interrupt our perceived notions with a reality that differs or surprises us or vice versa. Or to use Arthur Koestler's description, "'the simultaneous correlation of an experience to two otherwise independent operative fields'" (Koestler; qtd. in Welch 151). For example, we will examine a couple of instances of rape in the text, one comical, one deadly serious. In the first instance, I argue that the scene is an actual attempted rape of the oldest Renfro sister, Ella Fay, by the scurrilous shopkeeper Curly Stovall. In this scene

[2] Additional proof for categorizing Losing Battles as a comedy can be found in Mary Anne Ferguson's "Losing Battles as a Comic Epic in Prose". Ferguson addresses how a combination of the techniques of "ancient epics," the model of "heroic fiction," and the dark comedy inherent in detailing "battles lost" results in a book that makes you laugh by presenting familiar figures in ironic positions (305-307). But the laughs aren't cheap, according to Ferguson, and by the end of the novel Welty's characters have also given the reader a nuanced look at the human condition (315).

Welty correlates the sexual assault with the comic slapstick style of Curly and Jack's fight, thereby making the real violence seem humorous. In contrast, the second example of a scene involving rape is the simulated rape of Gloria in a watermelon fight with the Beecham aunts. This scene is real-time play-acting resembling a darker possibility. Though the reality in this second instance is not an actual rape, the correlation between Gloria being (wo)man-handled and force-fed watermelon by the Beechams and sexual assault is not dissimilar enough to strike the reader as comic. The description of Curly and Jack wrestling over Ella Fay's honor covered in corn meal, on the other hand, is dissociative enough to allow the reader to laugh at what is by all indications the threat of real sexual violence. Welch supports this reading by saying, "Generally speaking, comedy celebrates liberation from danger or oppression. It seeks the way out. Comedy needs, obviously, some danger to escape, a threat to avoid, an opponent over whom one can triumph" (152). This framework explains to the reader at least one reason the ring episode is so hilarious—it allows the reader to release the tension of the attempted assault through Jack's heroic (but ultimately ineffective) efforts to recover Ella Fay's lost wedding ring. Jack's fight with Curly allows the reader to escape sexual threat. On the other hand, the watermelon fight, though comic on its surface, creates apprehension in the reader because the threat of rape is simulated in real time and the "danger or oppression" Gloria perceives from the

Beecham-Renfro family comes to fruition in the scene. Thus, the reader experiences the violence and is barred from comedic reprieve.

Furthermore, making men the object of sexual failure and therefore comic material and transitioning women into the agents of sexual power places men in a subordinate position in the text. Welch discusses a survey that revealed "Women mainly fear violence; men mainly fear being laughed at" (150). Welty's positioning of men in a comic role, allowing them to be controlled, guided, and *laughed at* by women affirms the feminine hierarchy that I will explore in the text. Rebecca Mark adds to this idea that women wield power in Welty's comic texts. Mark's article responds in large part to the theme of female-centric comedy begun by Welch, but she differs in several key ways. In her article, Mark offers the caveat that women's power over the comedy of the text is not rooted in their physical act of laughter—women that are seen in the text audibly laughing are often disenfranchised in one way or the other—but rather their creation of or participation in an act of comedic import and their strategic capitulation to or refrainment from laughter. Mark further unpacks this complicated idea by explaining that in Welty's texts, "Women laugh where we least expect them to and do not always laugh when other characters, or the plot line, or a funny joke, calls upon them to do so," which points to Welty's women characters withholding their laughter in order to be "more politically radical, more feminist,

than when they join in the laughter of the group. Their withholding becomes a strategic self-preservation, a social commentary, a silent disapproval, and the controlling force of the comedian" (39, 40). In this way the female characters of Welty's text subvert the idea that "If we women laugh at men, we are in danger of evoking male violence. If we do laugh at men's jokes, we are supporting our own subordination and domination" (45). When the men of the text are at their most laughable, the women of the text withhold their laughter as an assertion of their dominance and a reinforcement of male impotence. Mark expands on this idea saying men's capitulation to laughter in the text may seem dominant but is in fact a surrendering of their power; "The male laugh is at once an antidote to death, a sign of erotic fertility, and slightly aggressive. But even these laughs diminish the male character's power. When men laugh, they give up some of their virility" (Mark 49). Take for example the overstated laughter of a big man like Uncle Noah Webster: he may be openly gregarious (a sign of his virility), but his laughter robs him of translating that virility into actual offspring. Therefore, he and Aunt Cleo are the only married couple that is childless (besides impotent Uncle Percy and his wife). In the following section, I will build on the understanding of female empowerment and male disenfranchisement laid out by Mark and Welch by exploring the ways in which men are made ridiculous in *Losing Battles.*

Men Falling Short: Male Impotence, Emasculation, and Exclusion in Losing Battles

Welty indicates that Banner is under the domain of women in several very clear ways: the allusion to male biological impotence, the verbal emasculation of men by women, and the willful ignorance and stupidity of the male characters. Furthermore, in reaction to these shortcomings, men become the actors of evil upon female bodies. As a result of these qualities and actions, men are pushed to the social periphery or entirely excluded from communal gatherings and community rituals. This marginalization makes room for the women in the text to become the center of the narrative.

Men are rendered impotent in the world of the novel in a literal sense, first and foremost; for example, Uncle Percy Beecham's inability to give Aunt Nanny the children she desires points directly to his infertility. Percy is fourth in line of the six Beecham brothers and is married to Aunt Nanny. When the reader is first introduced to the couple they are described as opposites. Aunt Nanny is described as a large woman, who openly demands, "'Got a baby here for me?' as soon as she enters the reunion and does not stop requesting possession of Lady May for the duration of the event (437). At one point, Aunt Nanny even laments that she didn't lay claim of Gloria when she was an orphaned baby, "'I wish I'd known you was going begging!' Aunt Nanny cried to her through the others' laughter. 'I'd opened both arms so fast! I always prayed for me a girl—though I'd

have taken a boy either, if answer had ever been sent'" (691). As all the other Uncles and boy cousins help unload the pickup trucks, we get our first look at Uncle Percy: "Uncle Percy followed it all silently. Because his voice was weak and ragged, he was considered a delicate man. He lifted up for Granny's eyes a string of little fish, twitching like a kite-tail. 'Happy birthday,' he said, his Adam's apple trembling like one of his fishes" (437). Seemingly not well enough to take part in the other men's activities on account of his "weak[ness]," Percy's offering of "little" fish that accentuate his "trembling" all point to man that is too "delicate" to produce healthy offspring (437). Aunt Nanny's frequent and ardent declarations of love over the children gathered at the reunion and her admission that she would have accepted any child, male or female, leads the reader to believe that the reproductive lack of desire must rest with Uncle Percy. In addition to Percy's physical description leaving much to be desired, there are recurring clues about his speech being "thready," "poor," "falsetto," "wavering," and "faint" necessitating him to "quaver" "primly" and "prettily" rather than speak clearly at a volume above a "whisper" (450-467). His inadequate speech organ causes him to pause at frequent intervals when it "failed him" (485). All these details point to the conclusion that it is Percy's shortcomings that prevent the couple from having children. After Percy doggedly gets through the story of Jack's battle with Curly Stovall and the subsequent trial and imprisonment, his

reedy voice slowly fades into the background and he's rarely heard from again.[3] During the story, other members of the family frequently interject and interrupt Percy's telling of the tale making him struggle to finish what he has started. At one point in the text, overwhelmed by the louder and more assertive female voices in the family, Uncle Percy tries in vain "to get the story back from them," but at that point it is too late, and the women drive the tale along with only occasional comments from the original narrator (494).

Sam Dale is the one Beecham brother whose voice is noticeably but explicably absent; however, that does not mean he is saved from emasculation. Having lost his life in combat during World War I, Sam Dale's story is told largely by Granny and Miss Beulah. Since he is deceased, he cannot speak in the present for himself, but even in death Sam Dale is emasculated when the story of his tragic burn is told by Miss Beulah.[4] As the contentious discussion over Gloria's paternity rages on, Miss Beulah feels it necessary to describe the tragic circumstances that transpired when Sam Dale was a baby that would, in her opinion, render him incapable of bearing children and therefore innocent of the

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[3] Percy does not have any additional lines of sustained dialogue for the remainder of the novel; however, he does chime in later when the reunion starts talking about Miss Julia to affirm that the assertive female teacher tried and failed to make something out of the Beecham boys.

[4] Though there is an argument to be made that Sam Dale's voice survives and lives in the text through the letter sent to Rachel Sojourner, kept by Granny, and read aloud to the reunion by Miss Beulah. However, this argument stumbles on the fact that even his 'voice' preserved in written words is given audible voice by women-and thus overpowered.

charge of fathering Gloria. Sam Dale Beecham, "'wasn't no more likely than [Judge Moody] to be responsible for Gloria being in the world'" because Miss Beulah failed to mind him when he was a little baby and as a result a "'Coal flew out of the fire and hit in his lap'" seemingly rendering the young boy's reproductive organs inoperable (763). The evidence presented by his letter that he cared for Rachel Sojourner only serves to further emasculate him when it is revealed that he was most likely cuckolded by Miss Julia's beau, Herman Dearman, while he was away at war resulting in the child, Gloria. Granny reveals that Dearman impregnated Rachel Sojourner, and thus Nathan kills Dearman, "for Sam Dale." Sam Dale was "going to marry the girl" in order to get "her out of a pickle," but the child was not his and his sweetheart was violated by another man (785).

The emasculation suffered by Percy and Sam Dale indicates a pattern that appears again and again for the men in the Beecham family: loss of textual masculinity at the hands of the women in the family. Percy and Sam Dale may be the only two Beechams afflicted by physical impotence, but social impotence seems to be a trait that runs in the family for the Beecham and Renfro men. Unlike the physical impediments that deter Percy and Sam Dale, this social impotence and the resulting social inadequacy are products of women verbally emasculating men. Men that fall victim to this verbal emasculation are Noah

Webster Beecham, Mr. Renfro, Jack, and Vaughn. Judge Moody also falls victim to this pattern but is not a member of the biological family. Still, his role in family affairs at the reunion and his position in the larger Banner community makes him worthy of examination as well. All of these men are silenced or verbally bullied at one point or another in the text by their more assertive, more vocal wives and mothers.

Vaughn and Mr. Renfro are two examples of male figures who rarely speak but are often verbally chastised by Miss Beulah. For example, Vaughn, who has been shouldering the man's burden of chores around the farm since Jack's departure, is frequently berated by his mother because, "'He'll never be Jack,' […] 'Says the wrong things, does the wrong things, doesn't do what I tell him'" (438). Miss Beulah nicknames Vaughn, "Contrary," and any time the little boy speaks up for himself his mother contradicts him and chalks up his shortcomings to forever being less than his older brother (438, 812). Similarly, Mr. Renfro is often silenced or overruled by his wife. When Miss Beulah begins her story in vindication of Sam Dale, Mr. Renfro limply cautions her, "'Now Mother,'" but Miss Beulah charges forward saying in response, "…I'm going to silence you, everybody!" (762-763). Mr. Renfro's only option after this statement is to disengage from the narrative and physically remove himself from the group, which he does immediately by saying, "'Mother, I believe I'm going and put up

the evening bars'" (763). Even when speaking to his children, Mr. Renfro does not exert his own authority but relies on Miss Beulah's ability to exercise her will: "'Feed the stock. Lead the cows to pasture, Vaughn,' said Mr. Renfro, 'You heard your mother'" (813).

The issues experienced by this small portion of the family are indicative of a larger pattern Banner-wide, as we see that even men outside of the immediate family are rendered impotent by the women of the text. Judge Moody is a figure in the community who wields municipal power and garners some degree of respect. Yet his wife Maud Eva frequently directs and bosses him.[5] She admits to Judge Moody that she failed to notice Aycock boarding her car because, "'I was too busy trying to steer you'" (577). She is also quick to announce to anyone within earshot that the stranded Buick does not belong to Judge Moody but is her possession alone. Maud Eva is not the only woman that took the Judge in hand. Miss Julia Mortimer instructed a young Oscar Moody and continues to exert her will-power over him well into his old age—even when she is in a different city on her deathbed. Miss Julia convinces a young Oscar Moody to forego law in a more promising area and stay in Ludlow, "doing what I could here at home, through the Boone Country Courts" (745). He presides over

[5] "…Oscar'[…] 'I warn you'" (573). "'Now cut it out, Oscar. You're about to start feeling sorry for yourself'" (575).

the sale of Miss Julia's property in Ludlow. In spite of Lexie Renfro's neglect, Miss Julia gets her will to Judge Moody, and he becomes the final executor of her last will and testament. Judge Moody suspects that even his arrival in Banner at the home of the Renfro's has been the result of Miss Julia's orchestration from beyond the grave. He says, "'I lost my **own** way on Boone County roads for the first time I can remember. I could almost believe I'd been *maneuvered* here, […] To the root of it all, like the roots of a bad tooth. The very pocket of ignorance'" (743). Judge Moody recognizes that the trajectory of his life has been more shaped by Miss Julia's designs than his own volition.

This pattern of impotence asks the reader to question whether there is a common denominator between these men that makes them ineffective and in need of direction from the women of the text, and if so, what it is. The answer, a resounding yes, identifies a characteristic that exclusively affects the male population of the novel and is best framed by Miss Beulah when she first encounters the Moody's Buick unsteadily skewered to Banner Top: she says "It's a very nearly perfect example" of "man-foolishness" (818). This "man-foolishness" seems to be at the root of the typical Banner-boy-uselessness, and the text points to several factors that contribute to its growth and spread throughout the novel's male population. The first example is given while the entire reunion is regaling the newcomers with stories of Miss Julia's efforts in the

classroom. All speakers agree that they resisted the teacher's encroaching knowledge, but the women at least admit to absorbing some things of value. For example, Miss Beulah admits to the crowd that, "She's responsible for a good deal I know right here today" (669). The men, on the other hand, seem to have been unwilling or even incapable of absorbing knowledge. Percy, Curtis, and Dolphus corroborate this assumption by remembering, "Boys, she wanted us to learn something if it was to kill us," "She was our bane," "But nobody could hold a Beecham boy down. Not if you was to kill yourself trying" (670). Curtis continues, "Outside the home, we boys was more used to sitting on the bridge fishing than lining the recitation bench" (670). Finally, Dolphus delivers the victorious statement, "She thought if she told people what they ought to know and told 'em enough times, and finally beat it into their hides they wouldn't forget it. Well, some of us still had her licked" (675). It seems, at least for the Beecham boys, it was an accomplishment NOT to learn anything. Here, Jack distinguishes himself as Gloria reveals that he was kept out of school, and even though he returned under her insistence, he has not even completed a seventh-grade education. The men of the family do not seem to recognize the value of knowledge. This is precisely the kind of thing that would qualify as "man-foolishness." The inability to apply foresight and the unwillingness to exercise

self-discipline creates for the men of Banner a cycle of unfortunate events that resolve only to repeat themselves in some new format.

An example of "man-foolishness" in action would be Jack's entire brilliant scheme to even the score with the Moodys. Earlier in the story, Jack helps remove a visiting car from one of Banner's notorious ditches. Unbeknownst to him, the car belonged to the very Judge that unjustly imprisoned him. Upon hearing this news, Jack resolves to un-do the kindness he unintentionally bestowed upon his arch-nemesis by re-stranding the Moodys in a ditch. His impulsive nature results in the Moodys' Buick being stuck to the edge of a cliff with his unreliable buddy, Aycock, in the backseat as the only anchor to Earth. Though the gathered male relatives rejoice to hear this news, Miss Beulah is understandably infuriated. She screams at the collected company, "And if he budges, he's a gone gander. What about the rest of it?! These boys, these men, they don't realize anything!" (634). Jack's actions throughout the novel offer endless examples of this determined male ignorance. One such instance is when he purchases his heap-of-junk pickup truck from Curly Stovall in exchange for a calf, only to have Curly take the truck back as soon as Jack is incarcerated. However, Jack is not the only man in Banner acting idiotically; other examples are the entire episode that precludes Jack's arrest, Mr. Renfro dynamiting Banner Top to free the Moody Buick, and Uncle Nathan murdering Dearman out of

misappropriated loyalty. Miss Beulah summarizes this phenomenon succinctly by querying Mrs. Moody, "Ain't men fools?" (640). Indeed, in the textual community of Banner, men are completely ineffective.

Two things are made apparent by the examples listed above. First, when actions are undertaken in the text without consideration of the consequences, those actions inevitably have unintended negative effects that needlessly complicate the given situation for all parties involved. The second, is that "man-foolishness" in its many different forms does not just plague Jack. "Man-foolishness" is a trait nurtured by ignorance and passed down from one male generation to the next through example. The foolish ways of the older generations of Banner men unavoidably shape the actions of the younger generation. The Beecham Uncles and the Renfro paterfamilias have done nothing but show the younger generation how exactly to *mis*behave. So, it is no surprise that Jack picks up exactly where they left off. Only Vaughn seems to differ slightly from this path. He doesn't cut up at school or slack off like his Uncles or brother before him. In fact, Vaughn "so loved Banner School that he would have beaten sunup and driven there now, if the doors had had any way of opening for him" (806). One can hope that this indicates an alternative to the pervasive pattern of male ignorance for young Vaughn. Still, if we are to learn anything from the "man-foolishness" of his father, brother, and the other men of

Banner, it is that this plague is both genetic and systemic and could thus foreshadow a bleak end to Vaughn's education.

The absurdity of the men in the novel is used to undermine their position in the community and in the narrative while also offering the reader a helping of levity. The violence done to women by male actors is portrayed in similarly comedic tones but portends much darker realities. With a few exceptions, men are the main perpetrators of violence in *Losing Battles*.[6] This savagery is not restricted to sexual violence; however, I will identify a pattern of violent interactions that begin with sexual misconduct, progress into increasingly brutal physical altercations, and ultimately end with severe, in some cases life-threatening, consequences. The first character suspected of sexual misconduct is Curly. Curly Stovall and Jack Renfro are friendly enemies who frequently exchange taunts and barbs but whose rivalry is painted in a humorous light because it remains in the realm of verbal sparring and rarely erupts in physical violence. However, the novel begins and ends with two specific occasions where the repartee of the pair explodes into physical altercations. Both instances are a result of perceived violence towards a woman. The first Curly and Jack

[6] These three notable exceptions include the watermelon fight, Lexi nursing Miss Julia, and Lexi altering Gloria's dress. In "Rewriting Violence in Eudora Welty's *Losing Battles*" Sarah Ford argues that all three of these scenes are sites of exclusively female-on-female violence. This violence carries on the tradition of violence in Southern literature seen in Faulkner, but it is producing very different results in that it is not entirely destructive.

showdown comes about when Ella Fay, Jack's younger sister, enters the Banner general store for "a wineball" and is subsequently sexually harassed by the storeowner (450). The circuitous re-telling of the story reveals that Ella Fay, just sixteen, entered Curly's store having "grow[n] a little during the summer," indicating she had gone through puberty and was now "Pretty as she can be" (450-451). Curly, who is "great big" with "little bitty eyes" has a reputation around town for being a "rascal"; Uncle Percy confides to the group that, "Girls of his own church will run from him on occasion" (451). A young, attractive girl and a big, villainous man are described above, essentially a damsel in distress and the town pervert, obviously meant to foreshadow a recipe for disaster.

The proof of these overtures occurs when the reader looks closely at Curly's discussion of compensation with Ella Fay. When Ella Fay enters Curly's store, he immediately begins to talk of the payment owed him by the Renfros and hints that perhaps the family debt can be settled through some form of carnal recompense. He says, "look who they're sending to pay the store," hinting that the girl's body is a form of currency. Curly makes the debt more specific to Ella Fay when he says, "When am I ever going to get *something* back on all that candy eating?" (451, italics mine). The implication that Curly isn't talking about cash remuneration for the debt that is now specific to the candy Ella Fay consumes is not lost on the girl and after this comment "she starts to running"

(451). It is understood that the family cannot afford to pay the debt owed to Curly.[7] The villain reinforces this notion by stating, "your folks been owing me for seed and feed since time was—and when's your dad going to give me the next penny on it! You-all never did have anything and never will!" (451). Thus, if Curly is aware he cannot get monetary reimbursement, we are meant to understand that he plans to get his in another fashion, ergo the mention of his lascivious reputation and his chasing of the girl. Luckily, as Curly is "just about to catch her," Ella Fay "reaches in, slides out in his face the most precious treasure there is…" (451). If the sentence ended here there would be little question of the sexually threatening situation Ella Fay was in; however, the treasure revealed is a "a gold ring" rather than some more private possession. The young girl apparently barters the family's only wedding band for her safety. When Jack finds Ella Fay in the road "bawl[ing]" and hears her account of the exchange, he marches into the store and the infamous scuffle ensues (452).

This does not conclude the episode; in fact, the sexual innuendo picks up in Part 6 right where it left off in Part 1. If the reader was not convinced that

[7] In addition to the narrative being set in the midst of the Great Depression, Welty mentions in her interview with Bunting that Northern Mississippi is especially known for its poverty (Welty, "The Interior World…"). This would indicate that the Renfro's poverty is not only a temporal matter, but a more lasting and definitive poverty that is pervasive throughout this party of the United States. Thus, Curly is probably aware that he will never receive the financial reimbursement he is owed.

Curly's overtones in the first exchange are meant to be explicit, then Jack's reaction should be persuasive. When Curly repeats his statement to Ella Fay from their first encounter, "Well, look who they're sending to pay the store," in front of her older brother, Jack does not wait to hear any more but instead "punched [Curly] in the nose" (852). It is clear by Jack's reaction that Curly's "fatuous look" upon Ella Fay's approach portends an untoward encounter took place between the two (852). This suspicion is confirmed later when it is revealed that Ella Fay did make a deal with Curly: "with a brief scream of pleasure" she shows Jack and Gloria "laid on her *sweet, horny*, greedy little palm" a pearl-handled pocketknife and "blushing at last" she explains that the exchange was "'all we did'" (853, emphasis mine). The implication here is that Curly and Ella Fay have traded sexual favors in addition to the symbolic tokens. This can be seen when the teenaged girl says, "'I made *him* give *me* something'" (853, emphasis mine). Curly may have taken Ella Fay's chastity in the form of the family's prized wedding band, but he has also given her something alluding to intercourse. After sharing her secret, Ella Fay taunts Gloria "'Watch and see! I can be a bride too. You can't always be the one and only!'" (853). The reader can see that Ella Fay expects marriage to result from the exchange shared by her and Curly, but when Jack asks Curly if his intention is to "marry Ella Fay," the older man never confirms it. Curly grudgingly admits that marriage into the sizeable

Beecham/Renfro family would offer him a political advantage but that does not seem to be enticement enough for him to make good on the marriage pact. He never actually ratifies this statement with his assent, and when paired with his reputation and prior actions, Curly would lead the reader to infer that he never promised, nor does he intend to marry Ella Fay, but rather the young girl is simply "grasping" at the shiny possibility (Welty, 853-4). Though Curly refuses to verify his intentions of matrimony, the intimation that relations have occurred is supported by the expectation that a marriage will result from what the two parties have exchanged in private; however, Curly's rascally behavior confirms that he has taken the girl's symbolic chastity and therefore must be punished with violence.

Another violent episode that results from the insinuation of sexual assault is the murder of Dearman. In the melee of accounts given around Gloria's paternity Uncle Nathan offers a vital clue as to the circumstances of the orphan's conception. Granny Vaughn identifies Rachel Sojourner as Gloria's mother, but the father figure is harder to identify. Originally Sam Dale Beecham is accused of impregnating red-headed Rachel before he goes off to war, but he is exonerated when it is revealed that in fact Dearman is the father. However, this detail is recovered only as a secondary revelation after Uncle Nathan confesses that his lost hand was given in penance after he "killed Mr. Dearman with a stone to his

head, and let 'em hang a sawmill nigger for it" (784).[8] Herman Dearman, who is described as "'crude as they come'" by Judge Moody, is also, and more importantly, described using the same word that identified Curly as a sexual profligate; he is called a "rascal" (744, 780). Miss Beulah is the one that identifies him thusly. She reports that Dearman was the kind of "rascal" that would attempt to court Miss Julia Mortimer, an "over-smart old maid" just because she was once considered, "'beautiful of face as a girl'" (780). Judge Moody explains that though Dearman "aspired to" Miss Julia, she never had any interest in settling down (744). So, Dearman was rejected by the school teacher and turned his attentions to a poor country girl with no line of defense against his advances.

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[8] Though Welty has said in interviews and in response to readers who have criticized the notable absence of black characters in *Losing Battles* that the text is intentionally focused on a rural population in Mississippi that is historically made up of largely poor white residents, it is worth noting that Welty also experienced a complicated relationship with what Toni Morrison would call "writing blackness" in her Southern setting during the Civil Rights Era. It is possible that Welty intentionally omits the inclusion of a three-dimensional representative black character throughout her novel while still keeping in the above reference to a sacrificial black body murdered in the stead of a guilty white man as a commentary on the state of racial tensions and cruelties in the South. However, it is more likely that Welty is operating within the confines of what Morrison describes in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* as "American Africanism" (6). This condition, Morrison says, affects many white writers and readers in American literature and can be identified as a term which refers to the "denotative and connotative blackness that African peoples have come to signify, as well as the entire range of views, assumptions, readings, and misreadings that accompany Eurocentric learning about these people. As a trope, little restraint has been attached to its uses. As a disabling virus within literary discourse, Africanism has become, in the Eurocentric tradition that American education favors, both a way of talking about and a way of policing matters of class, sexual license, and repression, formations and exercises of power, and meditations on ethics and accountability. Through the simple expedient of demonizing and reifying the range of color on a palette, American Africanism makes it possible to say and not say, to inscribe and erase, to escape and engage, to act out and act on, to historicize and render timeless. It provides a way of contemplating chaos and civilization, desire and fear, and a mechanism for testing the problems and blessings of freedom" (7).

We find later that Miss Beulah knows all about Dearman's indiscretions with Rachel, so we can infer that the tag of "rascal" is meant to indicate his sexual wrongdoings and weakness for pretty women (just as it did with Curly). Beulah finds out about Dearman because once he gets Rachel Sojourner pregnant, Uncle Nathan kills him out of loyalty to his brother Sam Dale. The veracity of these claims is corroborated when Granny Vaughn produces a letter that shows Sam Dale at least intended to marry Rachel Sojourner once he returned from war, if they had not already been married in secret. Granny contends that Sam Dale only offers to marry the pitiable, pretty, but potentially slow Rachel because "he's pulling her out of a pickle," referring to her pregnancy out of wedlock (785). Whether Sam Dale's offer of marriage was in fact made as an escape for Rachel *after* he found out she was pregnant or whether they were sweethearts before he went to war, and he planned to marry her all along and *then* Dearman impregnated her is unclear. It is stated that Uncle Nathan's crime is committed "for Sam Dale," but his rationale is not specified (785).

Another troubling detail is that in Sam Dale's letter to Rachel he claims the child as "our baby" (702). If Sam Dale is in fact the father, then Dearman's murder and Rachel's actions proceeding from the birth of the child are totally inscrutable. According to the pieced-together timeline, Miss Julia Mortimer finds a freezing Rachel on the Banner bridge looking as if she was "'about to jump in

the river'" and takes the girl to a doctor who treats her but cannot stop the pneumonia from taking root and killing her after childbirth (694).

This event corresponds to a period shortly after Gloria's birthday, April Fool's Day, and right in time for the "Easter Snap," which brings dewberries and an unseasonable chill to Banner. If the baby belonged to Sam Dale, who has promised to marry Rachel, there is no reason to give up the child and consider suicide. Even if the traveling soldier does not make it home alive, his letter would be enough proof for the family to accept Rachel and the baby into their ranks. However, if the baby is the result of a rape, the murder of Rachel's rapist, her abandonment of the unwanted child, and the suicide attempt that results from the guilt and/or grief of losing a child and a potential husband makes more sense. Furthermore, if Jack responds violently towards Curly when Curly *suggests* that he is sexually *harassing* Ella Fay, the proof of sexual assault represented by a pregnancy would more clearly explain the escalation of violence seen in the murder of Dearman by Uncle Nathan. This current of sexual violence resulting in additional violence is understated but is very likely a result of male inferiority in the novel while also further validating female superiority in the text.[9]

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[9] For an alternative reading of Gloria's origins, I would direct the reader to Rebecca Mark's article, "A Cross-mark Ploughed in the Center: Civil Rights and Eudora Welty's *Losing Battles*." Mark argues that Gloria is actually the child of Miss Julia Mortimer and Herman

A final indication that men are depicted as inferior to the women of the text is their spectator status in rituals and ceremonies of community significance. Louise Gossett tells us that Welty's fascination with communal activities is not restricted to *Losing Battles* but appears in much of her fiction.[10] According to Gosset, the "festivals, the entertainments, the games, the social rituals—by which groups of people explain, celebrate, and memorialize their experience" is in fact, "the pattern of ceremonial behavior [that] reassures its members of their importance and possible continuity" (341). The difference, therefore, in Welty's treatment of communal ceremony in this novel and her previous works is that in *Losing Battles*, men do not participate in meaningful community rituals. For the majority of the novel the focus of the text is on the women, their physical location, their conversations, and as we will see later, the exertion of their will and self-identification. Men are, for the most part, pushed from center stage in to the wings where they operate at the periphery of the reader's attention. An

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Dearman. Uncle Nathan is infatuated with Miss Julia and kills Dearman for 'defiling' her- though she is a consenting sexual participant in Mark's reading. This love-triangle leads to the erroneous hanging of a black man who worked for Dearman which Mark argues is one of the main events that haunts the text with a social commentary on Civil Rights.

[10] Gosset's article, "*Losing Battles*: Festival and Celebration" bases the author's reading in Joseph Campbell's theories of tribal ceremony and ritual. Through this lens Gosset sees the reunion functioning as the ceremonial crowning of the "family's future leaders: Gloria, bride and mother; Lady May, the spring-born child; and Jack, the awaited son and father.." (345). Though Jack is included in Gosset's consideration, she emphasizes the textual language Welty uses to paint Gloria and Lady May as "fairy tale princess or goddess" and Jack as "heroic albeit comic" (345).

example of this is seen when the reader is given access to exclusively female conferences, during which times "the men are all about ready to fall asleep anyway" (682). The men are largely oblivious to the exchange of knowledge that takes place when, "Nobody's listening but we women" (682). Indeed, while women are pictured participating in the vital oral rituals that preserve their community, men are pictured sleeping, whittling, playing banjo, or off on errands, everything but listening. When Miss Lexie takes to "mending" Gloria's torn skirt, she says, "'The men ain't going to pay a sewing session a bit of attention, and Jack ain't here to worry about,'" accordingly "the uncles turned their chairs a little bit, and Mr. Renfro got up and hobbled away" (708). Even when the men are asked to participate, such as when Uncle Nathan is told by Granny to fetch her Bible, or asked to read Sam Dale's letter out loud, the position is usually assumed by women nevertheless.[11] Throughout the novel it is more common that the male element is commanded by assertive women, like Miss Beulah, to hold their tongues and stay put, "'Men, hush!'" (501). When the ritual initiation of Gloria into the family by watermelon fight takes place, the men abstain from participation. The men are also absent in the community rites

[11] "Granny was looking at the still silent Uncle Nathan. 'Go get the Vaughn Bible, from under my lamp," she told him, her lifted foreigner pointing straight up. But Elvie, too quick for Uncle Nathan, ran and came staggering back with it…" (703). "'Let 'em hear that and see how they like it,' she told Uncle Nathan. But Miss Beulah flew between them and seized it herself and brought it to her eyes, picture side up" (703).

of passage surrounding childbirth.[12] Other examples of men operating on the margins are the multiple instances when Mr. Renfro absents himself from communal activities to operate independently and often ineffectively. For instance, he opts to stay at home with Lady May while Miss Beulah and Gloria take off to help Jack maneuver the Moodys' Buick off Banner Top, saying "'Don't believe I'll venture from the house,' […] 'If you ladies will excuse me'" (815). At other times men are intentionally excluded. For instance, Gloria puts an immediate stop to the "surge of men and boys departing from the house" ready to assist Jack in paying retribution to the Moodys (525). She says, "Let every one of you come back to your seats, […] I don't want man or boy to leave this house, or budge an inch till Jack gets back. This is Jack Renfro's own business. And nobody's coming with him but me and the baby" (525). Men are unnecessary, perhaps even counter-productive to accomplishing a task in Welty's novel.[13]

At first glance it may seem like *Losing Battles* functions in terms of the traditional patriarchy, but upon further inspection the reader sees that Eudora

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[12] Dr. Carruthers arrives to help Miss Beulah deliver Jack, but Beulah refuses to give him credit, rejecting his wish to name the baby after traveling the long, country road to help: "'He even wanted to name the baby, on top of the rest of it,' said Miss Beulah. I wouldn't allow him. That's Jack Jordan Renfro, I told him'" (698). However, this is the last birth any man participates in to any degree. The rest of Miss Beulah's children and Lady May are delivered "without a doctor," relying on Granny's abilities alone (699).

[13] Thanks to Jack's shenanigans it takes Gloria two full days before she is able to participate in the communal ritual of mourning and burial for Miss Julia.

Welty portrays the male population of Banner as ignorant, impotent, and violent. In fact, through the course of the novel the reader is shown repeatedly, just as Miss Julia Mortimer was back in her schoolhouse, that the men of Banner are incorrigible at best, and at worst they can be downright despicable. For these reasons, the women of Banner must join hands to rectify the wrongs perpetrated by their husbands, sons, and neighbors. It is left to the women to create meaning and substance from communal ritual and to prepare the next generation to do the same. In the following section I will examine how Welty portrays her community of complex, deeply human female characters as interacting in a series of complex, yet realistic and healthful ways to ultimately govern and guide their families, town, and the readership to a better understanding of what it means to participate in dynamic female community.

Ladies Take the Lead: Healthy Sisterhood Empowers the Women of Losing Battles

Seth Hagen reiterates this sense of a dichotomous social loyalty in his consideration of allegorical beckoning in *Losing Battles.* Hagen explores the cacophony of voices the reader is exposed to as they endeavor to traverse the events of the novel. Each voice has a competing, unique perspective on events that demands to be heard. Hagen posits that Banner "seems poised at the brink of ruin, at the blade's edge of history's allegorical process. By setting the story in a precarious historical moment, Welty underscores the power of culture's

allegorical forces" (121). This can be seen when in the course of the novel the power of the clan's uplifted voices brings Jack home from the penitentiary, unravels the mystery of Gloria's birth, and staves off Granny's death for one more year. Hagen compares the family's "alternative mode of distributing and sharing narrative power," to the more destructive "hierarchical and univocal model of dominant culture," saying that this subversive counter-culture depends on orality and "is further differentiated from dominant hegemonic society in that it is feminocentric and matriarchal rather than phallogocentric and patriarchal" (122). This multi-vocal chorus of human experience, Hagen says, is Welty's validation of the "many-chambered palace" of humanity (125). Though different characters may experience events in the novel in various ways, that does not invalidate their individual experience. Rather, by incorporating a mosaic of perspectives on any one event, the writer privileges the matrilineal narrative and requires the reader to participate in communal storytelling. According to Hagen, it is only through the kaleidoscope of communal experience that the reader can get a glimpse at historical truth. Though we have previously seen women co-opt the narrator role, we will also see them invite other voices into the telling. Furthermore, even as the women of the following examination summon the past with tales of shared familial tragedy and victory, they also usher in the future by

baptizing initiates into their ranks and creating new stories through shared ritual.

Two of the staunchest advocates for matrilineal narratives are the family preservationists, Mrs. Beulah Beecham Renfro and Mrs. Elvira Jordan Vaughn. Mrs. Renfro, or Miss Beulah as she is most frequently referred to in the text, is running the show at the Renfro house. It is on her schedule and by her orders that members of the family eat, execute chores, sleep, and tell stories. Her powers of command do not stop with members of the family either; indeed Miss Beulah also doles out the marching orders to Brother Bethune, the Moodys, Aycock Comfort, Curly Stovall, and anyone else who may be in need of directing. It is Miss Beulah's voice that first greets the reader in the novel, as she addresses her elderly grandmother in the opening scene of Book 1, "Granny! Up, 'dressed, and waiting for 'em! All by yourself! Why didn't you holler? (Welty, 430). Shortly thereafter, Miss Beulah issues her first command, "Come, *children!*" and from that moment on she deftly steers the goings-on of the family throughout the reunion and into the following day (430). The importance accorded to Miss Beulah by being the text's first speaker is readily evident: though the story follows the perspective of several different family members, Miss Beulah's is given priority. Similarly, the story features several strong-willed women exerting control over the men in their lives, but in speaking first, and often loudest, Miss

Beulah again secures herself priority. Even the physical description of her seems determined and willful, "This old lady's one granddaughter was in her late forties, tall, bony, impatient in movement, with brilliantly scrubbed skin that stretched to the thinnest and pinkest it could over the long, talking countenance. Above the sharp cheekbones her eyes were blue as jewels" (430). Compare this to her husband's description a couple of pages later, "Mr. Renfro came in and joined them. He was smaller than Miss Beulah his wife and walked with a kind of hobble that made him seem to give a little bow with every step. He came to the table bowing to Granny, to his wife, to his children, bowing to the day. He took his place at the foot of the table" (432). Everything about this description places Mr. Renfro in a position of deference, subordinate to the will and commands of Miss Beulah, and Granny Vaughn, even his young daughters seem to exert more power of will than him. Where Miss Beulah is "tall, bony" and "impatient in movement," Mr. Renfro, "smaller" than his wife "walked with a hobble" and even bows to the women in the room before taking up his seat at "the foot" of the table (430-432). Accordingly, Miss Beulah directs Mr. Renfro in his saying of the blessing, eating of breakfast and even in the way he holds his face: "And as for you, Mr. Renfro! If you don't stop bringing a face like that to the table and looking like the world might come to an end today, people will turn around and start going home before they even get here!" (434). Through

their physical descriptions and the examples of their interactions, the text indicates that Welty intends Miss Beulah to be the social superior in the Renfro marriage.

Mr. Renfro is not the only person held accountable by Miss Beulah's tight schedule; once the reunion gets in full swing she is in command. She moderates the conversation, interjecting when she feels someone needs to be corrected or to fill in details. She keeps members of the family in line. Especially the other women and girls. She provides domestic order, from making the majority of the reunion feast, and raising the Renfro children on "Praise! With now and then a little switching to even it up," to parceling out quilts and nightgowns at the end of the day's events for guest sleepers (493). If knowledge and power were ascertained purely on volume of content, I believe Miss Beulah would win by a landslide; the woman cannot seem to keep still or quiet. No one is safe from Miss Beulah's censure or direction. Brother Bethune, an aged man of the cloth, Judge Moody, a male representative of Justice, and even her favorite oldest child, Jack Jordan Renfro, all receive a tongue lashing at one time or another from Miss Beulah for their incompetence and/or impertinence. Miss Beulah's identity is firmly rooted in her family ties. She knows her own history and is not shy to speak out against any perceived enemy to the Renfro/ Beecham clan, be it Curly Stovall or Uncle Noah Webster's new wife, Aunt Cleo. Similarly, once someone

has been accepted as a member of the family Miss Beulah is firmly loyal. For example, Miss Beulah refrains from participating in the 'watermelon incident' with the rest of the Aunts and cousins, and even swoops in to keep Lady May out of the fray. Though she notably doesn't help Gloria, she obviously doesn't approve of the actions of the other women as she says, "'Sometimes women is too deep for me. But I reckon it's only for the good reason that I never had any sisters'" (707). When Mr. Renfro shies from executing a duty, like being witness to the final extraction of the Moody car on account of the rain, Miss Beulah does not hesitate to complete her commitments. Miss Beulah tosses this colloquialism at her husband: "I'm neither sugar nor salt, I won't melt. And morning rain's like an old man's dance, not long to last" then she marches off to support her son (814). For all intents and purposes, Miss Beulah seems to run the Renfro show, with a couple of notable exceptions. These exceptions refer to the other two women in the family that will be explored in this section. The first exception, Granny Vaughn, is the figurehead of the Vaughn-Beecham-Renfo clan. However, the good lady is getting on in years and has obviously ceded much of her considerable power to Miss Beulah. The second familial power figure is Gloria, however having just been initiated into the family we will see that she has not yet established herself entirely as a voice worth listening to. Still, just as Granny Vaughn passes on the power of the matriarchy to Miss Beulah, there is every

indication that Miss Beulah will share influence in the family with Gloria in the near future.

Granny Vaughn, the venerable Queen Mother of the Beecham family, is the celebrated figure whose birthday is ostensibly the reason there is a reunion in the first place. There are many symbols and gestures that mark Granny Vaughn as the Matriarch. Though age has taken its toll on the woman, physically and mentally, she is still the figure that the family turns to validate their existence. For example, upon entering the reunion each family member pays their respects to Granny Vaughn with kisses and some form of tribute to honor her birthday, "a bag of red-hot-poker seed," "a teacup quaking in its saucer," "a can of talcum powder," "hot peppers steeping in vinegar," a porcelain owl, a quilt in the pattern of the "Delectable Mountains," and even a "speckled puppy" (658). She is served first and presides over the telling of the family history. Even Miss Beulah refers back to Granny Vaughn, if and when her orders need confirmation, and cautions other members of the family, "Don't contradict her" (430). Miss Beulah also employs the name of Granny Vaughn when she is attempting to curb the behavior of any one of the mischievous family members, as the older woman is to be treated with the utmost respect and delicacy. However, Granny herself is not to be governed by rules of polite society; her age and status make her immune. This can be seen in the many instances when she responds with saucy

quips to members of the family, as when Aunt Birdie speaks loudly into her ear, and she says tartly, "My ears are perfectly good," or when Etoyle announces the arrival of Percy and Nanny and she declares, "I can still see" (436-437). Granny is in many ways the gatekeeper of the family gathering. For example, Jack's presence is summoned up from Parchman prison by the force of her wishing it, "That wasn't any kind of way to treat one of mine, no it wasn't. Tell 'em I said so. I'm in a hurry for him back" (480). Brother Bethune must be vetted by Granny before he may begin on his family history: "'Granny are you of a mind to let Brother Bethune use the Vaughn Bible today?' she asked. 'Not until he shows me his right to be here at all,' said Granny. 'Who went so far as to let him through the bars?'" (608). In preparation for the telling, "Rocker and all, Granny Vaughn is lifted high and carried through the crowd" she is "transported to the head of the top table and given some dahlias to hold," so that she may preside over the community ceremony as its officious leader (ibid).

Granny Vaughn's position in the family is not only symbolic, she is the keeper of memories and secrets that root the family to their history and give them a fuller sense of identity.[14] As Brother Bethune tries to warm to the weighty

[14] Kreyling notes that "The reunion celebration itself is the re-enactment of the cosmogony in which its consciousness is grounded. It occurs at a crucial time, for, in addition to the fact that Granny is the 'the last Vaughn in the world' the land is 'going back' on the people" (Kreyling 642, Welty qtd. in Kreyling 426).

task of telling the family history, he begins by describing Granny as "courageous, sweet, loving, faithful, frisky, and outspoken," to which she responds with challenging eye contact. As one of Banner's "oldest citizens today, beaten only by Captain Billy Bangs," Granny is one of the few bastions of history that has not yet lapsed into oral survival alone; her life and story is still in some senses a physical reality and can therefore be relied upon to validate the roots of the community identity (612). As a corporeal reminder of the community's history and the guardian of family truths, Granny's position in the family is vital. Born in the midst of the Civil War, Granny was supposedly around to "scamper out in the yard in her little flounce and boots and shame 'im [General Ulysses S. Grant] for it to his face" when the attacking Union General dared to launch a cannon ball at her family homestead (613). This seemingly minute detail traces the lineage of the gathered Beechams and Renfros back to a time that is incredibly formative in the identity of the South, and as such the identity of the Banner community. This picture of a gumptious little girl standing up to Grant, the 'Northern Bully,' indicates the role the South envisioned itself inhabiting within the national drama of the Civil War. Granny elaborates further with the threat, "Just wish she'd been a year older, she'd done better'n that" (613). In this exchange the historical facts are overlooked in favor of the presentation of a community-acceptable truth. Ultimately, the South could not stand up to General

Grant; even if Granny Vaughn's chimney withstood his volleys, the rest of Mississippi fell quickly.[15] The story of the toddler is merely re-affirming the identity that this community ascribes to, and as Granny is above reproach neither her gathered audience nor historical facts can correct her misrepresentation. Granny and Grandpa Vaughn's claim to the Banner land dates back to the time of Native inhabitants: Granny's granddaddy "perched him here in the thick of the Indians" and set up the house that survives to host the reunion in present day (613). This too, is a testament to the geographic rootedness of the family. The house is both stage and witness to community ceremonies such as the reunion itself. Moreover, Granny is the ceremonial and historical figurehead of the family and as the master of events she exercises her will over the reunion and the novel.

It is not just community history that Granny safeguards; family history is also her dominion. As the oldest living family member, only Granny has the answers to some of the riddles that most plague the reunion. Clues as to the identity of Gloria Short's parents, the circumstances under which Uncle Nathan lost his arm, the story of Sam Dale Beecham, and the beginning of Miss Julia

[15] Perhaps a reference to General Grant's campaign at Vicksburg- a Union victory that coincided with the defeat of Lee at Gettysburg and marked a turning point in the Civil War. The shelling of Granny Vaughn's homestead could have occurred as Union forces moved down from Southwestern Tennessee (and the battle of Shiloh in 1862) into Mississippi and towards Vicksburg. However, if Boone County is understood to be situated in northeast Mississippi then this could also be a reference to the Battle of Booneville that occurred in the summer of 1862. Additionally, the memory could be erroneous or merely historical fiction.

Mortimer's stay in Banner, are all locked tight in Granny's memory. She reveals these key tidbits, "'the way they come back to her at their own sweet will'" and though "she's not right in step with the rest of [the family] any longer" the information she gives about their collective past is the only evidence that remains to make sense of the puzzles that disturb the community (786). Granny's testimony is deemed trustworthy by Miss Beulah and the majority of the other family members, but even if a select few of the company suspect Granny is "'playing with us now, ain't you?'" they have no way to dispute her claims as all the community's documents have been lost in the County Courthouse fire (786). As a result, it is Granny's burden alone to reveal that Rachel Sojourner, or "'Fox-headed Rachel'" is most likely Gloria's mother. Granny addresses the gathered onlookers, "'Prick up your ears. Once is all I'm going to tell it […] Sojourner. That's your mother […] Fox-headed Rachel'" (689). Even when Gloria protests the proposed maternity saying, "It's just because Granny is so old that you believe her […] if she wasn't your granny celebrating her birthday, you'd think she could be as wrong as anybody else […] and you all believe her because *you're* old," the family persists.

Granny's next set of revelations shock more than Gloria. Her next announcement indicts a member of the family, Sam Dale Beecham, as Gloria's mysterious father. Just as the matter of Gloria's legacy seems satisfactorily settled

in the eyes of the reunion, "Granny's voice spoke, 'Sam Dale Beecham. Sam Dale Beecham was going to marry fox-headed Rachel'" (702). The old woman's news shakes her relatives to their cores; however, in addition to the memories of the family that place the two young parents in each other's company, Granny's word is verified by a letter from Sam Dale himself. Addressed to Rachel, the letter is signed, "'Sincerely your husband Sam Dale Beecham'" (704). Unlike the announcement of Rachel Sojourner's motherhood corroborated only by family resemblance and supposition, here the family has proof that if the two young folks were not married already it was their intention to become married when Sam Dale returned from World War I. The disclosure of such significant information at so late a time further reinforces Granny's position as keeper of family history. Rather than release the information piece-meal to individuals one at a time, Granny, ". . . held it in, kept it hid" until she "was a hundred years old and had my grandchildren and great-grandchildren all around me, all with ears pretty well cocked to hear it" (704). The veracity of the information aside, the fact that the old woman knowingly exercises her possession of valuable intelligence reinforces her position in community. Knowledge is a type of currency in the Banner community.

The reader can see that even other authority figures in the group cannot counteract the weight of Granny's memory. Beulah attempts to exonerate Sam

Dale from the stain of fathering Gloria by reliving the hot coal incident that took place in his infancy, but she is dismissed by Granny and Judge Moody (763). Even the honorable Judge himself is overridden by Granny's memory as another unexpected turn of events takes the story a new direction. The Judge attempts to verify the coupling of Sam Dale Beecham and Rachel Sojourner by producing a letter from Miss Julia Mortimer that makes reference to an unlawful child, that would be her "undoing" (739). Paired with the information Gloria shares that Miss Julia Mortimer tried to dissuade her from marrying Jack Renfro by threatening that any child of theirs would might be "deaf and dumb," readers and Judge Moody infer that Jack and Gloria are actually cousins whose marriage is both illegal and dangerous to any potential offspring. Granny trumps this information by telling of Miss Julia Mortimer's beau Dearman, "a great big grabber," who impregnated Rachel (782). In response to this act, Uncle Nathan murdered Dearman, "Did it for Sam Dale," and then cut off his vengeful hand. Judge Moody tried to enforce his version of events and justice on the family, but Granny counteracts him, "'Never said Sam Dale was the father.' She gave a minute nod at Judge Moody. 'Going to marry the girl, I said. Think Sam Dale was pulling her out of a pickle'" (785). Granny, as the storehouse of family wisdom and history has the last word, over Miss Beulah, over Gloria Short, over Miss Julia Mortimer, even over the representative of "Mississippi law," Judge

Moody. What Granny says goes, and everybody else can just "Put that in your pipe and smoke it" (787).

Granny Vaughn may exert a considerable deal of influence over her brood at home, but Miss Julia Mortimer is the figure that exerts the most influence over the largest number of people in the novel. Though the death of Miss Julia is discussed as early as Part 1, the reader does not learn of her origins or purpose in Banner until Part 4. In Part 4, Jack has returned with the Moodys to the reunion and the whole family is discussing the passing of the schoolteacher. Willy Trimble announces his plans to attend Miss Julia's wake and invites any riders-along, which prompts Aunt Cleo to ask if the gathered company knew the departed. "'Know her?' a whole chorus cried. 'Suffered under her!' cried Aunt Birdie. 'We all *had* her! She was our teacher, all the long way through Banner School,' said Aunt Beck. 'That's how well we know her, and so do a hundred other people born just as unlucky'" (668). The entire reunion has stories to share of the formidable school teacher, how she outlasted a "cyclone," taught the children to swim, fed them dinner, and "was ready to teach herself to death for you, you couldn't get away from that. Whether you wanted her to or not didn't make any difference" (674). Miss Julia is different from Granny Vaughn and Miss Beulah in that she not only exerts her influence over the Banner community but,

"'all Alliance, half of Ludlow, and most of Foxtown'" with a little "'sprinkling from Freewill,'" to boot (ibid).

Furthermore, she does not gain her position of authority within the community by being an established insider, but rather forges a way to authority all the while being an outsider not connected to the community through family or geography.[16] A fiercely independent woman, she "Taught to put herself through school in the first place" and then personally funded her efforts to keep Banner school open, "'And she said she'd do that if she had to walk over the backs of forty supervisors'" (677). In rural Mississippi, Miss Julia Mortimer undertook a colossal and largely unrewarding battle; she is quoted as saying, "If it's going to be a case of Saint George and the Dragon, I might as well battle it left, right front, back, center and sideways" (680). Gloria elaborates, "'She was Saint George,' 'And Ignorance was the dragon'" (680). Miss Julia's dedication is not to family or a specific geographic locale, but something that she deems of much greater value to the community: her sole allegiance is to cultivate and spread knowledge. With the assistance of an outsider's perspective, Miss Julia can recognize the potential in Banner School's girls and boys and Banner town's

[16] Miss Julia is born in Ludlow and though still a citizen of Boone County, of which Banner is a part, it is a distinctly separate place in the eyes of the family (as can be seen in the way they talk about Ludlow and the way the treat its other representative citizens, the Moodys).

women and men, but she is not blind to their willful ignorance and backward loyalties. She is aware that knowledge is the greatest social promoter, enabling young men and women to achieve more than could be hoped for in the typical rural upbringing. Thus, "'She had designs on everybody. She wanted a doctor and a lawyer and all else we might have to holler for some day, to come right out of Banner. So she'd get behind some bare-footed boy and push'" (670). Such determination and agency in a woman in this time period is remarkable. Yet the reader is led to believe that they should expect little else from a woman who, "'knew exactly who she was. And what she was'" (746). Miss Julia's sense of self is not dependent on the praise or censure of the citizens of Banner, and it is this independence and self-determination that makes it possible for her to soldier on when others may have fallen by the wayside.

Miss Julia Mortimer's efforts to "'*Put* Banner on the map!" were part of her larger plans to improve the entire state of Mississippi (712). As a result of these labors she affects the trajectory of the novel's central characters, Judge Moody, Jack, Gloria and Lady May Renfro. Judge Moody reveals that it is Miss Julia who "coached" him in Ludlow when they were neighbors and she was still a young woman. It is Miss Julia who inspired a young Oscar Moody to achieve, and when he was appointed district attorney she expresses her pride in his accomplishments. Judge Moody isn't the only jewel in her crown however; he

informs the crowd that, "'She's made her a Superior Court judge, the best eye, ear, nose, and throat specialist in Kansas City, and a history professor somewhere," in addition to a doctor, a County representative, and at least one schoolteacher (745). [17] Not all of Miss Julia's pupils fared so well after their time in her presence, however. In fact, the great majority of her country scholars seemed fiercely determined to stay ignorant *in spite* of Miss Julia Mortimer's best efforts. Thus, Adrienne Akins views Miss Julia's blind determination to school the population of Banner as a harbinger of institutionalized knowledge's attempt to colonize communal knowledge.

In Akins' reading of the text, the Miss Julias of the world are symbols for formal education. According to Miss Julia, and her disciple, Judge Moody, this hierarchy of knowledge and power can only be accessed through the regimented acquisition of learning. Naturally, the majority of Banner citizenship stand on the other side of this debate and their representative figures, like Granny Vaughn and Miss Beulah, assert "that the Banner community does in fact have lessons of value to teach to the world, assertions that represent rebellion against the banking concept of education" (Akins, 91). This community insight may not be

[17] Gerald Carruthers, who acts as her attending physician. Homer Champion declares, "'Miss Julia Mortimer made me what I am today, and you could have heard me declaring so tonight if you'd been there. I grew up only a poor Banner boy, penniless, ignorant, and barefoot, and today I live in Foxtown in a brick veneer home on a gravel road, got water in the kitchen, four hundred chickens, and filling an office of public trust, asking only—'" (779).

measurable in the same way as Miss Julia's seventh grade examinations measure her student's abilities, but that does not mean they should be abandoned entirely. Akins contends that Miss Julia's attempt to claim her students by educating them to be prominent social figures is just colonialism by another name. Thus, in the face of such an invading force the Beecham-Renfro's have no choice but to push back in any way they can. The entire older generation of Beechams admit that Miss Julia "scared 'em off by expecting a whole world *out* of 'em" (669). In contention with these expectations the Beechams and the rest of Banner school did their very best to let the tree of knowledge wither at its roots just like the peach trees Miss Julia endeavors to send out.[18] Yet Miss Julia was "of the opinion nothing could lick her," and so, undeterred, she soldiered on. When Gloria Short, an orphan and therefore the equivalent to social pariah, won the state spelling bee, "it gratified Miss Julia's soul," (677). In this lowly child the teacher thought she had finally found an empty vessel in which "all worth preserving is going to be preserved," a being to whom she could, "'pass on the torch,'" an acolyte who would prove worthy of Miss Julia's tenacity, and finally "*Put* Banner on the map!" as she had always urged (679, 712).

[18] Gloria informs the company that it was Miss Julia's wish that "'everybody grow as satisfying an orchard as hers,'" but sadly most in Banner are content to see their trees "'get killed back the second spring'" before they even see "'how it would have eaten,'" like Uncles Percy and Curtis (678).

Miss Julia is ultimately disappointed in Gloria's outcome, but that does not alter the fact that Gloria Short does seem to embody the potential for great things. Even after she has deserted the position of Banner schoolteacher, married Jack Renfro against the warnings and wishes of Miss Julia, and given birth to Lady May, her relatives still say, "'It's true, Gloria, you're the only one in sight that's been or is ever likely to go *there*'" (680, emphasis mine). The "there" is a reference in context to the state school where students could receive their "State Normal diploma" and become certified teachers. However, in a larger context the 'there' in question is not just an outside-of-Banner-locale, but actually an indication that Gloria is the only one that was likely to go outside of the immediate community in pursuit of something more than traditional ways of understanding, colloquial comforts, and the prevailing 'ignorance is bliss' mindset. Gloria admits that at one time,

> Miss Julia filled me so full of inspiration, I even dreamed I'd pass her. I looked into the future and saw myself holding a State Normal diploma, taking the rostrum and teaching civics in high school," […] "I'd keep on making the most of my summers, and finish as the principal. I always thought I'd wind up in Ludlow. (679)

But shortly after completion of her two-year certification, this dream gave way to another dream. This new dream involved the young teacher of Banner school abandoning her pupils in order to "give all my teaching to one," a "Banner boy," one Jack Jordan Renfro (685). Miss Julia's hopes that Gloria would turn herself

into "a better teacher" and do "'him and the world some good'" by refusing to marry Jack do not play out, but Gloria does "'stick to [her] guns'" as the older woman advises. Gloria intends to "'hang onto Jack and pull him through'" even though the odds (his incomplete seventh grade education, his economic status, his obligation to family and place) are steeply stacked against them. Then, when their daughter, Lady May arrives, Gloria's resolution to "save [Jack]" from his "mighty family" is doubled; she vows in front of the reunion that, "'We'll live to ourselves one day yet, and do wonders. And raise all our children to be both good and smart'" (759). Miss Julia's plans for Gloria's life may not have developed in the order she had in mind, but the knowledge she imparted, the influence, inspiration and encouragement she gave to the red-headed orphan has and will affect the lives of the young Renfro family in ways that are only "for the future to say" (759).

Miss Julia is a strong-willed woman, but in Gloria Short she meets her match. Gloria's stubbornness is one of the character traits that make her so formidable a character in the novel and one of the things that will make her able to withstand the initiation process necessary in order to participate fully in female community. Gloria has a sense of identity and agency that is astounding in the world of the novel as well as in our contemporary world. As an orphan, Gloria must define her 'self' as something separate from the categorizations often

supplied by family.[19] Similarly, her sense of 'self' does not rely on connection with place. Her mysterious origins and frequent childhood moves (as she is a ward of the state, then of Miss Julia's, then of the Normal school, and finally she lands in the Renfro household) keep her from forming a strong connection to any once place. We see in the text over and again that while a place in regional community is necessary, too strong of a connection can hinder a person's judgement and allow their critical thinking to be marred by misplaced loyalty.

Jack Renfro is a perfect example of the damaging potential of regional and familial obligations. When the couple reconnects with Judge Moody in the road to Banner, Gloria affirms this by saying, "Your honor, I'm here to tell you Jack Renfro's case in two words—home ties. Jack Renfro has got family piled all over him" (598). Jack is a good ole boy to the bone and cannot bear to think of living a life outside of Banner because it is all he has ever known. He also cannot create an individual identity for himself because he is inextricably linked to family and place. Gloria, on the other hand, articulates a desire to move beyond the parochial town of Banner and thereby leave behind its citizens' small-town mindsets. She mentions perhaps moving to Ludlow but is also open to the

[19] In his article, "Marrying Down in Eudora Welty's Novels," John Edward Hardy tells us that Gloria "prefers that [her biologicial parents] identity remain unknown because it gives her an advantage in asserting the truth and the superior right of her unique identity, which she would argue is not in anyone defined by either the genetic or the environmental influence of parents" (105).

possibility of moving somewhere new and untried, a place where she and her new family can forge a place completely their own.[20] Her identity is not defined by place, which she proves by declaring to Brother Bethune, "'I'm an orphan, sir,'[…] And Banner is not my home'" (536). Rather than be rooted by geography, Gloria is determined to stay true to her sense of self and forge her own path.

Nonplussed by others' mockery or derision, Gloria is unwavering in her resolution. This is not to say that she dismisses the opinions of others entirely. It is clear that there was a time in her life when she sought the approval of Miss Julia and perhaps even desired to be accepted by Jack's family at some level.[21] Still, she is not willing to sacrifice her principles to achieve either objective. Similarly, she is also not easily dissuaded once her mind is made up. These characteristics are most clearly exemplified in Gloria's altercation with Miss Julia Mortimer over Jack Renfro and later the younger woman's ensuing conflict over whether or not to attend her mentor's funeral. Though Gloria clearly values Miss Julia's high opinion, she is not hesitant to argue the point of Jack Renfro's worth

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[20] She's destined to join the ranks of the protégés of Miss Julia's that "'got up and left home'" who may eventually return "'from away'" once they've accomplished their plans in the greater world beyond Banner (866). She is therefore described repeatedly as looking to the future (877).

[21] Miss Julia's role in Gloria's formative years is foundational to who the young woman becomes. Without Miss Julia Mortimer, Gloria would never have gone to high school or gotten her teaching certificate. Gloria may have remained ambitious but a path to success would have been nearly impossible to achieve entirely alone.

with the older woman. When Miss Julia won't be persuaded, Gloria "'snapped the elastic band around my report, and took the roses she gave me with 'em, and went out of her house and into the spring, and took my road'" (688). Gloria knows she cannot convince Miss Julia that the sacrifice she is making is worthwhile, but at the same time she will not be talked out of the going her own way. Her path may not be of a "'wonderful teacher and lasting influence'" like Miss Julia's, but Gloria can say that her path shares the same intentionality that Miss Julia's had. Other than the elder teacher, Gloria is the only person in the novel who can claim that she "'took my road,'" in spite of the naysayers and obstacles in her path (688). Her agency, sense of identity and resolution make her unique in the text.

Gloria Short Renfro is easily the most dynamic member of this female-oriented community. She is the single character that moves from an outsider position to a core figure of the community. Gloria's trajectory from a "little nobody from out of nowhere'" to "'really and truly one of us," "one of the family […] tried and true," is a difficult journey (793). In order to gain access to the innermost level of community, Gloria must have the same resiliency as the women previously examined. We have seen that she is independent and strong-willed. She knows how to receive the opinions of others and still keep her own council. Now, the determining element that marks Gloria as the most dynamic

character in the novel *Losing Battles* is her ability to traverse the different stages of community and ultimately achieve admission into the innermost level of communion, sorority. In order to do this, Gloria must withstand initiation into the community of women in several stages. The first stage of initiation is becoming a part of the Banner community. We know from Miss Lexie's information that baby Gloria was surrendered in Medley, picked up by Miss Pet Hanks' mother, and taken to the Ludlow orphanage.[22] After seeing her excel in a spelling contest, Miss Julia Mortimer plucks Gloria out of the orphanage and "'coached that child'" until she is ready for high school and then to the Normal school for teachers. Once Gloria receives her two-year certificate, she is ready to take the helm of Banner school from Miss Julia. This is her first foray into the Banner community. Having been reared as an Outsider her entire life (both in a geographic sense--living in Ludlow, and a biological sense--she is assumed to be an orphan and have no ties to any kin), Gloria finds herself navigating the world of Banner as best she can. Her initial challenge is taking control of Banner school, a herculean task as we've learned, and one that she seems to relish. The reader gets a glimpse of Gloria's commitment to her new pupils and their education

[22] It is explained that, "'The home demonstration agent of Boone County come and out found her [baby Gloria] new-born on her front porch one evening'" (690). We know she's born in Medley because we hear that Rachel left Banner to have the baby and Miss Julia confirms it as well as Aunt Birdie, "You were found in Medley—that's walking distance of Banner School',"'If Mis' Hanks was the only soul in Medley that Rachel Sojourner knew well enough to speak to, that's the one she'd give her baby to. Wouldn't she?'" (688, 692).

when it is revealed that "Gloria wouldn't cross a dirt road herself to help a human fight free of his coffin" and instead continues "Teaching Sail On! Sail On!" in response to Jack and Curly's scuffle outside her classroom (463). She even manages to get Jack Renfro to attend school and receive passing grades by assigning him small tasks throughout the day and dedicating her hours to him after the school day is through.[23] Gloria manages to teach Banner School a full-year, during which time she boards with the Renfros, and after her year is complete she is ready to move into a deeper level of community.

Once Gloria is an accepted member of the Banner community and no longer considered a complete outsider, she undergoes another stage of initiation that moves her from member of the Banner community to member of the family. Gloria becomes "Mrs. J.J. Renfro" in a ceremony conducted by the then-patriarch, Grandpa Vaughn, "'Grandpa married us in Damascus Church and she's my wife, for good and all'" (786). This ceremony validates Gloria's identity as an honorary family member in several ways. First, the act of marriage is one of the rituals performed by the female community (with ceremonial male participation) that integrates a prospective member into their ranks. There is ceremonial

[23] When Miss Julia asks Gloria to describe her student suitor Gloria explains how she makes him drive the school bus, burn her trash, cut her wood, maintain the schoolhouse, raise the flag as well as any number of additional tasks she can think up "'and all the time I'm right behind him, teaching him'" (684).

clothing that must be worn, vows that must be given, and a high-ranking member of the community that must validate the experience. [24] Grandpa Vaughn is present for the ceremony, but the approval of Miss Beulah and Granny Vaughn is what really matters. This approval is not given until Gloria participates in two additional community ceremonies, one is giving birth, and the other is the infamous watermelon 'fight'.[25] The latter event takes place as a result of discovering that Gloria is not just an honorary family member through marriage, like Cleo or Mr. Renfro, but potentially a biological Beecham, and thereby member of the family through marriage and blood. This discovery gives way to a scene in the novel that is traumatic and somewhat problematic for readers. The watermelon fight is described in language that at best could be categorized as aggressive and unnecessary, and at worst sadistic and abusive.

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[24] Gloria declares that her wedding dress may be homemade, but it is not an old piece of goods and it is certainly not second-hand. Furthermore, though the Aunts make fun of "'old-timey looking'" sash, the "'wealth of material'" in the skirt, and the fact that the dress "'don't fit you very perfect,'" Gloria created her ceremonial garment with care (700-1). This fact is emphasized further when Lexie begins to hack at the garment in the name of mending the tear in the back gotten from Gloria's earlier adventure with Jack and Moody's Buick (708-723). Gloria withstands the abuse though there is frequent mention that the alterations are causing her physical pain (Ford, 30).

[25] We can infer that Granny gives birth to her many progeny by herself. With the exception of Jack's birth attended to by Dr. Carruther, Beulah's only assistant is Granny in the birthing of her children. Similarly, Gloria, "'had Granny,'" to assist her with Lady May's birth (698). Giving birth without the advantage of medical assistance is very much a rite of passage into the matriarchal hierarchy—it proves a woman's grit and necessary reproductive capabilities.

Laura S. Patterson and Sarah Ford help us navigate the complex coded pathways of this ceremonial initiation. Patterson approaches the text from an angle that examines the historical "rape complex" existent in the South as a perpetuation of racist and sexist agendas. She uses the lens of W.J. Cash's explanation of rape as "any assertion of any kind on the part of the Negro constituted in a perfectly real manner an attack on the Southern woman," to assert that this historical notion of rape is misleading in that "the original crime (whether real or imagined…)" of male-on-female violence in the form of rape is subsumed by a realm composed of ritualized masculine violence which 'degrades' the putative victim in yet another way: it renders her voiceless" (Cash qtd. in Patterson, 37; Patterson, 37). This is problematic because in the flurry of activity to apprehend the black male suspect of violence needed to justify white male's actuation of violence on the black body, the "female rape victim disappears entirely" (38). If we are to validate rape as "cultural ritual" in the historical Southern sense according to Cash, we essentially validate the abuse of black bodies and the silencing of female victims. Patterson details several ways to break free from the "rape complex" in literature. One way is to participate in storytelling while another is to participate in cleansing ritual in response to "ritualized rape," and finally the victim can transform herself "to become her

own savior" (55, 57). These modes of reclamation allow the victim to assert her own literary representation.

Sarah Ford argues that Welty "rewrites the narrative of violence in the watermelon scene to enable readers to see other scenes in the novel as acts of violence although the activities, such as sewing and nursing, are traditionally coded as feminine" and in so doing "complicates a simplistic model of male power/female oppression" (Ford, 24). Welty's description of violence at the hands of women towards other women highlights the "comic and ineffective nature of the male violence" in the novel while also allowing both female perpetrators and female victims to reverse narrative patriarchy. Though this act of violence is disturbing, it is also empowering within the text. Ford points out that the simulated rape does not silence Gloria the victim; rather she speaks out as soon as she is freed maintaining that she is not a Beecham and refusing to remove her wedding dress.[26] She may have been sullied by the seedy scene, but she is not silenced. Furthermore, the Beecham Aunts' simulated rape removes the threat of destructive racial and masculine violence heralded by Patterson. Unlike the actual rape of Rachel Sojourner by Dearman, a sacrificial black body is

[26] I agree with Ford's assertion that there are multiple acts of female-on-female violence in the text from the watermelon fight, to mending Gloria's tattered wedding dress, to the abusive nursing of Miss Julia, however my interest is primarily in this specific act of violence so I've chosen to address it in the singular sense.

not needed to fulfill the "cultural ritual".[27] Similarly, the attempted rape of Ella Fay results in the real, though comic masculine violence of Curly and Jack's altercation. Gloria's rape, therefore moves from the realm of the destructive into the realm of the constructive, even if the recipient of the simulated violence is still incensed the community allows her space to explore those feelings.

Sorority, unlike its mixed or all-male counterparts, does not use this ritual to ostracize members but rather initiate members into their company and in so doing co-opts a violent act and reforms it to counteract real-world violence. Gloria's birth may be the result of a rape, but her own ceremonial rape is actually a baptism into community. It is only after Gloria passes through this ritualistic rape/baptism that the entire family can declare, "You're one of the family now, Gloria, *tried and true*. Do you know what that means? Never mind! You're just an old married woman, same as the rest of us now. So you don't have to answer to the *outside* any longer" (793, emphasis mine). As a subsequent reward for surviving the initiation process and becoming a verified member of the Beecham family, and more importantly the female community, Gloria no longer has to seek validation from "'the outside any longer,'" nor does she need to explain

[27] For an insightful alternative reading of Rachel's pregnancy, as well as Welty's subversive and underlying Civil rights agenda in the text of *Losing Battles*, I would direct the reader to Rebecca Mark's, "A 'Cross-marked Ploughed into the Center': Civil Rights and Eudora Welty's *Losing Battles*".

herself to the family, her identity has been determined by her own ambition and strong sense of self and then subjected to the firing kiln so that the end result is a mature, well-rounded member of female community (793).[28]

The significance of the initiation process and the community that is created as a result cannot be overstated. Gloria's experience shows the reader that one is never free from the influence of community. Thus, the best acclimated individual needs to achieve balance between rejecting the community outright and fully drinking the watermelon kool-aid. Throughout the entirety of the novel Gloria is being affected by the community. This is true when she is searching for a home as an unclaimed orphan in Ludlow, completing her school days in Normal, serving time at Banner School and especially once she living in the Renfro's house. Regardless of the status of her paternity at any given time, the community around her is shaping her reaction and interaction with her world. As resistant as Gloria is to the encroachment of Beecham family values, she demonstrates the same brand of ferocious possessiveness over her own little

[28] It is very troubling to follow this line of argument. However, Patterson and Ford have established the pattern of destructive, real-world rapes taking place as a common theme in Southern literature. Thus, I see Welty working from inside a pre-existing phenomenon to subvert and reclaim an act for good. I don't think Welty, the critics I've cited, or I would ever advocate for this 'ceremonial rape' as I called it in the text, to be a preferred mode of initiation or something that is created purely by the author. However, when one acknowledges that Welty's novel is working within a prescribed framework with bounds enforced by the time, place, mode and genre one must contend with the "rape complex," and Welty has done so in the way she saw most fitting for her redemptive purposes.

family that Miss Beulah does over hers. She and Miss Beulah may often be at odds, but that seems to be a result of their similarities rather than their differences. Both women are fiercely protective over their families, and both women are used to having their commands followed. Similarly, they would each claim to have the best interest of their loved ones at heart. Yet, once Gloria becomes completely initiated into the female community, the evidence suggests that these two women will not always be at odds. Miss Beulah invites Gloria to join her as she takes off to witness the rescue of the Buick. The elder Mrs. Renfro even gives Gloria the credit for getting the Buick to the heights of Banner Top all by herself, which Gloria accepts. The women share sympathetic views on the necessity of directing their men. As the novel draws to a close, Gloria admits to Jack, "'One of these days I'm going to have to agree with your mother about something, Jack,'" (818).[29] The Beecham-Renfro women may have their disagreements, but they are stronger in sisterhood than outside of it. This, too, is a principle reinforced by Gloria's experiences in the novel.

In spite of her best efforts to remain separate from the varying degrees of community influence, Gloria cannot be effective outside of community. In the

[29] In the scene, Miss Beulah attributes the stranding of the Buick on Banner top as a "near perfect example" of "man-foolishness," which prompts Gloria to respond with the admission of sympathy to Jack (818).

novel, if a woman separates herself from the sisterhood of women, her fate is decided, and she will die alone. This dire sentence is the fate of both of Gloria's mother figures in the novel, Rachel Sojourner and Miss Julia Mortimer. Though the circumstances of each woman's departure from community are complex, the fact remains that each of them removed from community and lived out the end of their days in isolation, unable to fulfill their purpose. Rachel Sojourner seemed to have the same pride and determination that drives Gloria and yet, when she refuses the aid of her community, she dooms herself to a lonely end.[30] Likewise, Miss Julia refuses to bend the iron standard of her vision for Gloria's future to accommodate the young woman's wishes and consequently pushes her away. Miss Lexie shares an anecdote from her days nursing Miss Julia that give credence to the former teacher's crossroads. Miss Julia requests that a bell be brought to her bedside to which Miss Lexie responds, "'what is it you *want* that bell for? […] You want bring 'em, make 'em come? Or is this the way you're going to drive 'em off it they try? Make up your poor mind if the world is welcome or unwelcome. The world isn't going to let you have a thing both ways'" (718, emphasis Welty's). Though her stubbornness served her well in her

[30] Admittedly, Miss Julia is the only one the text directly portrays as offering help to Rachel and being rejected (695). However, one can assume from Aunt Nanny's willingness to take the baby Gloria, the elder Miss Hanks' actions in taking the child to safe haven, and the family welcome that would have been waiting from the Beechams if Rachel was engaged to Sam Dale.

time as a teacher, Miss Julia's rigidity of purpose drives a wedge in between her and her adoptive daughter, and she too expires entirely alone, without even Miss Lexie's lousy company at the end.

On the other hand, complete community assimilation can be just as toxic to a character, a diet of watermelon juice alone cannot sustain a body. Examples of female characters who have abandoned individual identities in favor of singularly communal identities are Miss Lexie and Miss Ora Stovall. These two women feed their identity and purpose on the community alone, and yet they are not fulfilled. Miss Lexie and Miss Ora are the spinster sisters of Mr.Renfro and Curly Stovall, respectively. Neither woman seems to have a fulfilling purpose in life and though each have abandoned lives of their own to fully submerse themselves in the lives of their families, (particularly their brothers) they are not respected or appreciated in those families. Miss Lexie's position in the Renfro/ Beecham family is on one of the lowest possible wrungs of the social hierarchy; only the children are lower. Unmarried and opinionated, Miss Lexie is constantly being contradicted or shushed by higher-ranking family members, particularly Miss Beulah. Though she cared for Miss Julia in that lady's dying days, it is apparent that the animosity between nurse and patient left much to be desired in terms of nurturing female relationship. At one point, Miss Lexie's warped attempts to administer to Miss Julia with "kind hands" reach a boiling

point when Miss Julia chucks Lexie out of her company declaring, "I want to die by myself, you everpresent, everlasting old fool" (723). Lexie's constant attention to others' lives and failure to mind her own means that aside from the yearly reunion, she does not have a home or, "elsewhere to go," as Miss Julia and Miss Beulah point out (719). Miss Ora Stovall's portrayal as a woman who is incomplete and ineffective in community may be troubling for some readers because on the surface she seems to one of the few entirely independent female characters in the novel. She describes herself thusly to Mrs. Moody, "I'm Ora Stovall, weigh more than I should, never married, but know how to meet the public, keep up with what's going on" (820). If this definition is to be believed, Miss Ora is an active member of the vibrant Banner community and should be applauded. However, it seems that her identity is limited in the sense that she is not a participant in community in any way, but rather a bystander.

Miss Ora writes for the local newspaper, the *The Boone County Vindicator,* and typically remains above the fray in any given situation so that she may better observe goings-on and eventually turn community happenings into stories for the paper (464). Even when Miss Beulah commands her to participate in the removal of the Moody Buick with the rest of the gathered community, Miss Ora abstains, saying, "'I'm going to put you in the paper and that's all!'" (825). Miss Ora conflates observing her community with partaking in it. From these

examples, one can glean the message of *Losing Battles* is that in order to be a healthy member of the community you must maintain a balance between total submersion in community and complete independence. A character must be aware of and secure in their own identity, but they must also be active participants in community life to be a well-balanced individual.

The future of Banner, therefore, lies in the hands of the next generation of women. There are several candidates for the imminent torch-bearer in the Beecham and Renfro families, but the most obvious choice for the role would be Lady May, the daughter of Gloria Short and Jack Renfro.[31] In, "'We're All Part of it Together': Eudora Welty's Hopeful Vision in *Losing Battles*," Stroup affirms that Welty's novel is not preoccupied with the outcome of battles inevitably lost, like poverty or mortality, but focuses instead on characters who "fight our battles with a fierce, indomitable spirit and an unquenchable sense of humor" (Stroup 44). Stroup also foresees that it will be the baby, Lady May who "will be one the to reconcile the idea and the oral tradition," the historical consciousness and mythical consciousness of Kreyling, the maternal/natural woman and the

[31] We can probably count out Ella Fay since it's clear that she's got her eye on a marriage with the villain Curly Stovall, or maybe an even more disastrous end, like becoming an unwed mother in the vein of Rachel Sojourner. Etoyle and Elvie may have a chance especially since Elvie is so dead-set on becoming a teacher that she makes Gloria recount every detail of her time in Normal school and she always seems to be up to mischief in the text which is a good sign of an independent mind (680-682).

individually ambitious woman, the allegorical beckoning and contemporary present (54).[32] Even her name "epitomizes the bringing-together of the 'well-matched foes.' She is a 'lady,' a term of civilization, and she is 'May,' the month when nature is bursting out in newness and fullness. She represents love in the coming-together of Jack and Gloria," who are themselves, disparate forces (54). Lady May has the benefit of coming into this world "'without blemish," to a mother who is determined to protect her from the malevolent elements of the world just as she shields her from the cruel rays of the country sun (Welty 524). Gloria wants to give Lady May the best of everything: her first dress is not "made of Robin Hood flours sacks, it was not handed down from Elvie. It was solid blue and had pockets" (524). She has a father who thinks the world of her and most importantly a community of women that will offer her multiple examples of meaningful participation, from her mother and grandmother to her aunts and neighbors. The text supports this reading from the first introduction of Lady May in Part 1,

> All at once Lady May Renfro, aged fourteen months, came bolting out into their midst naked, her voice one steady holler, her little new-calloused feet pounding up through it like a drumbeat. She had sat up right out of her sleep and rolled off the bed and come. Her locomotion, the newest-learned and by no means the gentlest,

[32] The quoted material in the sentence is from Stroup, but there is also reference to Kreyling's mythical consciousness, Prenshaw's natural woman/ambitious woman dichotomy, and Hagen's division between allegorical beckoning and contemporary present.

> shook the mirror on the wall and made its frame knock against the house like more company coming (475).

Like her spirited "soldier" of a mother, Lady May might be tiny, but she is by no means timid (868). The "drumbeat" of her approaching steps and the "steady holler" of her voice in her first appearance mark her as a character who has a disposition every bit as fiery as the red-hair she inherited from her mother. It is important to note, however, that Lady May's display of chutzpah does not mean that she is immune from improvement. Her mother is quick to reprimand her, "'Act like you know what you're here for, Lady May'" and to remind her "'Just you remember who to copy'" (476). The little girl responds by sitting still and quiet in the close circle of women on the family porch. These are the figures she should be copying, not the men with their ineffectual "man-foolishness," but the women, inside and outside this dynamic sorority with their collective wisdom and industry. Lady May might play a leading role in the mischief the family gets into on Banner road from running in front of the Moody's car to socking Jack in the eye, but she is also the "future" to which Gloria often refers and her security and opportunity are something for her parents to aspire to. Sarah Ford examines the idea that Lady May is the "new third term in the battle" between language and existence. Eudora Welty's intention that *Losing Battles* be a "pure talk story" where everything of significance is portrayed through "talk and action" alone, is

realized in Lady May Renfro.[33] Though her ancestry represented by the reunion is all talk and her community exemplifies error through action, Ford tells us that Lady May "is not fully part of either side," but enjoys "the inheritance of both" (Ford, 184). A "destabilizing" figure of indeterminacy, Lady May will usher in the "future" while continuing the "circle." Like the century plant's blossom appearing at the end of the reunion nurtured by the acts of community, Lady May will bloom into the beneficiary of the community's wisdom and experience, she will continue the circle of community into the next generation.

Thus, sorority, a dynamic community of women inside and outside of the nuclear family context will continue to direct the fictional world of Banner, Mississippi. As I move through my analyses in the next three chapters I will establish that Eudora Welty's creation of a vibrant female community is desperately needed for the tradition of women in literature to mature in the future. Additionally, I will explore how Welty's movement towards female community in fiction is born from a healthful environment of female community in her own life. I will then compare the vision of united female influence and strength seen in *Losing Battles* to the depiction of fractured identity that results when women are isolated and female community is denied by examining the

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[33] Taken from "'The Interior World': An Interview with Eudora Welty" conducted by Charles T. Bunting on 24 January 1972 and collected in *Conversations with Eudora Welty* (Prenshaw, 46).

trajectory of female protagonist, Alabama Beggs in Zelda Fitzgerald's *Save Me the Waltz.* In the fourth chapter I will compare the pattern of seclusion and mental instability demonstrated by Alabama Beggs to Fitzgerald's own personal and professional life. The contrast offered by these two authors, their work, and their inclusion or exclusion from female community will allow me to establish the necessity of community for women in the fiction we read and the lives we lead.

CHAPTER THREE

Alabama 'Beggs' for Self-Actualization: Community, Isolation, and Identity in Zelda Fitzgerald's *Save Me the Waltz*

Save Me the Waltz opens with the damning pronouncement: "'Those girls,' people said, 'think they can do anything and get away with it'" (Fitzgerald 9). This opening salvo against the self-determinacy of the Beggs sisters sets the tone for Zelda Fitzgerald's entire work. In the novel, the main character, Alabama Beggs Knight, is in a perpetual state of opprobrium, excoriation, and isolation. This censure comes from the prevailing popular culture, the social circles in which the story takes place, and even those friends and family members that inhabit the text with Alabama. The above quote is a perfect example of said censure. According to popular opinion, the Beggs sisters have little to no regard for the rules governing polite female behavior in the early twentieth century South, especially the youngest of the trio, Alabama. As the last child of Judge Austin Beggs, a social exemplar, Alabama has the audacity to believe at a young age that she may be able to enact some degree of control over the trajectory of her own life. With this opening line, the brazen expectation that life for Alabama can

hold more than the fulfillment of proscribed gender roles is questioned before readers even make it to the second sentence.

Zelda Fitzgerald's Alabama Beggs spends the entirety of *Save Me the Waltz* hunting desperately for an outlet that will allow her to foster and express her individual identity. She will explore and eventually reject family, place, and art as potential sites of self-expression. This chapter will explore how the failed and/or rejected community interaction available at each of these sites of identity will eventually lead to the fracturing and destruction of Alabama's identity and her ultimate isolation. Through this extended analysis I will demonstrate how the lack of supportive community interaction damages the formation of Alabama Beggs' identity. This analysis will then be used later in the project to compare this fictional representation of how absent community stunts Alabama's formation of identity with the reality of Zelda Fitzgerald's own absent community and subsequently stunted expression of identity and individuality.

Scholarly Voices: Critical and Biographical

In the scant scholarship surrounding *Save Me the Waltz*, biographers have gladly pored over material other literary critics have chosen to ignore. As a result, the body of work in Zelda Fitzgerald criticism is made up largely of biographical examinations of the author. Analyses both feminist and decidedly anti-feminist abound in the buzz that surrounds the historical and personal

conditions of Zelda Fitzgerald's fiction. Biographers Nancy Milford (1970), Kendall Taylor (2001), and Sally Cline (2002) take up the mantle of reading Fitzgerald's life from a feminist perspective but are mainly interested in probing the historical context of Fitzgerald's life with her husband F. Scott Fitzgerald, and less so with examining the parallels between her life and her fiction. As they are interested in chronicling the life of one of the more famed American women of the Jazz Age, biographers acknowledge to varying degrees Fitzgerald's artistic efforts, including her literary forays, as well as her efforts in ballet and painting. Tellingly, Fitzgerald's independent artistic efforts are rarely their priority. Approaching the biography from an alternative perspective, James Mellow narrows his critical focus to the events surrounding the marriage of Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald. Mellow's interest lies largely in Scott Fitzgerald's output rather than that of both Fitzgeralds. Possibly because there is more recorded material available on Scott Fitzgerald (both from his own meticulous provision in terms of records, as well as critical responses, correspondence, etc.), the biography has a telling slant towards the more famous member of the Fitzgerald couple.[1]

[1] James Mellow's *Invented Lives* does allot space to discuss Fitzgerald's writing endeavors, though he is largely dismissive of her career in ballet, he acknowledges some ability in her novel, but ultimately describes it as "a novel of showy brilliance, full of overwritten metaphors that the editors failed to prune and of glaring errors" (Mellow 400).

On the other end of the critical spectrum from authors like Kendall Taylor and Sally Cline there is the official Fitzgerald biographer, Matthew J. Bruccoli (1991). Bruccoli lends his specific critical lens to Fitzgerald's *Collected Writings*, as well as the re-published edition of *Save Me the Waltz*. In his afterword to Fitzgerald's novel, Bruccoli gives the reader a taste of a patriarchal interpretation of the relationship between famed husband and wife, professional and amateur writer, saying Fitzgerald's writing is "worth reading partly because anything that illuminates the career of F. Scott Fitzgerald is worth reading" ("Afterword" 206, qtd in Tavernier-Courbin 23). There is a clear pattern of de-valuation in these reactions to Fitzgerald's independent work. Largely, Scott Fitzgerald's biographers record Zelda Fitzgerald's individual literary efforts as an indulgence of the husband artist towards the increasingly eccentric and difficult wife.[2]

Still, a few critics, such as Susan Castillo and Linda W. Wagner, discuss *Save Me the Waltz* in terms of what it has to offer as an artistic endeavor.[3] Wagner feels as if *Save Me the Waltz* is both a tone poem and highly evocative picture of

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[2] That is with the exception of Henry Dan Piper, who gives a whole chapter to *Save Me the Waltz* in his biography of F. Scott Fitzgerald. Piper says SMTW "offers a more sensitive account of the deranged wife's view of her marriage than we find in her husband's version, *Tender is the Night.* An account that is, perhaps, not terribly flattering, but also refrains from being dismissive, and impulse that is not resisted by others of Scott's biographers.

[3] Though Wagner's article is more straight-forward about her assessment goals, Castillo's article endeavors in a similar way to justify the reading of Zelda Fitzgerald as a legitimate literary talent.

what it means to a female child to grow up, "to grow into the bleak recognition that being female in America is—or was at the turn of the century—synonymous with being inferior" (Wagner 201). This fictional portrait, Wagner affirms, is both a necessary 'cri de coeur' giving voice to the feminine struggles of the early twentieth century, as much as it is an intentionally stylized novel. Though original reviewers panned aspects of Zelda Fitzgerald's prose style, Wagner argues that "she knew how to write the way her husband did but she purposely chose to write the way *she* did" intentionally crafting a novel that is "haunting" in its ability to create images and suggest specific feelings (207). Susan Castillo finds Fitzgerald's prose to be less "a jazz bildungsroman,"[4] and more of a "surrealistic text" functioning within and against the confines of conventional autobiography (Castillo 60). Castillo argues that Fitzgerald's novel in its "startling association of images, its descriptions of objects as having a strange and at times sinister life of their own, its subversive sense of humor and parody, its juxtaposition of wildly dissimilar realms and discourses and categories" escapes from the realm of traditional autobiography and perhaps from conventional modes of fiction. Thus, Castillo argues that the novel stands out as an impressive work of fiction (62). Though both of these women laud *Save Me the*

[4] As Wagner would lead you to believe and is stated in Mary Gordan's introduction to The Collected Writings, p.xxi.

Waltz as an original and compelling work of fiction, each one also refrains from including much of the work itself in their assessments and depends instead on the conditions of the writer's life to prove their argument that her literary product is an extraordinary feat.

Four critics that mine the text for what it can illuminate about a specific historical or socio-cultural moment in time are Simone Weil Davis, Koula Svokos Harnett, Lisa Nanney, and Sarah Beebe Fryer. Davis, both in her article and in her extended cultural analysis of women's relationship to the advertising culture in the 1920s, looks to the broader historical and national setting to explain the trends playing out in Fitzgerald's texts.[5] Similarly, Lisa Nanney deals with the historical social pressures faced by an aspiring female artist in the South. Nanney contends that as a result of Fitzgerald's Southern upbringing and consequent social indoctrination there is an "inseparability of the text, its style and content, and its creator" that is the endemic paradigm of "female creativity" (221). For Nanney, Fitzgerald may be attempting to write a künstlerroman, but impeded by "nineteenth-century cultural values" she winds up penning a "Southern novel" through and through, and this restricts her fictional artist from achieving self-

[5] Simone Weil Davis published, "'The Burden of Reflecting': Effort and Desire in Zelda Fitzgerald's *Save Me the Waltz"* as an excerpt from her doctorate dissertation. Much of the article's substance and material is later adapted into a chapter in Weil Davis' book, *Living up to the Ads: Gender Fictions of the 1920s,* titled, "In the Tutu or out the Window: Zelda Fitzgerald and the Possibility of Escape."

actualization (226, 221). Koula Svokos Hartnett discusses the novel's creation as an addendum to a report otherwise focused on the psychiatric treatment Fitzgerald received from 1930 onward. Sarah Beebe Fryer uses the main character of Scott Fitzgerald's contemporaneous novel *Tender is the Night*, Nicole Warren Diver, as a comparison for Alabama Beggs Knight to indicate the ways in which each novel independently but similarly chronicles the momentous change taking place in the ideals that govern American womanhood at the time of their joint writing. Scott Fitzgerald's novel is widely considered a success and it is Fryer's contention that in light of the social implications shared by the two novels, Zelda Fitzgerald deserves to "be recognized at last as a spokeswoman for the women of her generation stranded between the old ideal of feminine subservience to men and the new ideal of equality" (Fryer 325).

In the remaining articles on Zelda Fitzgerald, scholars depend largely on the biography of the writer for their analyses. Jacqueline Tavernier-Courbin's defense of Fitzgerald's work is an insightful description of the destructive interference of Scott Fitzgerald on his wife's fiction. The article also functions to illuminate some additional categories under which a reader might file Fitzgerald's fiction: to künstlerroman, "Jazz bildungsroman," and surrealist autobiography add "a searching portrayal of a woman's soul," a fine depiction of "the world of ballet," and "a slightly fictionalized autobiography" (Tavernier-

Courbin 8). Mary Wood agrees with Tavernier-Courbin's suggested categorization of *Save Me the Waltz* as autobiography, but adds the caveat that to her it is an asylum autobiography that subverts conventions by refraining from the expected promotion of psychiatric methods and treatment and telling instead a story of mental illness from the patient's restricted lens. Wood's use of historical cases wherein psychiatrists urge their patients to pen their recovery narrative demonstrates a disturbing psychiatric appropriation on the part of a doctor towards patient that envisions treatment procedures interchangeably with the objectification and subjugation of female bodies. In order to make this argument, however, Wood relies heavily on correspondence between both Fitzgeralds and the many doctors that oversaw Zelda Fitzgerald's case, comparisons between Alabama Knight and Nicole Diver, as well as personal and historical accounts of Fitzgerald's hospitalization. Ultimately, Wood comes to a contradictory conclusion: *Save Me the Waltz* is an autobiography that "as a whole skirts the details of Zelda Fitzgerald's life" (259). Additionally, once Wood has categorized the novel as an autobiography that is not entirely autobiographical, she feels no obligation towards textual analysis in the stead of biographical facts. It is enough to establish that the women in these texts are suffering under the same repression as the woman writing the characters.

Once Wood and Tavernier-Courbin have pulled what they like from Fitzgerald's biography for dissection, they rest their pens and another critic takes up the mantle of biographical analyst. Alice Hall Petry sees Zelda Fitzgerald's life, and consequently her fiction, as one long campaign for domestic and artistic independence. In her article, Petry explores the parallels between Fitzgerald's life and her short fiction, often termed her "girl stories," and claims the "larger patterns of cause and effect, of frustration and denial, of thwarted ambitions and usurped achievements" can be seen in the way in which events in the author's life can be correlated with events in her fiction (Petry 69). Petry argues that the unhappy heroines in Fitzgerald's short fiction exemplify the reasons why the author herself was not satisfied in artistic expression via writing or ballet. In either of these careers, Petry says, Fitzgerald and her characters (for indeed the two parties are interchangeable in Petry's analysis) must navigate the mine fields that are "knotty problems about work and marriage" (74). In writing, Fitzgerald subjugates her work to her husband's editorial approval and must in fact share the credit with him.[6] In ballet, she develops an unhealthy fixation on disciplining

[6] Many references are made to Scott's destructive editorial oversight in Fitzgerald's fiction. Petry cites the fact that Scott is incorrectly assumed to be the sole author of "A Millionaire's Girl" because Harold Ober, Scott's literary agent, received Fitzgerald's manuscript with Scott's handwritten changes on it and just assumed his authorship (Petry, 79). However, Scott's role as editor is mentioned in almost every other piece of criticism as well: Bruccoli (Introduction to SMTW, 4), Castillo (58), Wagner (207), Tavernier-Courbin (25-26), Wood (253), Fryer (318), and Milford, Mellow and Cline on numerous occasions, with varying opinions on how much he did or did not interfere with Fitzgerald's writing process.

her body and on her ballet instructor[7] that will lead her towards a mental breakdown. It is only in painting, Petry posits, that Fitzgerald had the chance of finding "exactly what [she] had been looking for in all those years of writing fiction and studying ballet…," work that was "distinctly her own," "something tangible," a "purely individual effort" in which "the end product was the sole consideration for evaluation" (79). Thus, Petry dismisses the fiction of Zelda Fitzgerald completely.

The exception to this critical fixation on everything but the text of Zelda Fitzgerald's novel comes in an article by Courtney Salvey. Salvey's fascinating examination uses textual analysis to explore the ways in which *Save Me the Waltz* both adopts and attempts to subvert masculine subjectivity through the use of technology by female versus male characters in the text. Salvey does incorporate comparisons to *Tender is the Night* but maintains focus on the fictional material in her criticism. She argues that characters like David Knight adapt to the pattern of male dominance over technology depicted in Scott Fitzgerald's novels—a pattern that maintains patriarchal power by granting agency and subjectivity only to men. However, "as a ballerina, Alabama simultaneously assumes the

[7] Petry suggests that Fitzgerald might have been suffering Hebephrenia, as described by Thomas J. Stavola, as well as an unhealthy fixation on her real-life ballet instructor, Mme. Egorova (Petry 77).

technological pattern of masculine subjectivity and mimics the traditional female role as an instrument, thereby disrupting and subverting the machine of patriarchy" (Salvey 351). Still, Salvey feels that it is necessary to involve additional secondary material from Scott's oeuvre[8] to substantiate her claims, instead of allowing her incisive consideration of SMTW[9] to stand on its own.

Thus, with the exception of this single critic, the entirety of the available research on Zelda Fitzgerald's novel relies heavily on interpretations of the ubiquitous biographical and autobiographical material rather than the actual text of *Save Me the Waltz*. This is not censure of the thoroughly-explored, articulate, and informative research compiled by these readers and critics. Instead, this pattern is merely a substantiation of Mary Gordon's assertion that, "Whenever we read the work of women writers, we are tempted to go to the biography for illumination; when we read Zelda Fitzgerald, we feel the temptation as a duty" (Gordan xv). The allure of fame, beauty, tragedy, success, genius, and madness is easy to understand. Furthermore, a certain amount of biographical background is helpful, perhaps indispensable, in appreciating the feat achieved by a woman

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[8] Salvey compares depictions of technology in F. Scott's *Tender is the Night* and *The Great Gatsby* to the way in which Zelda depicts it in her fiction. I find this analogy necessary in Salvey's article as it helps to establish the parameters of her argument; however the inclusion of Scott's work does allow his presence to infringe upon the reader's evaluation of Fitzgerald's work if only at the beginning of the article.

[9] I will use this abbreviation to refer to the novel, *Save me the Waltz*.

in Zelda Fitzgerald's very unusual position. Yet, it is important that we read and respond to Fitzgerald's work as we would to any American author: examine it for meaning, explore the technical features and prowess utilized by the author, and assess the narrative on skill and content, rather than hunting through the prose for autobiographical parallels as if the novel were a literary scavenger hunt. Relying on these historical or biographical details without allowing the novel to speak for itself ignores Fitzgerald's intention and craftsmanship in her fiction by pushing aside the prose and forcing the author's real life to be at the forefront of the reader's consciousness instead. Wood asserts that Fitzgerald chose "not to tell explicitly the story of her illness and hospitalization" as a way to avoid being labeled, and consequently dismissed, "as a woman…mentally ill, play[ing] a part in a script written for her by husband and doctor" (Wood 248). This script would and does portray her as a one-dimensional grievance in F. Scott Fitzgerald's otherwise brilliant life. We grant this script priority when we diminish the textual material of *Save Me the Waltz* in favor of secondary biographical material. Moreover, the very "lush vocabulary and impressionistic structure" of the novel that drew so much criticism in contemporary reviews is by every indication intentional on the part of the author and one of the aspects that makes the novel unique (Wagner 207). Without incorporating analysis of

this "complexly metaphorical" language, the critic loses touch with what makes this novel distinctly feminine and remarkable (Tavernier-Courbin 31).

My argument looks to remedy this neglected aspect of criticism by exploring the novel's presentation of identity and isolation through the vehicle of community as it is experienced by Alabama Beggs Knight in *Save Me the Waltz* exclusively. I will attempt to refrain from the inclusion of biographical parallels throughout the analysis of the text. In allowing the fiction of Zelda Fitzgerald's novel to function independently, I aim to defend the integrity of the novel as a whole in and of itself, as well as to promote scholarly engagement with the text. This argument will exercise an understanding of community as integral to the development of the artist adapted from Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*.

Reading Fitzgerald under the Framework of Woolf's Prescribed Feminine Communities

In her essay on the subject of "women and fiction," Virginia Woolf maintains that the only conclusion she can draw about the relationship between the two is: "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (4). These two requirements are necessary in order for women to achieve the independence and leisure to write fiction in a manner comparable to their male counterparts. These two factors greatly increase the likelihood of success for any artist, but especially the female author in the twentieth, and arguably twenty-first, century. A source of financial security that is not dependent on

securing and pleasing a male spouse, nor on one's physical labor, enables a writer to secure those materials necessary to his or her endeavors without accruing additional obligations.[10] In Woolf's estimation a woman's role has historically been "as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size," in other words, as the source of confidence and empowerment for male figures (35). As a necessary element in the male sense of superiority, women may not seize upon independence of thought or action at the risk of diminishing male perception of self. Should a woman overcome these seemingly insurmountable odds then she still needs a space to marshal her powers and give unflinching attention to her work. Social pressure and expectation cannot force a female artist to maintain her usual domestic position. She cannot be sequestered in the kitchen, busied in the laundry room, or sentenced to mandatory accessibility in a sitting-room where children, visitors, spouses, and others can interrupt her at every inopportune moment. Zelda Fitzgerald's text, it bears mentioning, meets these requirements.

[10] Woolf gives the example of a fictional character Mrs. Mary Seton who is not allowed to enter the library or dormitory or classrooms at Oxbridge because she has no endowment awaiting her at college. What's more should she, or the generations of women before her, have believed a woman should have the right to an education and attempted to amass "great wealth and laid it under the foundations of college and library," it would have been impossible. Woolf argues that the very idea's unrealistic nature saying, "in the first place, to earn money was impossible for them, and in the second, had it been possible, the law denied them the right to possess what money they earned" up until the 1860s (Woolf 23).

Alabama and David Knight become wealthy from David's work as an artist, and, as we will see, Alabama manages to seize, if briefly, a space that can act as retreat and refuge; the ballet studio.[11]

Yet, I believe there is a third element in Woolf's recommendations to the female artist that goes frequently overlooked. That element is community. More to the point, Woolf implies in her testimonial that intimate female community is imperative for the female artist. In her research into the portrayals of women in fiction, Woolf finds that "All these relationships between women, I thought, rapidly recalling the splendid gallery of fictitious women, are too simple. So much has been left out, unattempted" (86). Woolf has the revelation that "all the great women of fiction were, until Jane Austen's day, not only seen by the other sex, but seen in relation to the other sex. And how small a part of a woman's life is that" (86). This simplistic rendering of women isolated from one another and brought to the forefront only as the object of the male gaze struck Woolf, as it should strike every reader, as senselessly restrictive. As Woolf observes,

[11] Tavernier- Courbin notes acerbically about Fitzgerald's productivity at the Phipps Clinic in February of 1932, "Apparently, Zelda Fitzgerald never functioned so well as when she was away from Scott" (26). It is well documented amongst biographers that Fitzgerald felt this time without her husband's supervision allowed her to write her manuscript unmolested. Nancy Milford discusses how Scott Fitzgerald's outrage at his wife and her psychiatrist for sending the manuscript to Scribner's without his approval turns to nasty talk about how Scott's money supports all of Zelda Fitzgerald's trivial artistic pursuits by maintaining her in the asylum, etcetera. (185 170).

"Sometimes women do like women" (86). Therefore, statements like: "Chloe liked Olivia" should not strike readers as revolutionary sentiments (86). Woolf reminds us that often women are more than "mothers and daughters," they move beyond the "confidantes" of Greek tragedies, they can experience emotions other than romantic love (86). Moreover, women with complex emotions depicted in various pursuits can, Wagner tells us, "help other women find their strengths" (Wagner 204). Woolf correctly deduced that it is when women interact with one another outside of archetypal proscriptions that they become completely realized human beings. It is in woman's interaction with other members of her gender that "Woman becomes much more various and complicated" (Woolf 87). Within a gender-inclusive community, women may explore and grow into a vast number of varied and interesting roles in relative safety. Thus, I argue that in addition to the more concrete financial considerations required for the female artist, Woolf recommends empathetic female community. With this endorsement in mind, we turn to the text to examine the ways which female community is imperative to achieve a sense of identity for Alabama Beggs Knight. I will examine three sites that have the potential to function as healthy sites of community interaction: nuclear family, marriage and community abroad, and artistic community. I will also analyze the

ways in which these communities are insufficient and are ultimately rejected by Alabama over the course of the novel.

Breaking the Molds of Family Community

Even as a young girl Alabama Beggs displays a pronounced interest in her own identity. In addition to this burgeoning sense of self, she exhibits a streak of stubbornness and is often depicted as challenging accepted behaviors. As a result of these characteristics, we see that from the very beginning Alabama is seeking a space where she might be able to cultivate her idea of self. Fitzgerald describes Alabama to the reader thusly: "live eyes of a soft wild animal in a trap peered out in skeptic invitation from the taut net of her features; lemon-yellow hair melted down her back. She dressed herself for school with liberal gestures, bending forward to watch the movements of her body" (13). In this description, the reader gets the sense of the quick intelligence housed in the young girl's tousled head, portrayed by her "live eyes" and "skeptic invitation," while simultaneously being made aware that restrictions already govern her life, she is after all described as a "wild animal in a trap" (13). Inquisitive about herself, as many children are, Alabama asks her mother to "'tell me about myself when I was little'" (11). Millie Beggs, however, has little to offer her daughter beyond, "'you were a good baby'" (11). We see immediately that Alabama is at a disadvantage when it comes to determining her identity because, as the text tells

us, "the girl had been filled with no interpretation of herself, having been born so late in the life of her parents that humanity had already disassociated itself from their intimate consciousness and childhood had become more of a concept than the child" (11). Still, this does not stop Alabama from attempting to assemble a sense of self from family history and acute observations. She asserts a will that would not have been bowed by her grandmother's reproaches and envisions herself as an active part in the phenomenon of family affairs (12). Headstrong and precocious, Alabama announces at the age of thirteen that she need not attend school any longer because as she states it simply, "I seem to know everything" (Fitzgerald 15).

What Alabama does not know is that the cards are stacked against her. Not surprisingly, the climate of the South at the dawn of the twentieth century is inhospitable towards young women who wish to separate themselves from the entrenched system of patriarchy and repression experienced by the generations of women that have come before them and in so doing stake some piece of themselves for themselves. For example, the opening line of *Save Me the Waltz* reveals that the townsfolk deliver a chorus of disapproval in regard to the Beggs girls' behavior, giving credence to this impression. Lisa Nanney explains, "even in the early twentieth century, the South in many ways still clung to its antebellum identity" (Nanney 227). Aspects of that antebellum identity, such as

the turn-of-the century cultural values that form the foundation of the Beggs' family, will inevitably have negative repercussions for the artistic heroine of the novel.

I will begin my examination of failed community sites with the first locus of community many humans ever experience, the family. By examining the interactions of the Beggs family I will show how community is denied to Alabama through the patriarchal commodification of women, as well as through the matriarchal example of adhering to prescribed gender roles. Virginia Woolf rightly identifies money and space as two required elements for female expression and exploration of identity. In the following section I will show the reader how, far from giving his artistic daughter the funds and space recommended, Judge Beggs will view his female offspring as opportunities to bring financial gains into the family. Furthermore, just as Alabama's father rejects Woolf's advice concerning space and funds, Alabama's mother will reject Woolf's advice to expose young artistic women to complex female relationships. Far from breaking with the stodgy expectations of Southern femininity, Millie Beggs will demonstrate to her impressionable youngest daughter that a woman can only hope to achieve status and recognition by conforming to tired domestic tropes and by refusing complex female relationships. Inevitably, as Alabama

grows in her pursuit of identity she will have to break with this first site of failed community and leave her family behind.

The fictional colossus that is Judge Beggs casts such an immense shadow in the narrative that his specter can be seen throughout the entirety of the novel. A presence in the life of his town, as much as he is in the life of his family, he is described at once as "genius," "inapproachable," in possession of a "cerebral laboratory," a "fine mind" with an acute sensitivity to social improprieties and a spartan sense of economy and decorum (1, 10, 16, 19, 27). The Judge is the epicenter around which all activities in the family revolve. He is such a force of nature that even time seems to be governed by his departure and arrival (14). Operating in proximity to such a force creates somewhat of a personality vacuum for the other members of the Beggs family. In the Beggs household, the word of Judge Beggs is indisputable, as good as holy command. Yet, the otherworldly intelligence of the good Judge is often not amenable to the minutiae of daily life, such as the preferences and budding personalities of his daughters. Ergo, conflicts arise from time to time in the family but are quickly and coldly contained before the equilibrium of the Judge's routine becomes unbalanced.

An example of the Judge's iron will is seen in the case of Dixie's unsuitable paramour, Randolph McIntosh. Dixie is the oldest of the Beggs' sisters. At twenty-five, Dixie is the social reporter for the town newspaper, has

several admirers, and is completely helpless to sway her father's judgment in favor of the likable but unbefitting McIntosh. Though Mrs. Beggs asserts that Dixie is a "grown woman," and despite Dixie's own pronouncement that, "'I make my own living and I'll do as I please,'" when the Judge declares that Dixie's beau is not to darken his doorstep anymore, Dixie dares not disobey him (14). Sure, she pushes the envelope and continues to speak to "'Dolph" on the phone and see him out on the town, but when her father finally puts his foot down the young woman ultimately, if tearfully, abides by the Judge's rules. Shortly thereafter, Dixie goes to New York and marries an Alabama man, whom the reader is to understand is a more acceptable match. Once she is satisfactorily wed, Dixie returns home for a last brief appearance and then unceremoniously fades from family consciousness and the narrative altogether. We will return to this disappearance after further consideration below, but first we need to address the actions taken by the Judge in Dixie's marriage plot.[12] What is curious in the Judge's dealings with his oldest daughter is that he rarely, if ever, speaks directly to his child. Rather than engage Dixie openly, the Judge often communicates his will through Millie or Randolph. On one occasion he even delivers his censorious

[12] Boone explains how the concept of a Marriage Plot is a narrative device that picks up popularity during the Renaissance but that continues well into the Victorian Era as an effective way to motivate and force interaction between protagonists, by constructing romantic interest between the female protagonist and her male counterpart

ruling on Dixie's relationship to the entire family, yet he never speaks to the offending daughter in particular. This lack of communication indicates that the Judge does not deign that his daughter is a self-possessed individual and thus does not find it necessary to speak to her on matters pertaining to her future.

The same willful failure to communicate is present in the Judge's relationship with his daughter Joan. Joan, the second oldest Beggs daughter who, according to Alabama's assessment, is "so orderly that she made little difference," also experiences some love entanglements of her own (14). Committed to Acton, a man of social standing and financial security in Kentucky, Joan entertains the charismatic Harlan while still living at home. Harlan, poor but charming, takes Joan on walks accompanied by Alabama, sends "roses on Sundays," and grieves his "unsatisfactory" status (26). Joan, called Joey by the family, is, by all indications, smitten by Harlan with the "serious voice like an organ," but she does not allow herself to follow her personal preference when it is clear that the Judge is "glad she's going to marry Acton" (24, 28). Trying to make sense of Joan's choice to marry Acton when she clearly is in love with Harlan, Alabama, "supposed that Joan had to do the right thing and have the right things" (27). This equivocation of material possessions with an appropriate life choice is clearly an understanding handed down by Judge Beggs to his daughters. Rather than have Joey "starting over where the Judge and Millie had

started" sans "racehorses to pull her background for her like Millie's father had had," it is clear that the priority is for Joey to make a match who is "well able to give you clothes and a good home and all you will be needing in life" (24, 27). Having little to do with the rearing of his children, the Judge seems to weigh in only when it comes time for his daughters to make an acceptable life match, and even then, his main contribution is to assert that a match's acceptability is measured purely in terms of capital.

The Judge is an isolated figure in the text. The narrator tells us that the Judge does not associate with his peers because of his exceedingly unique mind (19). He considers the girls to be "Millie's children," whom he loves with a "detached tenderness," but who frequently try his nerves (10). Even Mrs. Beggs, who seems to be his sole companion, does not dare counsel him, but rather is governed by him. This is the figure of irreproachable standing that is held up to the girls and their beaus as the standard by which one should measure themselves. This places an insupportable pressure on the Beggs' children, particularly Alabama. Searching to define herself in relation to familiar figures, Alabama cannot carve a spot for herself in her father's shadow. Instead "Alabama, came to realize that the bones of her father could indicate only her limitations" (11). That the Judge's massive presence will eventually have a negative effect on his offspring is revealed on the very first page of the novel:

> By the time the Beggs' children had learned to meet the changing exigencies of their times, the devil was already upon their necks. Crippled, they clung long to the feudal donjons of their fathers, hoarding their spiritual inheritances—which might have been more had they prepared a fitting repository. (Fitzgerald 9)

Judge Beggs' presence in the text, though it offers security and parameters at times, ultimately stunts the development of his children who cannot experience personal growth in his shadow.

Once Dixie's marriage has been satisfactorily achieved, "Joan had attained her right to the family spotlight" (23). As soon as she has been whisked away, Joan is written out of the family consciousness like Dixie before her. The painfully practical Judge Beggs views his daughters as loose ends that must be managed until they are ready to be tied off by entering into prudent marriages. Alabama gives witness to this fact as Judge Beggs parts with Joan:

> They put them on the train at midnight. Joan didn't cry, but she seemed ashamed that she might. Walking back across the railroad tracks, Alabama felt the strength and finality in Austin more than ever. Joan was *produced* and nourished, and *disposed of*; her father, in parting with his daughter, seemed to have grown the span of Joan's life older; there was only Alabama's future now standing between him and his complete possession of his past (Fitzgerald 29, emphasis mine)

According to the Judge's way of thinking, his daughters are a product. The idea that Joan was "produced" and then "disposed of" reduces her agency in her life to that of an object of capital, and if and when she steps out of line her indiscretion is judged as a hindrance to obtaining capital (29). In other words, her

agency is non-existent. The text corroborates this idea of the Beggs daughters as manufactured pawns when the reader is told that it is the Judge's wisdom, alone, that is responsible for the very existence of the female members of his family: "Alabama's father was a wise man. Alone his preference in women had created Millie and the girls. He knew everything…" (28). If the very being of the Beggs sisters is contingent upon the will of their father, then it is not surprising that all of the subsequent actions they undertake would also fall under his jurisdiction. Therefore, Judge Beggs does not consider Joan's marriage to be something that defines her individual life but thinks of it rather as something that contributes to his life's completion. In fairness to the Judge he is "gentle with Joan," if woefully dense, when it comes to light that she does not want to marry Acton (27). Still, this moment of empathy is fleeting as he quickly resolves what he readily believes to be at the root of Joan's reservations—concerns over the size of her trousseau—and then refrains from any further contact with the feelings of his child.

The effect this parental approach has on Alabama is not immediately visible. Desperate as she is to determine "the substance of herself," she grabs wildly at "family characteristics that she too must have in her" if only because "It was nice to have indications about yourself to go on" (23). At this formative time in her life, Alabama witnesses the unhappy marriage of convenience of not one,

but both of her sisters, orchestrated by the man in whom she has been trained to have the utmost faith, her father. Alabama is already aware as a preteen that, "Her father didn't know what she was really like" and yet she also feels "the necessity of being something that you really weren't" in order to appease the Judge (25). If Alabama is to learn by the example of her sisters, she will learn that personal preference, sense of identity, and most of all, agency over one's own life is to be sacrificed to the will of the patriarch.

Since the Judge does not view his children as individuals but rather extensions of himself, he does not equip them with the skills that would allow them to formulate separate, inviolable identities within the family community. As a result, Alabama will have to contend with this hole in her self-identification for the remainder of the novel. Early on, she begins seeking a "show to join," hoping that "she would have a place, inevitably—somewhere to enact the story of her life," an impulse that will eventually lead her to abandon her father's home (24). Judge Beggs' inclination to commodify his daughters means that not only is Alabama denied the financial support and space she needs to achieve Woolf's vision for the artist, but also that the young woman will have to overcome the conception instilled by her father that her self-worth is irrevocably tied to her ability to forge a profitable marital alliance. Thus, Alabama leaves her father's shadow only to fall under the darker shade of her husband's identity.

The responsibility of creating a familial identity for Alabama to draw on does not rest solely with the Judge. A definitive piece in any family community is the mother figure. This holds true in the Beggs family. Where the Judge impedes his daughter's identity by being too strong a personality to contend with, Mrs. Beggs has a similarly harmful effect on her young daughter's sense of self by modeling a complete lack of individual identity. Millie Beggs' most pronounced characteristic is her extreme distaste for, and avoidance of, confrontation. Mrs. Beggs' is described as someone who "never had a very strong sense of reality," "unable to form a judgement of people" equipped with an "unalterable optimism" she becomes an "emotional anarchist" who allows her children the reins if it will ensure their complicity in maintaining peace in their father's household (10, 16). Millie Beggs is the quintessential paragon of Southern womanhood who lives her life as a testament to upholding the status quo.

Though it is mentioned frequently by Alabama, it is not Millie's collusion with Judge Beggs that gives her character domestic importance. Her most important characteristic is her social currency. This facet of Millie's character profile is understated, but it reinforces what we have learned about the commodified nature of family in the Beggs household. As we explored with Judge Beggs and his betrothed daughters, women are only as good as an object of capital to be gifted to eligible men thereby increasing their property. Thus, in

the materialistic world of the novel the reader is meant to admire the captive aristocratic air about Millie Beggs. She is described as a fine treasure, a worthy possession of any man, but captured by the Judge alone. Alabama describes her mother working in the garden as a "chatelaine ministering to a needy peasant" (21). Interestingly, this description can pull double duty as both the whimsical detail attributed from loving daughter to doting mother (the kind of proto-typical female relationship Woolf bemoans as too simplistic), as well as a metaphor for Millie Beggs' role in the Beggs family. Despite the obstacles that face the Beggses, like the poverty that hovers at the edge of the family's reality throughout the first portion of the novel, Mrs. Beggs remains steadfastly patrician. Mrs. Beggs seems to have come from money,[13] and one of her main purposes in the Beggs household is to act as social endorsement and adornment next to the name and status Austin Beggs has created for himself as a Judge in a large regional community.

As a result of her fine breeding, a cool detachment belies all of Millie's interactions. She does not worry when Alabama throws a fit over her dress

[13] In the first paragraph of the Joan section I have included a portion of the text reference that implies this. The full quote says, "Harlan knew how to ingratiate himself personally; it was his status that was unsatisfactory. Marrying him would have meant, for Joan, starting over where the Judge and Millie had started, and Austin didn't have racehorses to pull her background for her like Millie's father had had" (Fitzgerald 24). Millie's father owned racehorses and though Judge Beggs was poor when he married Millie, her father's financial stability vouched for their social credibility.

specifications, she soothes Judge Beggs when his tremendous responsibilities get him down, and most importantly, she maintains the household status quo. Millie does not seem to have a vested interest in the details of her daughter's love affairs; she is equally affable to Joan's competing love interests, Acton and Harlan.[14] Nor does she pay much attention to worldly concerns such as the money worries that plague her husband. On the contrary, "She just lived from day to day" (43). Admittedly a sweet and likable character in the first portion of the novel, there is a marked indeterminacy about Millie Beggs' personality that allows her to be a presence in the novel without leaving much of an impression on the reader. Her presence in the Beggs family may be unobtrusive, but the reader should make no mistake: Millie will leave a large and detrimental scar on her youngest daughter through her domestic example.

As a wife, Millie Beggs is tireless in her attentions to her husband. She listens as he rails against their daughters' wild ways, patiently endures his anxiety over money, as well as his disappointment in the loss of their only son in infancy. Loyal to a fault, Millie dedicates her life to doing any number of mental acrobatics necessary to have a positive outlook on her husband and their

[14] For example, she feints ignorance over Joan's engagement to Acton though Alabama testifies that they both had witnessed Joan making vows to Acton in the front yard one stormy night. She is kind to Harlan when he has to take his leave of the ladies but is also quick to point out that "'You're just a baby…to care. There'll be others'" (Fitzgerald 28).

children, "shifting her actualities to conform to their inconsistencies" in order to preserve her "saintlike harmony" (10). She is not ruffled when Austin Beggs treats her with "cruelty" because she is dedicated to the idea of his "just and noble character" (10). Millie doggedly stands guard over her husband's work time even if that means sacrificing her own comfort: "perforce and unreluctantly" she "took her children out of bed at three o'clock in the morning and shook their rattles and quietly sang to them to keep the origins of the Napoleonic Code from being howled out of her husband's head" (10). It is evident from these passages that Millie Beggs exists largely to provide comfort for her husband. The reader will see this wifely example re-assert itself in the early stages of Alabama's marriage to David Knight. This model of preferential spousal treatment is something Alabama suffers under in her nuclear family community as well as something that will impede her life in her own future family. Yet, it is not just in marriage that Millie capitulates her individual self; she is equally yielding in motherhood.

As a mother, Millie Beggs is endlessly indulgent of her children. Generous with her time and energies, and especially prone to forgive their inadequacies, Millie could be accurately described as spoiling her children rotten. For example, when an acquaintance brings to Millie's attention, "that she had never seen a more troublesome brood in her life than those children," Millie responds simply,

"If my children are bad, I have never seen it" (10). Since Millie assumes the majority of the parenting burden, while simultaneously being at the beck and call of a demanding husband, it is not surprising that she allows herself the delusion that "All my children were sweet children," when by all indications they were hellions (11). Millie is not entirely alone in the execution of this duty, however. A brief textual aside reveals that Millie had help rearing her children: "Incubated in the mystic pungence on Negro mammies, the family hatched into girls" (10).[15] However, little credit is allotted to the help who undoubtedly eased the strain of child-rearing for both Millie and Austin Beggs. Nonetheless, Millie acts as a model of self-sacrifice for her daughters, demonstrating how a woman's

[15] Like the problematic absence of black characters in *Losing Battles*, the lack of black representation in Fitzgerald's SMTW is worth noting here. For a novel set firmly in 1930s-era South it is impossible to think that Fitzgerald's Beggs family would not daily encounter members in their community that were a part of the well-established Southern African American population. Several explanations could be pursued to explain Alabama Beggs' complete omission of three-dimensional black characters in her experience. One explanation would posit that as a self-involved adolescent, Alabama did not take notice of the members of her community that made her way of living possible (such as the negro mammies reference in the passage above), but simply took their presence for granted as an aspect of the comfortable lifestyle provided by her wealthy white parents. Another explanation would argue that much of Alabama's adult years (the time in her life when she has developed an independent consciousness from that of her parents and the South) are spent in Europe where racial tensions exist, but are much less likely to require national and subsequently personal attention. However, here again the most likely explanation is that Alabama, and Fitzgerald by extension, suffer from the same malady that will still plague Eudora Welty three generations later: they experience the world and thus describe it through what Morrison classes as the lens of American Africanism. In other words, black characteristics, mannerisms, and stereotypes are all adopted and used when it suits the white writer/narrator, but three-dimensional black characters—figures that are representative of the realities of the black experience in America during this specific time and place—are entirely left out.

individual needs are always secondary considerations to the needs of her husband and family.

As part of her indulgence of her children, Millie participates in the circumvention of her husband's rules to an extent. For example, she suggests that Dixie write her forbidden beau to schedule a rendezvous outside of the house, she takes Joan's side when the girl protests to eating crabs at dinner, and even though "Alabama quarreled with Judge Beggs about her collection of bric-a-brac" from her numerous military suitors, "Millie laughed and told her daughter to keep all those pins; that they were pretty" (16, 29, 37). Millie's leniency in the face of the Judge's stern consternation creates an unstable environment for her daughters. Her permissiveness is surely born of love for her children and an impulse to compensate for their father's neglect, yet it too ruins the girls. Unwilling to stand up to their father outright, Millie actually harms the girls more with her little intrigues and collusions because she keeps them hoping though she knows ultimately their father will forbid their matches.

Even more damningly, Millie babies Alabama to such an extent that she becomes "the wildest one of the Beggs" by the time she is the last child in the house (32). Largely ignored by her father and allowed to run rough-shod by her mother, by the age of seventeen Alabama is "a wild Comanche" who prides herself on her ability to "give a damned good show" (33, 32). Here too, is a

pattern that will repeat itself in Alabama's life when she becomes a mother to her daughter Bonnie. Millie Beggs has good intentions, but her children need structure and intentionality to flourish. Instead, Millie substitutes intentionality with indulgence and structure with a dangerous amount of freedom. This negligence will harm Alabama in the same way that her father's overpowering presence did; both cripple the child from developing a sense of self that is borne of emotional maturity and acceptance of responsibility.

The familial examples provided to Alabama Beggs by her father, two sisters, and mother will ensure a life stunted by warped domestic expectations and an identity that is only half-formed. Alabama, who wants to "be my own boss" by escaping to New York, may have been born with charm, perhaps even skill, "'The child has talent,' they said, 'it should be cultivated,'" is taught that her desires must be kept secret and will often be sacrificed to the superior desires of a patriarch (20, 17). The family example leads Alabama to have a precociously somber outlook on love:

> Being in love, she concluded, is simply a presentation of our pasts to another individual, mostly packages so unwieldy that we can no longer manage the loosened strings alone. Looking for love is like asking for a new point of departure […] another chance in life […]she made an addendum; one person never seeks to share the future with another, so greedy are secret human expectations (30).

Unable to reconcile disparate impressions of love she is offered, Alabama forms the opinion that a person does not enter into love selflessly, but rather in the

hopes of assigning the burden of one's personality and past to a helpmate. In Alabama's mind, humans do not want to build a future together they want to relinquish responsibility for their past to someone else. So, Millie is correct that, for Alabama, being her own boss "isn't a question of places," because regardless of her location, Alabama is taught by everyone in her familial community to surrender her own agency (20).

Unsurprisingly, Alabama feels like she must reject her familial community if she is going to have any chance to create an identity based on her own rules. As the First World War begins, she recognizes her opportunity to sever her family ties:

> With adolescent Nietzscheanism, she already planned to escape on the world's reversal from the sense of suffocation that seemed to her to be eclipsing her family, her sisters, and mother. She, she told herself, would move brightly along high places and stop to trespass and admire, and if the fine was a heavy one—well, there was no good in saving up beforehand to pay it. Full of these presumptuous resolves, she promised herself that if, in the future, her soul should come starving and crying for bread it should eat the stone she might have to offer without complaint or remorse. Relentlessly she convinced herself that the only thing of any significance was to take what she wanted when she could. She did her best. (32)

This excerpt proves the argument that the example her family has put before her has irreparably damaged Alabama's perspective on life. The young girl senses that her family, specifically, "her sisters and mother," are being suffocated and eclipsed by a will that is not their own (32). What is more, her presence on the

"high places" as a "trespass" that will result in the paying of a "heavy fine" shows the reader that Alabama has fully absorbed the idea that young women are not meant to experience life unfiltered by male protection (32). That Alabama feels that the only way she will gain access to these life experiences is by making a devilish bargain that would allow her to sample freedom by agreeing to the punishment of her soul afterwards speaks to the notion that she has not understood that she has the ability to be self-governing. She need not agree to punishment. She need not sever her soul and her desires. She need not sacrifice her sense of self in order to achieve a degree of freedom. Yet, in Alabama's mind the only way to escape her familial fetters is to do as Dixie and Joan have done before her and exit the family through marriage. As a married woman out from under the shelter of family, Alabama imagines that "her life would be different with her parents so far away" that "no power on earth could make her do anything […] anymore, except herself" (44). Yet she is inadequately prepared to be self-determining and instead of finding excitement or relief in her new freedom, she is "frightened" at the thought (44). So it is that Alabama trades the stifling identity of Judge Beggs' youngest daughter, only to assume the identity of her new husband, David Knight, by becoming "Miss Alabama Nobody" (32,

39).[16] Family community, though it is Alabama's first site of interaction, fails to offer her the appropriate guidance and encouragement she needed to form a strong sense of self and thus ill-equipped she moves to the next site of community, marriage and public community.

Community with David and the Expatriates

As a reaction to the failure of her private familial life to fulfill the role of community support and affirmation she seeks, Alabama pursues a community that combines private and public life in a volatile mix of publicity and conjugal melodrama. Alabama marries the artist David Knight in an attempt to create an identity for herself completely void of any tie to her socially restrictive life in the South. The allure of David's newly discovered fame and the offer of unbounded community that becomes accessible to her as a result of her celebrity marriage initially thrills Alabama. However, as the boundaries of privacy disintegrate, the

[16] It is worth mentioning here that Mr. and Mrs. Beggs react to the departure of their last child with a mixture of relief and resignation that perfectly encapsulates their feelings towards Alabama. Austin puts Alabama on the train with a simple, "Good-bye, Baby" (42). He then returns home to Millie and their empty house and thinks to himself, "It was his house at last" (43). Right on the heels of this statement, one that would paint the Beggs' as glad to be rid of their youngest, most troublesome child, Mr. Beggs predicts that without Alabama's nonsense to keep him active he will leave Millie a widow in a year's time. Millie rejects this as a piece of nonsense and the first part of the novel closes with Millie and Austin going to sleep in their "pleasant house," "two old people alone," thinking but not acknowledging aloud, "It was awful, though for the family to lose Alabama, because she was the last to go and the meant their lives would be different with her away" (43). This doesn't exactly express sadness over Alabama's departure, but it does acknowledge that her absence will cause her parents some degree of discomfort.

reader witnesses a concurrent disintegration in Alabama's selfhood. Increasingly, Alabama becomes defined by her relationship to David, and David becomes defined by his economic and artistic status. This development can be charted by observing how, as the couple moves further and further abroad, there is a coinciding retreat into isolation for Alabama. First, I will establish David and Alabama's interest in and pursuit of public community. Then, I will give three examples to prove how the Knight's increasing distance from home parallels Alabama's increasing loneliness and seclusion. The first example consists of the Knights' European passage. The second example is a series of episodes from their time in the French Riviera, and the third is comprised of the couple's experience once they are re-established in Paris.

After leaving her nuclear family, the next step on Alabama's journey of self-discovery is her marriage to former military officer and aspiring fresco painter, David Knight. David's self-assurance is a matter of fact. His confidence in himself and his abilities is one of the defining elements of the courtship he shares with Alabama. On the night of the Country Club dance David carves his name in triplicate in the doorpost along with a misnomer for Alabama, "David," the legend read, "David, David, Knight, Knight, Knight, and Miss Alabama Nobody" (39). Alabama protests this erasure of her identity by deeming David an "egotist," but she does not doubt his ability to make this label into a reality

(39). He has, she remembers, "told her about how famous he was going to be many times before" (39). Unprepared for a relationship with a man who is neither like her father nor the hound-faced lieutenant, she finds herself adrift in the sea of David's charms. David, on the other hand, with his "pale hair like eighteenth-century moonlight and eyes like grottoes" knows exactly how to act in such situations because he knows himself, "as if he had taken an inventory of himself … and was pleased to find himself complete" (39, 40). Similar to the situation she found herself in when she was in proximity to the gravitational pull of her father's personality at home, Alabama feels magnetized towards David. Before she has the chance to create an identity for herself as an individual separate from her father, Alabama's identity becomes consumed by representing one half of the glittering duo, "the Knights" (47). The fame David foretold during their courtship does indeed come quickly to the newly-wed couple:

> "Jesus Chr—Oh Jesus," groaned David
> "What's the matter?"
> "It says in the paper we're famous," he blinked owlishly.
> Alabama straightened up.
> "How nice—let's see—." (Fitzgerald 45)

Unbeknownst to either of the Knights, public attention will not offer the healthful community they seek but, rather, will corrupt their already vulnerable identities and turn their glamorous infatuation with one another into a dangerously possessive love. For example, conflicted by the desire to possess

Alabama entirely while maintaining his position in the spotlight and keeping complete autonomy for himself, David engages in a cruel campaign to degrade and segregate Alabama. Alabama, unstable and desperate for affection vacillates between the attentive wife Millie Beggs taught her to be and a rebellious young woman seeking individual fulfillment. In the following section I will look at how the Knights' removal to New York from the South will start a downwards trajectory for Alabama which will ultimately result in a continuous destruction of her identity.

One of the more troubling aspects of the quote included above is the way in which it speaks to the Knights' shared inability to distinguish perceived fame and popularity from the reality of their shared life. Rather than use their marriage as a private and supportive space to explore their individual identities, both David and Alabama choose to publicize their marriage and antics in an attempt to construct meaningful community through the pursuit of fame. The following passage, which picks up where the previous excerpt left off, is particularly resonant with the current American fixation on media-made celebrities:

> David impatiently rustled the Brooklyn real estate and Wall Street quotations.
> "Nice!" he said—he was almost crying—"nice! But it says we're in a sanitarium for wickedness. What'll our parents think when they see that, I'd like to know?"
> Alabama ran her fingers through her permanent wave.

> "Well," she began tentatively. "They've thought we ought to be there for months."
> "—But we haven't been."
> "We aren't now." Turning in alarm she flung her arms about David. "Are we?"
> "I don't know—are we?"
> They laughed.
> "Look in the paper and see."
> "Aren't we silly?' they said.
> "Awfully silly. Isn't it fun—well, I'm glad we're famous anyway." (Fitzgerald 45).

Over the course of this exchange, David and Alabama display an astounding naiveté, and an unwitting ignorance towards how the reality of their private lives can and should depart from the portrayal they receive in the public sphere. What is more, their absurd child-like faith that what the paper has reported must, in fact, be the truth, becomes for them the deciding factor of their own moral standing. When David relays the shocking announcement that the paper has found the Knights to be living in "a sanitarium for wickedness," it does not occur to him that either set of parents will treat the news with any skepticism (45). Furthermore, though Alabama originally reacts to the news of their sequestering with some vague doubt, she is quickly persuaded that by the very existence of such a report in print the truth contained therein is a foregone conclusion. One must only re-read the few lines of dialogue to see how rapidly Alabama moves from hesitation: "'Well[…]They've thought we ought to be there for months;'" to confusion: "'—But we haven't been.'" "'We aren't now.'" "'Are

we?'"; to acceptance and dismissal: "'Isn't it fun—well, I'm glad we're famous anyway'" (45). This passage shows how the Knights are woefully incapable of separating their fame for their innate identities. If the populace believes them to be "wicked" than it must be true. If the popular opinion finds them to be "wonderful," as it does just a few paragraphs later, then that too, must be the truth (46). With no firm sense of individual identities, the Knights become forged into a single unit, and defined by the reductive collection of things people say about them. Whether the topic is David's art, which "serious people took […] seriously," or their interpersonal relationship, "They're c-r-a-z-y about each other," David and Alabama do not seem to know how to interpret themselves without the frame of tabloid opinion (47).

This identity blindness is a troubling phenomenon that seems to affect not only David and Alabama, but the entire city of New York. The narrator describes the setting thusly, "New York was more full of reflections than of itself—the only concrete things in town were the abstractions" (49). A surreal landscape where impressions are warped by affectation and disillusion, New York has become a breeding ground for a generation of disaffected men and women who distrust self and mock convention. Alabama sees the city as a place that "fluctuated in muffled roars like the dim applause rising to an actor on the stage of a vast theater" (48). She observes that in this shared site of public spectacle excess lives

alongside depravation: "They were having the breadline at the Ritz that year. Everybody was there" (48). Everything about the city and its populace is new and disorienting but is presented under the façade of the familiar: "People met people they knew in hotel lobbies smelling of orchids and plush and detective stories and asked each other where they'd been since last time" (48). The fever pitch created by the combination of new found economic prosperity, and the slackened moral standards that came after WWI create a place and time in which, "People were tired of the proletariat—everybody was famous. All the other people who weren't well known had been killed in the war; there wasn't much interest in private lives" (48). Without a strong sense of self to rely on and removed from the comfortable definitions offered by her family and Southern hometown, Alabama finds that "she hadn't been absolutely sure of how to go about anything since her marriage…" (51). Thus, susceptible to suggestion, Alabama and David Knight become the poster children for this new way of living. Their private lives become public property and their individual identities are lost in the milieu.

The Knights leave New York after a disastrous visit from Alabama's family confirms that the Beggs disapprove of Alabama's lifestyle and plan on maintaining their distance from the raucous pair (56). Left to their own devices, the Knight threesome (having just welcomed baby Bonnie into the world with

very little fanfare) purchase first-class passage to Europe. Though it is still early in their marriage, Alabama has some vague foreboding that her marital bliss is but one more piece of ephemera in her unstable lifestyle. She theorizes about the nature of her happiness saying with characteristic opaqueness: "'We are very happy,' she said to herself, as her mother would have said, 'but we don't seem to care very much whether we are or not. I suppose we expected something more dramatic'" (60). The drama the Knights seek is supplied by their Atlantic passage. Once aboard the ocean liner, Alabama retreats further into her sickly marriage and away from the public community she once sought. Fame has quickly grown exhausting. Admittedly, the company aboard the ship offers slim pickings. Amidst other Americans making the voyage to Europe, the Knights encounter British Lady Sylvia Priestly-Parsnips (whose name is just one example of Fitzgerald's many sardonic touches throughout the novel) and her cohort. The Parsnips, Lord and Lady, are quickly identifiable as the most trivial kind of people. When the boat is caught in the midst of a prolonged storm at sea, the Parsnips react by drinking copiously and discussing abstract truths mingled with pop culture misinformation. David joins them enthusiastically. Meanwhile, Alabama, terrified for the safety of her family, cannot help but conclude that her distaste for the inconsequential conversation of David and the Parsnips must mean that there is something wrong with her, "'I'm very antisocial,' she

tabulated" (64). David replies helpfully that "all women were" (64). Confused by her husband's irrational calm and put off by the only female companion available, Alabama concludes, "'I don't know what I think about things'" (66). In this interaction we see multiple issues from Alabama's past unsuccessful communal interactions rising to the surface: her family community offered her no example of how to form personal opinions as a woman, her vacuous marriage provides no support or shelter for her when she is experiencing self-doubt and confusion, and beyond receiving the admiration of other women in a public community she cannot seem to figure out how to interact with her sex in a more complex fashion.

As we have already explored her family's lack of personal growth models, we will now examine the lack of matrimonial support Alabama receives from her husband, David. What is most tragic about the scenes that take place aboard the boat is that the reader can see Alabama's search for comfort and reassurance in David and his failure to provide them. To this end she composes a poem for David that is telling of her psychological state: "*Why am I this way, why am I that / Why do myself and I constantly spat?/ Which is the reasonable, logical me?/ Which is the one who must will it to be?"* (Fitzgerald 68). In this poem, Alabama is putting into words her inability to define herself. David responds to the very serious queries by laughing and saying, "'Am I expected to answer that?'" (68). We will see in

later instances David willfully harming Alabama through calculated sorties on her self-confidence; however, I do not believe David's behavior on the boat is as intentionally cruel as he will become the further away they venture from any kind of geographical/national identity. David is unable to provide Alabama with a sense of her identity, since he lacks a clear sense of his own individuality. This is no crime. Many young couples experience periods of confusion wherein they must discover what it means for them individually to form a new unit. But in addition to this common marital obstacle, David is a selfish person, an artist who has one priority in mind: fame. He is not interested in forming a clear sense of connubial community; he is interested in gaining personal celebrity. It is while they are aboard the ship that will carry Alabama farther into uncharted territories that she begins to suspect the foundation of her marriage, and thus her identity is not as secure as she believed. To make matters worse, as Alabama begins to question the role she is meant to play in her marriage, she is slowly losing community members that could help her discover it.

In order to create a true sense of distinct feminine identity, Woolf suggested that women seek relationships with other women that move beyond tired familial obligations and the one-dimensional world of tragic Greek confidantes. Unfortunately for Alabama, interaction with other women through the filter of affected celebrity does not allow for the vulnerability and

transparency female community requires to achieve acceptance as a complicated person. As a result, women like Lady Sylvia, or the many "wives of artists" that Alabama will come across, define themselves as either novelty items or in relation to their famous, artistic husbands. None of these women can show Alabama what it means to have sustainable depth. Women like Lady Sylvia only know how to lavishly entertain: the Lady says herself, "'We must all have an air of living up to something […] to please the waiters'" (62). Alabama is at once put-off by such transparent artifice while simultaneously at a loss for an alternative means of expression.

Therefore, we see Alabama adopting pretense. A perfect example of this can be seen in her exchange with an English gentleman passenger. After trading in nonsense, the Englishman remarks, "'You're as good as a book" (69). Alabama rejoins tellingly, "'I am a book. *Pure fiction*" (70, emphasis mine). When asked to explain her origins, she credits a teller at the First National Bank with inventing her and says, "If it hadn't been for him I should have to go on being myself forever. And then I shouldn't have had all these powers to please you" (70). From this exchange the reader can ascertain two things. Firstly, we see that Alabama considers her identity to be an entirely manufactured good, like "a book" produced solely for the purpose of male amusement "to please" the audience (70). Secondly, we see that as Alabama has gotten closer to the

European continent she has drifted further from any concrete idea of herself. I argue that this drift is more than coincidence. As the ship draws nearer to its destination, it becomes clearer that the Knights are not escaping their past issues but rather moving them to a new stage:

> The coast of Europe defied the Atlantic expanse; […] New York lay behind them. The forces that produced them lay behind them. That Alabama and David would never sense the beat of any other pulse half so exactly, since we can only recognize in other environments what we have grown familiar with in our own, played no part in their expectations. (70-71)

Alabama and David are leaving behind "the forces that produced them" only to move towards an unknowable future that they will not be able to experience "half so exactly" (70-71). Alabama may have felt as if home life stifled her, but without its foundations she is unrooted and her identity suffers from the displacement.

Alabama gets rid of the noxious Parsnips by disembarking in France, but her problems with a continually diminishing sense of identity continue once on shore. Initially, the Knights believe their Provençal summer home to be nothing less than heavenly. David remarks "'We are now in Paradise—as nearly as we'll ever get—" (78). In the throes of his new escape David even admits to the discontent both members of the couple made a concerted effort to ignore back in the states, "Oh, we are going to be so happy away from all the things that almost got us but couldn't quite because we were too smart for them!" (77). But just as

quickly as the storm rolled in on the high seas, life on the beach begins to deteriorate for the Knights. The intense self-interest and satisfaction that has always been an aspect of David's personality as an artist makes him frequently occupied in this new retreat. When David is not working he is talking about his artwork in a tone of self-importance:

> And so Alabama, we have never known in our times the touch of so strong and sure a genius as we have before us in the last canvases of one David Knight! He begins work after a swim every day, and he continues until another swim at four o'clock refreshes his self-satisfaction. (78)

Alabama is not amused. She responds to her husband's prediction of increased self-importance by saying, "And I luxuriate in this voluptuous air and grow fat on bananas and Chablis while David Knight grows clever," indicating that the sumptuousness of the surroundings will have a deleterious effect on her if she does not have an outlet for intellectual stimulation equivalent to what David finds with his work (78). Just as we saw in the early stages of their courtship, David is consumed with making a name for himself as a great artist. In his mind his wife's identity should also be at the service of his great art; what does it matter that she is listless, when "'There is art to be undone in the world'": Alabama, having been raised in a family community that supports this world view, tries to uphold the example Millie Beggs has given her but finds the pressure to be too much to bear (78).

Here, though the reader may be starting to sympathize with David's annoyance with his petulant wife, one must consider Alabama's position. Having married David at the age of eighteen,[17] gotten pregnant and had a child in their first year of marriage and moved shortly thereafter to Europe, she cannot be more than twenty-two years old.[18] At this point in the course of her short lifespan she has never been independent from the supervision of a male guardian. First her father, then her many beaus, and now David determine the parameters of her life. David's assertion that "A woman's place is with the wine" and Alabama's reluctant agreement that "It's a man's world" verify that in the Knight household Alabama is used to being treated as ornamental amusement for her husband in his downtime. The reader, therefore, may not approve of Alabama's juvenile behavior when she sulks for David's attention, but certainly we can pity the young woman's isolation and growing disenchantment. Growing

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[17] Though Scott Fitzgerald makes it seventeen in his version of events in *Tender is the Night,* we know Alabama was eighteen because she is "hardly out of school" according to Millie and we see her attending a "freshman leadout" in the same time span as she is cavorting with all the military personnel, including Lieutenant David Knight (33).

[18] If we consider the timeline: the Knights marry when Alabama is 18. Alabama gets pregnant at 19 after a year of marriage, and nine months later Bonnie is born. Though many critics speculate that the time between marriage and conception is three years, there is no textual evidence of that fact. Such math is based solely on Zelda Fitzgerald's own autobiographical timeline between marriage and the birth of Scottie, her daughter. SMTW, however, notes very little time passing between the honeymoon and the conception of the child, allowing the reader to infer that Bonnie is conceived on or shortly thereafter the honeymoon. If we say Alabama is 20 at the time of the birth, then we know she is 22 by the time the Knights arrive in France, because we are told that Bonnie is two when they set sail to Europe (66).

up inculcated with the belief that her greatest purpose in life was to attract and then marry a suitable man, Alabama's entire life thus far has been predicated on male attention. Add to these considerations the fact that she is a young woman in a foreign country with no friends, no relations, and no individual pursuits (a string of nannies and hired help take care of her daughter and most of the domestic responsibilities), and we see that Fitzgerald has painted a pitiable character. In light of this character analysis the line, "David worked on his frescoes; Alabama was much alone," takes on a heightened melancholia. Poor Alabama. The reader is moved to sympathy for the young wife's complete inability to construct community outside the boundaries of her husband's attention. Thus, when David tartly quips that "she couldn't always be a child and have things provided for her to do," the reader is stung with resentment for Alabama (79). Once she left the confines of her father's house, David has defined her. Now, David has taken her far away from any familiar community and then heartlessly abandoned her to her own devices. Alone in a foreign country, Alabama begins to act out.

In an attempt to regain that fragile sense of community she briefly enjoyed when first married, Alabama seeks to create crisis so that her community will reassemble around her. In order to do this, she must find another man in whom she can seek her identity. Enter, Lieutenant Jacques Chevre-Feuille, a bronzed,

daredevil French aviator who is immediately smitten with Mrs. Knight. David reacts to his prized possession being stolen away petulantly, completely disregarding his own infidelity when the couple was still newly engaged, and begins to pointedly degrade Alabama, attacking those characteristics of socially engrained domesticity expected of a wife. He bemoans her house management; "'I don't see why,' expostulated David, 'when you complain of having nothing to do, you can't run this house satisfactorily'" (83). He undermines her parenting when the British nanny quarrels with Alabama over Bonnie's diet: "'Can't you at least not interfere, Alabama?' he said. 'Peace is absolutely essential to my work at present" (87). He implies that her employments are inferior in nature: "'I know—but *you* needn't complain. Suppose you had to be thinking of composition while it [referring to the dull nanny's political tirades] was going on'" (Fitzgerald 84). He even threatens to abandon her in Europe and return to America alone. In his comments to Alabama, David is calculating and destructive. He is aware that he is the source of her self-esteem. By methodically stripping her of those tenets of womanhood society uses to evaluate women's worths, David is destroying Alabama's identity. Ultimately, the David Knights reach a tense cease-fire when they discover that Jacques is leaving to Asia. They decide that the best course of action would be to return to Paris even though, "they hadn't much faith in travel nor a great belief in a change of scene as a panacea for spiritual ills" (94-95). In

this regard, at least, the husband and wife are correct. The damage done, both to the individuals and the marriage, is irreversible and will only continue to worsen.

With the return to Paris, the Knights have the chance to start anew. There is the briefest glimmer of hope that once the couple establishes some roots David may resume his art while Alabama forms a supportive community around herself that allows her to foster a stronger sense of individual identity. Of course, this is not what transpires. David's notoriety has spread to Europe while the family has been vacationing and his inflated sense of ego, paired with his need to punish Alabama for her impropriety with Jacques, makes him villainous. For her part, Alabama is tortured by regret and resentment. Both husband and wife are fractious and listless. David has grown simultaneously more possessive of Alabama and more dismissive. Alabama's sense of identity is in crisis. It is in this portion of the novel that all of the underlying anxieties and inadequacies Alabama faces come to the forefront; she rejects unsatisfactory examples of female identity, and obsesses over David's piracy of her intellectual property. It is also in this section that the reader will glimpse how Alabama's psychological fracturing manifests itself in the nascent stages of body dysmorphic disorder.

Similar to the mad-cap pace of New York that had overwhelmed Alabama as a newlywed, the fever pitch of Paris is both distraction and sedative to

Alabama's increasing dissatisfaction in her marriage and rapidly deteriorating sense of self. In 1927, Paris is in its hedonistic heyday. The text tells us that parties went on for weeks at a time and "When you felt you couldn't survive another night, you went home and slept and when you got back, a new set of people had consecrated themselves to keeping it alive" (95). The text describes the social atmosphere as an aimless hunt: "The post-war extravagance which had send David and Alabama and some sixty thousand other Americans wandering over the face of Europe in a game of hare without hounds achieved its apex" (98). In this setting, the popularity of the Knights brings all sorts of unsavory characters flocking to the couple to bask in the glow of the newly famous. Just as the initial good press flattered David and Alabama and contributed to their idea of themselves as glamorous people worthy of attention and respect, so does the attention from Paris' elite party class. Alabama avers, "'It's very flattering […] to be sought after…'" (96). David, who "hadn't really felt glad since his first success," feels that his "work's getting stale. I need new emotional stimulus", by which Alabama understands that having mined their relationship for all the creative material he could, David needs a new muse (95, 97). The couple's already rocky relationship has reached its breaking point. David pursues other women. Alabama turns ever more inward. Though critical analysis has overlooked the parallel, it is worth mentioning that as David and Alabama move

further away from regional communities, hometowns, and people with conventional lives and established roots, their respective identities become fractured and more dependent on outside validation, either from one another, or from a similarly transient group of acquaintances, to define themselves.

Thus, once Alabama has lost the defining element of her identity, David, she begins to lose all sense of identity, and we witness the beginning of her descent into mental illness. Fitzgerald deftly includes this telling detail about Alabama's psychological suffering in an aside, "Since St-Raphael she had had no uncontested pivot from which to swing her equivocal universe. She shifted her abstractions like a mechanical engineer might surveying the growing necessities of a construction" (106). David is the "uncontested pivot" to which Alabama is referring. This quote reveals that Alabama is intimately aware that her identity as the wife of David Knight is a construct and that recent events will require a new persona to be constructed from the ashes of the old. Thus, as her husband hunts for "his new emotional stimulus" Alabama continues to hunt for ideas about how to define herself. She goes about this by comparing herself to the women of her husband's acquaintance, hoping to find the shared qualities that form the basis of community. Sadly, just like her inability to construct feminine community with Lady Parsnip during their Atlantic crossing, she discovers that

the women of her husband's social circle are just as lacking in substance as Lady Sylvia.

First, she examines socialite Dickie Axton, then starlet Gabrielle Gibbs, and finally the Russian princess-cum-ballerina. These women are nothing like the women she associated with back home, they are nothing like Dixie's friends that read the Decameron, or the Southern belles that she corrupted with alcohol as a teen. These shallow women are dangerous to Alabama. They are in competition with Alabama for male attention, and they normalize the destructive social standards that complicate her life and search for self. Dickie Axton is the grand master of ceremonies in the bahktinian carnival of Paris social life. The text describes Miss Axton's function thusly:

> The limits of Dickie's activities stopped only at the borders of moral, social, and romantic independence, so you can well imagine that her scope was not a small one. Dickie had at her beck and call a catalogue of humanity, an emotional casting agency. Her intangible commerce served up the slithered frontiers of Europe in a *céleri-rave*—Spaniards, Cubans, South Americans, even an occasional black floating through social mayonnaise like bits of truffle. The Knights had risen to so exalted a point in the hierarchy of the 'known' that they had become material for Dickie. (96)

This quote indicates that Dickie has very little interest in the Knights' moral character, but only seeks them as a new act to add to her entertainment bill. Using the observations of an ancillary bartender, Fitzgerald establishes that Dickie Axton represents the sexually liberated femme-nouveau: "People said she

had slept with a Negro. The bartender didn't believe it. He didn't see where Miss Axton would have found the time between the white gentlemen—pugilists, too, sometimes" (100). Miss Axton's interchangeable companion Miss Douglas is similarly made of such inconsequential stuff: "she was so much the essence of black chic that she was nothing but a dark aroma. Pale and transparent, she anchored herself to the earth solely by the tenets of her dreamy self-control" (100). Alabama listens as the women flit from one nonsensical subject to the next and feels she has nothing to contribute conversationally or physically: "Comparing herself with Miss Axton's elegance, she hated the reticent solidity, the savage sparse competence of her body—[…]Compared with Miss Douglas' elimination, her Patou dress felt too big along the seams. Miss Douglas made her feel that there was a cold cream deposit at the neckline" (101). Alabama covets the two empty women's easy acceptance of their purposelessness and yet cannot entirely submit to their way of life.

It is through the conduit of the shallow Misses Axton and Douglas that Alabama is introduced to Gabrielle Gibbs. Miss Gibbs is representative of the height, or more accurately the depth, of feminine vacuity in this Jazz Age. Miss Axton describes Gibbs as "a half-wit" whose only redeeming quality is that "she's very attractive if you don't feel like talking" (102). Miss Gibbs' "beautiful body" like "white marble" is presented to the party for their consumption

without hesitation as her most important social currency (102). Though the women all spout 'clever' ideas and comments for the amusement of spectators, Alabama finds that their personalities are no more substantial than "a restless pile of pink chiffon in a breeze" (103). This discovery disgusts Alabama as much as it causes her to become jealous. Miss Axton helpfully identifies for Alabama what is at the root of Alabama's issues. Dickie says, "I've always heard she was a little peculiar—I don't mean actually batty—but a little difficult," maddeningly speaking over Alabama's head like she is a child, "Running around caring about things—of course, I hardly know you, but I do think dancing would be an asset if you're going to care *anyhow*" (Fitzgerald 108). Despite her empty-headedness, or perhaps because of it, Miss Axton can see that it is Alabama's insistence on making something of herself, her unfortunate penchant for "caring about things," her commitment to finding her identity that makes her different from these frivolous females and incapable of creating community with them (108).

Sadly, to care is seen as an impediment in this social setting, not an asset. Furthermore, Alabama cannot recognize her search for identity as an attempt to create her own self-worth and instead fixates on her body as the site of her self-worth, as these women demonstrate is the socially sanctioned thing to do. David does not help Alabama's situation, either. As his wife is attempting to understand her role in this bizarre new world, Mr. Knight is scandalously

pursuing a love affair with feckless, marble-skinned Gabrielle Gibbs. The public womanizing is bad enough, but the act that finally pushes Alabama to the edge is David's thoughtless personal piracy. It is not made clear earlier in the text whether the "new, more personal, David on exhibit" that is garnering the painter so much attention is a result of David's incorporation of personal details of his marriage into his artwork.[19] What can be ascertained is that David feels he has a right to all minutiae of the Knights' private lives as fodder for his genius, thus he guiltlessly appropriates Alabama's characteristics to flirt with Miss Gibbs. He woos the lady by saying, "'I imagine you wear something startling and boyish underneath your clothes,' David's voice droned on, 'BVD's or something'" (105). Doomed to overhear her husband's overtures all night, Alabama is struck by this comment in particular because, "He'd stolen the idea from her. She'd worn silk BVD's herself all last summer" (105). Like Judge Beggs, David does not think of Alabama as having a separate, sacred identity from himself. In fact, with this example he makes it known that he views Alabama and all her characteristics as his property. It is no wonder that Alabama struggles to liberate herself; she is greeted with opposition from all sides. As a result of this fractured sense of self,

[19] Though we know from the biographies I have solemnly sworn not to mention that F. Scott Fitzgerald mined he and his wife's personal life as well as his wife's individual characteristics liberally for his fiction; we will examine this at greater length in Chapter Five.

Alabama will endeavor to completely de-construct her physical self in a desperate attempt to exercise control over her own identity.

Alabama alights on this idea of disciplining the physical self as a mode of self-expression from Dickie's last-minute addition to a party guest-list, "A woman with a shaved head and the big ears of a gargoyle," a former Russian ballerina (107). The Russian artist finds it perplexing that Alabama would "do anything in the world to learn" to dance, because, as she assures the girl, "It is a hard life. One suffers" (107). This does not dissuade Alabama. In ballet, Alabama believes she has found a vehicle to assert her independence, practice self-expression, and discipline her offensive body. Though the faded ballerina admits that Alabama is "too old," she agrees to share with Alabama "a letter to the necessary people" (107). The possibility of an expressive outlet creates a new determination in Alabama. This is displayed when she finally asserts herself to David:

> "I can't stand this any longer,"' she screamed at the dozing David. "I don't want to sleep with the men or imitate the women, and I can't stand it!"
> "Look out, Alabama, I've got a headache," David protested.
> "I won't look out! I won't go to lunch! I'm going to sleep till time to go to the studio."
> Her eyes glowed with the precarious light of a fanatic determination. There were white triangles under her jawbone and blue rings around her neck. Her skin smelled of dry dirty powder from the night before.
> "Well you can't sleep sitting up," he said.

> "*I can do* exactly as I please," she said; "*anything*! I can sleep when I'm awake if I want to!" (Fitzgerald 111, emphasis mine)

Though it will cost her, Alabama has finally rejected David's domineering interjections in her own conception of self. By asserting that she can and will do "exactly as [she] please[s]," she shakes off the patriarchal stranglehold on her identity. David tries to placate her saying, "'Poor girl, I understand. It must be awful just waiting around eternally'" (112). Alabama, however, is past the point of discussion, "'Aw, shut up!' she answered ungratefully" (112). The last few lines of dialogue are telling about the Knight's matrimonial state:

> "David," she said sharply.
> "Yes."
> "I am going to be as famous a dancer as there are blue veins over the white marble of Miss Gibss."
> "Yes, dear," agreed David noncommittally.

Just as it seems there is no identity left to save, Alabama finally takes a stand for herself. The victory is short-lived, however, as her completely unmoored self begins to break under the strain of the physical punishment she inflicts on body in her desperate attempt to re-define herself as a ballerina.

Artistic Community and Body Dysmorphia

In this last portion of our examination we will look at Alabama's final site of potential community. Unlike the family community where Alabama was defined by her relationship to her father, and unlike the expatriate community

wherein Alabama was defined by her relationship to her husband, the artistic community offered by ballet is the first and only place that Alabama is not subsumed by male identity. Within the artistic community she has a legitimate opportunity to form supportive friendships, grow from the guidance of healthy mentor relationships, and carve out a niche for herself as an individual with her own interests and goals. This section of the novel represents the most joyous and simultaneously heartbreaking segment of Fitzgerald's story. Alabama comes wonderfully close to creating an identity for herself. Tragically, however, she cannot entirely eradicate the damage done to her sense of self in her previous encounters with community. As a result of the mutilation done by these previous experiences, the interactions with possible supportive figures are poisoned. Furthermore, Alabama's psychological state degenerates until her body dysmorphic disorder controls her life and becomes her defining characteristic. Rather than allow her to enter into community by mastering her physical self, her mental illness affects Alabama's self-evaluation and she retreats from those figures who initial offered her community within the ballet. Alabama will be left physically and psychologically shattered once this last attempt at community proves as ineffective as her prior efforts. After we chart this trajectory we will examine what, if anything, can be done to rectify Alabama's identity crisis at the end of the novel.

Ballet is, Alabama thinks, the solution to all of her problems with self-identity. When she first meets with her Russian instructor, the Madame questions her as to why she is taking up such a demanding activity at so late an age. Alabama tries to communicate what it means to her to have this individual pursuit in her life, "'…it seemed to me—Oh I don't know! As if [ballet] held all the things I've always tried to find in everything else'" (115). In short, ballet is going to give her an outlet for self-expression. In ballet Alabama is offered discipline, purpose, and rewards. She can see the results of her hard work in her growing skill set and from this she garners a sense that she can in fact be self-determining. For the first time in her life, Alabama has passion and purpose. The text corroborates this reading saying:

> 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 had imagined went only in surety of one's self—that she would be able, through the medium of the dance, to command her emotions, to summon love or pity or happiness at will, having provided a channel through which they might flow (Fitzgerald 118).

Finally, it seems that Alabama's damnable impulse to care for things will result in social and psychological dividends that can be enjoyed by not just her, but everyone in her community. The notion that Alabama will finally "achieve that peace" that comes "only in surety of one's self" is a testimony to the turmoil in which she has been existing previously. In addition, once Alabama heals the

wounds inside herself she will also be better equipped to heal the wounds in her marriage and perhaps even in her familial relationships. To these ends, we see Alabama begin to practice healthful community relationships, first with Arienne and Stella, and then with Madame.

Alabama's first meeting with Arienne Jeanneret is different from her previous interactions with women. La Jeanneret is not the wife of one of David's friends, nor is she one of David's vapid social acquaintances, the Knights do not employ her, and she has not been vetted by Judge Beggs. In fact, she is completely free of any prior association. Arienne is a new confrère altogether, one that belongs to Alabama alone. When Alabama enters the ballet studio where she is to begin taking her lessons, Jeanneret is the first person she meets. The senior ballerina is initially uninterested in the neophyte, however they soon bond over their shared dedication to the art-form and to their instructor. Like Alabama, Arienne cares about things deeply. Arienne takes Alabama under her wing while their teacher is away, drilling the novice on form and technique so that she may be ready to dance with music upon Madame's return. Without recompense, "Arienne helped her to master the entrechats" (124). Under Arienne's stern eye, Alabama executes "miles and miles of pas de bourree" and finally shows progress. For the first time in her life, Alabama has a female friend

who encourages her and helps her along the way to achieving a sense of identity for herself.

Stella is another woman who offers the experience of healthy community to Alabama. While Arienne gives of her expertise and her time to help Alabama achieve her dream of being a ballerina, the impoverished and unattractive Stella gives Alabama an opportunity to return the kindness to another of the ballet's members. Stella, the ballet's pianist, is miserably poor but worships the Madame. Alabama conspires with her to get gifts for Madame so that the teacher will not reproach Stella for spending money she does not have. Alabama also treats Stella to meals and spends time after her lesson showing the less skilled woman how to execute moves she has just mastered. As a new member of community, Alabama learns that she can give support as well as receive it. Then there is Madame. In the aged Russian instructor Alabama finally finds a positive female role-model who gives her parameters and feeds into her growing sense of self. Though the ballet mistress is exacting, often intoning, "You must not rest," and "…you must not stop," she also represents a woman who has lived life by her own resources and has accessed what has previously seemed to Alabama to be inaccessible, a sense of independent self (116). She demands much of Alabama, but Alabama rises to the occasion.

At first, Alabama progresses with her dancing unmolested. In fact, "David was glad of her absorption at the studio" because "David could work more freely when she was occupied and making fewer demands on his time" (117). Of course, as it becomes increasingly apparent that Alabama is creating an identity for herself that is not dependent on his approval, David begins to revert back to his habit of demoralizing his wife:

> "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."
> "We have no life at home any more."
> "You're never there anyway—I've got to have something to do with myself"
> "Another female whine—I have to do my work." (Fitzgerald 119).

In the previous section, we saw David complain that Alabama was too much on his hands. Now that she has found an occupation, he is annoyed that his wife is so often unavailable. David continues to badger Alabama finally saying, "What's the use of having a wife? If a woman's only to sleep with there are plenty available for that—" (120). From the passage we see that David has grown used to his wife always being willing and available to amuse him whenever it suits him best, like Austin and Millie Beggs, or any of the loose Parisian women. Yet, when Alabama begins to achieve autonomy from this definition of herself as

David's wife, David is irate. He supports her ballet only when it is beneficial to him.

When Alabama's interest in artistic expression ceases to serve his interests, David begins to threaten Alabama with affairs and abuse her notion that she can actually achieve something separate from him. He inserts himself into her ballet rehearsal dragging in Dickie Axton and Miss Douglas so that they can treat Alabama as a spectacle and demean her progress: "Miss Douglas said indignantly, 'I think it's ridiculous to work like that. She can't be getting any fun out of it, foaming at the mouth that way!'" (134) Dickie chimes in likewise with, "It's abominable! She'll never be able to get up in a drawing room and do *that!* What's the good of it?" (134) In the faces of such determined ignorance and rebuke Alabama's resolve waivers; however, she still maintains she "had never felt so close to a purpose as she did at that moment" (134). David patronizes her saying, "'You're so thin'" and "'There's no use killing yourself. I hope that you realize that the biggest difference in the world is between the amateur and the professional in the arts'" (138). He continues chipping away at her self- worth saying, "'You're not the first person who's ever tried to dance […] You don't need to be so sanctimonious about it'" (138). In spite of these attacks, Alabama continues dancing and preserves the outward appearance that she is strong. Internally, however, the domestic fracas wears at her delicate nerves and

combined with her over-zealous ballet schedule the psychological toll tells as she develops full-fledged body dysmorphic disorder.

In previous scholarship on *Save Me the Waltz,* critics have identified what they believed to be symptoms of anorexia nervosa in Alabama Knight.[20] I argue that this classification is incorrect. It is more accurate to discuss Alabama as suffering from body dysmorphic disorder or BDD. Though symptoms, causes, and treatment of these two mental illnesses can overlap, there are some important distinctions that separate them. For the purposes of this analysis, the most important determining factors that identify Alabama as afflicted with BDD rather than anorexia are her points of fixation, spectator's perception, and the effect this specific mental disorder has on the sufferer's participation in social life and self-evaluation. Unlike anorexia's internally placed locus, BDD is a socially manifested disorder that originates at the site of broken and harmful social interactions. By categorizing Alabama's mental disorder as BDD instead of anorexia, I argue that one can see the culmination of the lack of community in

[20] Michelle Payne traces Zelda Fitzgerald's own descent into what Payne diagnoses as anorexia from 1929 to 1930. Payne says, "I would suggest, that Zelda began to suffer from anorexia. Her weight loss, hours and hours of dancing in front of a mirror, and her own admission that went for days without eating suggest and intense focus on her body, a disciplining of it uncharacteristic of her prior to this period" (Payne 41). However, these are all aspects of Fitzgerald's biography and though there are parallels between the author and the fictional character of Alabama, namely in their dedication to ballet, there are not references to intentionally restrictive lack of food intake. Nor are there any of the references to gained pregnancy weight in Alabama's story, as there are in Fitzgerald's life. Thus, I believe this to a be an instance where biography is written over actual textual support.

this very personalized attempt to destroy what Alabama grows to consider a broken vessel for self-actualization.

Both body disorders share a disturbed body image pathology as their suspected origin, and both can manifest themselves in obsessive behaviors, compulsive/repetitive worries, and disruptive thoughts. According to the Harvard Medical School's official website for Obsessive Compulsive Disorders, in coordination with the Massachusetts General Hospital, sufferers of anorexia and BDD both display behaviors such as compulsive mirror-checking and ritualistic inspection of body parts. Alabama displays these behaviors as a very young girl. A detail that could be passed off as childish vanity, Alabama's repeated glimpses into the mirror as a child may be early symptoms of the disorder that we will see envelop her later life. For example, Judge Beggs teases a teenage Alabama saying, "'She's always looking in the glass at herself'" (30). Alabama responds in a similarly jovial tone, "'Daddy! I am not!'" (30). Yet, it is the sentence that follows this playful exchange that indicates a deeper issue at work already in the young woman's psyche. "She knew, though, that she looked more frequently than her satisfaction in her appearance justified in the hope of finding something more than she expected" (30). Alabama's persistent gazing is not a sign of immodest self-satisfaction, but in fact, the opposite. She does not look in the mirror because she likes what she sees. Alabama looks in the mirror

in an attempt to evaluate her physical inferiorities. Compare this to David's smug self-assessment referenced earlier wherein he takes stock of his Aryan features and "was pleased to find himself complete" (40).

This dissatisfactory self-evaluation does not end as Alabama grows into maturity. The fateful day that the Knights make the acquaintance of Lieutenant Chevre-Feuille, Alabama inspects herself skeptically in the mirror of the hotel bar; "'Combs, yes we have no combs today,'" Alabama sings sarcastically to herself as she rearranges her hair (80). Unsatisfied with her reflection, "She decided the part was better on the other side of her head" (80). She is caught in the act of fussing over her stubborn appearance by the French pilot who offers her a comb for her hair. Alabama accepts his comb but describes her embarrassment as if "she had been caught red-handed in some outrageous act" (81). Surely, it is not unheard of or frowned upon for a woman to 'freshen up' in the mirror. Yet, Alabama's shame at being caught and her dissatisfaction over her reflection demonstrated by the two previous examples are symptomatic of a more serious problem than mere feminine vanity or physical discontent. These are the first signs of a mental illness that will continue to reveal itself as the novel progresses.

Though there are many similarities between the two body perception disorders, an aspect that differs in people dealing with BDD versus those dealing

with anorexia is the focal point of their fixations. A person with anorexia nervosa focuses primarily on weight and body shape. People with BDD, on the other hand, fixate on a wide variety of insufficiencies in addition to body shape, such as perceived face, hair, and skin malformations. In the previous paragraph we saw two examples of Alabama fixating on her face and hair. When we examined Alabama's jealous evaluation of Miss Douglas and Miss Axton in the previous section, she mentions her hatred of her "reticent solidity, the savage sparse competence of her body" while simultaneously bemoaning that "her Patou dress felt too big" (101). While still in New York, Alabama tries to make David release her from social obligations by explaining that she has been obsessively picking at her face. He dismisses this excuse by focusing on his feelings: "'Anyway, you're coming, Alabama. How would it look for people to say, 'And how is your charming wife, Mr. Knight?' 'My wife, oh, she's at home picking at her face.' How do you think I'd feel about that?'" (58) Alabama says he could make up a different excuse and then stares "woefully at her reflection" (58). From these examples the reader can tell that Alabama's displeasure with her physical appearance is not restricted to weight and body shape (though we will look at these symptoms too), but rather expands to a whole myriad of perceived corporeal shortcomings.

An additional difference in the two disorders are the ways in which sufferers view themselves versus how spectators view them. This is simultaneously the point at which I believe the strongest argument for Alabama's BDD diagnosis can be made, as well as the area in which most people get the impression Alabama is suffering from anorexia nervosa. Reports state that for most cases of anorexia, body proportions are severely and noticeably inconsistent with healthy standards. In fact, most anorexics have a "body weight at 85% or less of what is expected" in a person with a healthy body weight" ("About BDD"). Conversely, a diagnosis for BDD usually states that though the patient may become preoccupied with a physical detail that they find unsatisfactory, misshapen or deformed, doctors and other spectators report no abnormality. For sufferers of BDD, the malformation is entirely a matter of perception. During her stint with the ballet, Alabama's body issues take on bizarre new heights as she becomes increasingly disgusted with her body and attempts to exert mastery over it by repeatedly abusing it. There are multiple examples where Alabama describes her normal features as grotesque and unwieldy. The first comes when she is still just starting out in the ballet she thinks,

> It was humiliating that Madame should have to touch her pupil's ankles when they were so hot. The human body was very insistent. Alabama passionately hated her inability to discipline her own. Learning how to manage it was like playing a desperate game with

> herself. She said to herself, "My body and I," and took herself for an awful beating: that was how it was done (118).

The reader can see that the fissure that was opened up between Alabama's sense of self and her ownership of her own body has widened so that she no longer imagines them as one in the same. The body and the self are separate entities that work against one another in the description above. Moreover, Alabama hates her body's lack of discipline and is humiliated that her teacher should be made aware of her body's disobedience by touching "hot" "ankles." In time however, she crushes her body's resistance to the contortions required by ballet. Though David makes the comment referenced earlier in the section patronizingly, he, nonetheless, makes note of Alabama's reduced frame and shows off Alabama's growing muscles "as if she were one of his pictures" (138). People suffering from anorexia have a warped body image that causes them to reduce their food intake until onlookers notice their gaunt frames. The anorexic, however, cannot be thin enough. In spite of a physical reality that is malnourished and waifish they may continue to see an obese figure in the mirror. Many scholars argue that this is what is happening to Alabama. Yet, in all of the novel, David only makes one reference to her thinness. For the remainder of the novel, Alabama's physique is likened to the athleticism of La Jeannerett whose sculptured muscularity is a

compliment to her discipline,[21] and positively compared to the amateur ballerinas of the Italian ballet, who are "fatter than the Russians and their legs were shorter; they danced with bent knees and their Italian-silk tights crinkled over their dimples" (142 and 157). Alabama, in contrast to the corpulent Italians has the commitment it takes to build the strong physique Arienne has cultivated, and though David makes one disparaging remark about her physical changes, he also proudly exhorts friends to "Feel her muscle" (138).

Alabama's fixation, as I demonstrated above, is not on becoming slender to an unhealthy extent but rather to disciplining her body to run with mechanical precision. To this end, she works relentlessly in the studio. Still, where David and his friends see muscle, Alabama feels "her legs like dangling hams," she thinks "her breasts hung like old English dugs" (144). Yet she recognizes that this impression "did not show in the mirror. She was nothing but sinew" (144). Alabama does not display the classic body dissatisfaction associated with anorexia. She does not simply want to be thin. She wants to be strong. She wants to be able to manipulate her body in any way that the ballet might demand. If we classified Alabama as suffering from BDD such a classification would allow the

[21] Arienne's "impeccable technique" is paired with a body that is almost mechanical in its perfection with "rigid in-steps and the points of her toes shoes slic[ing] the air like a sculptor's scalpel" (142). Even though "the weight of great strength and the broken lines of too much muscle" keep Arienne from reaching "the infinite," even surgeons are impressed by her level of anatomical perfection (142).

reader to reconcile the idea that Alabama can at once, be "gladly, savagely proud of the strength of her Negroid hips, convex as boats in a wood carving" while also hating her body for its perceived opposition to her goals (127).[22] Body dysmorphic disorder makes Alabama feel like "The complete control of her body" through ballet is the only way she can be free "from all fetid consciousness of it" (127). Moreover, once she is free from an awareness of her body she can fully inhabit the identity as supreme artist that she has desperately created as the last bastion of hope for self-determination.

In cases of anorexia, patients suffer from an internalized sense of inadequacy that eventually effects their physical reality to such a degree that medical professionals and loved ones can recognize that there is something amiss. Patients with BDD, however, suffer from a similar sense of inadequacy, manifestations of their psychological trauma patients with BDD are often misdiagnosed, or in some tragic cases, they suffer through a deteriorating mental

[22] Here Alabama commandeers stereotypical aspects of a black body and applies them to herself favorably. She glories in the fact that her body has transformed from what she considers unsatisfactory white qualities into what are, in her mind and phrasing, more physically suitable black qualities that will allow her to perform at a higher athletic level. An obvious and jarring use of racial stereotypes, this reference supports the fact that Fitzgerald is working within the confines of the reductive "American Africanism" that Morrison suggests will allow authors to use "silence and evasion" when it comes to critical discourse on racial matters while still enabling the same authors to exploit their perception of blackness. This is a pattern in literature and critical studies that is as disturbing and widespread as "the willed scholarly indifference" of "the centuries-long, hysterical blindness to feminist discourse and the way in which women and women's issues were read (or unread)," and certainly something in Fitzgerald studies that bears considering at greater length and depth (14).

illness undiagnosed, retreating further and further into isolation as an escape from their illness. Sadly, this is the case for Alabama Beggs Knight. Body dysmorphic disorder causes Alabama to have a negative self-evaluation, and retreat from community interaction within the ballet. Furthermore, family and community members cannot see the physical signs of mental deterioration in Alabama, as they would in a patient with anorexia, thus as she pulls away from them, they in turn pull away from her. Diagnosing Alabama as a sufferer of BDD instead of anorexia nervosa is a more accurate assessment of the symptoms she exhibits in the text. Additionally, a BDD diagnosis grants the reader a better understanding of the depth of isolation and resulting identity conflict that Alabama suffers in *Save Me the Waltz*. Though Alabama has finally encountered a site of productive community through the ballet, her body dysmorphic disorder will prohibit her from seizing the opportunity and her resulting isolation and depression will cause her to suffer a breakdown.

Alabama's hysterical dedication to her art at the cost of her community results in her catastrophic mental breakdown. The more effort she dedicates to severing all ties between her body and her new identity as an artist the more her grasp on psychological wellness slips away. We can see this in the way in which her demanding hours in the studio take a toll on the interpersonal and professional relationships she has formed, as well as on her physical well-being.

At this point in the novel, the Knights' marriage is a shadow of what it once was. Alabama thinks of "life at home" as "simply an existence of individuals in proximity; it had no basis of common interest" (144). David stays late at his studio, dines out, and when he does come home "he nearly always brought somebody" (144). When Alabama tries to spend some time with David alone, he angrily says, "'What right have you to complain? You have cut yourself off from all your friends with the damn ballet'" (144). Though one could argue that the "friends" Alabama had in Paris were really all David's social acquaintances alone, Mr. Knight is not incorrect in his statement. Alabama has created an isolated life for herself to the point where she tells Stella to keep people from visiting her in the studio, "'Stella,' she said, 'if they should come again—if anyone should come here for me, you will always say you don't know anything about me—that I am not here" (128). It is not just her husband and her old associates that Alabama has cut herself off from by embracing the ballet, it is also her daughter Bonnie.

Alabama may never have been a very hands-on mother, but at the very least she had positive interactions with her only child on a regular basis before her ballet career. Now, after a long day of ballet Alabama has very little left to give to the child, whose every need is seen to by Nanny. This distant relationship is displayed in one particularly poignant exchange between mother and

daughter. One morning, running late for ballet rehearsal and already irritable, Alabama accuses her unoffending daughter of purposefully not brushing her teeth. The little girl maintains that she has obeyed her mother's rules and that her teeth are brushed every morning as a matter of routine. The argument escalates until, "Alabama grabbed the small arms and slapped the child soundly over the thighs. The short explosive sound warned her that she had used more force than she had intended. She and her daughter stared at each other's red reproachful faces" (137). Alabama apologizes to Bonnie for her disciplinary outburst, but the child is not comforted. To make matters worse, Alabama learns that it was in fact she who was in the wrong, when Bonnie's au pair corroborates that the little girl dutifully followed her mother's instructions. The bond is sloppily held together when Bonnie begins dance lessons, but the child has little interest in becoming as "'serieuse'" as her mother, and when Alabama leaves for Italy to pursue her dance career she leaves Bonnie behind[23] with her father and the new French nanny (138).

[23] Bonnie has one disastrous visit to Alabama in Italy. This further damages the strained relationship between mother and daughter when conditions are less than optimal. Bonnie falls ill and Alabama forgets to pick up the medicine and the little girl lies sick in bed for a week. Bonnie is disgusted by the squalor Alabama lives in compared to her father's accommodations in Paris. Alabama throws Bonnie an ill-fated birthday party where the calamitous trip is sealed when a child's pet monkey bites the birthday girl and ruins the fete. Bonnie gratefully returns to her father.

Eventually, even the community Alabama has built for herself within the ballet crumbles under the pressure of her fanatical dedication to dance and her disintegrating grasp on her own physical reality. The friendship between Alabama and Arienne devolves into pettiness and jealousy because Arienne feels, "Alabama was an interloper" in the ballet studio, who absorbs more than her fair share of Madam's attention and the studio's practice hours (148). Alabama's obsessive devotion to becoming a ballerina makes her intractable to her friend's pleas to switch practice times so that La Jeanneret can continue working two jobs and practicing. When it becomes clear that the former comrades-in-arms now exist "in a state of amicable hatred," Alabama comforts herself by theorizing that "Professional friendship would not bear close inspection—best everybody for herself…" (147). Likewise, Alabama loses her patience with dutiful Stella and begins to abuse her in the same way as the other prima ballerinas. Eventually, Alabama even cuts ties with Madame to pursue the chance to dance in a real ballet in Naples. For the first time in her life, Alabama feels close to achieving an identity. Prior to her time in the ballet, her familial community, marital community, and the expatriate community failed her in that they did not support her life as an individual. When Alabama discovers dance, she finally discovers an outlet that will allow her to create a sense of self that is unique and sacrosanct, or so she thinks. But what her previous community

experiences have failed to impress upon her is that the artist cannot flourish in a vacuum. Therefore, when Alabama chooses to prioritize her newly found identity at the cost of her community, she is doomed to fail.

Shortly before she is to achieve her dream of dancing as the lead ballerina in the famed "Le Lac des Cygnes" or Swan Lake, Alabama's beaten body succumbs to a blood infection, and she is hospitalized. After "Alabama clamorously dropped her person bit by bit into the ballet," after painstaking dedication, complete isolation, and the sacrifice of the first supportive community she has ever been a part of, she learns from a stricken David, that she "will never be able to dance again" (181). "'Oh my body,'" Alabama responds to the news pitifully, "'And all that work for nothing'" (181) This is the final blow; the destruction of Alabama Beggs Knight's identity is complete. After her recovery, Alabama will return to America with David and Bonnie to witness the death of her father. Some readers may think that this reincorporation into the family community in a time of crisis could assuage the damage done to Alabama's identity; however, I would argue that the text says otherwise. Rather than finding comfort in her return home, Alabama is faced with more gruesome realities. The father she once thought of as imperturbable has been weakened by old age, his infallible wisdom cannot answer her persistent questions. Judge Beggs dies without having imparted to his daughter any purpose for his life or

her own (185). Alabama realizes that her mother will now be utterly alone, having composed her life "as part of a masculine tradition," once the Judge is dead, "there would be nothing left" of Millie (186). Thus, Alabama's family community no longer exists, and the identity she once sought there has dissipated with it. She returns to New York with David completely defeated. She cannot be part of the family community, David has total possession of their social acquaintances and the expatriate community, even the memory of Alabama's attempt at individual identity is eradicated when David commandeers the ballet as material for his latest series of pictures (194).

It is surprising, therefore, just how innocuous the last lines of *Save Me the Waltz* seem. They depict David and Alabama Knight staring at each other over "the pleasant gloom" of a party that has just finished (196). The Knights sit together "watching the twilight flow through the calm living room that they were leaving like the clear cold current of a trout stream" (196). This final image could even be interpreted as peaceful, what with the invocation of a "calm" stream flowing somewhere undetermined. At this point, however, the reader should have learned that with Zelda Fitzgerald appearances are never to be taken at face value. With very little effort the reader can ascertain the end Fitzgerald has divined for Alabama, the peaceful stream is flowing towards

death. On the last page of the text just above the final image of the tranquil watercourse, the party guests take their leave of the Knight's home saying:

> "We've talked you to *death*."
> "You must be *dead* with packing."
> "It's *death* to a party to stay till digestion sets in."
> "I'm *dead*, my dear. It's been wonderful". (Fitzgerald 196, emphasis mine).

Four mentions of death in as many lines is not pure coincidence. Under the placid surface of polite conversation and party accoutrement, Fitzgerald wants the reader to know that death is present. Alabama has surrendered her identity completely and "having thus emptied this deep reservoir that was once myself, I am ready to continue" (196). Sadly, there is nowhere left for Alabama to go. Without community, identity, or purpose, the only thing Alabama is moving towards is death.

Conclusion

Thus, ends the story of Alabama Beggs Knight, the precocious Southern girl with such talent and promise has been ground down to nothing by loneliness and an inability to achieve self-determination. Reading this tragic tale, one is reminded of the fate of Shakespeare's sister referenced in Woolf's *Room of One's Own*. Like Alabama, the female Shakespeare suffers from the burden of carrying "the heat and violence of the poet's heart" woefully "caught and tangled in a woman's body" (Woolf 65). In the case of Shakespeare's sister, though she

possessed a "genius" "for fiction" she can find no mentorship, no community in which to perfect her craft, and eventually her attempt to express her identity ends in an extramarital birth and her eventual suicide (65). Similarly, though Alabama "has talent" as a child, she lacks the money and the community that Woolf tells us would enable her to cultivate an individual identity and give it artistic expression (Fitzgerald 20). Throughout this chapter I have examined how, beyond the monetary recommendations Woolf makes, the support and mentorship of a feminine community is the main element that is lacking in Alabama's life. Alabama explores and rejects several sites of potential community throughout the novel beginning with familial community, moving to spousal community and subsequent public community, and ending with artistic community, and at each site fails to form lasting and supportive bonds. Having exhausted herself and her resources in unsuccessful attempts to create an individual sense of self and purpose, Fitzgerald ends Alabama's search with a woman resigned to life the remainder of her life as little more than an empty vessel.

Zelda Fitzgerald's single completed novel offers critics, readers, and researchers ample material from which to source autobiographical parallels, and as a result most of the critical responses to *Save Me the Waltz* has been limited to these heavily biography-dependent analyses. However, the heart-rending

portrait of a young woman's search for identity through community, and her ultimate failure to achieve either is a topic just as, if not more, fascinating to examine. No amount of fame, fortune, or attention could adequately replace a sound sense of self and a supportive community in the life of our main character. In the following chapters we will switch our focus from the fiction of our two authors to their real lives to examine how this maxim holds just as true in the personal lives of Eudora Welty and Zelda Fitzgerald as it did in their fiction.

CHAPTER FOUR

Editors, Mentors, Friends: The Presence of Supportive Communities in the Life of Eudora Welty

> Please know that I am quite aware of the hazards. I want to do it because I want to do it. Women must try to do things as men have tried. When they fail, their failure must be but a challenge to others.
>
> —Amelia Earhart

Stubborn Enough to be a Writer

In the summer of 1961 Eudora Welty was torn between caring for her aging and ailing mother and working on the manuscript for the novel that would eventually become *Losing Battles.* Suzanne Marrs tell us in her meticulously compiled record of the correspondence between Welty and her longtime friend, the author and her editor at *The New Yorker*, William Maxwell, that "Since the mid-1950s, [Welty] had attempted to write two novels but finished neither in the first half of the 1960s" (Marrs 141). After a series of health complications made it impossible for Chestina Welty to receive adequate care at the hands of her daughter, Eudora Welty made the difficult decision to move her mother to a nursing and rehabilitation facility. Distraught at the idea of leaving her mother alone and ill, Welty frequently (as often as daily when her speaking engagements did not demand that she leave the state) made the drive from her paternal home

in Jackson fifty miles to the nursing facility in Yazoo City.[1] This family responsibility made progress on her prose difficult. In a generous gesture that seems typical of the deep friendship shared by the two writers, Bill Maxwell offered Welty the use of his secretary, Barbara Nicholls, to expedite the writing process by typing up drafts of *Losing Battles* as quickly as Welty wrote them down. Welty shares her appreciation with her friend saying, "What this has done for me already is so much—But you more than anybody know this & very well. Thank you with my love for it all every day" (Marrs 149). Perhaps in response to this direct passage of gratitude and shared compositional experience, or perhaps because he intimated the anxiety his friend was experiencing over her stalled and stuttering drafts, Maxwell responded in his next letter with the following observation:

> The thing about interruptions is that they don't count. If you are stubborn enough to be a writer in the first place, I mean. And it takes twice as much stubbornness if you are a girl, since the arrangements for you are somewhat made and certainly different. When you are able to pick up again, everything is ready and waiting at the end, and you can go on as before. (Marrs 149)

[1] Chestina Welty would move back and forth between the facility in Yazoo City, Mississippi to her home in Jackson from 1961 until she passed in January of 1966.This particularly painful family tragedy would be followed just four days later by the death of Welty's one remaining brother, Edward, from a brain infection and would leave Eudora alone as the singular living member of the Welty nuclear family (Father, Christian Welty having died in 1931 and brother, Walter, having passed in 1959).

Maxwell is, of course, entirely correct in his statement. To be a writer requires a herculean dose of both focus and perseverance, but to be a female writer in the twentieth century when "arrangements" were most definitely made, if not to bar you from success, then at least to hinder your progress, and the standard for acceptance in literary company and critical regard was "certainly different" is a feat closer to a miracle (149).[2] Eudora Welty was no ordinary writer, either. Her extraordinary ear for the tenor and tempo of dialogue, her keen photographic eye for capturing detail and transmitting reality in her settings and landscapes, her intuition of human frailty and folly, and her sense of humor in relaying these very common shortcomings make her an enduring literary voice. The truth of Maxwell's words, however, rings just as true for this remarkable Southern literary figure as they do for her less well-received predecessor, Zelda Fitzgerald.

In this chapter, I will examine the factors that contributed to one woman's success as an author and in the following chapter I will look at how the absence of those same factors necessarily inhibited the other's critical reception. That is

[2] Elaine Showalter also supports this idea in *A Literature of Their Own,* saying in her second chapter, "The Feminine Novelists" that most first-generation women writers have to exercise extreme self-discipline in their education, craft, and the required maintenance of their gendered profession. Though Showalter is speaking primarily about 19th century British women authors when she says: "The continual pressure to prove themselves, a pressure more internalized than manifest, kept them [women writers] desperately sensitive to criticism" while still demanding of themselves "immense productivity," a reader can draw a direct parallel to the pressures, anxiety and subsequent grit that a writer like Eudora Welty would need to survive in the literary world—even one a century and continent removed.

not to say that where the latter woman has fallen short in her prose efforts that she has failed entirely, because as we will see through our investigation, the effort put forth by both women evince the requisite "stubbornness" prescribed by Maxwell to be a writer. Furthermore, we will see how one woman's perceived "failure" can act as a "challenge to others" to perfect what she has set forth, a call to action, a starting place for the next effort, a communal lesson that moves the entire artistic body forward. By examining the people that supported, guided, advised, and most importantly, read Eudora Welty, we can establish a pattern of communal support and feminine interchange that was instrumental in her success as a writer. In addition, we can apply this pattern retroactively to Zelda Fitzgerald's work and better understand the obstacles she faced and the hard-earned accomplishments she won for the women writers that came after her. Feminist literary historian Ellen Moers argues in *Literary Women* that a creative interdependence is critical for women writers. She charts a tradition of such relationships between women through history with the point that women writers provide each other with a complex imaginative validation of their experience which is lacking in current male-centric literary canon. Furthermore, Moers avers that once this community is in place, it begins to shape literature in new and exciting ways: "one cannot talk rationally of the English novel, or of French Romanticism, or of the American short story and modern poetry without

discussing women writers, as we always do. Here, in the history of literature alone, women have long been both central and female" (xi). It is precisely this artistic and specifically feminine exchange and validation that connects the writings of Eudora Welty and Zelda Fitzgerald and makes them so important to the American literary canon. When readers can visualize the trajectory of women's contributions to the literature of our nation they will be more capable of identifying how women have shaped literature through time into the contemporary moment.

I will examine how Eudora Welty created the supportive community that would later enable her success as a female writer. First, I will contend with the problematic statements from Welty that would push back against categorizing her life and writing in any gendered way. Then I will set up the three levels of support that I believe to be pivotal in the formation and sustainability of Welty's identity as a writer. In order to be a successful writer, I contend that first Welty needed to identify herself in the writings of other women. This is a move that Patricio Schweickart terms "feminist reading" (Schweickart 32). We will look at how Welty draws inspiration from three female novelists who helped not only inform her approach to fiction but helped a young Eudora Welty begin to envision what a life as a woman writer could and should look like. The next integral piece in Welty's writing community is a contemporary example of a

woman author to help her navigate the literary landscape as a new author. We will examine the relationship between Eudora Welty and Katherine Anne Porter to establish how the older female author helped to instruct Welty's early career moves. Finally, the third piece of community we will explore is the relationship between Welty and those figures of vital importance in every author's life: her professional collaborators, editors, agents, and readers. I posit that it was by carefully constructing this network of support that Eudora Welty is able to elevate her prose into the lasting pantheon of American fiction. Furthermore, it was the absence of these same figures that doomed Zelda Fitzgerald's fiction to eventual obscurity.

Rejecting "feminine repartee": Feminism and Authorial Politics in Welty's Writing

Welty critic Louise Westling begins her book *Women Writers: Eudora Welty* with the apt but somewhat disheartening statement, "Eudora Welty has never been comfortable with feminism" (1). Westling supports this statement by citing an interview Charles Bunting conducted with Eudora Welty in 1972 in which the author states, "All that talk of women's lib doesn't apply *at all* to women writers. We've always been able to do whatever we've wished" (Prenshaw 45, qtd in Westling 1). Though Westling will help Welty amend her earlier statement by including an interview done six years later in which Welty grudgingly agrees that women writers "have been at a disadvantage compared to men," she makes

such an effort to dissociate herself with the categorization of "woman writer" that the overall impression one gleans from the two statements is of an author divided from her subject matter, disdainful of her audience, and excluded from the legacy of women's literature that comes before and after her (ibid).

Fortunately for Welty's readers, her feigned disinterest in feminine community is not the case. But in order to best understand Welty's ability to subvert the structures of the literary patriarchy and continue the history of empowering women's literature, one must first contend with the author's seemingly conflicted and distant stance on the role of the author in moral and ideological areas of debate. Welty's seminal essay, "Must the Novelist Crusade," published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1965, directly opposes the idea that any author (but in her particular case, a Southern female author) has any responsibility towards advocating for causes in his or her novels that he or she is associated with by nature of locale, gender, political affiliation, or moral lens. Welty makes it clear in her article that she feels "that preaching of any kind is antithetical to the real work of a novelist, which is to capture human life as it is, not as one might wish it to be according to some general political programme" (Westling 1-2). It is, therefore, impossible for critical readers of Welty to align her novels with any particular cause, such as feminism, because the author clearly states that her fiction is not meant to be an argument. In fact, all of the aspects

that make for good argument—neat and accessible organization, general appeal, and clear answers—are in direct opposition to what Welty says makes a good piece of fiction. Welty maintains that it should not be the author's mission to tell a reader anything. Fiction is not meant to be a corrective to the reader, but rather a gateway to deeper understanding of ourselves: "There is absolutely everything in great fiction but a clear answer. Humanity itself seems to matter more to the novelist than what humanity thinks it can prove" (149). In order to guarantee life for a piece of fiction, the work must be as close to life as possible. Welty points out that in life, "people are not Right and Wrong, Good and Bad, Black and White personified; flesh and blood and the sense of comedy object … If human beings are to be comprehended as real, then they have to be treated as real, with minds, hearts, memories, habits, hopes, with passions and capacities like ours" (150). Ergo, to examine Welty's fiction fairly one must be able to acknowledge that there is no singular political or moral objective; rather the texts are often an exploration of the innerworkings of humanity. Welty explains her fiction manifesto as:

> Mankind still tries the same things and suffers the same falls, climbs up to try again, and novels are as true at one time as at another. Love and hate, hope and despair, justice and injustice, compassion and prejudice, truth-telling and lying work in all men; their story can be told in whatever skin they are wearing and in whatever year the writer can put them down. (157)

With that said, Welty is not rejecting feminism's principles or the incarnation of feminist characters in her fiction; on the contrary, strong independent women are at the heart of many of her best stories. She is simply asking that readers and critics refrain from compartmentalizing or restricting her efforts to one subject matter or the other. If anything, this is a feminist stance, in and of itself. Eudora Welty refuses to adhere to ill-fitting prescriptive categories in life and in her fiction. She consistently wrote multi-dimensional complicated female figures in her texts that make readers grapple with preconceived notions of femininity and strength, of good and bad. Welty may have tired of fielding somewhat antagonistic questions about the feminist messages of her novels and lashed out at the tiresome refrain of critics, publishers, and readers that novels all presumably have one message. "Nevertheless," Louise Westling reassures us, "Eudora Welty's writing is centered in the experience of women, and it is important to consider the ways in which her stories and novels explore the traditional sources of power in women's lives. Much of Welty's best writing dramatizes the centrality of the feminine which has been denigrated or marginalized in masculine literary tradition" (2).

We have already looked at the proof offered in *Losing Battles*, a text in which Welty painstakingly creates strong, realistic female characters that complicate a one-dimensional interpretation of feminine experience. To add to

what we already know of Welty's loyalties we will inspect some of those authors she found to be particularly formative in her young life, and her attitude towards mentorship. Then we will examine figures that were especially influential in her own personal and professional life. Ultimately, we will uncover a community of women and enlightened men as varied and complex as the Renfro-Beecham clan, and just as instructive and significant to the young Welty as that Beecham-Renfro sorority is to initiate Gloria. Eudora Welty may not have believed in turning her fiction into feminist propaganda, but as we will see in our investigation of her life and work, a supportive and committed community is absolutely necessary for the success of this woman writer.

"[Her] work burst upon my imagination like fireworks": The Women Writers who Influenced Welty

Eudora Welty was a voracious reader from a young age. In her essay, "A Sweet Devouring" she relates that before she developed "taste" she was indiscriminate in her wholesale rapaciousness for the written word (Welty, EoTS 284). To Welty, aged 9 or 10, "The pleasures of reading itself—who doesn't remember?—were like those of a Christmas cake, a sweet devouring" that she greedily gobbled up (281). The lesson a young Welty learned from this childhood avarice was that not all books were created equal; children's books, especially children's series books, were rarely filled with the stuff of import, but were more

often than not "one grand prevention" that delayed the reader's discovery of substance interminably (285). Luckily, for the writer and for ourselves, Welty graduated to reading books that were "good all the way through" (285). First she read Mark Twain, then moved onto [in no particular order] Anton Chekhov, William Faulkner, Jane Austen, Elizabeth Bowen, Flannery O'Connor, Virginia Woolf, Willa Cather, and too many others to enumerate here. The young Welty's palate may have become more refined, but her hunger for literature persisted all of her life. As a result of this well-known and oft-discussed hobby, Welty has been asked in most of her interviews which particular writers she reads and who amongst them she considers to have *influenced* her writing. Welty often hedges around this question of influence and typically answers with something vague such as, "Nobody can help you but yourself" or "It would be a good thing if you could just go and influence yourself by the right person each time you find something wrong. But that's not the way it's done" (Prenshaw, *Conversations* 80, 19). This avoidance should not be seen as a reticence towards giving influential writers such as Faulkner or Chekhov, both of whom she mentions often (not only in interviews but in her critical essays as well), the credit they are due for their work and their impact on her literary life. This anxiety over influence, much like Welty's preoccupation with being categorized as a regional, gothic, or female writer, all originates from a concern that allowing one's work to be compared

and contrasted to the work of other writers gives critics and readers the opportunity to call one's work derivative, in essence denying a work of art its individual identity.

Harold Bloom addresses this concern in his critical work, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, wherein he posits that literary influence is a type of Oedipal conflict between father and son with offspring always having to destroy or misread the father's work in order "to clear imaginative space for themselves" and their own work (5). Jane Marcus aptly notes that this theory excludes women from consideration, and indeed women, though they share the same anxiety experienced by male authors, can participate in a literary tradition that is markedly different than the strictly patriarchal model, one that "affords the woman writer relief from anxiety" (8). This model of a feminist dialogic is explained by Patrocinio P. Schweickart's when he argues that rather than Bloom's embattled position of male reader having to deconstruct the father's work to make space for himself, the woman reader is supportive of and an advocate for the writing of the women authors she reads, or to use Bloom's phrasing, women readers defend their literary mothers (Schweickart 30-62). Schweickart explains further that "the feminist reader speaks as a witness in defense of the woman writer. Here we see clearly that gender [of the reader] is crucial. The feminist reader takes the part of the woman writer against

patriarchal misreadings that trivialize or distort her work (49). Women readers and women writers are not adversaries, but allies. In fact, Schweickart contends that women discover their own ability to create by first attempting to access the life created in another female writer's material. When female readers consume female narrative, they learn to project themselves into the role of creator and in so doing unlock their own creative abilities. Schweickart gives the example of Adrienne Rich's reading the poetry of Emily Dickinson, saying that it was not enough for the younger woman to research the life of Emily Dickinson, to visit her home and collegiate haunts; no, in order to understand Dickinson, Rich felt she must enter the poet's mind and see her poetry through the lens of a single unified imagination. The process of self-discovery that was made possible through this communal action helped Rich discover her own poetic voice. This process is the reason it is so important for women to read the writing of other women: "feminist readings of female texts are motivated by the need to connect, to recuperate, or to formulate—they come to the same thing—the context, the tradition, that would link women writers to one another, to women readers and critics, and to the larger community of women" (Schweickart 48). To establish Eudora Welty's place in this feminine literary tradition, we will now look at the women writers she read and how they influenced her formation as an author.

Though Eudora Welty read and loved many authors,[3] we will examine her participation in this cycle of feminist dialogic by looking at the influence of three particular female authors: Jane Austen, Willa Cather, and Virginia Woolf. We will achieve this by examining Welty's critical essays on and personal responses to each of the authors mentioned above. The similarities between these four women may not be immediately recognizable, especially to a regionalist critic. Cather came from a similar native soil to Welty and wrote in what Kenneth Millar calls "a recognizable North American language which speaks to all of us in the accents of home," but she largely writes of the experience of the American West a generation prior to Welty (Marrs and Nolan 2). The other two writers under consideration, Jane Austen and Virginia Woolf, came from a national climate entirely foreign to Welty's own and in addition to nationality they are also separated by time, Austen is from the 19th century and Woolf is early 20th century. Though Woolf and Austen may have spoken with a different cadence, the impetus and urgency of their fiction was something with which a young

[3] In response to Linda Kuehl's question, "Is Austen a kindred spirit?" "Chekhov I do dare to think is more 'kindred.' I feel closer to him in spirit." (Prenshaw, Conversations 74). She also frequently mentions William Faulkner's work as some of her favorite to read and discusses how his fiction affects her writing (Conversations, 280, 220-1, 80, 19). She speaks to Elizabeth Bowen and Flannery O'Connor's writing as well, and even though they are women and fit the paradigm I chose to exclude them from discussion because it was getting too long and they are too close to Welty's work, they are contemporaries, and I think are likely influenced by similar sources and thus things would get repetitive.

Eudora Welty was intimately familiar. I argue that we can see in the way she wrote about the women listed above in her collection of critical essays titled, *The Eye of the Story*, exactly how each of them affected her through their work. Furthermore, I believe that each writer affected a specific aspect of Welty's writing; Jane Austen instilled the value of scope, Willa Cather the value of landscape, and Virginia Woolf the value of community.

In an essay titled "The Radiance of Jane Austen," Welty makes the claim that "Jane Austen's work at its best seems as nearly flawless as any fiction could be" (Welty EoTS,4). Eudora Welty's affection and respect for this pioneering female British author is vast; however, one can see in Welty's own writing similarities to the older author that attest to the influence of Jane Austen on Welty's later career. Though she remarks in an interview that she felt like Chekhov "is more kindred" than Austen to her spirit, Welty says, "I love and admire all she [Austen] does, and profoundly" (Prenshaw 74). When reading Welty's essay on Jane Austen one can recognize some striking similarities in upbringing, family life, and personal life. Welty may have felt an alliance with Chekhov, but I argue that it is the above similarities with Austen that would have greater significant in Welty's personal and professional habits over the years.

It may be hard to see the similarities in the fiction of these two writers immediately, and as a result some readers may gravitate instead towards the similarities in their personal lives. In her essay on Austen, Welty asks a rhetorical question when she wonders aloud how the future will treat this "unusual" author's "unique" life (5). In her deliberation on the matter of Austen's personal life affecting her critical treatment, the reader can hear echoes of Welty's own anxieties over her future reception: "will the future treat her as blindly as we have been known to treat her and take her down because she was a spinster who—having never lived anywhere outside her father's rectory and the later family homes in Bath, Southampton, and Chawton[…]—could never have got to know very much about life? Will they wish to call her a snob?" (Welty EoTS 5). Like Welty, Austen's fiction was largely unconnected to the major sociohistorical events of her day: "Her detractors have also declared that even the Battle of Waterloo went by without her notice, so remote was her life" (EoTS 5). As certainly as these charges have been hurled at Jane Austen through the years, these things would and have been said of Eudora Welty. Both women remained single and dedicated to their work throughout their lives. Both women have been criticized for having somewhat insular visions that omit larger world events—Austen did not acknowledge Napoleon's campaigns in Europe, and Welty was largely silent when it came to the explosion of the Civil Rights Movement in the

South—with some notable exceptions. More than anyone, Eudora Welty must have felt how these reproaches could sting a writer. In her essay, she works to defend Jane Austen's talent and vision, and in so doing displays to the reader those characteristics she has in common with her beloved Austen.

In her description of Jane Austen, Welty emphasizes how the older author's raw talent is encouraged by a conducive home environment and how both aspects work in tandem to bring forth the writer in Austen:

> Her intelligence is formidable, and it was well nourished by an understanding family. She was beautifully educated at home, was always well read […] and 'her memory was tenacious'. Best of all, she had been born, or rewarded with fairy gifts—not one, but two entirely separate ones. She had the genius of originality, and she had the genius of comedy. (EoTS 4)

Welty was also the product of an encouraging family, just as extremely well-read as she testifies in her autobiographical essays, and a unique and engaging mind. In fact, much of what Eudora Welty praised in Jane Austen could just as easily and truthfully be said of her. Welty commends Austin's "wit" and "celerity" and her use of comedy; however, it is interesting that Welty connects Austen's comedic confidence and prowess to the family life that many critics believe limited her writing abilities. Welty says,

> There is probably some connection between this confidence, this positivity [that Austen received at home], and the flow of comedy. A novelist may be strictly satiric in the presence of strangers, encouraged to more acidity still by a ring of sworn enemies. But when the listeners all have bright faces, ready minds, teasing and

> affectionate dispositions, mimicking ways, and kindred ears, it would have been hard, even had it occurred to her, to keep up hauteur, to give in to sentimentality, to plunge into unconfined melodrama, to pause for too many sermons along the way. Comedy is sociable and positive, and exacting. Its methods, its boundaries, its point, all belong to the familiar. (6)

Welty displays a similar comedic comfort in her own writing. Rarely lapsing into sentimentality or cruelty but relying purely on shared experience to construct the comedy of her regular people, Welty takes from Austen this notion that "Comedy is sociable and positive, and exacting" (6).

In order to keep themselves to this 'exacting" code of comedy, both Welty and Austen shift their focus from the large stage of human drama and interactions to the smaller, more challenging stage that is small town and domestic life. Welty lauds Austen's interior vision declaring one can be "indelibly certain" that "never did it escape Jane Austen that the interesting situations of life can take place, and notably do, at home. The dangerous confrontations and the decisive dialogues can very conveniently happen in country parsonages" (5). Austen, having remained for the majority of her life in the same small country home surrounded by her family and close friends, rarely ventured beyond the world she knew so intimately. Welty, too, remained for the majority of her life in Jackson, Mississippi, in her paternal home keeping company with the same friends and family she had known her whole life. Yet, Welty contends that this somewhat limited experience was precisely enough

material for Austen to craft an entire universe: "Jane Austen *needed* very little space, very limited material, to work with; asking for little seems immoderate to us. Given: a household in the country, then add its valuable neighbor—and there, under her hands, is the full presence of the world" (6). Welty learns from Austen that it is not the size and variety of life experiences that make her a good writer but rather the attention and insight she bring to her everyday experiences that determines her place as a writer, or to put it in Welty's words, "[one's]world, small in size but drawn exactly to scale, may of course easily be regarded as a larger world seen at a judicious distance—it would be the exact distance at which all haze evaporates, full clarity prevails, and true perspective appears" (7).

In both women's work families are central to the lessons and the comedy because they are the most immediate material either author has and from that immediacy a discipline emerges that informs their entire careers. Each author conveys in her fiction that "the unit of everything worth knowing in life is in the family, that family relationships are the natural basis of all other relationships" (7). Welty admires Jane Austen's acuity in her representation of human interactions and strives in her own work to be as perceptive. Both authors realize that writing about a specific place in time (what critics may call regionalism) can limit a story's resonance, but the stuff of humanity does not age. To this point Welty says,

> There is nothing in Jane Austen's work to let us imagine we have learned any more about human character and behavior than she knew; indeed, part of what we know today may well have come to us through reading and rereading her novels. {…} How familiar, after all, and how inevitable is the motivation of man. (11)

Though Austen, like Woolf, is separated from Welty by nationality and geography, the simple but never simplistic writing of one author informs and shapes the younger author so that her fiction takes on much of what she admires. In the personal and professional lives of Jane Austen and Eudora Welty, as well as both authors' approach to comedy, a reader can see how beneficial the influence of one writer's work was on the other.

Willa Cather is the only American writer that I examine in connection with the work of Eudora Welty, and as the token American it may seem like Cather is already speaking the same geographic language as Welty. Certainly, one of the labels that both enabled Eudora Welty's success and somewhat limited her readership is the label of regional writer. Eudora Welty is unavoidably connected to the South that she so vividly portrays in her fiction. She is unapologetic about her chosen setting and views the landscape of the South—geographically and culturally—with an unflinching gaze. Welty's townscapes (Morgana, Banner, Jackson), and her landscapes (Northern Mississippi, the Delta, the rural South) are remarkable in their accuracy and still leave much to the imagination. Willa Cather is similarly categorized by her interest in undeniably

American landscapes. However, for both writers these scenic settings are but only one element of a larger story. Welty's characters may have experiences that can be superficially categorized as Southern but ultimately the themes her characters explore through these experiences speak to a universal human condition. In turn, the characters' universality imbues their settings with a transformative ability. Readers from across the country (even from around the world!) can see resemblances to their own communities in these rural Southern towns. Cather appeals to the experience of immigrants from far reaches of the globes in her texts, even though those stories are indisputably set in the American West. Because their distinct landscapes are given the ability to shape-shift through their adroit creation of universal human experiences, Willa Cather and Eudora Welty reach out beyond the red prairies and Mississippi Delta to appeal to a shared sense of aspirational humanity.

Though Eudora Welty read Willa Cather later in life, she responds to a question in an interview with John Griffin Jones by stating that Willa Cather was an American female writer that greatly moved her: "I was kind of slow finding her. I wish I had had the sense to read her sooner. One time I just sat down and read it all through" (Prenshaw 324). In a separate interview in 1978, Reynolds Price attempts to make Welty ascribe a specific word or feeling to her book of essays, *The Eye of the Story*; however, when Welty resists Price, volunteers the

following as the theme he finds most explicit in her critical work, "The word I noticed most frequently…is *radiance* in its various forms. It recurs a dozen or so times and clusters round the writers who seem closest to you, both as reader and writer" (231). Price follows his first statement with a poignant observation: "And it seems to me that the word contains and summarizes an important theme of all the essays—that the writer is a visionary whose gift is a gift of actual and internal vision; that the writer is someone who both sees and radiates" (231). Certainly, this observation is true of Willa Cather as well, and Eudora Welty's critical essay on the subject, "The House of Willa Cather," validates this idea. By reading the entirety of Willa Cather's fiction, Eudora Welty found "a visionary" who modeled the gift of "actual" vision in her landscapes and settings, as well as "internal vision" in her deft navigation of human desires (23).

In her essay on Cather, Welty does not shy from singing the Nebraskan's praises, she speaks of her as a visionary, a virtuoso, a high priestess. Welty applauds Cather's ability to make fiction come alive: "There is a quality of animation that seems naturally come by, that seems a born part of every novel. Her own living world is around us as we read, present to us through our eyes and ears and touch" (41). Still, Welty reminds herself that though the world on the page seems real enough to enter, Cather has crafted something that is beyond the perception of ordinary viewers: "What she has given us is, of course, not the

landscape as you and I would see it, but her vision of it; we are looking at a work of art" (42). Welty even analyzes how Cather achieves this affect in her fiction:

> Willa Cather saw her broad land in a sweep, but she saw selectively too—the detail that made all the difference. She never lost sight of the particular in the panorama. Her eye was on the human being. In her continuous, acutely conscious and responsible act of bringing human value into focus, it was her accomplishment to bring our gaze from that wide horizon, across the stretches of both space and time, to the intimacy and immediacy of the lives of a handful of human beings. (44)

Just as Willa Cather narrows her panoramic vision to pinpoint "the lives of a handful of human beings," so Eudora Welty exercises a strikingly similar strategy when she paints a picture of a whole state, even an entire section of America, and then immediately zeroes in on one specific family. The effect of this strategy, both in Welty's fiction as well as Cather's, is to give the characters that one focuses on a position that is simultaneously elevated and communal. The Shimerdas in *My Antonia* and the Beecham and Renfro clans in *Losing Battles* are perfect examples of this approach. Both sets of families would have seemed unremarkable to the passerby, merely faceless representatives of a great agrarian rural population in America. Yet, Welty and Cather give these hoi polloi distinct identities, and by doing so lift these characters out from the midst of their fellows to epitomize a specific human experience. These families become representative of American experience and the standard by which we measure other family

interaction. In the hands of these two authors, unremarkable people and places are vessels that transport the reader into understanding of universal themes.

Each author recognizes that they should not be pushing a specific political or social agenda in their texts, but rather that their purpose as artists was to lead the reader to a firm foundation of truth. Welty speaks to this when she addressed Cather's position on storytelling: "Truth is the rock. Willa Cather saw it as unassailable" (60). To reach an objective depiction of truth is the artist's highest goal; however, what Eudora Welty and Willa Cather both understood and strove to communicate in their fiction is that the integrity of the vessel matters, that without an inviolable identity a story cannot lead the reader to truth. An emphasis on large landscapes and small groups of somewhat ordinary folk garnered each woman a place amongst regional writers, but close readers of both Willa Cather and Eudora Welty will notice that regional writing meant that they each "used [their] own terms; and left nothing out. What other honorable way is there for an artist to have her say?" (54). Willa Cather's dedication to truth, the scope of her imagination, and her attention to details all affect the way Eudora Welty, another regional writer, conveys her truth. Both writers deliver their lessons on their "own terms" which involved writing in specific regional settings, but the truths they uncover about the human condition, are rock hard and "unassailable" (60).

The last woman writer I will discuss gives Eudora Welty the most valuable lesson I think a young female artist can learn: surround yourself with sympathetic and supportive individuals. Though Welty acknowledges in her interviews and essays how Woolf's writing influenced her own conception of fiction, I argue that the lifestyle Woolf led was also terribly attractive to Eudora Welty and something she emulated in her later life. In Linda Kuehl's 1972 interview with Welty, Kuehl asks if Welty ever returned to the writing of Virginia Woolf, to which the author emphatically responds, "Yes. She was the one who opened the door. When I read *To the Lighthouse*, I felt, Heavens, *what is this?* I was so excited by the experience I couldn't sleep or eat. I've read it many times since" (Prenshaw 75). Eudora Welty does not hesitate to acknowledge the depth of gratitude and appreciation she has for her fellow female in letters across the Atlantic: "I know even though I couldn't show it in my work, heavens, the sense of what she has done certainly influenced me as an artist" (325). Though reticent to encourage comparisons between the work she was producing and Woolf's work, Welty is nonetheless enthusiastic about Woolf's literary output and everything that it encompasses. In her review of Woolf's *Granite and Rainbow*, Welty characterizes Virginia Woolf's artistic powers, saying,

> That beautiful mind! That was the thing. Lucid, passionate, independent, acute, proudly and incessantly nourished, eccentric for honorable reasons, sensitive for every reason, it has marked us forever. Hers was sensitivity beside which a Geiger counter is a

> child's toy made of a couple of tin cans and a rather common piece of string. Allow it its blind spots, for it could detect pure gold. In the presence of poetic fire, it sent out showers of sparks of its own. It was a mind like some marvelous enchanter's instrument that her beloved Elizabethans might have got rumor of and written poems about (EoTS, 191)

It is not just Woolf's "beautiful mind" that Welty admired; she also closely follows and is impressed by Virginia Woolf's artistic lifestyle. The community of like-minded individuals Woolf surrounded herself with greatly appeals to a young Welty.

It is a well-known fact that Virginia Woolf's lifelong battle with manic depression hindered her work as often as it spurred it onward. One of the elements that she intentionally establishes as a restorative in her life, to help her maintain some semblance of control and consistency during periods of "violent illness," was a community of friends and artists (EoTS 197). Undoubtedly, the Bloomsbury group has now garnered enough fame and recognition in critical circles as a group that supported and fostered the artistic efforts of its members that it comes as no surprise that Virginia Woolf needed to live so closely with a community of like-minded individuals. Though Eudora Welty does not have to contend with the same level of mental instability, a writer's life can be extremely solitary and if one does not construct a support system around oneself, then the result can lead to the kind of depression and isolation that plagued Zelda Fitzgerald. Eudora Welty, as Woolf's contemporary, in fiction as well as the

tradition of women writers, perceives the world that Woolf has constructed around herself and can identify the action as purposeful. Welty praises the Bloomsbury group for what it represents in the larger world of literature as well as for the personal function it served in Virginia Woolf's ability to sustain her efforts as an artist. Welty paints the scene lovingly:

> We are in Bloomsbury when it was young, when the creative juices were running high and there was a heady current of daring in the air. Seen through the eyes of one who helped make it, it is restored to us briefly here, a society every bit its own, brightly conscious of itself, civilized, unsentimental, liberally disposed, not only led by, but thrilled by, the intelligence, young artists and writers wandering in and out of one another's houses in a sort of homemade state of grace. (EoTS 195-96)

Welty identifies how necessary this vibrant atmosphere is for Woolf's work, likely because she too longed for and carefully constructed "a society every bit its own, brightly conscious of itself," "thrilled by the intelligence" of other artists and writers to help fuel her own creative output. Though other critics, such as Suzan Harrison, have managed to plot comparisons between the two authors that are both fascinating and instructive, the place of intersection that is interesting for our purposes is both writers' construction of and participation in community. I believe that, among other lessons, one of Virginia Woolf's greatest gifts to the younger writer is the example she sets in her reliance upon a community of like-minded individuals.

Welty makes the following statement about Woolf, but it could be applied just as aptly to her work and life: "what her readers have always known from her writings is that a need for intimacy lies at the very core of Virginia Woolf's life. Besides the physical, there are other orders of intimacy, other ways to keep life from splitting asunder. Lightly as it may touch on the moment, almost any letter she writes is to some degree and expression of this passion" (197). In a similar way, not only does Eudora Welty's prose speak to what she feels is one of our more basic and urgent human desires, a quest for intimacy, but also her letters are a frequent practice of and testament to that fact. Geography and marital status may have separated these two women, and one's career may have been just starting out when the other's career ended, but their desire for community is remarkably similar. Each author's best works are dedicated to this theme of navigating community as the artist/individual, and their very lives adhere to the pattern they explore in their fiction. Virginia Woolf indeed "opened the door" for Eudora Welty in that she offered her an example of healthful community and an invitation across the years and pages to join in the sorority.

Eudora Welty is an undeniably unique writer. Her literary voice is one that was cultivated over decades of writing and one that rings out amidst regional and gothic writers as something set apart. However, it is my contention that admiring and adapting the fiction of other women writers allowed Eudora

Welty to craft her own voice in a way that is both familiar and different. Because Eudora Welty had read and admired the work of Jane Austen, Willa Cather, and Virginia Woolf, she had a blueprint in mind for how to craft a supportive personal life as a woman writer. Furthermore, by reading the writing of other women Welty was given examples of subject matter that was simultaneously interior and universally insightful and instructive. She was shown how artistic vision could be sweeping and still focused on a pinpoint of truth. Because Eudora Welty read and loved other women writers she was given an example of how to become the kind of woman writer that future generations would also read and love. In my fourth chapter we will contrast this example of a supportive tradition of women's fiction with the absence of influential women writers in the life of Zelda Fitzgerald. Now that I have examined which female writers lit the torch for Eudora Welty, I will discuss how she developed her persona as a writer by building from the example of two female contemporaries.

The Paradox of the Woman Writer: Mentorship and Comparison in Welty's Early Career

In the introduction to his book on famous American literary friendships, *A Common Life*, David Laskin quotes Henry James saying "[E]very man works better when he has companions working in the same line" (Laskin 13). This holds true for all four of the literary pairs Laskin holds under the microscope, but it is a complicated and unwieldy truth for the only all-female pairing under his

consideration: Katherine Anne Porter and Eudora Welty. As important as it was for Eudora Welty to have read and admired past female authors, it was just as important for her to have female contemporaries that she could learn from. We will examine one relationship that was beneficial for Welty's formation as a writer and one that was instructive, if only as a negative example. We will begin with the positive example and examine Welty's mentorship under Katherine Anne Porter. Though Welty's relationship with Porter seemed to be an unusual fit, it was a fruitful association that helped Eudora Welty hone her authorial identity.

Laskin describes the odd couple of Porter and Welty thusly: "How strange that the extravagant, flamboyant southern belle Katherine Anne Porter should have launched the career of the shy, watchful, carefully guarded Eudora Welty" (15). In the observation above, Laskin touches on the differences of personality between the two unlikely literary companions, but his remark also touches on something even more startling and certainly more significant: the importance and influence of mentorship in the life of the young Eudora Welty. Of course, the idea that mentorship would be helpful to a fledgling writer just breaking on to the scene in the competitive world of American letters is not surprising. Yet, from what we know of the discretion, modesty, and quiet but fierce independence of Eudora Welty, it is astounding to uncover the details of Porter's

mentorship of Welty, undertaken initially at the prestigious writer's colony in Yaddo, New York, in the summer of 1941. The two women shared a meaningful relationship, in spite of the fact that they appear to be intrinsically opposed in manner, appearance, taste, and habits, both personal and professional. In so doing Welty and Porter bear witness to the complexities and richness of non-nuclear, sororal relationships, as advocated by Michie, in the life of a woman writer.

Yaddo, an invitation-only writer's retreat existed as the "Harvard of artists' colonies" since its inaugural season in the late 1920s (Laskin 214). The resplendent grounds of the fabled retreat served as a stage for the personal drama and collegial rivalries of some of the American literary world's most glamorous figures. Katherine Anne Porter sponsored Eudora Welty's invitation to Yaddo as she had sponsored her early candidacy for the Guggenheim Fellowship, and shepherded the younger writer for the duration of her stay. Porter's own residence in Yaddo had begun the previous June after the very public breakup of her marriage to Albert Erskine in 1940. Laskin says Porter was "received like royalty in exile and was initially put up in the mansion's huge tower room, which had seventeen windows opening on views of trees, hills, and gardens. The aristocratic aura of the place suited Porter" (215). This depiction of

Porter's flair for excess, paired with Laskin's description of the writer below begin to form a picture of Porter that is glamorous, if a tad ostentatious:

> She was one of those writers around whom shimmered the silvery aura of celebrity: Like Byron (the godfather of all literary personalities), Dickens, the young Melville, Oscar Wilde, Edith Wharton, Ernest Hemingway, Norman Mailer, Robert Lowell, she satisfied (or pandered to) our need for literary "stars," figures whose lives and loves seem larger, deeper, more significant than our own, people whose behavior in bars, wars, bedrooms, public stages, or simply in conversation with their friends seems far more wonderful and romantic than anything their characters do on a printed page. (206)

This clear preference and predisposition towards being treated like Southern gentility demonstrated in Laskin's depiction of Porter, as well as Porter's eager participation in public life as a literary "star," is at odds with what we know of Welty's own behavior and personality. Welty is most frequently ascribed adjectives like painfully shy, reticent, sheltered, and private; and while these terms may be somewhat hyperbolic, they certainly do not paint the picture of a social butterfly eager to participate in a highly-charged competitive residency at the behest of someone like Porter.

To further contribute to the oddness of the situation, Laskin shares that Welty had been to a similar writer's conference in Middlebury, Vermont, the summer prior to her stay at Yaddo and had found the experience odious. Bread Loaf, a two-week sojourn for promising writers under the supervision of Robert Frost, seemed to be too self-conscious, and too self-congratulatory for Welty's

tastes,[4] so it may seem curious that she would willingly undergo a similar experience the very next summer. Yet I posit that there are two very practical reasons for Welty to accept the invitation as well as one reason that is slightly more difficult to categorize, but just as integral to the formation of the young writer.

The first and most pressing reason for Welty to go along with Porter's invitation to summer at Yaddo is to be in close proximity to the older writer in order to ensure that she followed through on her promise to pen the introduction to Welty's forthcoming collection of short stories, *A Curtain of Green.* Porter had graciously accepted the task early in 1941 and by that summertime Welty's long-awaited collection[5] was nearly completed and ready for publication. The only thing that was missing was Porter's introduction. John Woodburn, Welty's

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[4] Laskin insists on calling Welty's tastes sensitive in his description of her experience and subsequent dislike of the two artist conferences. He intimates that the liberal literary ways of the New England literati are shocking to the young Southern writer, and she shrinks from them with prudish self-censure. He says: "This episode is utterly characteristic of the young Welty […] the acute concern for good manners (she mentions that, as a fellow, she stayed at Bread Loaf for free and hated the idea of looking like an ungrateful guest); the eagerness to suppress anything mean-spirited, nasty, or sharply critical that she might have said or thought. Nice Southern girls do not voice horror, even quiet horror, about their hosts in public" (213). However, I think her writing pays testament to her lack of squeamish-ness when it comes to criticism of absurdities in the manners and being of any group, and I believe that it is actually Welty's natural reserve and humility, her disdain of self-promotion, which made the "high-powered" workshops an unpleasant experience for the young writer (214).

[5] Laskin notes that Welty had been writing and compiling the short stories that make up the collection in *A Curtain of Green* for nearly four years by 1941 when she is shadowing Porter around Yaddo.

publisher,[6] sends her several feverish letters while she is at Yaddo, urging her to press Porter for the introduction saying, "Kid, you keep after her!", "Remind her we've got a deadline," and "Get it out of her, baby" (Kreyling; qtd in Laskin 216). Even with this insistent pleading from Woodburn, Welty shrinks from pressing Porter for this favor and an additional seven months elapse before the introduction is completed. This example of Porter's insensitivity to Welty's position is somewhat emblematic of the relationship the two writers had. Welty understood that to be initiated into sorority, and from there into the highly competitive world of American literature, it was essential to have an established mentor like Katherine Anne Porter; however, this does not mean that their relationship was always easy or mutually beneficial. Sometimes, Porter took advantage of Welty's good manners and pressed the young writer into uncomfortable situations. Still, being challenged inside the relatively safe bounds of sorority is preferable to trying to make it on your own outside of any community, as we will see when we examine Zelda Fitzgerald's experience with her contemporaries.

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[6] John Woodburn is working for Doubleday at the time. He is responsible for publishing Welty's first short story collection as well as giving her name to Diarmuid Russell, who would become Welty's agent, head council, and close personal friend. Welty moved with Woodburn from Doubleday to Harcourt, Brace and then when Woodburn retires, she collaborates with Albert Erskine again, then a publisher at Random House, for the publication of *Losing Battles.* This information is from an interview conducted with Jean Todd Freeman in 1977 (Prenshaw 186).

Another practical consideration that could have motivated Welty to attend a less-than-appealing-writer's engagement is the opportunity to work uninterrupted on new material. Having finished her first short story collection, Welty could have begun to look towards her next big writing project during her stay in upstate New York; however, Laskin informs the reader that this was nearly impossible as Porter's protégée. Welty is pressed into service as Porter's chauffeur and has a ring-side seat to her mentor's performances as Porter played chef, hostess, deejay, and social coordinator for the summer. Shockingly though, Porter manages also to produce the first seventy-five pages of the novel that will become *Ship of Fools* during breaks between the entertainment. It is during her time attached to Porter at Yaddo that Welty learns a lesson that will serve her again and again during her own life as a writer: "Her life was one of interruptions, and interruptions of the interruptions" (*My Introduction to Katherine Anne Porter*, 23). Welty is referring specifically to Katherine Anne Porter here, but her statement is applicable to the lives of all women writers. Welty continues: "I was to learn that writers do generally live that way, and not without their own collusion. No help ever comes, unless in the form of still another interruption" (23). This observation of the interruptions suffered (or in Porter's case created) by women writers is almost a prediction of Welty's own

future, a fact she testifies to in her correspondence with William Maxwell.[7] Of course, interruptions are a fact of most writers' lives, as the outside world does have a rather nefarious way of demanding attention, yet this is particularly true in Welty's case as the nature of her many interruptions usually come in the form of caring for her mother, or other family members, her paternal domicile, or maintaining the many friendships she kept up over the years. Learning to write despite the many distractions life has to offer was a valuable lesson Welty learns from her otherwise perpetually distractible mentor.

There are additional reasons that Welty may have been persuaded to join Katherine Anne Porter on a summer excursion that would turn out to be simultaneously professionally fruitful and frustrating, but this reason is more intangible in nature. At the point in time when the young writer embarked on her summer journey, she had not yet spent any notable time with Porter. Porter had, as mentioned previously, sponsored Welty for the Guggenheim Fellowship, and the two shared a number of famous literary friends, among them Robert

[7] This is a reference to the specific quote at the beginning of this chapter where Maxwell encourages Welty that her tenacity and commitment to the work is what makes her "stubborn enough to be a writer", but also an acknowledgement that in the majority of Welty's correspondence with Maxwell in WTiTSWHS she is always having to put down a draft to do something else, often something specifically domestic, such as tend her mother's garden, return a nicety (like paying a social visit or writing a letter of thanks), take care of her ailing relatives, and oversee home construction.

Penn Warren and Ford Maddox Ford[8], but they had not spent much time in each other's company. David Laskin's portrayal of the friendship, though decidedly misogynistic in its undertones, does serve to paint a clear picture of the striking figure Katherine Anne Porter was in modern literary circles.[9] He spends a good deal of time chronicling Porter's famed Southern beauty but also mentions that in literary circles her gifts as a conversationalist "were as legendary as her beauty," and these social graces paired with her writing talents meant that Porter "was indeed a 'Great Personage' … and someone to be reckoned with (206).

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[8] Welty actually meets Porter through Porter's ex-husband Albert Erskine. Erskine is a publisher with the *Southern Review* out of LSU to whom Welty sent many of her first short stories, and Erskine passes them to Porter to read. Of this early literary relationship Welty has said, "He [speaking of Robert Penn Warren, Erskine's co-publisher at SR] helped me for the time he accepted my stories for the *Southern Review*. He and Cleanth Brooks and Albert Erskine all were down at the *Southern Review* … and it was to them I sent my earliest stories. And they accepted them! Helped me? Why, it just gave me, you know, my life to get my stories into print at that time, and they printed a number of them. They were marvelous to me" Taken from an interview with Charles T. Bunting (Prenshaw, 41).

[9] I say misogynistic because Laskin seems to dedicate an unthinkable amount of space to establish how Porter's male acquaintances perceived her particular beauty. I have included a few examples here as proof, but my list is not nearly as exhaustive as Laskin's. Cleanth Brooks, Porter's neighbor and friend says, "Katherine Anne knew how beautiful she was and she loved being beautiful. I'm sure she thanked God on her knees every night for making her beautiful." Glenway Wescott describes her, "She has in fact a lovely face, of the utmost distinction in the Southern way; moonflower-pale, never sunburned, perhaps not burnable. She is a small woman, with a fine figure still; sometimes very slender, sometimes not. Her eyes are large, dark and lustrous…Her voice is sweet, a little velvety or husky." David Diamond, the composer says, "Hers was not a soft, feminine body. She was bony and hard. There was no succulence to her. There was a hardness of body and character." Laskin throws in his own two cents saying, "As a young woman, Porter, bony or not, had been pretty enough to work in the movies, and approaching fifty, she looked a least a decade younger, with the sleek poised demeanor of a mature woman of the world. After a three-year residence in Paris from 1933 to 1936, she had become the epitome of literary chic" (Laskin 206-7).

Katherine Anne Porter enjoyed the status of literary celebrity during this time period and, though it is doubtful that Welty was seduced by the glow of literary fame, it is feasible that this established female writer's artistic success and confidence was more attractive than that of the many masculine literary figures that Welty had so far encountered. Katherine Anne Porter was both similar and decidedly foreign to Welty, the exact recipe for healthful sorority as prescribed by Michie. Thus, a connection that may seem inexplicable when viewing both authors from a cool contemporary critical distance, makes perfect sense when viewed under the lens of beneficial female community

For a young Eudora Welty, the allure of Porter was entirely in the art she created and the successful career she made for herself. Porter found the process of writing difficult and strenuous, and it tormented and delighted her in equal portions. Welty writes that "one of the most enduring lessons she learned as a writer from Porter was to value 'the role of difficulty in writing . . . Katherine Anne was helping me to recognize living with difficulty as a form of passion'" (208). Welty's short stories are bursting with exuberant characters, but it is through Porter that Welty learns that even within the process of producing fiction, especially onerous fiction, passion could and should exist. Though they seem an unlikely duo, Eudora Welty learned several important lessons about the business of writing fiction from Katherine Anne Porter. Furthermore, through

Porter's mentorship, Welty was able to gain entreé to the highly exclusive social world of American writers, and once in she made the acquaintance of literary figures that would be helpful to her in her later career. Most importantly of all, Eudora Welty learned through her relationship with Katherine Anne Porter how one could interact with literary recognition as a female author and this informed how she would deal with that same fame in her own life.

In an interview with Linda Kuehl, Welty is asked she ever felt like "part of a literary community, along with people like Flannery O'Connor, Carson McCullers, Katherine Anne Porter or Caroline Gordon" (Prenshaw 80). Her response to this question concerning her membership in a distinctly Southern, all -female literary group is characteristically evasive,

> I'm not sure there's any dotted line connecting us up, though all of us knew about each other and all of us, I think, respected and read each other's work and understood it. And some of us are friends of long standing. I don't think there was any passing about of influences, but there's a lot of pleasure in thinking in whose lifetime your own lifetime has happened to come along. (Prenshaw 81)

Typical of Welty's preference to stay unfettered to any one category she eludes Kuehl's attempt to classify her writing. Yet, whether she admits it or not, Welty *is* connected to each of these writers in ways that are instrumental to her formation and success as an author. However, in the interest of concision we will focus on one specific connection between Welty, her mentor Katherine Anne Porter and a

juvenile Carson McCullers that through its negative dynamics taught Welty a valuable career lesson.

Porter and Welty were not the only two female writers-in-residence at Yaddo in the summer of 1941. Carson McCullers, then just 23 and the "enfant terrible" of the American literary scene, was also present (Laskin 224). Loud, rash, demonstrative, alcoholic, and determined to shock the old guard, McCullers burst into the spotlight with her first novel, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* and became an instant success. Laskin avers that other than her regional identification, McCullers had nothing in common with Porter and Welty, "[They] knew at once and for all time that McCullers was not *their* kind of woman or their kind of writer. McCullers was not, in their opinion or really in just about anybody's opinion, a nice girl—in fact, just the opposite. Welty called her a nasty little girl who wrote nasty stories" (223).[10] The relationship between the three women is thorny to navigate at best and at its worst it can seem like a case of bullying. Still, the connection between the three literary women informs Welty of the paradoxical nature of being a woman writer in the American South at this time while it also underscores the double-sided nature of sorority for later readers.

[10] Laskin takes this quote from a letter that Welty writes to Katherine Anne Porter in September of 1941, from the McKeldin Library, University of Maryland.

Due to the proximity of both writers' literary debuts, their similarity in region, age and gender, and their seemingly similar interests in the grotesque, McCullers and Welty were instant candidates for comparison, and many friends and critics leapt at the opportunity to link the two together[11]. I have already documented how strongly Welty resisted comparison and categorization, insisting that "a writer's work should be everything" (Prenshaw 81).[12] Thus, it should come as no surprise that these parallels between her work and the work of McCullers rankled the individualistic Welty. In addition, Laskin astutely notes that each writer used the grotesque in very different ways. For her part, McCullers is interested in the ways in which "love is essentially perverse," and the grotesque serves as a mere vehicle for that perversity. McCullers does explore how alienation can manifest in the lives of her characters, but she seems preoccupied with what Laskin calls "the bisexual love triangle" in which at least one, if not all, members of the equation are ultimately unsatisfied and estranged from hetero-normative society at tale's end (225). Though Welty also relies on the

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[11] As in the interview with Linda Kuehl cited earlier in the section, as well as Welty's interview with Charles Bunting and others in Prenshaw's *Conversations.*

[12] From the Kuehl interview in response to a question about Welty's feelings towards biography, particularly one with her as its subject. Full quote is, "How would you feel about a biography about yourself?" "Shy, and discouraged at the very thought, because to me a writer's work should be everything. A writer's whole feeling, the force of his whole life, can go into a story—but what he's worked for is to get an objective piece down on paper. That should be read instead of some account of his life, with that understanding—her is something which now exists and was made by the hands of this person. Read it for what it is" (Prenshaw 81).

incorporation of all manner of stunted, isolated, disabled, and maimed persons in her work, her focus is not on the perversity of their situations but rather on how their physical differences point to universal human experiences, namely loneliness and dissatisfaction.

McCullers seems to be a personification of those traits she bestows upon her characters, her social difference becomes exaggerated and eventually seen as deformity and this results in the author's bad behavior, loneliness, and eventual isolation. Laskin agrees with this impression and adds, "with her strange fits of passion, her thermos of sherry, her monologues and moping, her habit of hurling herself physically and emotionally at people who aroused her, [McCullers] was just such a **freak** in the eyes of Porter and Welty" (225, emphasis mine). It is unclear whether Welty and Porter believed in and attached this cruel epithet to McCullers, especially since Welty publicly professes to McCullers biographer Virginia Spencer Carr that "I wish Carson's and my own paths had crossed more…We were never to know each other very well, though I do know we always liked, right along, each other's work," and never speaks ill of McCullers's personal habits or her fiction in interviews or public spaces (Laskin 230). However, there is documentation that both Welty and Porter avoided McCullers

during their sojourn at Yaddo[13] (probably a noticeable pattern as Yaddo was a rather insular community). Sadly, without guidance or healthful community McCullers continued the destructive habits she had formed at this early age,[14] and perhaps even sadder still, she remained in the eyes of her peers a freak.

As we examined in chapter one, Michie's *Sororophobia* creates a framework of sorority wherein "differences between women" can be articulated in "a safe, familiar, and familial space" (17). It is through this process of interaction that dissimilar sisters can "work out issues of identity and difference with relation to each other" without fear of rejection (ibid). However, Michie includes that female community can sometimes come at the cost of ostracizing those women who land beyond the scope of sisterhood, women who are othered by their sexual status or preference. Michie says historically female figures that sexualize the sisterhood community cannot be reclaimed by sisterhood, but rather must be sacrificed so that the sisterhood may remain inviolable. The reader can see similarities between this Victorian model of sisterhood and the dichotomy of

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[13] Both Virginia Spencer Carr's biography of Carson McCullers and Joan Givner's biography of Katherine Anne Porter mention McCuller's infatuation with Porter that resulted in the older woman spurning and avoiding the younger woman. One can assume since Eudora Welty was attached to Porter during her stay at Yaddo she likely had little to do with McCullers either.

[14] McCullers dies early at the age of 50, and though she publishes four novels and a number of short stories that are adapted to stage and silver screen she is never personally comfortable with her success nor certain of the critical acclaim she garners.

Flirt and Freak established in Welty's modern American circle. Welty's ability to overlook Katherine Anne Porter's accepted, if somewhat overstated, sexuality as it falls within the realm of nominal difference is an example of rehabilitative sisterhood. Yet, the sisterhood cements their identity by contrasting themselves with the other, in this case, Carson McCullers' freak figure. McCullers with her indecent display of sexual interest, her bisexuality, and her untiring advances makes for the perfect sacrificial lamb. However, acceptance of this paradigm keeps alive "sororophobic undercurrents" by "simultaneously displaying and containing sexual rivalry between women within the trope of sisterhood" (18). Therefore, Eudora Welty's choice to reject the flirt and the freak paradox and maintain civil professional relationships with both women shows us that she recognizes that these comparisons reduce women to sexual caricatures. For her part, Eudora Welty chooses to remove sexuality from the equation in her personal and professional life. Though this certainly has its challenges and does not entirely counteract sororophobia, we will explore in the next section how this strategy enables Eudora Welty to sustain lasting and beneficial relationships with women and men throughout her career.

Welty's Epistolary Friendships: A Chronicle of Supportive Professional Community

Eudora Welty was fortunate to possess many close personal friends who also doubled as professional contacts. These friendships were an integral piece of

Welty's growth and success as an author and have been well-documented in recent literary criticism. Michael Kreyling's 1991 novel, *Author and Agent: Eudora Welty and Diarmuid Russell* explores the relationship between Welty and her longtime literary agent and friend, Diarmuid Russell. Welty biographer Suzanne Marrs has edited two collections of Welty's correspondence with notable literary friends. The first, *What There is to Say We Have Said: The Correspondence of Eudora Welty and William Maxwell*, was published in 2011 and covers Welty's letters with her counsellor, friend, and fiction editor with *The New Yorker*, William Maxwell. The second collection of letters Marrs co-edited with Tom Nolan is titled, *Meanwhile There are Letters: The Correspondence of Eudora Welty and Ross Macdonald* (This volume explores the epistolary relationship Eudora Welty had with Ross Macdonald[15]). There is also the 2013 collection of gardening letters to various friends edited by Julia Eichelberger titled, *Tell About Night Flowers: Eudora Welty's Gardening Letters 1940-1949* that documents a series of professional friendships, including Welty's friendship with Mary Louise Aswell in addition to many of the names mentioned above, that are maintained through a shared interest in horticulture. Patrick Samway also shares his knowledge of the friendly professional relationship shared between Eudora Welty and her second editor,

[15] Ross Macdonald is the real name of mystery fiction writer Kenneth Millar. The correspondence begins in 1970 and continues through 1982.

Robert Giroux at Harcourt, Brace that is frequently documented in the exchange of letters and telegrams from the deep American South all the way to the South of France.

This recent interest in the correspondence of Eudora Welty is caused in part by two main components. The first component is that Eudora Welty just happened to be a dedicated, and by all accounts delightful pen pal. Her letters are filled to the brim with solicitous inquiries about the health and well-being of her many friends, amusing anecdotes about life in Jackson, thoughtful musings on fellow authors and their work, and updates on her own projects. More often than not, her letters were accompanied by a token of her affection—a cutting from one of her many famous rosebushes, Mrs. Mosal's white Christmas fruitcake, a book she had read and wanted to share, or a newspaper clipping that made her think of that specific friend. All of this makes for charming reading, and it is easy to lose oneself among the familiar exchanges to the point where you feel a companionship with the author.

The second component of this surge in epistolary criticism is that Eudora Welty's community of friends was integral in her writing process. Spliced in between the snippets of small-town news, and tidbits about the Maxwell family cat is invaluable feedback on drafts of short stories, advice on the formatting of her manuscripts, and most importantly validation that her ideas were landing

with her readers (and of her friends, almost all of them were avid readers of her work). Many of the people Welty became closest to initially got acquainted with Eudora Welty through her writing. Both William Maxwell and Mary Louise Aswell were valued companions, and each of them first got to know Eudora through her fiction submissions to their literary magazines, the *New Yorker* and *Harper's Bazaar*, respectively.[16] Diarmuid Russell, Eudora's longtime literary agent and perhaps one of her biggest fans and advocates, was recommended to Eudora by editor John Woodburn, but upon their first meeting each person realized they already knew and liked one another through their shared literary interests and experiences. Even Welty's relationship with Ross Macdonald, perhaps the closest she came to a romantic attachment, was spurred by a fan letter Macdonald sent to Welty in 1970 after reading *Losing Battles.*

In spite of the volumes mentioned above that contain painstakingly transcribed letters for public consumption, some may still be tempted to dismiss the value of Eudora Welty's correspondence as inconsequential sentimentality. How much critical value, really, can one derive from a letter that consists of no more than a couple of sentences? Herein lies another intangible, yet critical,

[16] Maxwell initially meets Welty at a party hosted by Aswell and thrown by *Harper's Bazaar* and immediately asks her for submissions, and even though the *New Yorker* had rejected three of Welty's stories in the past with Maxwell as her advocate, the journal would eventually publish multiple short stories by Welty-at least seven.

element of sorority for the woman writer: emotional support. Biographers and critics of Eudora Welty are quick to point out that Welty lived what many consider a sequestered life in her paternal home, in a relatively small city,[17] in the deep South, unmarried, with sporadic forays into the wider world for the entirety of her adult life. It is the contention of these same people that the aforementioned facts constitute proof that Eudora Welty was a practical hermit, in the style of other famed women of letters,[18] closed-off from the world and from fulfilling emotional experiences. The collected correspondence of Eudora Welty resoundingly proves these naysayers wrong. Far from a lifelong shut-in, Welty had a very active life in her home community, and though the illness of her mother and the untimely deaths of her father and brothers required her to remain in Jackson her rich network of friends—maintained tirelessly through frequent visits and letters—guaranteed that she was rarely at a loss for companionship or stimulating emotional and intellectual interactions. Suzanne Marrs echoes this idea by saying, "For both Welty and Maxwell, letters provided a way of expanding the range of their friendships. Letters provided a more

[17] Obviously, Jackson is not small by standards of small towns, especially small towns in the South, but in comparison to the size and variety of the cities that were hosting many other artists of this time period like New York, Paris, London, San Francisco, Jackson seems like small potatoes. For example: Wikipedia timeline puts the population of Jackson in 1940 at just over 62,000. The population of New York City in the same year is about 7.5 million.

[18] In the tradition of women authors like Emily Dickinson and the Brontës.

comprehensive sense of the person who, whether or not that person was someone they had actually known, stood behind the stories, poems, and essays they valued or found interesting" (Marrs WTiTS 2). Furthermore, I believe that the nature of Welty's prose—as it is deeply concerned with accurately relaying human behavior and conditions—would have been insurmountably challenging to write had the writer no intimate experience of human interactions and relationships. Eudora Welty's work is strongest when it is bringing to life an ensemble, her mastery of fiction is on full display when she is orchestrating an entire chorus of well-developed characters with individual motives and roles.

This chapter began with a statement wherein Welty evaded categorization as a purely woman writer. Admittedly, the intention of this project is to re-claim Welty for exactly the space that she does not claim herself; however, one aspect of achieving this goal is to dismiss the notion that a woman writer cannot appeal to male readers. We have discussed in an earlier section how Welty maintained relationships with female mentors like Katherine Anne Porter, and how the unsatisfactory dichotomy of flirt and freak was ultimately rejected by Welty, I would now like to consider Welty's relationships with supportive male figures.

The list of Welty's famed male readers is not limited to the men mentioned in this section alone but extends to include some of the most respected names in modern southern literature, such as William Faulkner, Robert

Penn Warren, Ford Maddox Ford,[19] as well as international readers such as V.S. Pritchett, E.B. White, Cleanth Brooks, Henry Volkening, Walker Percy and many more. In pursuing literary relationships/mentorship with men, Welty managed each interaction with warmth and familiarity while still making sure the relationship was professionally beneficial. Through her relationships with Diarmuid Russell, William Maxwell, and Ross Macdonald, Welty manages to expand the definition of healthful sorority to include male influence in community. Furthermore, through her relationships with each of these men Welty receives valuable lessons that help her professionally and personally.

In Welty's introduction to *The Norton Book of Friendship* she has this to say on the value of friendship, "the promptings of friendship guided us into learning to express ourselves, teaching ourselves, between us, a language to keep it by[.] Friendship might have been the first, as well as the best, teacher of communication" ("Introduction" 40). Suzanne Marrs builds on this by saying that Eudora Welty was unique among artists in that she believed "friendship and

[19] Welty shares with Millar that she could not comfortably read Arthur Mizener's prose on Ford Maddox Ford because in addition to what she perceived as its academic inferiority she admits that "Ford, who helped all those other young writers, helped me too—he tried to interest a publisher in my stories. He couldn't—it must have been one of the last things he busied himself on, it was the last year of his life." She follows up this personal connection saying that she wishes that she could have done a better job on her "piece" reviewing Mizener's biography of Ford (Marrs & Nolan 10-15). Welty tells the whole story of Ford trying to find her a publisher in the Bunting interview (Prenshaw 40).

life as a writer…can be closely related, and the writer need not make (as distinguished psychologist Howard Gardner believes creative individuals typically do) a Faustian bargain, opting for an ascetic existence, isolating herself, or exploiting others in the quest for artistic fulfillment" (4). Welty understood that to condemn herself to complete isolation would be to cut off the root of her creative energies. Thus, for her fiction and for her sanity, Welty carefully grew and maintained relationships with people of letters for the entirety of her professional life.

When Eudora Welty was first contacted by Diarmuid Russell in the spring of 1940 she could have had no idea the absolutely crucial role he would play in reading, editing, and marketing her fiction over their thirty plus years together as author and agent.[20] Michael Kreyling characterizes the important role Diarmuid Russell plays in Welty's career by saying:

> There was a time—a long time—when Eudora Welty was not the eminent American writer she is today. Russell can take some credit for her success, although he would refuse it, for from the outset he expressed boundless faith in her art. Like all writers, Welty has had ups and downs, stretches of confidence and of doubt. Some of the stories we now think of as immediately recognizable were, Russell himself would be quick to point out, rejected by more than one prestigious journal and respected editor. A few were minutes from

[20] Welty accepted Russell's offer of representation on May 31, 1940, and they worked together until Russell's cancer forced him to retire from his agency in March of 1973. Diarmuid Russell passed away in the winter of that year on December 16, 1973. Timothy Seldes who took over when both Russell and Volkening's health issues forced them out, represented Eudora Welty from that point on.

> the incinerator. The rare ensemble or exhibition-like quality of Welty's collections, her reservations about the primacy of plot and the novel as a genre, her uneasy but career-long alliance with ambiguity as foe and as chose ally—these have not been more clearly illustrated than in her correspondence with Russell. (4)

In 1940 Eudora Welty was a relatively unknown author. She had had some luck publishing a few short stories in regional publications but had been unable to interest any larger national publications in her short stories, nor was she having any luck interesting a publisher in a collection of her short stories. For his part, Diarmuid Russell was just beginning his independent[21] career as a literary agent: in fact in the same year he wrote to Welty he opened his own literary agency with business partner Henry Volkening. The new agent proposed a mutually beneficial alliance to the young author. In his letter to Welty, Russell is much more self-deprecating in his estimation of what an agent can offer a client saying, "I suppose you know the parasitic way an agent works taking 10% of the author's takings" but qualifying this dim view of agents by adding, "He is rather a benevolent parasite because authors as a rule make more when they have an agent than they do without one" (Kreyling, 9). This purely economic point proved very true in Welty's experience with Volkening and Russell; however,

[21] Independent in that he had worked for his famous poet father, A.E. Russell, on an Irish publication for years prior to his move to New York and his partnership with Henry Volkening; so he had years of experience in the business under his father's tutelage before striking out on his own enterprise.

Diarmuid Russell's services were not limited to financial benefits. Russell would act as intercessor, first reader, collaborator, editor, advocate, and confidante over the years that he worked for and with Eudora Welty.

At the time Russell wrote to Welty, the author sensed that the success of her writing had come to a sort of impasse and thus responded to Russell's letter just three days later saying simply, "Yes—be my agent. Just as the letter was given to me, I finished a story, and holding one in each hand, it seemed inevitable" (23). Welty uses the word "inevitable" where some may have used the word serendipitous, but certainly each writer's sense of dry humor drew them closer together, regardless the partnership that began with so little fanfare would prove to be a fruitful one.

As committed as Eudora Welty was to her short fiction, Diarmuid Russell was equally committed to finding her fiction a home that would be worthy of its quality and would help position its author to achieve bigger and better things with each subsequent publication. Russell realized an important aspect of the literary business that Welty may have sensed but not yet fully grasped; in order to achieve success in fiction it was imperative to fashion a readership for oneself and to maintain consistent contact to the "literary outside" (24). Though Russell's functions were many and great in their partnership, the two mentioned above were his first and most important. Diarmuid Russell was Eudora Welty's

champion in the world of publishing for the entirety of their friendship and professional partnership.

An instance of Russell's important guidance in Welty's early career can be seen in his advocacy for her short stories. Welty had begun her fiction career as a short story writer. As such she felt it was both a legitimate field of prose and her area of proficiency and balked when publishers overlooked her first collection of short stories and asked for a novel instead. In some of her early correspondence with Russell, she entreats him, "Please do not tell me that I will have to write a novel. I do not see why if you enjoy writing short stories and cannot even think in the form of a novel you should be driven away from it and made to slave at something you do not like and do badly" (Kreyling 34). Rather than give in to publication pressures, Russell assured his author that she need not switch literary modes until, if ever, she felt ready: "You needn't fear that I will attempt to persuade you to write a novel . . .You can write what you wish and all I will ever do will be to tell you what I think of the quality" (35). In the meantime, Russell pounded the figurative pavements of New York, not satisfied until he found a home for each of Welty's "wandering" stories (35). Kreyling tells us that Russell wholeheartedly rejected the idea of being published gratis in exchange for the "honor" and on more than one occasion withheld stories from an organization in favor of publishing the story where it would be both well

positioned and paid for.[22] Russell also felt each rejection personally and railed against "nitwit" editors who lacked "perspicuity."[23] While promising his author that they would continue to market her stories to all the best spots, Russell also cautioned Welty that "editors are kind of stupid people and it takes some time for merit to dawn on them for most of their time is concerned with what is openly commercial" (41). The loyalty and tenacity Russell showed towards Welty and her work was a boon to the young author's morale. Furthermore, having someone who was knowledgeable about the marketing aspects of the literary business was invaluable to an author recently entering the unfamiliar world of publishing politics.

Russell acted as an arbitrator for Welty's short fiction expertly navigating the rocky terrain of the world of publishing for the young writer. The first obstacle for the duo was correctly branding Welty's prose, as they both recognized that "openly commercial" was one thing her fiction certainly was not. Prior to getting on board with Russell and Volkening, Welty had been burned by

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[22] When Welty first won the O.Henry prize, the committee wanted to publish her short story in their magazine but Russell declined until he realized she had won first prize, which came with a $100 check.

[23] When he reads "The Key" for the first time Russell writes, "Giving all due respect to the editors of the various magazines to whom you sent "The Key" they must know little about writing. I claim no particular superiority in knowing the requirements of commercial writing, with its angles and wrinkles and slants. But for several years I selected the stories for a paper called the Irish Statesman and its general reputation in that line was the best in the British Isles. I would have taken The Key immediately and I would have been right" (Kreyling, 37).

her ignorance of the marketing angle of publishing.[24] Russell as the mediator between the outside world and Welty understood that "to be published in the big time meant that one needed not only a worthy piece of work but also someone to anticipate market conflicts and clear them away" (Kreyling 12). Welty's short stories also had initially challenged editors and readers with their mystery, gothic characters, and Southern settings. Here, too, Russell was of great help; he fervently encouraged the young author that fiction that was as good as hers did not also have to be easily accessible. He allowed Welty to explore and perfect aspects of ambiguity in her fiction that would later become characteristic of her writing. Where other agents may have only seen "obscurity," Russell helped refine Welty's prose without demanding she change her writing style to fit the market's demands (33). Furthermore, he gave her invaluable and detailed feedback that allowed her fiction to maintain its quality of mystery without being incomprehensible. One of the complaints Welty had about her early rejections from magazines like Warren's *The Southern Review* was that the editors "never made any remarks or comments at all, and it was just like being kept in the dark" (48). Welty understood that "Of course, their sending it back was a sort of sign"

[24] Welty's early version of her short story collection had been rejected by Smith and Hass, Inc. Even though editor, Harrison Smith was "personally keen," he said they had just published a book remarkably similar and he "felt that the respective market for such a book—fiction and photographs with a Southern and black subject—had already been cornered by Julia Peterkin" (Kreyling 12).

but of what exactly, she was unsure, "were they bored, enraged, or what?" (48). Thankfully, with Russell as a reader she was no longer at a loss, "If you keep telling me when what I write is clear and unobscured and when it is not, as it appears to you, then I will have something so new to me and of such value, a way to know a few bearings. Is this what was in our contract? I didn't understand it would be so much" (49). Welty's gratitude is palpable in this letter to her most trusted reader. Still, Russell believed that Welty could and would reach others as she had reached him with her fiction.

The first step in this process was cultivating a readership. Russell knew that Welty needed to gather a faithful and discerning group of readers at an early stage in her career if her later work were to have any chance of being lucrative. Diarmuid Russell was also keenly aware of those publishers and editors that would pigeonhole Welty as a gothic, regional, or worst of all, women's[25] writer and as a result he actively marketed her stories to publications whose readership was wide and varied enough so that Welty's fiction could partake in those characteristics without being subsumed by them. To this end, Russell sent Welty's stories to *The Atlantic Monthly* (who would be the first large publication

[25]Russell did not necessarily voice that this would be an error that would be hard to come back from, but he does say on two separate occasions that he doubts the editor and/or readers over at the Ladies' Home Journal would be up to the task of tackling a Welty short story (Kreyling).

to print Welty's stories), *Harper's Bazaar, Harper's Magazine,* the *New Yorker, The Saturday Evening Post,* and more. Russell had specific reasons for sending each story to each publication; of sending "The Wide Net" to *The Saturday Evening Post* rather than *Harper's Bazaar*, Russell reportedly said the story was "more masculine than feminine" and would therefore fare better at the larger publication (79).

Russell understood that there was an unspoken but strictly observed hierarchy in American periodical publishing in mid-twentieth century. At the top were old established literary magazines that had prestige for their authors, but not necessarily proportionate monetary compensation. Out from under literary culture sprang up a category of magazines referred to by Russell as "the slicks," that included publications like *The Saturday Evening Post* and *Collier's* which "could and did sometimes pay ten times what the older magazines offered for short fiction" but without bestowing upon the author the subsequent status (35). Also, in this category were the new women's fashion magazines like *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Mademoiselle*, and *Redbook;* however, these publications "encountered, not surprisingly, considerable condescending and suspicious criticism from the male-dominated publishing fraternity of editors and critics" (Kreyling 15). *The Atlantic Monthly* and *Harper's Magazine* enjoyed slightly more prestige as they had been established in the mid-nineteenth century "originating

in the Northeastern literary culture of Longfellow and Hawthorne" (ibid). Russell deftly distributed Welty's short stories at each level of publication, following a formula that weighed the chances of publication against the magazine's reputation resulting in each story being placed where it had the best chance of reaching the audience Russell and Welty had in mind for it. With this plan in place it was only a matter of time until Welty's stories began to be picked up regularly by the "slicks" and her reputation as a writer of inarguable talent grew.

By the time Welty was heading off to Yaddo under the supervision of Katherine Anne Porter, nearly all of her original short stories had been published independently in well-respected national magazines and her short story collection, *A Curtain of Green*, had finally landed with a publisher, Doubleday and Doran, Inc. The first year of their collaboration demonstrated just how much Diarmuid Russell could and did offer Eudora Welty as a literary ally. From his feedback on short story drafts to his encouragement when editors rejected a piece, from his care to craft an authorial identity and readership from Eudora Welty to his insistence that she was published and paid a fair amount, Diarmuid Russell was more than Eudora Welty's literary agent; he was her most trusted consigliere.

The second relationship that positively affected Eudora Welty's writing career was her friendship with writer and editor William Maxwell. What starts as a little more than a professional interest in one another's work, Eudora Welty and William Maxwell's connection quickly transitions into a close personal friendship and valuable professional relationship, "For more than fifty years, Welty and Maxwell wrote to each other, sharing their worries about work and family, their likes and dislikes, their grief and joys, their moments of despair and hilarity" (Marrs 3-4). Maxwell is an enthusiastic champion of Welty's fiction and also helps connect her to fellow writers and cement her place in a literary community. Moreover, Maxwell understood what it was to live a writer's life and though the two artists did not make every aspect of their personal lives available to one another (they avoid politics and talk of Welty's romantic attachments), their letters are filled, as Marrs observes, "with vibrant, beautifully crafted descriptions" that point to the care and creativity both correspondents crafted into their letters to one another (14). For artists, every act of creation is an effort to "construct as well as unveil images of themselves," thus there are places in these epistles where a reader must acknowledge omissions and lend a close critical lens to authorial hyperbole (14). Still, critics will also be able to identify the aspects of this friendship that made it instructive and treasured for both Maxwell and Welty. William Maxwell served Welty for years as a trusted reader

of her work. His perspective and encouragement on her fiction help her envision her prose more clearly and through their continued correspondence and professional collaboration Maxwell ensures that Welty's prose reaches thousands of new readers by helping her become a regular contributor to the famed publication, the *New Yorker.*

Maxwell begins advocating for Eudora immediately after meeting her. He responds to her December 1942 letter that reported she was "fresh out" of new material for his magazine and that should he "ever have a desire to see something at any particular time" to contact her agents, by insisting that his journal's interest in Welty's prose "is neither particular nor temporal" and that "A telephone call, say, every six weeks, until they [Russell and Volkening] get thoroughly annoyed and go out of business" should help prove the tenacity of his resolve to get a Welty work published in the *New Yorker* (Marrs 18). Upon reading *The Golden Apples* in August of 1949, Bill (as author now called editor) gushed that he "finished reading (while the lawn mower stood idle on the lawn) the first section" and then "rushed back to your book" once he finished his chores only to find "that I was holding my breath, a thing I don't ever remember doing before, while reading, and what I was holding my breath for is lest I might disturb something in nature, a leaf that was about to move, a bird, a wasp, a blade of grass caught between other blades of grass and about to set itself free"

(Marrs, WTiTS 24-5). The world Welty had created was so real, so artfully rendered that Maxwell felt it necessary to hold his breath in reverence. He concludes his review of the short story collection by acknowledging that "This is how one feels in the presence of a work of art," art so masterfully done that "in the last paragraph, when the face came through, there was nothing to say. You had gone as far as there is to go and then taken one step farther" (25). Maxwell not content to let his praise be words alone, finally convinced the *New Yorker* to accept a Welty story for publication in 1951. Two more stories followed in 1952 and in 1954 the magazine printed her novella.

Once the two friends became professionally involved, the care Maxwell took to uphold the intention of Welty's prose—down to the comma placement—is a sign of the deep well of respect editor had for writer. As for Welty's trust in her editor, Maxwell's feedback became an irreplaceable part of her writing process. She attests to this fact in a 1952 letter saying,

> Here this is, and **my hope is we got it ["No Place for You, My Love"] better**. **You were helpful as could be** […] **I do feel the story's more <u>out</u>, clearer**, but the main thing (and the trouble) was **I felt it essential to keep the mystery in it, as you understood.** In Galley 25, **please use your judgement** (this is the last day and I have to mail it and shall be satisfied either way) about leaving in or taking out the parenthetical sentence on my typed sheet. And whether, if in, it should be in a parenthesis. I don't see a thing I can do about the end, the last paragraph—if it isn't understandable I truly can't help it, as I see no other way, at present, to say it. **Yes, your idea was right about it. […] I hope all's well about the story**

> **now, and thanks once more for the help, and your carefulness. (Marrs 29)**

As the bolded text testifies, Welty trusted in Maxwell's judgement completely. For his part, Maxwell was so attuned to Welty's narrative voice and her intentions for her work that he did everything in his power to bring her ideas to fruition, even if that meant he went against her instructions. Maxwell responds to Welty's letter saying, "I haven't followed your instruction in two places because to have done so would have been to do just what you (from your notes) didn't want," "If you even so want me to make these two changes I will, naturally. There is still time" (Marrs 31).

William Maxwell's importance in the writing life of Eudora Welty cannot be overstated. Welty makes just such a point in a 1969 missive concerning her manuscript of what would become *Losing Battles,* "now if I can know what you think of it—at last—having seen all those beginnings and never given up on me and all the strength I took from all this, then I think I'll cease to wobble, and breathing will be back on a 24-hour basis" (260). When she hears back that Maxwell considers the book to be "a comic masterpiece" on par with Shakespeare and Henry Fielding, Welty declares: "I don't care what critics or reviewers or any of them say, once the few I long all the way through to read what I'm trying to write have read it and told me their minds" (262). For his part, Maxwell gladly lavished praise and encouragement upon Eudora Welty

when she was still a largely unpublished writer, he helped establish a safe, creative space for her to flourish professionally and acted as an editorially collaborator when she was in the revision stages of her writing process. More than anything he offered her the emotional sororal support that allowed Welty to thrive as a person and author.

The last relationship under examination is very different from the two that have come before it. Eudora Welty's relationship with Ross Macdonald was initiated as a fan-letter in 1970 after Macdonald finished reading *Losing Battles.* Welty's response to his letter revealed that she had read and enjoyed his books "as they came out since away back when you were John Ross Macdonald, and it's not only the first reading but returning to them that gives me a great deal of pleasure" (Marrs & Nolan 3). After a year of correspondence, the two crossed paths while both in New York for business. In fact, Macdonald was tipped off by his editors that Eudora was in town and he tracked her down to her hotel, the Algonquin, and waited in the lobby until he could introduce himself and ask her to dinner the following evening (Marrs and Nolan 22).

Though the pair would not get to meet again in person until "Eudora Welty Day" in Jackson in 1973, nor talk privately until Welty visited Santa Barbara (where Millar lived) for an annual writer's conference in 1975, they immediately recognized one another as kindred spirits. In fact, the enormity of

affection and respect the two writers shared for one another is expressed well in the speech Millar/Macdonald delivers to introduce Welty at the SBWC,[26]

> She is a woman who illuminates her surroundings, and she does so in a quiet way, without fireworks. Her being is as quiet and shy as the moon. Only afterwards do you realize that the light has changed. For Miss Welty is one of the most completely articulate women who has ever practiced the art of letters in the United States. Her range of expression is remarkable, unique, extending from broad humor through tragic emotion. The underpinning and undersong of all her imaginative work seems to me to be her respect for, her fealty towards, our common humanity. She is one of those aristocrats of the arts who has never turned her back on common men and women. There is a profound equalitarian and religious quality which informs all her work and set it apart. Miss Welty celebrates human life in all its conditions. (Marrs 251)[27]

Welty similarly values Macdonald's work and acknowledges early on in their acquaintance that "I love and need and learn from my friends, they are the continuity of my life" (Marrs and Nolan 44). Marrs and Nolan affirm the "particular significance" of the "impact each writer had on the other's work" citing the fact that "Eudora credits Ken with suggesting the key scene in her

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[26] This is short for the Santa Barbara Writer's Conference, which Welty and Millar both attended, and Marrs says they were both headliners and introduced one another to the gathered participants (Marrs 250).

[27] In this same speech Millar says, "The important thing is not the honors, but the work. Her stories are among the best and saddest and funniest and [most] humane in the whole range of American literature. They will never go away. She is a first-rate playwright and novelist. Her body of criticism is brilliant and still growing, in size and depth . . ." (Marrs 252). Additionally, in this speech Millar as good as calls Welty America's best living writer: "I don't want to burden Miss Welty with the appellation of our best living writer. But I do suspect that, line by line, word by word, that may be what she is. She has taken possession of the language as if it were her own invention, and given it back to us refreshed, clean, brand new, with a kind of half-heard musical accompaniment, and joyous laughter in the wings" (252).

Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *The Optimist's Daughter* (1972)" and she dedicates her critical essay collection, *The Eye of the Story,* to Millar in 1978 (Marrs and Nolan xvi). Millar similarly felt that his friendship with Eudora had positively affected his writing; in fact he avers that the friendship "had been a key to the development of his novel *Sleeping Beauty* (1973)" (Marrs and Nolan xvi).

Unlike the incredibly close and valued relationships she has with Diarmuid Russell and William Maxwell, there are some complications involved in her bond with Kenneth Millar/Macdonald. As mentioned previously, all the men in her acquaintance are married during their associations, and frequently Welty carries on as rich and stimulating friendships with the wives of these men as she does with their spouses. Though Welty meets and is friendly with Margaret Millar, Kenneth Millar's wife, the two are never close and do not exchange personal notes nor build an individual friendship separate from polite inquiries ferried back and forth with Ken as go-between. Furthermore, though Welty is careful not to violate her own code of conduct when it comes to the sanctity of another's marriage, Ken grows increasingly more animated and direct in his profession of affection for Welty. When he visits Jackson in 1973 for Eudora Welty Day, sans Margaret, he reportedly tells Reynolds Price over drinks in the bar of the Sun'n'Sand, "You love Eudora as a friend, I love her as a woman" (Marrs 387; Marrs and Nolan 183). In his reply to a letter in which Welty

comments on their continued inability to be in geographical proximity to one another but averred, "I think we stay close," Millar positively gushes: "I feel as you do that you and I are close, and count it one of the great blessings of my life. […] You know what pleasure and pride your friendship brings me, and what understanding, and what absolute pure thought in which I dwell content" (Marrs 380).

As the years progress, both writers works are affected by the friendship, and Millar renews his sentiments of appreciation repeatedly with growing intensity: "Our friendship rests by now on deeper-driven pilings even than letters … Your spirit lives in my mind, and watches my life, as I watch yours" (387).[28] In his letter for Eudora's birthday, dated just ten days after the letter from which the previous excerpt was pulled, Millar writes:

> You in person and you in your stories and your letters have taught me to perceive and value the things they touch, and put them together in a single rhyming scheme, in which I can hear the slightly hesitant rhythms of your voice. My favorite of all your rhythms and rhymes, and mine, is the one in which we were able to dedicate books to each other, as you say a fortunate chance, in a fortunate season. The more so because our interests flourished and crossed in these books, your lifelong dedication to the written truth, my feeling that it could all be lost but will not be. Nothing of yours will be lost, dear Eudora. Love, Ken. (Marrs 387)

[28] Proof of the influence each writer had on the work of the other can be seen in the fact that Welty makes her dedication out to Ken Millar in *The Eye of the Story* (1978), and credits him with suggesting the key scene in *The Optimist's Daughter* (1972). For his part, "Ken felt his friendship with Eudora had been a key to the development of his novel *Sleeping Beauty* (1973) (Marrs and Nolan xvi).

By this time in their friendship Millar was suffering from increasingly aggressive symptoms of Alzheimer's while also caring for his wife after she underwent surgery for lung cancer. In light of these professions, and Millar's personal health, it may seem curious that Welty responds in such a reserved manner agreeing with "[Millar's] letter about our friendship—you were speaking, as you knew you were, for both of us—You live in my mind in the same way as I do in yours" (Marrs and Nolan 388). After reporting on some gardening news, Welty ends her return letter by saying that she will not be able to visit Ken in Santa Barbara as they had previously hoped. She signs-off saying, "But I know we will meet somewhere, before too long—Like letters, it isn't what our friendship depends on, but meetings really are blessings, added on—and your letters are very close to my heart. Love, Eudora" (Marrs & Nolan 388). Welty does not address Millar's passionate professions of shared rhythms nor does she speak to the lasting testament to their relationship that their exchanged dedications will serve. However, I believe there to be both a practical explanation for Welty's reservations and a psycho-social reason.

The first reason that I believe Welty's response seems somewhat cooler in comparison to Millar's words is that Millar's second letter is penned on Welty's birthday, April 13th, 1978, the exact same day that she is writing her letter in response, which likely means that their letters crossed in transit and that Welty is

not responding to Millar's second letter, but rather his earlier letter written on April 2nd, which mentions Welty's upcoming plans to travel as part of her lecture series and her tentative plans to visit Santa Barbara. The second reason that I would attribute to Welty's measured response to the man that has become more than a friend and mentor to her over the years goes back to the lessons she learned as a young author. Even though Welty had, at age 69 accomplished many of the things she had set out to do at age 26 (published lauded works of fiction and criticism, received awards, honors, degrees in recognition of those works, built lasting community of authors, writers, fans and friends), she never forgot the lesson she learned from Porter and McCullers, namely to separate her life and her work. Welty's career was well established in the spring of 1978, even perhaps in its twilight, but the author had worked so long for her place in the literary community that it is my contention that the work, that work which she claimed, "should be everything" had actually come to represent the main meaning in her life. She may have grown to love Kenneth Millar over the decade or so that they wrote each other letters and certainly benefitted and enjoyed his friendship, but her bottomless and abiding love would always be the work.

These three epistolary relationships with men in her profession act as a testament to the community Eudora Welty had around her. The support that these relationships offered was as separate and unique as the men that were a

part of them. Diarmuid Russell was Welty's advocate and trusted reader. William Maxwell was her kindred literary spirit and close personal friend. Kenneth Millar enriched the last decade of Eudora Welty's life with his attention to both her literary career, as they swapped praise and ideas on each other's texts, and his attention to who she was as a person and a woman. As a direct result of these relationships, Eudora Welty's writing continued to grow and mature throughout her career. Furthermore, without these relationships and the concrete professional benefits that they produced, it is plausible that Eudora Welty would not have been the well-known literary figure she is today. These men read, inspired, and advocated for Welty's work and by so doing brought her writing to the attention of thousands, possibly tens of thousands of readers around the world.

Conclusion: It Takes a Village, or Rather, a Community

We have charted in this chapter, three distinct areas from which Eudora Welty drew inspiration and direction for her fiction. First, I examined the women writers that helped Welty envision a space for herself in the literary world through their writing. Virginia Woolf taught Welty the value of community in the writing process, Jane Austen taught her the value of a simple, but not simplistic, scope in her literature, and Willa Cather taught her the value of landscape. But most importantly these women validated the value of Eudora

Welty's unique, feminine perspective in a largely male literary canon. Then, I explored how Katherine Anne Porter and Carson McCullers gave Welty contemporary examples of how to navigate a literary landscape that could be reductive and dismissive of women writers. Finally, I demonstrated how Eudora Welty's ability to expand her community to include healthful collaboration with men in her profession allows her writing to reach audiences far beyond what she could have achieved alone. Ultimately, this diverse community through its many specific machinations, worked together to make it possible for the singular fiction of Eudora Welty to achieve the lasting literary acclaim it deserves. It is by examining these examples of healthful community in Eudora Welty's life that we see how sorority should function if an artist is to be successful. In the next chapter we will examine these same areas of community to establish how an absence of the personal and professional support enjoyed by Eudora Welty negatively affects the life and literature of Zelda Fitzgerald.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Absence of Supportive Artistic Communities in the Life Zelda Fitzgerald

To Know Her is to Romanticize Her: Limitations to Fitzgerald Materials

First, I must address the difficulties that arise out of a dearth of scholarly materials available on Zelda Fitzgerald. In my third chapter, I was able to examine sources that corroborated and explored the authorial processes of Eudora Welty. These sources were academic works written by reputable scholars analyzing the role several influential people played in what is indisputably valuable prose. The archival work these sources required was undoubtedly arduous, but undertaken meticulously and with the great benefit of a wealth of well-preserved, carefully catalogued pieces of manuscripts, drafts, galleys, hundreds of letters, etc. Welty was a great preservationist herself, despite her reservations about the survival of her personal correspondence; however, there are many additional voices that contribute to the chorus of information available from the Welty estate. For example, most of the influential people we discussed in the previous chapter maintained their documents pertaining to their relationships with the person and fiction of Eudora Welty. Thus, the documents that survive paint a clear picture of the way Eudora Welty crafted her fiction. It is

the dedication and single-minded passion to that craft that strengthens Welty's standing as a great writer. Readers can see, decades later, the thought and care and skill Welty put into each of her works. Additionally, we have the eye-witness testimony of other reputable friends and close acquaintances who understood and valued Eudora Welty as a writer at the time of her artistic output who acknowledge the herculean effort she put into her writing and were more than happy to help nurture that writing when and where they could.

The scant information available on the works of Zelda Fitzgerald (I do not limit this to her prose work alone but extend this condemnation to the lack of information on all of Fitzgerald's artistic endeavors, including painting, drawing and ballet) immediately establishes how fraught her journey to artistic recognition is and always has been. The information available about Zelda Fitzgerald's life and work fits into two distinct categories: biographical sketches that are highly subjective and significantly filtered through the biographer's own cultural milieu, and those documents that testify to her effect on or secondary role in the story of F. Scott Fitzgerald's life and career, similarly plagued by the issues and biases of the first category. A paltry amount of original material survives from what we can infer was a large body of artistic work for Zelda Fitzgerald. Many of her paintings have been destroyed or lost to time. The same goes for many of her original manuscripts, galleys, and drafts. F. Scott Fitzgerald,

who was such a careful, and some could even say obsessive, self-historian, kept meticulous records of everything that dealt with his artistic output, including detailed ledgers that log not only his daily creative output but also the minutiae of his life, knowing that it might be of interest to later biographers. From these ledgers, we are granted some insight into Fitzgerald's life and work. Scott records when and what Fitzgerald may have been working on (largely because much of what Fitzgerald published during her marriage with Scott was either attributed solely to him or bore a joint attribution to both husband and wife, even though much of it was the product of Zelda Fitzgerald alone). Scott also kept those original source documents that he stripped and excavated for his own prose, such as Fitzgerald's diaries and letters; however, his collection is not exhaustive and again pertains only to those materials he deemed valuable to *his* work, biography, legend.

Additionally, as with Eudora Welty, many people understood and acknowledged the value of F. Scott Fitzgerald's work in its contemporary setting and preserved much of the material they had that pertained to his life and work. The same respect and interest has not been accorded to Zelda Fitzgerald. What remains as testaments to the extraordinary life of this woman are but the shadows and intimations of what could have only been a gargantuan amount of original material. We know for instance that Zelda Fitzgerald, like Eudora Welty,

was an avid letter writer, though many of her letters, with the exception of her letters to Scott, have been lost to time and disinterest. The galleys and drafts of her writing that must have been submitted to those editors that published her work in periodicals like *College Humor, Harper's Bazaar,* and *The Saturday Evening Post* have mysteriously been mislaid, though many of Welty's and Scott's exist to this day and have provided copious material for academic scholars to pore over. Fitzgerald's work seems to have been dismissed from the very beginning, having been accorded such low value and interest, in spite of its publication worth that it was frequently mislaid, destroyed, forgotten and otherwise abused. Therefore, scholars must make use of the unsatisfactory materials that remain.

With these limitations in mind, this chapter will draw extensively from the existing biographies of Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald, specifically Nancy Milford's *Zelda,* Sally Cline's *Zelda Fitzgerald: The Tragic, Meticulously Researched Biography of the Jazz Age's High Priestess,* and Matthew J. Bruccoli's *The Collected Writings of Zelda Fitzgerald,* with supplementary information pulled from joint biographies of the famous couple, as well as the biographies of F. Scott Fitzgerald. There exists an understandably negative predisposition towards scholastic works supported largely by biographical inquiry. Many biographers have a vested interest in dramatizing, romanticizing, or otherwise heightening the events of their subject's life to generate interest in their material and support sales of their

works. The biographers I rely on are not immune to this temptation. Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald, their subject, is also a figure that enjoys a particularly sensationalized legend in literary circles. Thus, the task of separating fact and fiction is even more riddled with difficulties than the average literary biography. Carl Rollyson, himself a biographer, testifies, "Biography often arises as an impulse to do justice, or to pay homage, to a life" (161). This impulse often makes the biographer into the kind of crusader that Eudora Welty would abhor. Rollyson builds from his personal experience, as well as his reading of all of the most notable Zelda Fitzgerald biographies, when he says, "The biographer as advocate is a stirring figure, engaging in the rhetoric of rehabilitation and in the dynamic of rectification. An old story, in other words, gets refurbished" (158). The difficulties notwithstanding, I have endeavored to eschew any biography that deals with apocryphal Fitzgerald or any information that does not pertain to the literary formation and output of Zelda Fitzgerald. Similar to the treatment applied to the work of Eudora Welty, I have examined biographical and epistolary sources to obtain information about those figures who were instrumental in Zelda Fitzgerald's authorial life. In doing so, I will establish as I did with Eudora Welty the necessity of community in the artistic life of this female author. An important point of contrast, however, is that in this section we will examine how the absence of supportive figures and community had a

negative effect on the work of Zelda Fitzgerald in her several artistic fields, and how this lack of support was a contributing factor in the reception of Zelda Fitzgerald's surviving prose works.

Another contentious element of Zelda Fitzgerald's prose is the effect of her mental illness on the validity of her fiction. Some critics contend that the timing of Fitzgerald's only novel-length work,[1] *Save Me the Waltz*, corresponds with her hospitalization in a way that suggests that her novel was created only because she was mentally ill. These critics imply that the ideas and style of Zelda's prose are in effect caused by her psychological breakdown, and are not therefore, a legitimate narrative creation, crafted intentionally and painstakingly. Furthermore, these critics use this theory as the foundation for denying Fitzgerald the designation of professional writer. As we explore the elements of Fitzgerald's long and committed relationship to prose, I will establish her interest in and talent for prose that pre-dates her hospitalization, as well as dispute the idea that an extraordinary mind is invalidated if brilliance and madness co-exist within it. I will follow a similar chronological format as I have done in the previous chapter. This will allow us to establish an artistic trajectory as well as a pattern of missed opportunities for community that will culminate in the

[1] The manuscript of her second novel, *Caesar's Things*, was never completed; however, the length of the manuscript itself is substantive enough for a novel, in spite of its other issues.

troubled, fragmented legacy Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald has left behind. First, we will establish her early interest in novels and examine the potential role models she uncovered there. Next, we will move to contemporary figures that surrounded Fitzgerald and included or excluded her from their artistic ranks. Then, we will examine figures who were positioned to provide guidance and support for the fledgling author, most significantly and problematically her own husband, and examine the effects of their actions on Fitzgerald's legacy. Throughout this chapter, I will explain how a woman writer who possesses drive and creative gifts beyond that of the average person, can be thwarted by the absence of a creative community to bolster and guide her.

The Original Flapper: What to make of Zelda's Position on Feminist Politics

Like Eudora Welty, Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald has a complicated relationship with what modern scholars would consider early feminism. Recently, Fitzgerald has been enthusiastically reclaimed by feminist scholars as an early fire-brand for the cause. She is depicted as a revolutionary woman who abjured gender normative dress and behaviors in favor of ushering in a new age of increased autonomy and self-determination for women. However, her socio-historical counterpart, the flapper, and her personal life resist this clean-cut picture of feminism and further complicate the position of "Jazz Age's High Priestess." Though Fitzgerald is undeniably an iconic figure for women, Carl Rollyson

explains how these women often resist simple categorization in his book, *Female Icons*. Rollyson states that for many of the most popular women in our cultural consciousness, there exists an individual life that is enveloped on all sides by many layers of legend. He gives the example of Marilyn Monroe saying, "that even among her friends, Monroe was a kind of cult item, a sacred object. This was no mere sentimentality, for like most mythic figures she had a strength and contradictoriness that made her particularly suitable to be an icon" (Rollyson 1). Rollyson frames his discussion of icons by saying that he is not examining women who are merely admired, but specifically women who participate in "a modern, aggressive self-imaging process," what Norman Mailer called a "Napoleonic mentality" in his biography of Marilyn Monroe. Certainly, Fitzgerald fits this description. She was very aware of her status as a public figure, and she and F. Scott both participated, to varying degrees, in cultivating their own mythic status.

Like Monroe, there are competing versions of Zelda Fitzgerald that depict her either "as a passive and pathetic prey" or as the calculating megalomaniac, "brooding, self-destructive and tragic," but perhaps there is a more accurate middle ground that can acknowledge both sides and envision the golden girl of the roaring twenties as "a prisoner of her own dream" who could not "find her

way out of her self-imposed …fantasy" (Rollyson 1-2). Some scholars even contend that the Fitzgeralds

> inscribed and reinscribed in conventional social roles (Scott as breadwinning husband and Zelda as supportive wife) had never been so unconventional as they had liked to imagine. Zelda's roles as wife had included being Scottie's mother, being the person who ran the household, and being the beautiful woman known as 'Mrs. Scott Fitzgerald.' Once she had stopped being only a wifely appendage, however, she became an object of criticism. (Wagner-Martin 107)

It is Fitzgerald's perseverance in the face of criticism that makes her a notable figure of interest for feminist scholars. Instead of crumbling beneath social censure that would admonish her for abandoning an increasingly soused and miserable F. Scott, Zelda Fitzgerald stayed true to her artistic course. Admittedly, many of the people likely to criticize Fitzgerald were friends and acquaintances that had heard first-hand from her husband how Fitzgerald's dancing and writing were ruining their lives and marriage. His drinking and carousing notwithstanding, F. Scott Fitzgerald would always enjoy more professional courtesy and public respect and stature than his wife ever could[2].

It seems that not all of the people in Fitzgerald's social circle could be considered her friends, and when asked to take sides, many of them aligned

[2] Even Gertrude Stein and Dorothy Parker, both independently successful authors in their own right, are denied the literary acclaim received by men like F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway. This is partially a result of the kind of literature these women were writing (largely short essays, non-fiction, and in the case of Stein experimental prose) , but is also a side effect of the pervading social climate.

themselves with F. Scott Fitzgerald. This could have been caused by several factors, but most scholars agree that conventional patriarchy is at least in part to blame. However, it is interesting that depending on which biographer one reads, Fitzgerald's ability to connect with other women is up for some debate. The original Zelda Fitzgerald biographer, Nancy Milford, uses Fitzgerald's own statements to prove that she had few people she considered friends, and among that small group none of them were women. Recently, Kendall Taylor has followed a similar line of argument and used Fitzgerald's psychiatric testimonies to give credence to the idea that Zelda Fitzgerald was often isolated, though she leaves up to the reader to decide whether this isolation was purposeful or incidental. On the other hand, Sally Cline takes pains to establish a dedicated circle of friends from Zelda Fitzgerald's early Southern childhood that she kept in contact with throughout her life and whom she visited when she returned to Alabama on sojourns from the hospital. One of those friends, Sara Mayfield, writes in her own biography of Fitzgerald that she was not aware of any "intimate women friends beyond those she grew up with in Alabama" (146). Though Linda Wagner-Martin also makes mention of several women with whom Fitzgerald gave every impression of being friendly in her later life, it is clear that Zelda Fitzgerald was a woman who was selective about the female company she kept.

All of her biographers, and many of F. Scott's, make allusions to Zelda Fitzgerald's acquaintance with the Parisian lesbian circle whose headquarters were on the Rue Jacob, an acquaintance and affinity which would later be used as a mitigating factor in her clinical diagnosis. Sara Mayfield charges Ernest Hemingway for circulating most of the ruinous rumors about Fitzgerald's Sapphic tendencies after her death in his novel *A Moveable Feast* as a way of repaying sleights he had received from Fitzgerald during their ex-patriate years together. These differing accounts of Zelda Fitzgerald's relationship with other women raise the question: can a woman be a feminist figurehead if she does not advocate for nor enjoy the company of her own female contemporaries? Can a woman whose own friends described her as "typically and wholly a man's woman" to whom "women and their concerns" were likely to "'bore the tar' out of her" be considered a feminist icon (Mayfield 146)? It is undeniable that as a symbol of the liberated flapper, as well as the model for the strong-willed female protagonists in her fiction and that of her husband, Zelda Fitzgerald influenced the perception of appropriate femininity and its performance at a critical time in the progression of woman's rights. Still, Fitzgerald the individual held no political or ideological aspirations. Though she may have liked being admired, she did not aspire to, nor did she ever claim to be a figure that others should emulate. In fact, much of Fitzgerald's early short fiction includes sketches of

women much like her in lifestyles very similar to her own that are plagued by unhappiness or inadequacy.

Like Eudora Welty, Zelda Fitzgerald was opposed to self-righteous crusades; in fact she finds them and their purveyors maudlin and laughable. Still, there exists in Fitzgerald's life and writing a sense of self-worth and a desire for autonomy that is remarkable for her time period and has inevitably resonated with women from many walks of life long after the flapper faded from cultural memory. Though she may have had few female friends, those she admitted to her confidence immediately recognized that "she was plainly tired of being a successful novelist's wife, who provided the copy for his stories and books. She, too, was intelligent and artistic; she wanted to make a life of her own, to achieve, at least, a modicum of intellectual and financial independence" (Mayfield 118).

I will argue that though Zelda Fitzgerald may not have sought strictly female companionship, she would have benefitted greatly from a community of earlier female writers, contemporary artists, facilitators, and a willing audience, just as her successor, Eudora Welty did. Fitzgerald may not have been a feminist in a strictly political sense of the word, but the way in which she created space for future women writers through her prose contributions means that she substantially contributed to the growth of the feminist community through her life and work.

A Southern Belle to Beat the Jazz Band: Familial Ties and Early Influences

Zelda Fitzgerald's life was not always tumultuous. Born Zelda Sayre in July of 1900 to a prominent Southern family that enjoyed high-standing in Montgomery, Alabama, the reputation of Zelda's father, Judge Sayre was often adequate to cover the sins of his spirited youngest daughter. Yet, it was not the status of the Sayre family alone that protected Fitzgerald in this conservative, tight-knit community, but also her embodiment of a long-standing figure of the South-lands, the Southern belle. As the baby of a large family, Fitzgerald enjoyed her mother's indulgence and her father's indifference. By all accounts Minnie Sayre spoiled "Baby" (as Zelda Fitzgerald was called by members of her immediate family) and allowed the wild child free rein in the Sayre household and on the wider Montgomery stage. Judge Sayre, the family disciplinarian, was much more exacting but was frequently occupied at the Court House or in his study at home and emerged only occasionally to rail against Fitzgerald's behavior for a moment and then retreat back to his strongholds.

Sally Cline describes Zelda Fitzgerald as the product of a South not too far removed from the Civil War South wherein Southerners emphasized the importance of family history, were proud of the role they played in what they considered to be the birth of a nation, and one where they were still convinced in "the secret heart of the South" by "an uneasy but powerful sense of the rightness

of its nineteenth-century position on slavery" (Cline 14). It is easy to see how these antagonistic Southerners would also be "fanatical about their Southern beauties" (14). Nancy Milford agrees with this depiction of the South by relaying the events of a ceremony performed by the Key-Ice Club in January 1918 wherein members made solemn toasts and paid unironic tribute to Southern women with her purity and chastity. Milford describes this mind-set saying,

> This extravagant and somewhat sinister homage to Southern womanhood has the social context in which Zelda grew up, and against which she was reacting. Her family was firmly fixed in it, and if many of its tenets were more literary than practical it made little difference, for their acceptance in the Deep South was almost complete. Women were expected to be submissive, if not passive. The Southern belle had certain prerogatives that her more ordinary sisters were not granted, but she had won these by her beauty, her spirited veneer, and her ability to manage men without seeming to do so. The art of dissembling perforce became a valuable social asset for a girl. (Milford 21)

Though Linda Wagner-Martin's description of this same powerful figure is a little more light-hearted, it coincides with what Milford says in terms of the Southern belle status enabling young Southern women to operate above a certain degree of reproach: "Flirtatious and flamboyant, the Southern belle was often a local celebrity. She was, however, the woman one courted, and she was never assumed to be available" (Wagner-Martin 1). As a participant in the myth of the South, Zelda Fitzgerald inherited a role that enjoyed many social rewards, not the least of which was the wide margin for saucy behavior; however, it was the

internalization of this role that would eventually set her up for conflicting and ultimately damaging beliefs on women's proper social roles.

A prime example of the negative expectations inherent in this role is a Southern belle's education. A certain amount of precocious knowledge was allowable for a belle, but girls had to be careful not to accrue too much knowledge and thereby threaten and then scare off potential beaus. Fitzgerald learned this lesson well. Milford attests that "People in Montgomery still remember Zelda as being 'smart as a whip' and 'quick as a steel trap' (Milford 8). Though bright and inquisitive from an early age with a natural love of reading, Fitzgerald despised school[3] and spent much of her time there goofing off and attending to her social calendar. Cline tells us that "Though she read a great deal, not surprisingly she preferred books with action" (Cline 25). The fairy tales were purported to be Fitzgerald's favorite with their colorful characters and action-packed tales of adventure. Her fascination remained with her until she was adult when she took the sketches she made as a child of Alice in Wonderland and turned them into formal paintings. She also decorated lampshades and screens with fairy tale scenes and characters for decoration in Scottie's nursery (Milford,

[3] Though she officially started school in 1906, Zelda reportedly hated it and refused to attend. Minnie eventually gave in to "Baby's" tantrum and kept her out of school until she was seven. Once Zelda returned her outlook on formal education hadn't seemed to brighten much and though she easily maintained a B average "her teachers found her "mischevious" "increasingly impatient, restless, and undisciplined" (Milford 9, 12).

Cline). Even though she favored the fairy tales, a young Zelda Sayre, much like a young Eudora Welty, ravenously consumed any printed material she could get her hands on without discrimination. In addition to the "popular tales for boys, novels that my sisters had left on the table…all I found about the civil war" and Victorian children's stories that Fitzgerald read, she also explored Judge Sayre's extensive library where "she dipped into his encyclopedias, Shakespeare, Thackeray, Dickens, Scott, Wilde, Galsworthy, Kipling, Plutarch, Aristotle, Aeschylus and Gibbons" (Milford 12, Cline 25). This enthusiasm for reading, Cline tells us, did not replace the preparation a sound formal education could have offered Zelda Fitzgerald, and as early as "her later twenties" Fitzgerald would rue "her inattention to early school life" (Cline 25).

It is not surprising that a creative and unique mind like Zelda Fitzgerald's would seek inspiration and entertainment in a variety of literatures, often literature that was probably a bit too old for her. What is interesting, in comparison to the education of Eudora Welty (both formal and informal), is that Fitzgerald's education was not more closely monitored. Like the Mr. and Mrs. Welty, both Minnie and Judge Sayre had both attended public schools and graduated from their respective highest levels of schooling,[4] and they both

[4] Minnie had graduated from Montgomery Female College in 1878 and spent a winter at a finishing school in Philadelphia before having children-quite the academic accomplishment for

valued education as a public service and for their children. In fact, Judge Sayre was a member of the Montgomery Board of Education and felt so strongly about the quality of education offered in Montgomery that he insisted his children should be educated in public schools"[5] (Cline 25). Moreover, Fitzgerald's older sisters, Rosalind and Marjorie, each dutifully completed their schooling and Rosalind became "one of the first young ladies from a good family to go to work in Montgomery" as a writer for a local newspaper[6] and Marjorie taught school before she was married (Milford 18). Even Fitzgerald's close friend, Sara Haardt "overcame bouts of illness to enter Goucher College," which would prepare her to become a writer later in life (Cline 39). Cline makes much of the comparison between Zelda Fitzgerald and Sara Haardt, who would later be married to famed writer and critic H.L. Mencken. The two had very similar upbringings, many of the same friends and interests, and later in life each woman pursued a career as a writer. However, Cline pinpoints this moment in time when Haardt took "the path which sharply divided the Brains from the Belles" that points to the

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a woman in the 19th century. Minnie was also a student of theosophy and therefore put a higher premium on education for her girls than did many other mothers of the time (Cline 26).

[5] The Judge's insistence meant that Zelda did not join many of her old money friends at "Miss Gussie Woodruff's Dame's School" where she would have perhaps learned skills that would have better suited someone interested in being a Southern society lady (Cline 33).

[6] Rosalind wrote a column for the society page of her Uncle's newspaper. This at a time when the only socially acceptable job for an unmarried woman was to be a schoolteacher (Milford 18).

dissimilar trajectories each woman's professional life would take.[7] It is curious that Zelda Fitzgerald's education would not be prioritized more, if not by the young, restless but "whip-smart" socialite, then at least by her erudite parents.

In addition, though Fitzgerald's love of reading would serve her well throughout her life, the material made available to her from a young age seemed predisposed towards a masculine tradition of literature. Fitzgerald fondly remembers reading "popular tales for boys," anything she could find about the Civil War, "The Rise and Decline of the Roman Empire," Kipling, Galsworthy, and Wilde. Noticeably absent from that list are the women who featured so heavily in Eudora Welty's young life and education as a writer. Though the works of Virginia Woolf and Willa Cather would not be readily available for Fitzgerald's perusal until she was a grown woman, the complete works of Jane Austen could have been feasibly accessed and understood by a young Zelda Sayre. However, at the time when she was reading most widely and enthusiastically the literature that was available to her was shaped largely by the Judge's tastes. Of course, readers must bear in mind that this is the same Judge who allowed Fitzgerald to shirk her education where he had strictly enforced his

[7] Sara Haardt Mencken would become a successful writer who was encouraged and promoted by her individually famous husband. In spite of her poor health and early death, Sara Haardt achieved the kind of independent achievement that Zelda yearned for from a young age but naively pursued through what Cline deems a more "conventionally accept[able]" route through marriage rather than career (Cline 39).

other children's, the same Judge who regarded his youngest child's spirted antics as the incorrigible behaviors of a flirt who couldn't be serious about anything. Perhaps it is not surprising then that Judge Sayre's library didn't offer a curious young Zelda Fitzgerald any examples of literary women, with the exception of those distressed princesses in fairy tales. The only thing Fitzgerald learned about being a woman from this kind of literature was what she did not want to be one. Like her fictional doppelganger, Alabama, the life of the puerile Princess in her gilded tower did not appeal to Zelda Sayre.[8] Yet, even when she grew older her literary tastes were affected by another man, one who was similarly disinterested in the feminine perspective and likely to encourage what he thought was a jejune interest in literature by providing his youngest daughter with Dreiser and Hemingway in place of women writers, even though there were several at hand in his very circle of friends.[9] Of course, there is a valid point in arguing that as an adult, Zelda Fitzgerald should have been capable of selecting her own reading material. And there is evidence that Fitzgerald disliked the writing of some

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[8] Zelda rebukes Scott early on in their courtship for repeatedly telling her he wanted to keep Zelda locked up like a Princess in a tower that she replies in a letter, "'I'm so damn tired of being told that you 'used to wonder why they kept princesses in towers'—you've written that verbatim in your last six letters!'" and indeed he records the exact same phrase in his ledger dated 1919 (Cline 68, 414).

[9] Though I am not intimating that Scott denied Zelda the opportunity of reading people like his pal Gertrude Stein, or even his acquaintance Dorothy Parker, he certainly did not encourage her to read these women and instead gave her reading homework that listed towards the classics and his own bricolage.

women authors.[10] However, having been raised in an environment that denigrated female intelligence, except for the purposes of coquetry, provided a singularly masculine literary example and then having had that example reinforced as an adult[11], it is hardly surprising that Zelda Fitzgerald lacked experience of viable female literary community.

As we saw in the previous chapter, the experience of an empowered female perspective in literature is an integral part of the construction of community for a prospective woman writer. Of course, if one has any familiarity with the history of literature that female perspective has not always been readily available to women. Yet, its presence can give an aspiring young woman writer invaluable support as well as a road map of sorts when embarking on her own career. Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald received a sub-par formal education both through her own inattentiveness and her parents' irresponsibility when it came to enforcing their own personal standards and beliefs on education for the bright

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[10] In a letter to Scott from Prangins hospital in 1930, Zelda asks him to bring her something to read, she requests "Spengler's *The Decline of the West* and specifically requests that he doesn't bring any Woolf, "I have been reading Joyce and find it a nightmare in my present condition…since I have enough difficult with English for the moment and *not* Lawrence and *not* Virginia Woolf or anybody who writes by dipping the broken threads of their heads into the ink of literary history, please" (Milford 187) . It is unclear what Zelda means by this objection to Woolf. Perhaps Zelda felt that Woolf's own struggles with mental illness would have only exacerbated her delicate state; alas, her objections can only be guessed at as she does not elaborate further.

[11] That is supposing that the readers consider seventeen the appropriate age one reaches discernment, independence and autonomy, as seventeen was the age at which Zelda began replacing the Judge's influence with Scott's.

child. Furthermore, though she undertook her own informal education by reading widely and consistently, the literature she had at her disposal (histories, classics, and fairy tales) offered few and paltry examples of young women living lives that appealed to her. When she later embarked on a literary career of her own this absence would affect the way she wrote and lived. Having had a purely male example, her prose style was modeled on masculine prose that did not adequately fit her own style or material. Because she read repeatedly tales of adventurous, victorious men and their ancillary women, she struggled to conceive of a life that departed from this conventional pattern. Unprepared by her education and undisciplined from an early age, her natural giftedness for literature was impaired. Therefore, it is not an overstatement to say that this early inattention and masculine literary example would handicap Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald's foray into literature.

Fitzgerald left the South before she was in her 20s and moved to the bustling metropolis of New York on the arm of her newly famous author-husband, F. Scott Fitzgerald. With this change in venue came an opportunity for Zelda Fitzgerald to make a sortie into new and liberating company. In New York and later in Paris, the Fitzgeralds enjoyed the company of some of the Jazz Age's most dazzling and liberated minds, writers and painters and thinkers that were not imprisoned by the archaic legacies of the South. In her new life, Zelda

Fitzgerald had a chance to form community with female contemporaries that shared her drive and ambition. In the next section, we will discuss how a community of contemporaries evaded Fitzgerald's grasp.

The Girls in the Boys' Club: Fitzgerald's Exclusionary Contemporary Communities

After several years of courtship, first in Montgomery and then long-distance for many agonizing months,[12] the Fitzgeralds were married on April 3,1920. Zelda was just 19. Before traveling to New York to meet Scott for their wedding, Zelda wrote to him one last time as an unmarried woman, and the letter seems strangely foreboding in retrospect. It reads more like a requiem for the lives they lived at their end rather than a celebration of the journey on which they were about to embark:

> "Darling Heart, our fairy tale is almost ended, and we're going to marry and live happily ever afterward just like the princess in her tower who worried you so much—and made me so very cross by her constant recurrence—I'm sorry for all the times I've been mean and hateful—for all the miserable minutes I've caused you when we could have been so happy. You deserve so much—so very much—

[12] Agonizing from Scott's perspective, at least. See note vii. Scott grew increasingly jealous of Zelda's continued dating and flirtations while he was away. Even though there is reason to believe Scott was simultaneously dating other girls when he is away from Montgomery (Cline 69), and even though Zelda reminded him of her attachment to him alongside her not-so-subtle insinuations that he shouldn't wait too long to commit (Cline 68), Scott wrote to a friend in October of 1918 that "my mind is firmly made up that I will not, shall not, can not, should not, must not marry—Still she is remarable…" (Milford 35). These circumstances paint the portrait of a young man conflicted. For her part, Zelda carried on with life as usual.

> I think our life together will be like these last four days—an I do want to marry you—even if you do think I 'dread' it—I wish you hadn't said that—I'm not afraid of anything. To be afraid a person has either to be a coward or very great and big. I am neither. Besides, I know you can take much better care of me than I can, and I'll always be very, very happy with you—except sometimes when we engage in our weekly debates—and even then I rather enjoy myself. I like being very calm and masterful, while you become emotional and sulky…I'm absolutely nothing without you—Just the doll that I should have been born—You're a necessity and a luxury and a darling, precious lover—and you're going to be a husband to your wife—(quoted in Milford 61-62).

The careful reader can identify several troubling signs about Zelda Fitzgerald's early dependence on her husband Scott, as well her conflicted conception of her own identity. First, she speaks of her marriage to Scott Fitzgerald as an ending, rather than a beginning. We see early in this letter the effect of both the legacy of her Southern belle role and her internalization of masculine literary traditions. Zelda Fitzgerald as Southern belle would have no further purpose in life than marriage, which once achieved would essentially signal the end of her ambitions. As a reader of fairy tales and histories, Fitzgerald recognized that marriage meant the end of her story, the end of any individual identity she may have had and the official beginning of her life as an accessory to a male personality. She has so internalized this surrender as the appropriate step that she even relinquishes her firm position on the tiresome metaphor Scott Fitzgerald frequently used in his early letters during their courtship and refers to herself as "the princess in her tower who worried you so much," she then apologizes to

Scott for her perceived misbehaviors and predicts that their future together will be happy as her behavior will be rectified. She re-assures her beau in his role of provider saying, "I know you can take such better care of me than I can" only to immediately undercut the masculinity she just constructed by averring that when they argue she remains "calm and masterful" whilst Scott devolves into the feminine role, becoming "emotional and sulky" (ZF and Milford 62).

As for her own sense of self, Zelda Fitzgerald already seems to have conflicting opinions about her self-worth. She contends that she is fearless, not a coward as an early accusation of Scott's implies, but nor is she someone "very great and big." Though she may remain "calm and masterful" in the face of Scott's tantrums, she also assures him that she is "absolutely nothing without you—Just the doll that I should have been born" (62). Fitzgerald claims her identity here to be little more than puppetry, mimicking the puppet-master's whims. Scott's identity is dynamic in her description. She calls him "a necessity and a luxury" and makes him the actor in their partnership who will take on the responsibility of being "a husband to your wife" (62). In all of these scenarios, Fitzgerald depicts herself as the passive recipient of whatever F. Scott Fitzgerald should deign to give her. She recognizes that she has valuable traits such as bravery and self-control, but she cannot yet reconcile these qualities with life beyond the scope of the examples she was afforded from a masculine literary

tradition. Furthermore, her dependence on Scott means that she is not likely to receive different information from him. However, her removal from the South of her childhood to New York and then Europe will mean that she comes in contact with several figures who could have provided a different view of life for the young spirited Southern girl, just as Katherine Anne Porter did for Eudora Welty some twenty years later. Dorothy Parker, Gertrude Stein, and Sara Haardt were all women writing at this time with varying degrees of prestige and popularity. Each of these women was living a life defined by her work and could have provided examples and comradery to Zelda Fitzgerald. We will examine the relationship Fitzgerald had with each female writer and discover how this first real opportunity at artistic community was ultimately unfulfilled.

Dorothy Parker, prominent member of "the Round Table" or what was later known as "the Vicious Circle," lived in New York city at the time when Zelda and Scott Fitzgerald were first making their debut on the literati scene there. Parker worked as a reviewer for *Vanity Fair* with fellow humorists Robert Benchley and Robert Sherwood. However, after she wrote a contentious dramatic review, she was fired from the publication; Sherwood and Benchley resigned in protest and Scott's longtime friend Edmund Wilson took up the vacancy left at the magazine. The intertwined lives of the individuals in New York's literary circles is hard to ignore, Edmund Wilson's book, *The Twenties*

attests. Wilson takes credit for introducing Parker to the glittering pair already making quite a name for themselves around New York. He claims to have arranged dinner for the group at the Algonquin, but Parker remembers spying F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald previously—driving down the streets of New York in a scene that would soon enter into legend, Fitzgerald riding on the hood of a taxi while her husband hung on to the roof. Biographer Cline describes Parker as "seven years older than Zelda, a talented satirist whose barbed aphorisms delighted New York journalists. A short-story writer, playwright and essayist, her lasting work has been her light verse which cleverly mocked at failure, loneliness, and despair" (Cline 98). From this description, it would seem Dorothy Parker was perfectly positioned to take a young girl with artistic aspirations under her wing, or at the very least befriend a vivacious girl who was new to the big city. However, according to Wilson it was Scott that interested Parker, not his wife (Wilson 28). Dorothy Parker and Scott Fitzgerald had similar themes to their writing, and both were already considered noteworthy writers;[13] Zelda Fitzgerald in comparison did not seem very appealing.

[13] From their initial meeting in 1918 (Parker had met Scott when he was single prior to her introduction to the Fitzgeralds as a couple), to the end of Scott's life, he and Dorothy Parker remained friends. Visiting with each other in Paris, running in similar literary circles with many mutual friends. Scott writes Zelda as late as 1940 to say that Dorothy was throwing a tea at her home that he planned to attend.

Parker's biographer Marion Meade has stated that Parker had little use for dependent women like Zelda Fitzgerald, and that her view of F. Scott Fitzgerald's wife formed on that initial meeting in 1920 "was negative—and I don't believe she ever changed her mind" (qtd. in Cline 98). Apparently, Dorothy Parker was also opposed to Fitzgerald's "foreign accent" and her looks, which she described to Nancy Milford thusly, "I never thought she was beautiful. She was very blond with a candy box face and a little bow mouth, very much on a small scale and there was something petulant about her. If she didn't like something she sulked; I didn't find that an attractive trait" (Meade 33, Milford 68). It is clear from Parker's reaction to Fitzgerald that she viewed the younger woman as nothing more than a decorative novelty on the arm of the great author, F. Scott Fitzgerald. This dismissal of Zelda Fitzgerald as a valuable person is a pattern that would be repeated again and again in her life, making it clear that among her contemporaries she was not considered an individual or an artist, but merely an accessory. It may seem shocking to modern readers that Dorothy Parker—a woman in this historically revolutionary time who was already leading a life that defied gendered norms—could be so very conventional in her approach to other women, but there are two reasons that this failed connection should not surprise us.

First, at the time of their first meeting, Zelda Fitzgerald had not yet taken up writing. Dorothy Parker, older and established as she was, had many demands on her time and could not mentor any and every struggling young creative mind simply because she was a woman. But even later in their lives, when both women had returned to the United States and Fitzgerald had been hospitalized for half a decade while maintaining a rigorous work ethic that produced numerous paintings, short stories, and her novel, Parker did not consider Fitzgerald's achievements worth noticing. Dorothy Parker attended an art show of Zelda Fitzgerald's and even purchased a couple of her paintings, one a portrait of F. Scott Fitzgerald called "The Cornet Player" and another of a dancer called "Arabesque." Parker admitted that Fitzgerald "had talent" but thought her art was "pitifully inexpensive," and though she purchased two pictures, Parker felt she "couldn't have stood having them [Fitzgerald's paintings] hang in the house" (Milford 291). This dismissal of Zelda Fitzgerald as a secondary talent who needed to be patronized by Scott Fitzgerald's friends to make anything of herself is an attitude we will see repeatedly from the group that surrounded Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald in the 1920s and 30s.

This brings us to the second reason that Dorothy Parker excluded Zelda Fitzgerald from artistic community. Parker suffered the side-effects of the same institutionalized sexism that would have denied her entry into literary

community if it could. Having succeeded in carving a space for herself in the highly competitive literary world, Parker protected her territory from anyone who came close. This aggression was not reserved just for Fitzgerald, but for anyone who could threaten the position Parker had claimed for herself. However, it did not help Fitzgerald's case that she represented everything that the staunch Manhattanite considered backwards in the world: a Southern, dependent woman making a name for herself with a beauty that was just sub-par and antics that were absurd. Dorothy Parker worked hard for her seat at the male-dominated table that was literary society in the early to mid-twentieth century, and she was not willing to compromise it for the sake of some little Southern nobody.

Dorothy Parker was not alone in her response to Zelda Fitzgerald. Gertrude Stein, one of the ex-patriate movement's leading literary figures, hostess of Paris's most fashionable salon, also excluded and overlooked F. Scott Fitzgerald's upstart wife. After several years of living life fast and loose in the big apple, the Fitzgeralds were running low on funds and Scott was growing increasingly anxious about his slow progress on his newest novel. Moreover, the marriage that had begun on rocky ground continued to erupt in ugly spats, usually preceded by alcoholic binges and excessive spending and partying. The no-longer-newlyweds decided that re-settlement in Paris, the headquarters of

American émigrés in Europe, would be the elixir that cured all their earthly ailments. In May of 1924, they disembarked in Europe and immediately attempted to reconnect with old friends that they were close to in America, like John Peale Bishop and his new wife Margaret.[14] By this time news of the famous Fitzgeralds and their antics had reached Europe and their circle of literary friends grew and expanded to include talented ex-patriates from other artistic disciplines and powerful socialites. One such glittering couple, Sara and Gerald Murphy, were two of the first people the Fitzgeralds met in Paris and they soon became an inseparable quartet. The Murphys were both artistically inclined, but their greatest gift lay in collecting dazzling famous friends. Through the Murphys, the Fitzgeralds became acquainted with some of the most influential artists of the Lost Generation, including Archibald and Ada MacLeish, Philp and Ellen Barry, Cole Porter, Pablo Picasso, and perhaps most notably, Ernest Hemingway. The move to Paris was meant to facilitate Scott's work on the manuscript that would become *The Great Gatsby,* but from all accounts the Fitzgeralds spent their first year abroad on the same spree of partying that had occupied them stateside.

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[14] John Peale Bishop, the famous literary critic, originally praised *The Beautiful and The Damned* and spotted Scott as a significant literary talent. John also was involved in a love triangle with Edna St. Vincent Millay and Edmund Wilson. He also incurred Scott's jealousy, if not wrath, by openly flirting with Zelda (Cline 90).

Accompanied by new and old friends alike, the Fitzgeralds entertained lavishly up and down the French Riviera during the summer of 1924. Nancy Cline notes that because the Fitzgeralds lacked a knowledge of French they spent their summer neither participating in the local community nor visiting tourist spots but moving between the homes of their ex-patriate friends or spending time alone in their villa by the sea (Cline 149). It was during this period that Fitzgerald met with French aviator Edouard Jozan, and the infamous affair memorialized sensationally by both Fitzgeralds in print took place.[15] At the end of the summer of 1924, both Fitzgeralds felt worn down by the rigors of frivolity; Zelda Fitzgerald had been separated from her French paramour (forcibly, by some accounts, locked in her room by her furious husband who challenged Jozan to fisticuffs, though other reports record a less dramatic fizzling out of the attachment by summer's end), and Scott Fitzgerald had exhausted himself with general bad behavior at several parties over the vacation.[16] By the spring of 1925,

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[15] The affair between Jozan and Zelda is recorded as little more than "a summer flirtation" by Jozan himself to biographer Nancy Milford, but is cast as something much more significant in both Zelda and Scott's re-telling of the material in their fiction. Perhaps as a result of this fictional re-telling of events, many of Scott's biographers, like Jeffrey Meyers, figure that Zelda was definitely guilty of "infidelity" and that it had an "agonizing aftermath" for the Fitzgeralds marriage (Meyers 116-17). No definitive proof of sexual infidelity exists and with Jozan's testimony denying any such indiscretions, all other versions of events are speculation, at best.

[16] Milford relays that Gerald and Sara Murphy both note Zelda's attachment to Jozan. Scott recorded in his Ledger that "The Big Crisis—13th of July" meant that the situation with Jozan and Zelda came to some sort of a head and years later he told a relative that in July Zelda had come to him and asked for a divorce to be with Jozan to which he responded furiously with

the Fitzgeralds returned to France. F. Scott Fitzgerald had finally finished his original drafts of *The Great Gatsby* and all impatiently waited for the proofs to return from Scribners. It was during this period that Scott Fitzgerald's famous relationship with Ernest Hemingway solidified into the oft-mythologized literary friendship that both would benefit and suffer from. Both men admired one another's writing and found it easy and enjoyable to get together and discuss authors, books, and styles they each appreciated over a drink at one of Paris's many cafes. However, although the two men saw much of each other, their two wives[17] had less of a connection. Milford says that while Scott and Ernest "were then 'very thick'" neither Fitzgerald nor Hadley Hemingway "was included in their literary discussions, but met on a purely social level, as the wives of writers" (116). With this single detail in common, it does not seem surprising that a friendship between the two, one a quiet but intensely devoted new mother and wife, the other a spirited young woman attempting to define herself as something separate from her domestic roles, was not forthcoming. In fact, the

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an ultimatum that Zelda meekly accepted. Jozan leaves the Riviera shortly thereafter saying he had little knowledge of what transpired between the Fitzgeralds. While still at the beach later in the summer, Zelda makes a suicide attempt with sleeping pills—this goes unrecorded in Scott's ledger, he writes instead that they are "close together" (Milford 111).

[17] Hadley was Hemingway's first wife with whom he had a son. He would divorce her in 1927 to pursue affair with Pauline Pffeifer. Of Hemingway's wives, Hadley was the only one who Zelda is recorded meeting with socially with any regularity

move to relegate the wives to less intellectually stimulating conversation in a parlor or another out-of-the-way room would be repeated in so many of the social gatherings the Fitzgeralds attended that Zelda Fitzgerald not only resented the exclusion, but also the company of women that it relegated her to, and the culture that permitted the entire process. This can be seen most clearly in Fitzgerald's interactions, or more accurately lack of interactions with Gertrude Stein.

Interestingly, Nancy Milford omits the meeting between Stein and the Fitzgeralds from her biography, though she does note that Stein sent Scott a complimentary letter on the publishing of *The Great Gatsby*, comparing his work to Thackeray and saying that his writing was responsible "for creating the contemporary world" (Milford 116). However, not a month later the trio met up for the very first time, thanks to the social engineering of Ernest Hemingway. As a favorite of Gertrude Stein's, Hemingway enjoyed much of her praise and attention for the majority of the decade. Gertrude Stein was the heart and soul of the Parisian literary salon at 27 rue de Fleurus, while her companion, Alice B. Toklas, ran all of the domestic affairs. Both Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald understood the significance of gaining entrance to Stein's salon and each eagerly agreed to attend when Hemingway brokered the invitation. Scott looked forward to meeting a keen literary mind who had publicly praised his work in the past

and maintained close friendships and mentorships with so many of the great artists of their day. For her part, Fitzgerald likely looked forward to viewing Stein's fantastic collection of modernist artworks. However, there were many interests the two women had in common that could have feasibly sufficed as foundation for a friendship/mentorship.

For example, as one of the vanguards of the modernist movement, Stein was considered an authority on much of the artworks from the period (both literary and physical). Stein was close personal friends with brilliant and popular painters like Pablo Picasso. Fortuitously, at the time of their meeting, Zelda Fitzgerald had just begun painting professionally. Also, both were women living abroad from upper-middle class American roots. Additionally, Gertrude Stein helped launch the career of many unknown artists. Through her extensive network of literary friends, critics, publishers, and artists, Stein greatly enjoyed engineering mutually beneficial connections for people she believed had talent. Like Fitzgerald, Stein was also a woman who valued her own independence and thrived in the attention of men. It is not too much of a leap to assume then, that the two women had several areas of common interest that would have given them any number of topics to discuss. In fact, perhaps because they were so similar it was inevitable that they would become competitors rather than companions, yet of all the people that Zelda Fitzgerald came in to contact with, it

is her lack of relationship with Gertrude Stein, the single most perfectly positioned woman to help elevate Zelda Fitzgerald on her path to self-identification, that highlights the failure and exclusion from community that Zelda Fitzgerald experienced during her life as an artist.

Unfortunately for Fitzgerald, Sally Cline paints the first meeting between Gertrude Stein and the hopeful painter/writer as a distinct scene of dismissal for the younger woman: "Stein always demanded the undivided attention of gentlemen guests, while females were handed over to Alice" to be swept off into conversations more fitting an artist's helpmeet (166). While F. Scott Fitzgerald was praised and entertained with Stein's other worthy guests, Zelda Fitzgerald was entirely disregarded as someone unworthy of attention. Scott sent a gushing letter to Stein thanking her for her hospitality after this first meeting, assuming the job of doling out niceties usually observed by wives in the twenties. Likely this fell to F. Scott Fitzgerald because his wife did not share his enthusiasm for their host or salon society, divided as it was. Furthermore, Zelda Fitzgerald made the keen but rather biting observation to Sara Mayfield that Stein was as interested in her own opinions as her listeners were. Fitzgerald even went so far as to call Stein's bombastic sermons on style and content "sententious gibberish," and to describe the woman many intellectuals hailed as the oracle of contemporary literature as "a stout, dumpy old woman with her hair cut short

and brushed back like a French barber's" (Mayfield 19-20). From these comments, it can be assumed that the meeting was not a fortuitous one.

Fitzgerald's assessment of Stein may seem an unfounded account of female hostility, but her feelings of exclusion and her wounded pride led her to put her sharp wit and descriptive eye to less-than-flattering use. Linda Wagner-Martin reports that after this initial encounter with Stein's intellectual/social double standards, Fitzgerald "chose not to go to Gertrude Stein's rather than be partitioned off 'with the wives' in conversation with Alice Toklas rather than with Stein" (Wagner-Martin 117). Zelda Fitzgerald, the Southern belle, was used to being the center of attention, or at the very least included in the conversation. In mixed company, she could rely on distinguishing herself with her unique combination of genteel ways and outrageous actions—she always knew how to draw attention both male and female, but when she was relegated to a side room she lost interest in the performance entirely. Zelda Fitzgerald was not just a wife. She was a Southern belle, a flapper, an artist in her own right. She was anything but just another wife. And she was insulted at being treated in such a fashion. Stein, though she was a confirmed lesbian and exerted several progressive feminist views, kept what appeared to a confoundingly hetero-normative home, with she and Alice occupying two very distinct and separate roles in the home and in society. Unlike Hemingway, who would eventually sever his connection

with Stein over her homosexual relationship with Toklas, Fitzgerald took a more open-minded approach to sexual difference, but was still barred from entry into Stein's literary community.

Biographers are very delicate when it comes to discussing Zelda Fitzgerald's sexual identity. The prejudice and stigma in the time periods of the original biographies of both Fitzgeralds make biographers understandably reticent to broach the subject. To increase complications, much of Fitzgerald's original psychiatric diagnosis seems to have hinged on accusations Scott made that his wife was engaging in socially unacceptable sexual forays with other women. With so very little proof of Zelda Fitzgerald's overt interest or participation in any conventionally untoward sexual activities, recent treatments of the biographical material have not delved overly deep into what is obviously sensitive subject matter. There is enough material, however, to state that both Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald likely indulged in bi-sexual curiosity, if not exploration. Yet, due to the cultural context of their upbringings—F. Scott's in an upstanding Irish-Catholic home in the Mid-West and Zelda from the ultra-conservative upper-middle class in the Deep South—each of them faced censure about these interests and did not pursue them at any length. However, it is a testament to Fitzgerald's desire for community as well as another confusing element of her isolation from community that she temporarily occupied a

familiar position in Romaine Brooks and Natalie Barney's famous lesbian salon on the rue Jacob and that her attachment to her ballet instructor, Madame Lubov Egorova reached obsessive levels. We will look at each instance where there were community possibilities, explore why they failed, and ultimate re-confirm the pattern of isolation for Zelda Fitzgerald.

Sapphic Sisterhood: Experiments in Community

Zelda Fitzgerald first met the French painter, Romaine Brooks, when she and Scott vacationed on the Italian Isle of Capri during the summer of 1925. Brooks and her friend/lover American Natalie Barney were at the heart of the other popular Parisian artistic and intellectual salon and happened to be much more accessible and accepting towards Fitzgerald than Gertrude Stein's salon. While the Fitzgeralds were on Capri, Zelda was inspired to paint daily. Fitzgerald felt that she might have some talent worth cultivating and she was encouraged by the lessons Gerald Murphy had arranged for her back in Paris. While Fitzgerald worked, her husband, by his own admission, busied himself not with his novel but with "drinking"[18]. This set-up, Zelda Fitzgerald working and Scott Fitzgerald procrastinating, made both Fitzgeralds eager to mingle with people outside their own villa. Enter Brooks and Barney. Some scholars will view

[18] Scott records in his ledger of March 1925, "Zelda painting, me drinking" (Cline 162).

Fitzgerald's interest in these new-found friends as evidence that she had lesbian tendencies, while others aver that Fitzgerald's artistic inclinations led her to interact with the counter-cultural group, nothing more.

Most Fitzgerald biographers mention Zelda *and* Scott Fitzgerald's visitations to Barney's Parisian salon. Furthermore, it is no secret that the Fitzgeralds had several acquaintances who were homosexual; in addition to the women in Barney and Brooks' circle there was Jinnie Pfeiffer, the sister of Hemingway's second wife Pauline; as well as Dolly Wilde niece of the author Oscar Wilde; Gerald Murphy's sister Esther Murphy; and even Tallulah 'Dutch' Bankhead from Fitzgerald's hometown, who all carried on illicit or overt lesbian relationships. However, Sally Cline and Kendall Taylor are the only biographers to consider Fitzgerald's singular interest in the Barney and Brooks' circle as one that evinces her artistic interests. Cline also avers that this original artistic interest developed into a more controversial sexual curiosity, but the focus of our study will be on the potential fellowship Zelda Fitzgerald sought at the Rue du Jacob during that first summer in Capri.

The scholars who believe that Zelda's interest in the salon was a sexual one largely build their arguments on the grounds of the loud and sometimes crass testimony of Ernest Hemingway. Hemingway's slanderous accusations of lesbianism are built on the Fitzgeralds' frequenting the Barney/Brooks salon in

1929 and keeping company with the aforementioned Parisian lesbian-feminists. Yet, when Hemingway recalls the timeline of Zelda's downfall, he places the beginning of Zelda's sexual misbehavior in 1925, the summer she met Brooks and Barney in Capri. Cline writes that though many of Scott Fitzgerald's biographers believe Hemingway misremembered the dates; Zelda Fitzgerald's own artistic output during 1925 would attest to the outside support of the artistic all-female group. Sally Cline sees this time in Fitzgerald's life not as one of alternative sexuality exploration but of supportive artistic community. She argues that in 1925, "Zelda was now painting steadily" and was benefitting from the "artistic camaraderie" and "willingness to take her art seriously" that the group of all-female artists offered (177). Certainly, it was a welcome change from the feedback Fitzgerald was receiving at home from her husband, which Cline tells the reader, "vacillated between suggesting she [Fitzgerald] do something for herself and giving her little credit when she did" (Cline 177). Scholars infer that Fitzgerald made anywhere between a dozen to two dozen paintings in the summer of 1925. This output is a shocking feat for any artist, and a feat that I maintain could not have been accomplished without some support system in place. With her husband ill-suited for the position, Cline insists that this artistic community headed by Brooks and Barney acted as a sounding board for Zelda Fitzgerald, the energetic painter. Yet after this initially flurry of artistic graphic

activity, of which few pictures remain, Fitzgerald returned to another one of her artistic interests, ballet, and did not resume her association with the Parisian provocateur set until 1929 when she experienced another burst of what Cline terms "dangerous energy" wherein she painted frequently, continued her ballet, and visited the sixteenth arrondissement[19] frequently. Though Cline argues that Zelda Fitzgerald's interest in the lesbian group was largely artistic in nature, there are other explanations for her association.

Linda Wagner-Martin attributes the Fitzgerald's interest in Natalie Barney's salon as an action forced by the "collective cold shoulder of old friends" (106). In Wagner-Martin's estimation, the Fitzgeralds did not willingly attend the salon as a matter of preference but were rather banished there as a punishment for their annoying antics which had finally exhausted the patience of their "reputable" friends. Sara Mayfield and Nancy Milford exclude mention of Natalie Barney and Romaine Brooks entirely, though they each delicately skirt Fitzgerald's rumored lesbianism,[20] Sally Cline believes that what started initially

[19] The Right bank was a an artist colony in Paris in the 1920s, the sixteenth arrondissement was specifically known to house Paris' lesbian artist community including Romaine Brooks' studio at 74 rue Raynouard and Natalie Barney's salon (Taylor 220).

[20] Milford addresses Scott's rumored homosexuality and only makes passing reference to accusations towards Zelda as something that is ancillary to Scott's own anxiety on the subject. Mayfield uses the comment mentioned on page 7 of this chapter, about Zelda having no use or interest in women necessarily to vaguely refute the insinuation made by Hemingway that Zelda "made Scott jealous by running around Paris with women" (Milford 211, Mayfield 146).

as an artistic attraction to the company of other women developed into a sexual curiosity that made Fitzgerald both "anxious and confused" (Cline 253). Zelda Fitzgerald's anxiety over her nascent lesbianism and Scott Fitzgerald's increasingly jealous outbursts and accusations, Cline argues, eventually reached critical mass and resulted in Fitzgerald's first nervous collapse and the end of her association with Barney and Brooks. I am inclined toward Kendall Taylor's more measured view of events.

Taylor asserts that though Stein may not have welcomed Zelda into her exclusive boys club, the two women shared a similar mindset towards the act of lesbian love; they felt that it was not a repulsive act and it could actually function as "an extension of masculine-feminine sexuality" (Taylor 222). Zelda Fitzgerald was not disgusted with or frightened by lesbianism as Hemingway was or as Scott Fitzgerald claimed to be. Rather, she viewed this alternative sexuality as a way of women leading equal and fulfilling lives and living in community with one another. It is not a coincidence that while she was in contact with this set of women Fitzgerald began to transition from viewing herself as the amateur artist to seeing herself as a professional artist. Previously, Fitzgerald had not received any individual acknowledgement for her artistic output and had likely been convinced by her husband's taunts that she was not a true professional. He is recorded frequently making remarks like, "she [Zelda] no longer read or thought

or knew anything or liked anyone except dancers and their cheap satellites…she was becoming more and more an egotist and a bore" (Taylor 218). However, with the encouragement and attention of women like Brooks, Barney, and eventually the retired ballerina, Lubov Egorova, Zelda Fitzgerald could begin to visualize herself as someone with worth and talent independent of her husband's work. So, it is confusing and surprising that having discovered this opportunity for community Fitzgerald would desert the Sapphic salon entirely.

Some scholars say that Zelda Fitzgerald stopped visiting the Rue du Jacob because of increasingly negative public opinion. Others say Scott Fitzgerald's jealously over his wife's lesbian flirtations reached critical mass. But it seems most likely, based on the previous patterns of behavior from both Fitzgeralds, that even though Scott Fitzgerald's jealousy was a probable mitigating factor in Fitzgerald's eventual exclusion from the Barney/Brooks set, rather than quit attending over fear of social opprobrium, Fitzgerald chose to capitalize on what she saw as her strengths and switch her energies from painting to ballet, which she resumed in the late 1920s. Though scholars say she stopped visiting Brooks and Barney for fear of the social reprisals, and that the rumors swirling during this time of her lesbianism precipitated her mental breakdown, I think that these explanations provide only a portion of the story. In the next section I will

forward what I believe to be at the heart of Zelda Fitzgerald's withdrawal from the feminine community that she so desperately needed.

By 1928, Fitzgerald had begun dancing avidly. The physical strain of her ballet practice paired with intense marital discord is a more likely source of psychic distress than Fitzgerald's fear of social reprisals when, in fact, her entire life is one long series of dismissals of the status quo. Zelda Fitzgerald was ambitious. Painting was not affording her the recognition she had hoped. So, Fitzgerald chose the group, specifically the mentor, that paid her the most individual attention and the area in which she held the most promise. Though she loved painting and would continue to dabble in the art form her entire life, she never received any formal instruction. Her pictures are fascinating and striking, but they can also be disturbing, and throughout her life they would never gain the acknowledgement she hoped. Romaine Brooks and Natalie Barney may have found her an interesting companion and may have seen potential for her paintings, but their attentions were drawn in a million different directions. Moreover, though painting was an artistic interest for Fitzgerald, by 1929 her ballet was consuming for her. Furthermore, Madame Egorova gave Fitzgerald private lessons in addition to formal classes, and Fitzgerald's own rigorous private schedule of dance practice testifies to how seriously she took this art form.

By participating in the Salon on Rue du Jacob, Zelda Fitzgerald was looking for a place to be acknowledged and encouraged in community. The fact that she left this relative sanctuary does not necessarily mean that she rejected the community that was proffered but only that she found a community that she believed would be more suited to fitting her needs and preferences. However, it remains vital to acknowledge that Zelda Fitzgerald was initially elated to be welcomed into a community that viewed her as a talented individual as is evidenced by her enormous artistic output during this time. Meeting Brooks and Barney in Capri gave Fitzgerald her first chance to exist as something other than an ancillary character in Scott's narrative. Amidst her husband's circle of friends, we have seen how Zelda Fitzgerald was overshadowed, overlooked, and even bullied (by the likes of Hemingway and her own husband). Thus, when Fitzgerald is offered entry into community of her own, it is not surprising that she welcomes the escape, despite the transgressive connotations that this community bore. However, when another opportunity to reach artistic fulfillment presented itself to Zelda Fitzgerald with greater possibilities for achievement and fewer sexual politics, she ultimately left the community offered by the Barney/Brooks set and pursued terpsichorean community instead.

Little did Fitzgerald know that when she made the move to dedicate her time and creative energies to ballet the wheels of her destruction had already

been set in motion. Alerted by the accusations of Hemingway and suffering from his own homosexual tendencies and anxieties, Scott Fitzgerald grew increasingly fractious about Zelda Fitzgerald's individual work, particularly ballet. Absurdly possessive and hypocritically maddened by jealousy, F. Scott resented the time Fitzgerald spent on ballet and began to project his own homoerotic interests onto his wife and her beloved instructor, Egorova.[21] Fitzgerald was single-minded in her pursuit of ballet (displaying many of the symptoms of mania that would be typical of her later mental illness), but the object of her desire was artistic perfection and subsequent recognition, not the aged ballet instructor. The Russian Diaghilev was also a focus of her intense admiration and respect and as a former student and dancer for Diaghilev, Egorova was immediately a figure of admiration for Fitzgerald. Moreover, once Egorova agreed to teach Fitzgerald ballet she gave the fiercely determined younger woman her time and attention. These attentions may seem like an exceedingly small crumb of kindness to a spectator, as Egorova was a paid instructor, but as Zelda Fitzgerald's identity was inextricably tied to her husband's opinions and portrayals, it bolstered her budding independence to be taken seriously by the former prima ballerina.

[21] In a letter describing Zelda's distressing behaviors to her doctors, Scott would later describe Zelda's relationship with her instructor by saying, "her first indications of lesbianism [were] directed towards Egorova" (Taylor 220).

Admittedly, there are occasional bursts of obsessive behavior from Fitzgerald that do color this student/teacher relationship as unusual and perhaps indicate the widening schism in Fitzgerald's emotional and mental well-being. For example, she showered Egorova in presents relentlessly: bouquets of exquisite flowers, chocolates, and tokens of her affection. Once after class, Fitzgerald flung herself at the instructor's feet in an emotional display of loyalty and gratitude that was a cause for concern for both Egorova and Scott Fitzgerald. However, Fitzgerald herself again described a suspected homosexual attachment as an aesthetic and artistic one, not a sexual one: "My attitude towards Egorova has always been one of intense love. I wanted to help her in some way because she is a good woman…I wanted to dance well so that she would be proud of me and have another instrument for the symbols of beauty that passed in her head that I understood".[22] Fitzgerald was attracted to Egorova's artistic genius, she was empathetic to Egorova's vision, and she wanted to possess it herself, so desperately in fact that she clung to Egorova as the vehicle that would enable her to achieve "the symbols of beauty that passed" not only in Egorova's head, but in Fitzgerald's as well. Here at last, it seems Zelda Fitzgerald had found healthful,

[22] Cited in Milford (258) taken from a letter to Scott from Zelda written in July 1930, shortly after her institutionalization.

productive community. However, we now know that this was to turn out to be yet another failed area of community.

In view of the deep artistic connection Zelda Fitzgerald felt for the ballet, it is even more disheartening to think of her ignominious parting from it. Once her breakdown occurred, Fitzgerald was kept from returning to ballet through a carefully orchestrated effort between her husband and her physicians. Scott Fitzgerald conspired with Zelda Fitzgerald's doctors to keep her immobile while she was interred in her many clinics, claiming that her delicate health could not survive the extreme activity, mental or physical, she had been undertaking with her dance practice. Scott Fitzgerald worked closely with Dr. Forel at the Pragins clinic to undermine any successes his wife had attained with ballet in hopes of discouraging her from returning to her practice once she was released. This pattern of denial and dismissal has been energetically pursued by many Fitzgerald scholars and biographers as proof that Scott Fitzgerald acted in the best interests of his unstable wife while she was hospitalized. However, closer analysis of Zelda Fitzgerald's relationship with Egorova, ballet, and subsequently her husband, reveals a much more favorable assessment of Fitzgerald's artistic abilities, thereby complicating Scott Fitzgerald's motives during her treatment. We will look at the specific letter from Madame Egorova that is frequently used by F. Scott Fitzgerald scholars to contradict and discredit

Zelda Fitzgerald's competence in ballet. We will then examine the context of the letter, how it was solicited, and by whom. In doing so, this examination will grant us better understanding of yet another specific artistic disappointment in Fitzgerald's life, and how that disappointment excludes her from another form of artistic community.

Ballet and the Breakdown

Zelda Fitzgerald entered Prangins clinic in Lausanne, Switzerland, for the first of her many psychiatric stays at the beginning of June 1930. Over the previous two years Fitzgerald had grown increasingly thin and neurotic, the colossal strain of her demanding ballet practice, genetic predisposition, and marital discord finally amounting to a mental breakdown. Kendall Taylor describes Fitzgerald's "ascent to madness" saying, "Her Herculean effort to become her own person, to identify and do valuable work, love whom and how she pleased, and escape from being F. Scott Fitzgerald's wife and model for his heroines had ended in madness" (228). Though Fitzgerald had allowed herself to be admitted to Prangins and was technically allowed to leave at any time, when she attempted to escape the clinic early in her stay, she was physically confined in the hospital's wing for highly disturbed patients, Eglantine.

During this period of confinement, Zelda Fitzgerald suffered enormously, both through physical discomfort and mistreatment, as well as with acute mental

distress. Sally Cline describes how once confined in Eglantine, Fitzgerald would have been subjected to all manner of atrocities. Patients in Eglantine were regularly

> administered morphine and bromides rectally, preceded by an enema. These drugs induced a two-week-long narcosis within twenty minutes. Patients on this 'Swiss Sleeping Cure' were aroused only to relieve bladder or bowel or for minimal food. This narcotic procedure had several known side-effects, one of which was eczema, by which Zelda was again tortured from 15 July onwards. (Cline 272; Taylor 235)

Her attending psychiatrist at the Prangins clinic was Dr. Oscar Forel, son of the esteemed Professor of Psychiatry at Zurich University, Dr. August Forel. The younger Dr. Forel ran the expensive clinic in Lausanne and treated Fitzgerald's case while she was housed at Prangins over 15 months. Dr. Forel believed it would be in Fitzgerald's best interests if he worked closely with her husband to understand her psychological background and devise a strategy for re-educating and re-integrating the wayward wife back into normal life (which he felt included resuming regular domestic and wifely duties). Forel was the doctor responsible for Fitzgerald's schizophrenic diagnosis, a diagnosis that has been contested not only by medical improvements and advancements in recent generations, but even by Forel's contemporaries in the other clinics Fitzgerald visited[23]. Schizophrenia was a condition that had just been introduced to the field

[23] Fitzgerald's other attending physicians, Dr.'s Rennie, Spires, and Slocum disagree with the diagnosis. Furthermore, Linda Wagner-Martin explains that the men that favored this

of psychiatry in 1911 by Dr. Eugene Bleuler. The symptoms of schizophrenia Bleuler identified were/are shared by several other mental illnesses and the available treatments for the condition, if that was truly the condition the patient suffered from, were rudimentary at best.

In a time period where a gender-typical relationship involved conventional roles for men and women, Zelda Fitzgerald's manic pursuit of artistic ambition, resentment towards Scott, and pursuit of gender-alternative relationships would have easily translated in the eyes of her doctors as the hysteria, delusions, confusion, and propensity towards homosexuality that were symptomatic of the newly-found schizophrenia disorder. Leading schizophrenia doctor, Bleuler, consulted with Zelda Fitzgerald's main physician, Forel, on her case. It is more than a little suspect, however, that Bleuler remarked of schizophrenics that many manifested their symptoms in their anger toward their inability to control life situations. Overlooking environmental factors and cultural elements is a huge handicap in Bleuler's diagnosis and understanding of the disorder; furthermore, his flippant remark that "On the higher levels of society," schizophrenics were most commonly "the wife who is unbearable, constantly scolding, nagging, always making demands, but never recognizing

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diagnosis, led by Dr. Forel, were all dedicated Freudians- a group that notoriously operated with an extreme degree of sexism and whose psychiatry was largely debunked in the decades that followed (131).

duties," smacks of astounding sexism and is a reductive treatment of a complicated neuro-psychiatric disorder (Taylor 237). Similarly, Forel's prescribed reeducation program focused on removing those areas of life where Fitzgerald seemed to be "competing publicly with her more famous husband in an inappropriate manner;" Sally Cline says that charges of "ineptitude at housework, cooking and servant management" were all examples of "pronounced gender implications in the way the label schizophrenia was constructed in the Thirties" (Cline 288).[24] This patriarchal assessment of women with difference as mad or ill is an astounding theme that recurs frequently for Zelda Fitzgerald, not only in her medical records, but in her artistic efforts as well.

In addition to the assistance Forel was receiving from Bleuler, the Swiss psychiatrist also received a great deal of help from Scott Fitzgerald. Early in Zelda Fitzgerald's stay at the Prangins institution, Forel wrote to F. Scott Fitzgerald saying he was grateful for the detailed accounts of Zelda's family background and mental decline that Scott had provided. Over the course of Fitzgerald's stay at Prangins, Forel would write to Scott Fitzgerald frequently,

[24] Zelda was placed on a program "aimed at changing 'inappropriate' feminine behavior into something nearer the conventional wifely model of the era". "Many women like Zelda, who were artists or married to artists, who were unwilling or unable to conform, whose behavior or speech did not fit approved family patterns, were administered remedies or 'cures' in mental asylums that were often a method of containing them for long periods of time" (Cline 445, note 61).

and vice versa,[25] keeping him apprised of all the intimate details regarding his wife's diagnosis, treatment, and progress, thereby "allowing [Scott] to feel responsible in his new role as unofficial co-consultant" on his wife's case (Cline 267). There are several unprofessional, if not alarming, aspects of Forel's permissive and even sycophantic attitude toward F. Scott Fitzgerald. First, and by his own admission, Forel became personally involved with Zelda Fitzgerald's case through his coordination with Scott Fitzgerald on the details of Zelda's early life and their marriage. He wrote to Scott Fitzgerald saying that "he shared Scott's ordeal" and that his "personal feelings were mixed with his professional role" (267). This is a violation of the professional distance needed to keep personal bias from interfering with medical diagnoses. Forel's personal feelings are also terribly sympathetic towards Scott Fitzgerald, making his patient's feelings and experiences of secondary importance. Forel wanted Zelda Fitzgerald to get "better," but this subjective achievement did not necessarily involve gaining fulfillment or independence for Fitzgerald, but rather Forel hoped to make her ambitions and her moods more manageable for all involved (267).

A prime example of this destructive collaboration between doctor and husband is seen in the case of the notorious Egorova letter. When Zelda

[25] "Fitzgerald once said that he must have written Forel over forty thousand words in an effort to straighten things out" (Mayfield 154).

Fitzgerald arrived at Prangins, she was in a delicate emotional state, and her body was physically exhausted. However, she still maintained the hope and desire to distinguish herself as a prima ballerina once she conquered her illness and returned to her regular life. Ballet offered a great sense of purpose and community for Fitzgerald. She had gotten a glimpse of what artistic life and community was like during her involvement with the Brooks and Barney salon, but as a dancer she moved from onlooker to participant. She was close with other members of her ballet classes and was incredibly dedicated to her ballet instructor, Egorova. Though she was kept from practicing dance at Prangins, Fitzgerald believed that the exertion of ballet was curative and good for her depression and anxiety. She took the matter to her physicians and when rebuffed she sought her husband's support on the issue. He, too, encouraged her to give up ballet. Finally, Fitzgerald implored Scott Fitzgerald to reach out to Egorova and ask the ballet instructor's opinion of her abilities. This redress to Egorova as a figure of empathy testifies to the strong attachment Zelda Fitzgerald felt to the community she had created within the group of dancers. Fitzgerald repeated her request several times and finally in late July, her husband acquiesced. It is clear from Fitzgerald's thinly veiled keenness on this topic, displayed in excerpts from one of her letters to her husband below, that she hoped Egorova would deliver an assessment of her abilities that would validate the time and energy she had

poured into her practice, but also perhaps legitimize her pursuit of what she calls repeatedly her "work."

> If you could write to Egorowa[26] a friendly impersonal note to find out exactly where I stand as a dancer it would be of the greatest help to me—Remember, this is in no way at all her fault. I would have liked to dance in New York this fall, but where am I going to find again these months that dribble into the beets of the clinic garden? Is it worth it? […] If I had **work** or something it would be so much decenter to try to help each other and make at least a stirrup cup out of this bloody mess.
>
> You have always had so much sympathy for people forced to start over late in life that I should think you could find the generosity to help me amongst your many others—not as you would a child but as an equal.

Then in a postscript to the letter she adds,

> Please write immediately to Paris about the dancing. I would do it but I think the report will be more accurate if it goes to you—just an opinion as to what value **my work** is and to what point I could develop it before it is too late. Of cource, I would go to another school as I know Egorowa would not want to be bother with me—Thanks. (qtd. in Milford, emphasis mine, 165)

As all correspondence to and from patients at Prangins was read by their attending physicians, Dr. Forel also wrote to Scott Fitzgerald and encouraged him to grant his wife's request and write to Egorova. However, Forel's motivation for writing to Egorova was much more manipulative. Both Scott Fitzgerald and Dr. Forel agreed that Zelda Fitzgerald should no longer pursue

[26] Zelda and Scott are both notoriously poor spellers. I have kept all of the misspellings in the quote as have other scholars, in an effort to stay as true as possible to the original content of their letters.

dancing and that quiet, domestic activity was most beneficial for her health and recovery. Fitzgerald's single-minded determination to return to ballet placed her at an impasse with her doctor and her spouse. As a means of resolving the discord between patient and her male keepers, Forel suggested Scott Fitzgerald write to Egorova and request that she deceive Zelda about her ballet potential, thereby delivering a blow to Fitzgerald that would rend any "overweening inflated ambition" (as Forel termed Fitzgerald's dedication to ballet) from Fitzgerald's personality.[27] The desired result would be a subdued Zelda Fitzgerald who would be more amenable to the kind of cures Forel and his associates wanted to apply. Essentially, Forel wanted Fitzgerald to be cut off from her remaining outlet to community. Prangins was already physically isolating Fitzgerald (as we have already discussed how she was forcibly restrained in Eglantine), but up to this point Zelda could seek reassurance in the thought of returning to community. Forel aimed to remove even this small consolation of community support from Zelda Fitzgerald's grasp.

Though Scott Fitzgerald may have refused Forel's proposal to deceive Zelda outright, an action he is applauded for by many scholars, though surely this is just fundamental spousal decency, he does write to Egorova heavily

[27] Taken from letter from Forel to FSF written June 23, 1930. Pulled from the archives at the Princeton University Library by Cline, p.443.

implying that it would be in Zelda's best interests if she were discouraged from continuing with ballet:

> Zelda is still very ill. From time to time there is some improvement and then all of a sudden she commits some insane act . . . It is doubtful—though she is unaware of it—that she could ever return to her dancing school . . . doctors would like to know what her chances were, what her future was like as a dancer, when she fell ill . . . Her situation being critical, it is rather necessary that she should know the answer, despite all the disappointment it could cause her. (qtd. in Cline 273)

Scott Fitzgerald emphasizes the connection between his wife's ballet practice and her declining mental health in the letter. He makes sure that, before Egorova even has a chance to answer his questions, he establishes, regardless of her response, that it is "doubtful" Zelda will ever "return to her dancing," though he does not specify whether this abandonment would be a matter of inability or prohibition. He also includes that his wife's situation is "critical" and proceeds to make the assumption that Egorova's report will be negative but should still be delivered to his isolated, sick wife "despite all the disappointment it could cause her."

Attached to this already heavy-handed letter to Egorova, Scott Fitzgerald included several questions that are also highly suggestive in nature. Rather than asking for Egorova's estimation of his wife's abilities and allowing the teacher to make an unaffected response, Scott asks a series of leading questions that could only result in a measured, if not flatly negative, response from the instructor.

Scott Fitzgerald asks unambiguously if Zelda could ever be "first-rate," specifically if she could reach the status of Nikitina or Danilowa, if she started too late to achieve the desired balance and bearing of a prima ballerina. Barring those particular, yet ambiguous, symbols of achievement (here again Scott Fitzgerald assumes Zelda Fitzgerald's inadequacy) Scott asks whether she could at least land a supporting role in a small regional ballet company, not by her skills or merits but on the value of her "charming face and beautiful body" (the two qualities Scott Fitzgerald himself regards as her most valuable). We have already uncovered the motives behind Scott Fitzgerald's writing to Egorova, first to quell his persistent wife and second to discourage her, in coordination with her doctor's opinions, from resuming ballet. Now, in order to understand just how manipulative this letter is, one must understand the standards of expertise Zelda Fitzgerald is being held to.

Scott Fitzgerald sets up a series of impossibly high standards by which Egorova should judge Zelda Fitzgerald. For example, the ballerinas he asks Egorova to compare Fitzgerald against are Nikitina, Danilowa, and Nemtchinova. Kendall Taylor tells us that these three are none other than the cream of the crop of Diaghilev's Russian ballerinas, a group of performance professionals who were already considered to be the premier ballet company in the world. Nemtchinova and Nikitina both had spectacular careers with the

Diaghilev's Ballet Russes in the 1920s and both retired before 1930, though two and seven years younger than Fitzgerald, respectively. Maria Danilowa died prematurely at the age of seventeen but was widely considered "the greatest Russian dancer of the nineteenth century" (Taylor 234). Not only were these ballerinas technically exceptional, they were also younger than Fitzgerald and had been training to be prima ballerinas from their childhoods. To ask Egorova, who taught two of these extraordinary women, to compare Fitzgerald, who began dancing seriously in her late 20s and had been under instruction only for a few years, to these exceptional artists was to set Fitzgerald up for failure.

Zelda Fitzgerald was ambitious with her ballet practice, perhaps to a foolhardy degree, and she zealously admired the ballerinas of the Diaghilev school, but even she realized that she could not compare to such stars as the women mentioned above. Moreover, Fitzgerald knew that just because she did not live up to the level of a Danilowa, her level of existing skill did not exclude her dancing from exhibiting promise. Zelda Fitzgerald saw ballet as a desperately needed outlet for artistic expression. To participate in this community, she knew she needed to be good, but she did not delude herself that she had to be the best. We see evidence of Fitzgerald's self-awareness in a transcript recorded in 1933 of a conversation between the Fitzgeralds, husband and wife, facilitated by Zelda's residing psychiatrist, Dr. Rennie. In that

conversation, Scott Fitzgerald makes reference to the letter Egorova wrote to Zelda Fitzgerald when she was in Prangins saying that Egorova encouraged Zelda then only because she was paid "$300 a month" for lessons, but that her final appraisal of Zelda's skills was that Zelda Fitzgerald "could not dance." To which Fitzgerald retorts, "That is not so. She said I could dance a leading role in the Mazarine Ballet…What she said was that I started too late to be a star. You know what being a *star* in the Russian Ballet means. There are about six of them" (qtd. in Wagner-Martin 169).

Zelda Fitzgerald evinces self-awareness and even modesty in her response to her husband's barbed criticism. She realizes the amount of potential she possessed and was able to properly contextualize it in the realm of competitive Russian ballet. Fitzgerald even modestly over-exaggerates the number of Russian stars, doubling it from three to six. Even at six, the number of stand-out ballerinas is pitifully small, especially when compared to other similarly competitive fields such as theater (from the perfoming arts side) or professional basketball (from the athletic side of things) where there can be and frequently are standout performers numbering in the dozens.

In addition to the absurd comparisons Scott Fitzgerald asks Egorova to make, he also imbeds elements he knows weigh against his wife when he questions the elder ballerina about Fitzgerald's ballet aptitude. For example,

most ballerinas must begin practice at a very early age in order to adequately shape their bodies and posture for the grueling physical demands of ballet. Though she danced as a young girl, we have acknowledged that Zelda Fitzgerald did not begin to seriously pursue dance until her age had increased to a prohibitive number. Therefore, when Scott asks Egorova to consider whether Zelda began ballet "too late to achieve good balance," he limits the ballet mistress to a single possible response. Again, Zelda Fitzgerald started pursuing ballet in earnest too late in her life to become the star ballerina. It becomes apparent that these questions are circular in nature and all of them lead a reader and responder to the conclusion that Fitzgerald's ballet practice is doomed to fail. Conveniently, this is exactly the response that Dr. Forel and Scott Fitzgerald believed would finally get Fitzgerald to abandon her obsessive pursuit. However, the letter Egorova sent in reply read a little differently than perhaps any one expected.

Egorova did not mince words. She informed Scott Fitzgerald that his wife, Zelda, had begun ballet too old to become a star ballerina in the manner of Russians like Nikitina or Danilowa. However, if Fitzgerald's ambitions were slightly moderated, Egorova added that she could definitely have a successful career with roles, possibly even lead roles, in metropolitan ballet companies such as New York's Massine Ballet Company. After all, Zelda Fitzgerald had already

been offered a solo in the San Carlo Opera Ballet's product of *Aida*. The invitation came by way of Madame Sedova. Sedova was a former classmate Egorova's, a "ranking Russian ballerina" and a woman who in 1929 when the letter was sent, "was still a dancer of great distinction" (Wagner-Martin 125). If this was not affirmation of Fitzgerald's legitimate ballet abilities, then surely Egorova's testimony was. Still Scott Fitzgerald, Dr. Forel, and even Zelda Fitzgerald herself, remained unsatisfied by the response and ultimately, through coercion and desperation, Zelda Fitzgerald chose to abandon ballet. Another door to community was closed to her.

Last Attempt at Artistic Expression and Community: Zelda Fitzgerald's Writing

The end of her ballet career was a major turning point in Zelda Fitzgerald's personal pursuit of fulfillment. The pattern of isolation from community had now placed her in a space both physically and mentally confining. In 1930, she was distant from her husband and her daughter, severed from her previous outlets for personal expression, and losing all grip on her mental stability. Some F. Scott Fitzgerald scholars pursue an uncharitable line of argument that places Zelda Fitzgerald as a hopeless copy-cat when it comes to her writing pursuits. When seen in the light of her desperation and searching, however, Fitzgerald's attempt to form some sort of intellectual community through writing can more accurately be perceived as a desperate woman's final

attempt to achieve artistic recognition and support, and ultimately self-realization. Fitzgerald's life up to this point has been spent in relentless pursuit of self-recognition, and yet, we have seen how her attempts to gain it through various artistic outlets are foiled when she is isolated from artistic community. By choosing to pursue writing, Zelda Fitzgerald had simultaneously her best and worst chances at finding the community that is so necessary for her to achieve her goal. As an area that is intimately familiar to her, and one in which she already had an established network of contacts, writing was a discipline that gave her a feasible chance of succeeding in creating her own identity and community. However, as the area which was the strict domain of her possessive and competitive husband, writing is also an area of community which will be closed to her. This time, however, Zelda Fitzgerald will not be isolated from community through her choices or through circumstances, but through the intentional exclusion of people in positions of influence. Specifically, Maxwell Perkins, Harold Ober, and her husband, co-author, and saboteur, F. Scott Fitzgerald.[28]

[28] Here again we must depend on autobiography to piece together information about Fitzgerald's publication records and efforts. Unlike Scott's professional relationship with these men that has been analyzed and studied in several scholastic volumes, Fitzgerald's relationship with them is seen to be fulfilling a kind of hobby not necessarily a professional working relationship/collaboration. But the details surrounding their involvement in Fitzgerald's writing career, though few and far between, are very telling about the kind of help and attention they were willing to offer her.

Where Eudora Welty enjoyed the unmitigated support and feedback from the men in her life that occupied the invaluable positions of editor, agent, and readers, Zelda Fitzgerald was, time after time, foiled by the very people who should have offered her community. Maxwell Perkins, acting as Fitzgerald's editor at Scribner's, and Harold Ober, acting as Fitzgerald's agent through his own agency, may not have maliciously railroaded Zelda Fitzgerald's writing career, but instead suffered from their strained loyalty to Scott Fitzgerald and therefore neglected the work of his less important wife, or worse, collaborated with Scott to misrepresent or misappropriate her ideas. Scott Fitzgerald's part in this ostracization is more intentional, however, and should therefore be viewed as more malevolent. Zelda Fitzgerald's attempt to harness writing as a mode for self-expression is doomed, as we have seen with her previous attempts at community. However, once this outlet is closed to her, Fitzgerald will not be able to re-direct her energies and passion. With this final rejection from community, Zelda Fitzgerald will become permanently stuck in a cycle of institutionalization and isolation.

In the previous chapter we examined the critical role a well-connected group of industry professionals played in the success of Eudora Welty's fiction, and the same could be said of many aspiring and established writers. In fact, the same held true for F. Scott Fitzgerald when he began to publish his fiction in the

early 1920s. Though always an ambitious and talented literary voice, Scott was helped immensely by the guidance and support of Maxwell Perkins and Harold Ober when just starting out in the industry. Perkins helped get F. Scott Fitzgerald's first novel, *This Side of Paradise*, accepted by Scribner's Publishing house after suggested revisions were made to the earlier drafts. Scribner's published *This Side of Paradise* in 1920 to warm critical reviews. Riding high on his acceptance at Scribner's, Scott met up with a young Harold Ober in New York. Ober worked for the Paul Revere Reynolds Agency and quickly recruited Scott as a client.[29] It was Ober that first managed to place one of Scott Fitzgerald's stories with the *Saturday Evening Post*, a publication that Scott had been courting in the hopes that *Post* would reach a larger audience, sell more copies and net him a higher paycheck than smaller or more literary publications like *The Smart Set* (Milford 58). With Ober working relentlessly to net Scott Fitzgerald publications that would be well-viewed and lucrative, Scott soon started to see returns for his work. In fact, by the mid-1920s Scott Fitzgerald was regularly commanding upwards of a thousand dollars per story sold to publications like the *Post*, making him one of the highest paid short-story writers of the decade.

[29] In 1929, Ober would leave Reynolds Agency and create his own agency, Harold Ober Associates, Incorporated. Scott would follow him to the new company.

As F. Scott Fitzgerald's career grew, the bad habits that had always been part of his life also began to increase exponentially. Scott's drinking and poor money management would become hallmarks of his career in literature. However, here again Perkins and Ober played supportive roles to their troubled artist. Ober worked with publishing houses to get Scott multiple advances on novel projects that ran years over their projected deadlines. Perkins carefully read over drafts of Scott's work and meticulously edited Scott's notoriously bad spelling and grammar, thereby improving many a project's chance of placing with a magazine or being considered for publication. Furthermore, both men acted outside their professional roles to offer personal support and guidance on many occasions, just as Welty's publishers, editors, and readers did for her over the years. For example, Ober and his wife Anne acted as guardian for Scottie when Scott Fitzgerald had to take time away from the states to work and Zelda Fitzgerald was in a psychiatric ward. During Fitzgerald's early bouts with madness, Perkins acted as Scott's friend and confidante, offering the stricken husband a shoulder for support. Even after Scott's death, both men remained loyal to their departed friend and his family. Ober gave Scottie away at her wedding and his wife made all the wedding arrangements. In another gesture of friendship, the Perkinses and the Obers were both members of the small group of friends that attended Scott Fitzgerald's funeral and even funded significant

portions of the provisions for the event. On each occasion, the wedding and the funeral, these two men stood in for parents or spouses who were unable to attend the event and perform their expected role[30]. These instances prove just how carefully Maxwell Perkins and Harold Ober tended to the community they helped construct with Scott Fitzgerald, but the same support is not wholly extended to his wife.

The men and women that were so instrumental in the career of Eudora Welty worked tirelessly to promote and secure the young Mississippian's place in the world of the written word. However, they never had to contend with the kind of obstacles that faced the community working with F. Scott Fitzgerald. There are several times in the lives of the Fitzgeralds, well before Zelda's extended battle with mental illness, wherein their partying, binge-drinking, and dangerous antics threaten to end the career of one of America's most well-loved and widely-read authors. It is no exaggeration to say that Perkins, Ober, and the other men that formed Scott Fitzgerald's literary community were vital in keeping the mercurial writer at least relatively stable

Perkins and Ober were deeply attuned to the style and voice of Scott Fitzgerald's writing. As a result of their long-standing professional knowledge of

[30] Unfortunately, Zelda Fitzgerald was not able to attend either event and stayed at the institution upon her doctor's recommendations.

Scott's work, which was substantially autobiographical, both Perkins and Ober necessarily came into contact with many intimate details of Scott's personal life. In fact, Perkins and Ober were not only privy to Scott Fitzgerald's personal thoughts and ideas, but also to Zelda Fitzgerald's. Scott copied and sent portions of Zelda's diaries to Perkins and Ober as early as 1918. Kendall Taylor points out that what began as admiration for Fitzgerald's "highly original and evocative" prose soon moved towards outright plagiarism when Scott Fitzgerald uses portions of the diaries to revise *This Side of Paradise* to Perkins' liking and then begins to incorporate whole sections of his wife's prose into his second novel (Taylor 72). Scott Fitzgerald had Zelda's diaries typed and mailed both Perkins and Ober copies of the manuscripts.[31] Perkins is said to have found Zelda Fitzgerald's work "extremely readable and agreed Zelda possessed an original voice and natural talent" (Taylor 72). Scott Fitzgerald made it clear to both men that he would be pirating sections of the diaries and using them in his own material.[32] Neither man made any objection to this proposed plagiarism.

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[31] These are not the only people Scott showed Zelda's diaries to, however he made the mistake of showing them to his friend George Jean Nathan whose immediate interest in both the diaries and Zelda threatened to turn into a publishing opportunity for her. Scott immediately "resented Nathan's intrusion" and quickly put to rest any notion of Zelda's material being published independently from his, "'Fitzgerald's answer was a resounding no,' Nathan recalled. 'He said he had gained a lot of inspiration from them and wanted to use parts of them in his own novels and short stories'' (Nathan qtd. in Taylor, 73).

[32] Scott tells Perkins when he sends the typed manuscript of Z's diary that Perkins will undoubtedly "recognize much of the dialogue" from the recently submitted draft of This Side of Paradise. Scott urges Perkins to not show the diaries around, certainly fearing that someone else

Beyond the issue of intellectual property and the ethics of plagiarism, the fealty shown by both Ober and Perkins towards F. Scott Fitzgerald would spell failure for his wife's attempts to publish independently. It needs to be said that though Perkins and Ober were clearly allied to Scott Fitzgerald's perspective on most, if not all, the issues in his personal life, they never seemed to harbor overt ill will towards Zelda Fitzgerald. On the contrary, on more than one occasion, each man goes out of his way to show her a kindness. For example, Perkins hosts a luncheon for Fitzgerald's first art exhibition and purchases two of her paintings from that collection. Ober's kindness to the family has already been documented above, but he also checked in on Zelda Fitzgerald during her hospitalizations and was even the one to inform her of her husband's passing (Milford 350). Yet, when it came to Zelda Fitzgerald's effect on her husband's literary productivity, her illness, and her own writing, the men had a long-standing bias that came from decades of hearing Scott Fitzgerald's version of events. For example, when, as early as 1920, Scott was already encountering what would be a lifelong struggle with handling his personal funds and he appealed to Perkins for a loan, Perkins did not accuse Scott of mishandling the money, but instead "blamed

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would recognize their inherent value as he did. Similarly, Scott tells Ober that he'll be using parts of Zelda's diary in a short story serialization that would be netting him $7,000. This would include the novelette "The Diary of a Popular Girl" taken almost entirely from Z's material (Taylor 72).

Zelda for Fitzgerald's financial crisis. 'She wanted everything,' Perkins complained" (Mayfield 65). Michael Kreyling and Perkins' own biographer, A. Scott Berg, also record that Perkins held a sexist bias against women in the workplace quoting Perkins as having advised Diarmuid Russell to open his own literary agency before, "the damned women take over the entire business" (Berg 333, and Kreyling 15). Perkins' misogynistic view of women in the literary business was certainly not unheard of at the time, but it would also weigh negatively against Zelda Fitzgerald's individual writing efforts.

It is important to establish this social and psychological pressure in combination with personal biases in order to explain how the next and final artistic community is eventually closed to Zelda. Though Perkins and Ober may not have intended to sabotage Zelda Fitzgerald's writing career, they managed to do irreparable harm to her material through a combination of mishandling materials, negligence, and mismanagement. It does not seem likely that these two men were simply incompetent. Both Ober and Perkins successfully managed the careers of some of the most notable men in fiction in the 20th century; not only did they work with F. Scott Fitzgerald, but with Ernest Hemingway, Thomas Wolfe,[33] Langston Hughes, Sherwood Anderson, J. D. Salinger and many more.

[33] Perkins worked with the first three authors. Ober represented the remaining authors.

It is far more likely that Ober and Perkins dismissed Zelda Fitzgerald's work as unimportant and did not give it the attention or dedication they would afford her husband's work over the years. Not only do these actions hurt the sales and publication of Fitzgerald's fiction, but they also ensured that she was excluded from entering into fellowship with her contemporary literary community.

Before Zelda Fitzgerald sent Maxwell Perkins the manuscript of *Save Me the Waltz* that would establish her place as a serious author and press her relationship with Scott to the brink, she made several forays into writing and publishing. Scholars that would dismiss Fitzgerald's novel as a singular event often overlook the short stories, editorials, a play, and the unfinished novel, *Caesar's Things*, that Fitzgerald produced in her two decades of writing output. As we saw previously in this section, Zelda Fitzgerald had been keeping a diary from a very young age and many of the ideas Scott would use in his early short stories would come from her distinct turn of phrase and ability to capture a scene on paper.[34] As Scott Fitzgerald's career continued to grow, he occasionally made notes in his ledger that indicated when his wife would advise or help him edit pieces he was working on, and though he calls her his muse in many public

[34] Alex McKaig noted in his journal that Fitzgerald openly acknowledged to him that, 'Zelda's ideas entirely responsible for "Jelly Bean" and the "Ice Palace" (Taylor 73). Zelda's diaries also appeared largely in Scott's second novel, *The Beautiful and the Damned*.

settings he refrains from publicly detailing just how much Zelda Fitzgerald helped form his work.[35]

Fitzgerald's frustration with this elision can be seen in one of her first published pieces, a review of Scott's second novel, *The Beautiful and the Damned,* for the *New York Tribune*'s book critical column titled, "Friend Husband's Latest." In her review, Fitzgerald makes a point of Scott's plagiarism with her signature wit, she remarks, "On one page I recognized a portion of an old diary of mine which mysteriously disappeared shortly after my marriage, and also scraps of letters, which, though considerably edited, sound to me vaguely familiar" (qtd. in Cline 122). Fitzgerald goes on to comment that her husband "seems to believe that plagiarism begins at home" (qtd. in Cline 123). Critical reactions to her biting review were so positive that *Metropolitan Magazine*, in coordination with *McCall's,* asked Fitzgerald to contribute four feature pieces on the flapper, which she did: "Eulogy on the Flapper," "Does a Moment of Revolt Come Sometime to Every Married Man," and "The Super-Flapper" were all published in 1922, and the fourth piece, "Where Do Flappers Go," was combined with a work of Scott Fitzgerald's and run under the new title "What Became of Our Flappers and Our

[35] He even writes to Max Perkins in 1924 confessing to how much he relied on Zelda, admitting that he should stop "referring everything to Zelda—a terrible habit. " *A Life in Letters* p. 67, picked up from Cline p.138.

Sheiks" with Zelda Fitzgerald as a co-writer. It is apparent that Scott Fitzgerald valued his wife's opinion and assistance in his own writing; however, it is also clear that readers appreciated Zelda Fitzgerald's singular fictional voice and that she held promise not just as a writer's assistant but as a writer herself.

In spite of an otherwise unpleasant year in terms of her health and marital discord, Fitzgerald published "Our Own Movie Queen" in the *Chicago Sunday Tribune* in 1925. Then between the end of 1928 and the beginning of 1929, Fitzgerald wrote three short stories all revolving around ambitious but disappointed women. The first "The Original Follies Girl" follows a woman named Gay who lives beautifully for a while but then dies tragically in childbirth. The second short story is called "Poor Working Girl" and follows a young woman named Eloise as she tries to make it to Broadway. Eloise's hopes are also smashed as she never manages to save up the money needed to grant her financial independence, and the story closes with the girl's youth and vigor fading in a local power plant job. Finally, in the short story "Southern Girl," Fitzgerald places her heroine, Harriet, back in the South of her childhood, and though Harriet seems to make progress towards her goal of independence—rejecting a fiancé and managing two successful jobs simultaneously—she eventually chooses to settle for domestic security instead of fulfillment. The stories are promising but could have benefitted from an interested and invested

reader prior to publication. Unlike the community that surrounded Eudora Welty, who willingly gave feedback and was an integral part in the drafting process, Zelda Fitzgerald does not enjoy the same support, and the stories are not revised beyond their original drafts.

In 1929 the Fitzgeralds returned to Paris, and Zelda resumed her ballet lessons with Egorova. However, she set aside time to finish the three remaining 'Girl' stories, "The Girl the Prince Liked," "The Girl with Talent" and "A Millionaire's Girl." Sally Cline describes all three as having "heroines [who] possess talent or energetic, driving ambition but still have not found appropriate outlets for a satisfying career" (Cline 235). But the somewhat melancholic tone of the stories does not stop Harold Ober and Scott from arranging a deal with *College Humor* magazine to publish the six stories, with the contingency that *CH* will run the stories with Scott's name on the by-line with Zelda's. Ober recalls the details of the arrangement: "SF said that Z would do six articles for *College Humor*, that he would go over them … and that the articles would be signed with both their names" (Cline 238, but also in *As Ever* 127). This note, along with notes Scott Fitzgerald made in his now infamous ledger, make it clear that although his name is on the by-line, Scott had very little to do with the production of the "Girl" stories, beyond his function as an occasional editor. It is even more shocking, then, that after Ober delivered five of Zelda Fitzgerald's stories to

College Humor, he sold the sixth story, "A Millionaire's Girl," to the *Saturday Evening Post* for a whopping $4,000 and published under F. Scott Fitzgerald's name alone. Ober claimed to be unaware that the story belonged to Zelda Fitzgerald when he sent it to the publication, and once he discovered the error he relayed to Scott that the *Post* would pay the exorbitant sum—approximately five times as much as Fitzgerald had received for her best paid story, and ten times as much as she was paid for her first short story in *College Humor*—only if Zelda Fitzgerald's name was dropped from the story. Later Ober writes Scott that he "really felt a little guilty about dropping Zelda's name from that story" but he quickly justifies his actions, saying, "but I think she understood that using two names would have tied the story up with the *College Humor* stories and might have got us into trouble" (*As Ever* 166; Cline 240). In this instance, Ober displays his loyalty to F. Scott Fitzgerald and his willingness to misuse Zelda Fitzgerald in order to net the highest possible fees for a story. Unlike Diarmuid Russell, who was dedicated to Eudora Welty's paycheck as well as guiding and guarding her reputation as a writer, Ober is willing to let Zelda Fitzgerald be overlooked if it will keep his primary client, her husband, happy.

This instance of misrepresentation on Ober's part is not an isolated event. He continues to promote Fitzgerald as wife of the author F. Scott Fitzgerald, instead of promoting her materials as her own. Between the end of her stay at

Prangins and the winter of 1931, Zelda Fitzgerald completed eight additional short stories. Scott Fitzgerald was absent during this period of productivity for his wife, as he had returned to Hollywood to write a screenplay for Irving Thalberg in October of 1931. Since Scott was busy with his own writing, Zelda Fitzgerald mailed her stories to Ober without consulting her husband. Ober in turn read the stories and attempted to market them to primarily women's magazines, such as *Harper's Bazaar*, *McCall's*, *Vanity Fair*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Redbook*, and *Ladies' Home Journal*. Rather than cultivate a specific readership, Ober planted Fitzgerald's short stories with the people he though most likely to read them: other women. All of the women's publications passed on Fitzgerald's short stories. Finally, Perkins accepted "A Couple of Nuts" for publication in *Scribner's Magazine*, after asking Fitzgerald to make revisions to her draft.

Several scholars have remarked on the how similar "Nuts" is in style to Scott Fitzgerald's writings; Linda Wagner-Martin says that rather than Zelda Fitzgerald's typically description-oriented prose, "A Couple of Nuts" is "Plot-dominated" and largely infused with bits of her and Scott's autobiographical experiences in Europe in 1924 (144). One other story from this set, originally titled "Miss Bessie" but eventually changed to "Miss Ella," would also be published, also by *Scribner's.* Out of the six stories that remained from Fitzgerald's winter of productivity, not a single other story was ever revised or

published. At least, no revisions were documented by Scott, Ober, Perkins, or Zelda. However, it is hard to be certain about these revisions and the nature of any of the original material involved in the remaining short stories as all manuscripts and drafts have since been mislaid, and only the agent's notes on the originals survive in his files.[36] The loss of these stories is yet another instance of negligence on Ober's part.

Yet, as disappointed as Fitzgerald was when her stories did not sell, she was not discouraged entirely. She continued to write, and in 1933 when she re-entered a mental health clinic (this time at the Phipps Clinic in Baltimore), she made significant progress on her draft of the novel that would become *Save Me the Waltz*. Though the head physician at the Phipps Clinic, Adolf Meyer, was a firm believer in the same arm of Freudian psychoanalysis that had led Bleuler and Forel before him to conclude that Zelda Fitzgerald was schizophrenic, other more junior doctors at the clinic approached Fitzgerald with more sympathy and gave her a greater range of freedoms and abilities during her stay. One of the new freedoms she enjoyed at Phipps was being allowed to write for two hours each day (Wagner-Martin 154). In Dr. Mildred Squires, Fitzgerald even had a

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[36] From Matthew Bruccoli's article "Zelda Fitzgerald's Lost Stories" in the *Fitzgerald/Hemingway Annual,* 1979 p. 123-6. Also, according to W.R. Anderson in that same publication two years earlier, there may have been at least three other short stories that Zelda wrote during her last few months in Prangins, that Scott toke and then lost. According to the materially originally found in Linda Wagner-Martin's notes (228 note 21).

reader at Phipps who encouraged her work and offered her feedback on her progressing drafts.[37] Cline tells us that though she was still institutionalized, Zelda Fitzgerald thrived in this new environment and not only completed her draft of *Save Me the Waltz*, but also finished "a play and a great many paintings" (304). Interestingly, this period of productivity is much like the one Fitzgerald enjoyed in 1925 back on the isle of Capri. Though there are obviously marked differences in locations and personal circumstances, what is similar and integral to Zelda Fitzgerald's productivity during these times is the presence of supportive community.

Mildred Squires was Fitzgerald's first female physician. Unlike the men who had treated Fitzgerald previously, Squires was very close to Fitzgerald's own age, and she was an avid reader and supporter of her work. The two women enjoyed one another's company, and as long as conversation remained on topics other than Fitzgerald's sickness, they had a pleasant relationship. Squires frequently wrote to Scott Fitzgerald, who was still incredibly involved in his wife's diagnosis and treatment, even at this new clinic, to report on Fitzgerald's speed and impressive progress on her novel. From the time Fitzgerald arrived at Phipps in the middle of February 1932, she wrote furiously.

[37] Cline says Squires' is one of the first people to appreciate Zelda "as an artist". Zelda would eventually go on to dedicate her novel to Squires.

On March 9th, less than a month after admission to the clinic, Fitzgerald sent a completed copy of her novel to Max Perkins. The uninterrupted space to focus on her work as well as the unparalleled support she received from Squires, combined to enable Zelda Fitzgerald to create her longest and most ambitious work.

Unfortunately for Fitzgerald, the small community she had discovered with Dr. Squires did not extend out into the professional writing world. That remained the domain of her husband. When Scott Fitzgerald discovered that his wife had not only completed the novel, but also sent it on to Perkins without consulting him first, he was, by all accounts, incensed beyond belief. Yet, confusingly, Scott chose not to talk to Zelda about what he saw as an abject betrayal but to express himself to Squires who would be charged with mediating his rage. The excerpt below is proof of just how rankled Scott became over what he felt constituted material that had been stolen from shared experiences he planned to cover in his own novel. The language he uses to lash out about Fitzgerald's writing also shows the reader how insensitive Scott is to Zelda's accomplishment and position in life. Scott addresses how he prohibits Zelda using the name of his autobiographical character Amory in her novel:

> Do you think that his turning up in a novel signed by my wife as a some-what anemic portrait painter with a few ideas lifted from Clive Bell, Leger, ect. could pass unnoticed? …it puts me in an absurd and Zelda in a rediculous position…this mixture of fact and

> fiction is simply calculated to ruin us both or what is left of us and *I can't let it stand*. Using the name of a character I invented to put intimate facts in the hands of [my] friends and enemies…My God, my books made her a legend and her single intention…is to make me a non-entity. (Cline 308 from letter dated 14 March 1932, *Life in Lettters*)[38]

Nowhere in his tirade does Scott Fitzgerald acknowledge the personal details he thoughtlessly pirated from his wife, nor does he pause to consider how his abuse would make Zelda feel. However, the italicized portion of the letter makes it clear, what Scott Fitzgerald's next move would be: if he could not stop Zelda from writing, he would stop her original novel from reaching publication.

First, in an effort to take the book off the market entirely, Scott wired Perkins that the novel was no longer to be published (Wagner-Martin 157). Then upon reconsideration Scott stipulated that Scribner's could have the book after substantial revisions, which would include cutting entire portions of the novel that he felt touched on or interfered with material in his forthcoming novel. Scott then demanded that if Perkins decided to go ahead and publish the novel after revisions that he "not praise it to Zelda, as it might damage her mental health or give rise to what he termed her incipient egomania," a term he borrowed from Dr. Forel (Cline 309). Scott Fitzgerald's third and final restriction on Zelda's work was that exactly half of the profit made by her novel would be credited against

[38] Spellings true to letter.

his debts with Scribner's. Over the next few months, Scott cabled Perkins frequently to note that Zelda was moody, irrational, and irritable (Cline 310). However, Scott forbade both Zelda and Perkins from contacting one another directly. This interference on Scott's part would serve, regardless of the outcome of Zelda's final drafts, to bias Maxwell Perkins against what he would have undoubtedly begun to suspect was a dangerously unhinged author. Scott's frequent assurances that he and Zelda were working on revisions that would improve the novel must be taken at his word. Maddeningly, after the initial scuffle, Perkins returned the manuscript, and yet again, the original work fell to the same fate as many of Zelda Fitzgerald's other pieces of work: it was lost somewhere along the way.

After painstaking cuts were made to the manuscript, Zelda Fitzgerald finally heard directly from Perkins via telegram that he would be "delighted to publish writing" (Cline 311). The news was surreal and amazing to Fitzgerald. She replied to Perkins saying she would "gladly change the questionable parts" (311). But strangely, no changes were made. But perhaps stranger than that is the fact that no changes were requested by Perkins. Whether it was because he feared setting off a terrifically unstable woman, or if like Ober he caved to the months of pressure and insinuation from Scott Fitzgerald, Perkins allowed *Save Me the Waltz* to be published in appalling shape. Scott Fitzgerald and Max

Perkins had supposedly worked for months on helping improve Zelda's manuscript. Though the first was a notoriously bad speller whose own novels needed copious grammatical assistance, the second man was an esteemed editor. The fact that Maxwell Perkins permitted *Save Me the Waltz* to be printed "without decreasing the convoluted metaphors or correcting the grammatical errors, typographical mistakes, and misspellings which litter the text" is a testimony to how negligently, intentionally or subconsciously, he acted as her editor. The novel went on to sell 1,392 copies, net Zelda Fitzgerald $120.73, receive mixed critical reviews, and largely be berated on account of "overwriting and lack of careful editing and proofreading" (Milford 263). Perkins had to have suspected how this failure affected Fitzgerald as he wrote to her in August of 1993 saying, "Maybe I ought to have warned you about corrections for they came to a great deal. I knew they would, when the proofs began coming back, but I knew you wanted to get the book the way you thought it ought to be. The result won't be encouraging to you…" (Milford 264). Here again, Zelda Fitzgerald expected to find solace and direction in an artistic community, but through the interference of her husband and the intentional negligence and incompetence of her editor and agent she was denied the respect and fellowship of a professional author.

Stripped of this outlet for artistic expression and community, Zelda Fitzgerald unsurprisingly retreated into madness. This pattern of promise denied

repeats in Fitzgerald's life until it culminates in her last and greatest disappointment, her failed foray into writing. Though Zelda Fitzgerald shows remarkable talent from a young age in a variety of fields, she is thwarted repeatedly by obstacles that finally become too great for her to overcome. This pattern culminates in her final rejection from the one artistic community she considered a safe haven. Denied entry or assistance into the writing community, the very elements that would prove to be so vital in the life of Eudora Welty, we must now pick up the mantle and acknowledge the value and voice of Zelda Fitzgerald. Our responsibility as readers and critics is to offer her the readership and community she could have had during her life and to recognize that it is because of sacrifices like hers, as well as the sacrifices of other women like her, that women writers like Eudora Welty can come afterwards and carve a more successful path for themselves. In the following chapter we will examine how to restore Zelda Fitzgerald to her rightful place in the American canon.

CHAPTER SIX

Epilogue

Women's "books continue each other": Anthologizing Zelda Fitzgerald with Eudora Welty

When considering the argument for placing Zelda Fitzgerald on a continuum with Eudora Welty in an anthology of Women's literature, Southern Women's literature, American literature, or Modernist Literature, it is usually much easier to come up with all the reasons why she does not belong there. First and foremost, among these reasons is that Zelda Fitzgerald's writing, especially her novel *Save Me the Waltz* and her incomplete manuscript *Caesar's Things*, are notoriously difficult to categorize. These texts are as mercurial and complicated as their author and defy their many critics to make sense of them. Critics and readers struggle to qualify correctly what it is that Fitzgerald is attempting in these works and if and how she is missing the mark. This ineffable quality of both woman and material does not just plague Zelda Fitzgerald, however. The inability to describe the work and the woman haunts Eudora Welty's prose as well, both at the outset of her career as an author up through the present day. In fact, critical disagreement over how to categorize the artistic output of women, and the resultant popular or contemporary sidelining of that work has been a

pattern that recurs again and again in the work of many, if not most, famous female writers.[1] Therefore, in order to complete my analysis of the imperative function of female community in the lives and works of Eudora Welty and Zelda Fitzgerald, I will argue for the practical application of community by outlining an argument for how Fitzgerald and Welty should be included in anthologies, curriculums, and classrooms together. In order to do this, I will survey popular literary anthologies to document how selections are made in line with exclusionary cultural patriarchy, then I will explain my contention that we should correct this oversight in our American cultural canon and finally how we can go about doing so. Finally, I will look forward to the next phase of this march towards erecting a healthful community of women in literature. This stage will involve the expansion of sororal community to include minority voices and perspectives that further enhance our understanding of vibrant female community. Ultimately, I will conclude that by including Zelda Fitzgerald with Eudora Welty in our American literary canon we bolster the reputation of one beloved writer, revitalize the reputation of a nearly-forgotten writer, and

[1] We have already discussed how this applies to Welty and Fitzgerald, but Suzan Harrison says that even Virginia Woolf underwent this frustrating genre merry-go-round. Woolf, most often associated with other modernists like "Joyce, Kafka, Proust, and Musil" writes novels that seem to entertain tragedy and comedy, explore traditional epic themes and take on new narrative challenges (Eisinger 4). For example, "Jean Guiguet begins his discussion of *The Waves* with an attempt to define its genre. He compares it to a play, a ballet, an opera, and a poem, finally settling on the phrase 'play poem.' Maria DiBattista applies the terms *epic*, *romance*, and *heroic elegy*, finally adopting 'comic romance in prose' as a descriptive title" (Harrison 87).

encourage the nascent literary community of women, writers, readers, editors, and artists, that desperately need these role models to flourish.

A Canon-hole in the Canon: Corrective Community and Inclusive Literary Anthologies

In Ellen Moers' work *Literary Women,* she explains how literary communities of women are, far from the homogeneity of their male counterparts, diverse, complicated, and at times even at odds with one another. Moers asserts that to be part of this female community is not to draw from the creative tradition of your forbear(ers) per se, but to be heartened by the existence of any community to the degree that you will depart from that tradition and create your own unique contribution:[2]

> To be a woman writer long meant, may still mean, belonging to a literary movement apart from but hardly subordinate to the mainstream: an undercurrent, rapid and powerful. The word 'movement' gives an inaccurate idea of an association often remote and indirect. To use the word George Sand imposed, and speak of a 'solidarity' of women, would also be misleading, for writing women have never felt much of a sentimental loyalty to their own kind—quite the contrary… Not loyalty but confidence was the resource that women writers drew from the possession of their own tradition. And it was a confidence that until very recently could come from no other source. Male writers have always been able to study their craft in university or coffeehouse, group themselves into movements or coteries, search out predecessors for guidance

[2] This is the reverse Bloomian theory that I touched on in my introduction and in my fourth chapter- that far from having to destroy the father like Bloom insists poets must do to contend with a male tradition that extends far beyond their contemporary efforts, women just want to find their mothers in the vast expanse of male mainstream literature. They want to see something familiar so that they are encouraged to take up the mantle and create for themselves in the face of the "contrary voices" Woolf cites in *A Room of One's Own.* (Bloom 5; Woolf 26).

> or patronage, collaborate or fight with their contemporaries. But women through most of [history] were barred from the universities, isolated in their own homes, chaperoned in travel, painfully restricted in friendship. The personal give-and-take of the literary life was closed to them. Without it, they studied with special closeness the works written by their own sex, and developed a sense of easy, almost rude familiarity with the women who wrote them" (42-43).

Moer elucidates above why literary community is so essential for women. Where men had direct social interaction and companionship many women had isolation. Even in our modern era, we see a similar need for communal outreach. Women may not be restricted in their modes of travel or in the educations and careers they are allowed to pursue, but the increasing pressures and demands of a contemporary world filtered through the many extraordinary expectations and restrictions of social media and faux internet connectivity result in women who are as isolated as their historical sisters. The need for a literary community that encourages recognition of individuality while still beckoning women into supportive units is imperative. By interacting with these texts women transcend the superficiality that limits them in certain social settings and discover the value of their unique voice in coordination with community.

Helen Michie's description of functional sorority advocates for groups of women to bond together (I would suggest specifically to bond over a shared interest in these literary examples) to support and challenge one another in a safe space that is mutually beneficial for all participants. Michie reminds us that

participants need not be identical—in fact it would be antithetical to the cause of sorority if sisters were overly similar—they only need to enter into sorority valuing the community and willingly contributing to its perpetuation. It stands to reason then that Zelda Fitzgerald, and Eudora Welty are not, and need not be, identical in their literary styles or personal preferences to draw and grow from one another's writing. Rather it is the community of which they are a part and the tradition of writing that they are establishing that is the most vital contribution.

In her foundational text on the evolution of the description, perception, and function of groups of women throughout history titled *Communities of Women*, Nina Auerbach explains that the concept of women in groups developed to denote a group of women ostracized for their incompleteness: "A community of women may suggest less the honor of fellowship than an antisociety, an austere banishment from both social power and biological rewards" (3). Throughout history, Auerbach tell us, women that have formed societies have been depicted as seeking this shelter and protection because they were lacking some socially perceived feminine essential, such as a husband, one of their six senses, or anatomically whole bodies. These women sought out the society of one another not because they desired community with like-minded, like-bodied individuals, but because their survival required it. Auerbach gives the example

of two communities of women, the Amazons and the Graie, who have come to symbolize powerful sisterhoods in our modern time, but whose origins are in this tradition of womanhood maimed, incomplete, powerless. [3]

Auerbach traces the pattern of women in community through mythology as outwardly powerful, but in their very composition, weak. Finally, Auerbach explains:

> As a recurrent literary image, a community of women is a rebuke to the conventional ideal of a solitary woman living for and through men, attaining citizenship in the community of adulthood through masculine approval alone. The communities of women which have haunted out literary imagination from the beginning are emblems of female self-sufficiency which create their own corporate reality, evoking both wishes and fears. (5)

The world of literature allows women to explore spaces beyond the boundaries of socially acceptable life and discover their own power. Auerbach explains that "Though history itself has only grudgingly accommodated the aspirations of

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[3] In contemporary parlance the mythic Amazons are often synonymous with the idea of "female impregnability," yet Auerbach explains that their name, the same name that stirs up images of the virtuous and indomitable female spirit derives from Greek folk etymology to mean "without a breast" (3). Auerbach goes on to explain that the Amazons of myth famously sliced off their right breasts to shoot more effectively, thereby making them more proficient warriors and hunters; but despite this self-mutilation in service of victory Auerbach informs the reader that the Amazons record of battle is one of defeat. Similarly, the Graie, a mythological trio of sisters who share a single eye which they pass between one another, look to be a powerful group of women. In ancient mythology they appear outside the laws of time and age, yet still they are vulnerable to male invasion. Auerbach refers readers to the tale of Perseus to show just how susceptible the sisters are to outsiders' malintents. In order to slay the Medusa, Perseus comes and steals the Graie's shared eye and uses it to hunt down their other trio of sisters, the Gorgons, both violating and decimating the sanctity of sisterhood in a single theft. Breaking in on the sisterhood of the Graie, Perseus uses their single power against them to wreak havoc on the trio as well as on women beyond their immediate circle.

women, literary history has moved through a series of emancipations and expanding fields of conquest" (6). When women are shown communities of individuals like them they can begin the task of moving themselves psychologically from the maimed and outcast pathos of humans on the margins to reclaim the strength that comes from being a part of unit, resulting in a "force neither god nor hero dare invade" (Auerbach 5). Thus, it is our duty as literary critics to foster these communities of women within fictional worlds as well as communities of women responsible for creating said fiction. In doing so we support what Auerbach calls the "drama of widening cultural consciousness" which ultimately results in "an evolving literary myth that sweeps across official cultural images of female submission, subservience, and fulfillment in a bounded world" (7). To reshape the cultural perception of female communities as refuges for the wounded and broken, we must continue to support the fictional creation of powerful autonomous groups of women so that, in due time, our fiction gives way to our reality. One of the ways in which we can achieve this future in the present is by gathering and acknowledging the work of women writers and disseminating it as widely as possible.

I argue that the first place that this canon revision should be attempted is in the college classroom. Of course, the process can and should begin as early as possible; however, as one of the first places that students may elect to deepen

and expand their literary acumen, the college classroom seems like a rational place to start. One of the tools that goes hand-in-hand with an English education in the college setting is the literary anthology. These tomes of knowledge are wielded by the great majority of students entering their first literature seminars and are used by their instructors to disseminate the most pertinent and crucial information about a specified literary canon in as efficient a way as possible. Enter *The Norton Anthology* collection. In addition to being one of the most widely used resources in the collegiate English classroom, *The Norton Anthology* is also one of the most highly rated literature compilations at the collegiate level.[4]

Though the *NA* initially offered a compilation of only English literature in textbook form, as demand increased for American literature courses in colleges across the nation, the company expanded their offerings to include an anthology dedicated solely to American literature. Similarly, as literary criticism grew in

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[4] In her article, "Canonized Women and Women Canonizers: Gender Dynamics in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*'s Eight Editions" Gillian Gualtieri supports this ranking explaining that most Ph.D. hopefuls must take the GRE Literature Subject Test to gain entry into graduate-level literature programs[4]. The test-takers are examined on the knowledge of "literary history, the literary canon and the schools of literary theory and criticism" (94). According to the Princeton Review's *Cracking the GRE Literature Subject Test*, "*The Norton Anthology* is your best friend on the GRE Literature in English Subject Test. The ETS [Educational Testing Service-writers of the GRE] consider everything in volumes I and II of *The Norton Anthology* fair game" (p.24 cited in Gualtieri 95). The most popular test preparation manual considers the Norton Literature company as the most skilled purveyors of requisite information for the single-most widespread examination of graduate-level knowledge of literature. As the predominant source for literature teaching in the twentieth and twenty-first century college classrooms the NA (as *The Norton Anthology* will be abbreviated in the rest of the chapter) determines much of what scholars, critics, teachers, and students consider to be canonical texts in English, American and minority literatures.

fields outside of the purview of the mainstream canons the *NA* also grew to expand the variety and selections it offered in its anthologies to include a specific anthology for most college literature courses. According to The Norton Literature Online website the company now offers nine anthology titles under the heading of American Literature, eleven under World Literature, and seventeen under English Literature. The anthology titles in Literature by Women are much more limited; currently there exists only a single anthology under this heading. Now on its third edition, *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Tradition in English* has been faithfully edited by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar since the inaugural first edition in 1985 to the third edition which was released in the summer of 2007.[5]

In their introduction to the anthology, Gilbert and Gubar write:

> By gathering in a single volume a range of literary works in which women writers have expressed their sometimes problematic, sometimes triumphant relationship to culture and society, our collection seeks to recover a long and often neglected literary history. Although this history cannot be adequately defined by the categories and chronology customarily used to organize 'mainstream' literature, its contours document Woolf's thesis that women's 'books continue each other'. Complementing and supplementing the standard Norton anthologies of English and American Literature NALW should help readers for the first time to appreciate fully the female literary tradition which, for several

[5] There is an argument to be made here that even the act of separating minority texts into their own distinct anthologies apart from the larger American Literature canon is not helping these texts receive the attention and recognition they deserve, but rather assisting the vehicles that would exclude these texts by perpetuating the 'separate but equal' ideology that has been proven so erroneous in other aspects of American life/culture.

> centuries, has coexisted with, revised, and influenced male literary models. Designed to serve as a 'core-curriculum' text for the many courses in literature by women that have been developed over the past ten years, this collection includes examples of women's work in every genre and period; it thus carries on the tradition of a 'course in a book' pioneered by the other Norton anthologies of British and American literature which have proved so consistently useful. (xxvii)

It is evident in the quote above what these two trailblazing scholars had in mind when they set out to assemble the first of Norton's anthologies that dealt exclusively with the writing of women, an alternative canon. Gilbert and Gubar sculpt a canon that deals with literature that has been marginalized and overlooked by the "mainstream," literature that is at its core "problematic" because its authors are nothing less than subversives (xxvii). It is a little surprising then, that the women's writing included in this anthology is not a departure from other Norton anthologies but rather an endorsement of popular texts that have already been anthologized numerous times. Yes, the collection is a triumph and tribute to the history of women's writing, pulling together texts from women from both sides of the Atlantic, New Zealand, Africa and Australia dating back to the Middle Ages and through to the present day. Yes, there are less well-known women writers included, and the editors are quick to point out this fact:

> Our texts by Jane Lead, for instance, have heretofore only been available in rare book rooms; some of our selections by Cavendish, Finch, Edgeworth, Barrett Browning, Rossetti, and Eliot have never

> been reprinted in widely available popular editions; our texts by Lorraine Hasberry, Ruth Stone, and Margaret Drabble include work that has never before been published in book form. (xxviii)

However, the anthology is not exhaustive, and an astute reader can ascertain that many of the selections enshrined in the pages of this textbook are the identical texts from the same authors that comprise the more "mainstream" Norton anthologies. It should not surprise us then that Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald is not included. There is not a single selection sourced from her essays, short stories, or novel(s) in the entire anthology. In Gilbert and Gubar's defense, and the defense of what is otherwise a thorough and necessary text, their omission is not a singular one. In fact, the work of Zelda Fitzgerald does not appear in single copy of any of Norton's entire library of textbooks. Yet again, Norton is not alone on this oversight. There is not a solitary mention of the work of Zelda Fitzgerald in any edition of the dozens of anthologies I consulted through Baylor University Library, ILL or the worldwide web. I consorted *The Longman Anthology of Women's Literature,*[6] *St.Martins Anthology of American Literature, The Heath Anthology of American Literature, The Macmillan Anthology of Literature, Oxford Anthology of American Literature, American Literature, Library of Great American*

[6] Once thought to be the biggest competition to the dominant *Norton Anthology* franchise, the Longman publishing group came out with their own versions of Norton's more popular anthologies, including the text mentioned above. Gualtieri says, "According to Shesgreen, the Longman 'continues to claim the strategic market innovations where the NAEL is vulnerable, as in its coverage of women" (Shesgreen 28 qtd. in Gualtieri 103). Yet, Norton's place at the top of the publishing charts has stood unshaken.

Writing, Literature of our Time, Major Writers of America, Library of America, as well as all 9 existing editions of *The Norton Anthology of American Literature* amongst other anthologies and critical texts and Zelda Fitzgerald is absent from every single one. F. Scott Fitzgerald, on the other hand appears in eighty percent of the same anthologies, with at least one if not multiple works credited to him. By the same standard, Eudora Welty appears in seventy percent of the works mentioned.[7]

Using anthologized materials as a metric for what is being read on college campuses has already been proven to be a sound one, so it follows rationally that to get Zelda Fitzgerald read more widely and thereby increase the strength and diversity of the American canon one must first endeavor to see her anthologized. In order to do achieve this goal a couple of things need to happen. First, a community of women must be put into place in order to make sure that there are people aware of and willingly to advocate for the writing of Zelda Fitzgerald. Of course, this community does not have to be exclusively women, as was seen in the life and writing of Eudora Welty in my fourth chapter, men can and have played an instrumental part in supportive communities for women artists.

[7] Eudora Welty comes out in the titles mentioned previously in the paragraph with at least one of the following short stories: "Keela, The Outcast Indian Maiden," "Petrified Man," "Death of a Traveling Salesman," "The Demonstrators," "Why I Live at the P.O." and "A Worn Path."

However, *without* the support of a community of women this project will never be able to succeed. Women must take an interest in the literature written by them and about them if we expect to see any positive change in the future. [8]

Elaine Showalter explains that "the focus on women's writing as a specific field of inquiry, moreover, led to a massive recovery and rereading of literature by women from all nations and historical periods. As hundreds of lost women writers were rediscovered…the continuities in women's writing became clear for the first time" (Showalter, "Women and the Literary Curriculum," 29). In order to establish a vibrant tradition of women's literature the writing of women must be considered together on a continuum with the writing of other notable voices in their fields, especially other female voices. To achieve this we need women readers, editors and teachers and their informed male counterparts to advocate for the increased inclusion of literature by women in the canon. Furthermore, to position women in their appropriate historical context they need to be compared and analyzed alongside other established women writers. Thus, in the interest of

[8] Gualtieri records that there are no women on the editorial staff of the *NAEL* from its first published edition in 1962 to its fourth edition published in 1979. The percent of pages of text written by women that are included in these four early editions of the *NAEL* represent between 1.166 and 4.716 percent of the total number of pages in the anthology (Gualtieri 101). In 1986, the editorial board of the *NAEL* welcomed two female editors, Barbara K. Lewalski of Harvard and Carol T. Christ of University of California, to its ranks. From less than 5 percent of the total text in 1979 the percentage of writing by women steadily increased until it was up to 15.138 percent in 2000 (102). Though this reflects an increased appreciation of writing by women it is nowhere near a representative number.

achieving this goal, I contend that we should read and anthologize Zelda Fitzgerald alongside Eudora Welty in American literary anthologies and between Welty and Woolf in anthologies that deal specifically with the writing of women.

The Next Phase: Expanded Communities

Though the immediate aim of this project has been to highlight the contributions of female community by examining community presence in the work and life of Eudora Welty and comparing it to community absence in the work and life of Zelda Fitzgerald, the future aim of this project is to bring attention to female writers who have been wrongfully overlooked by the mainstream canon by establishing a literary legacy of women writers. This inclusionary community analysis would be at once a teaching tool for professors who desired to teach women's literature in a way that departs from the patriarchal anxiety of influence model in favor of the model of sorority, as well as an area ripe for additional scholarship. For example, the limited scope of this original analysis required that I focus solely on two white American women writers from the early 20th century. If this analysis were to continue, it would necessarily include the immediate consideration of women writers of color as well as women writers from later in the 20th century and into the present day.

Two writers that would work well in the context that has already been established by my analysis would be Alice Walker and Toni Morrison. Toni

Morrison's fiction deals in the intimate world of female communities and looks with a gaze both unflinching and sympathetic at the good, bad, and startling effects of women existing in these spaces together. Furthermore, though she often sets her narratives in the South, her authorial identity as a Midwesterner would help expand our analysis to include differing perspectives on the South, in addition to her invaluable perspective on race as it correlates with women's experiences. Morrison would also work well in an a scholarly analysis that included Alice Walker's prose and theory.

Alice Walker's womanist theory, as elucidated in her book of essays *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose*, contends black women have doubly overcome the oppression of racial segregation, as well as patriarchy. Thus, to cultivate an artistic voice as a black woman requires, even more than the writers we've already examined, a supportive community of women and men to guide and protect the writer's art. Additionally, Walker says that black women artists need to see the legacy of artistry from their ancestors acknowledged in order for a clear communal identity to be established because

> these grandmothers and mothers of ours were not Saints, but Artists; driven to a numb and bleeding madness by the springs of creativity in them for which there was no release. They were Creators, who lived lives of spiritual waste, because they were so rich in spirituality—which is the basis of Art—that the strain of enduring their unused and unwanted to talent drove them insane. Throwing away this spirituality was their pathetic attempt to

> lighten the soul to a weight their work-worn, sexually abused bodies could bear. (233)

The traditional canon does not have a place for these women as their output would be too hard to classify, yet to continue to overlook their contribution to the feminine communal legacy of artists is to doom them to repeat "The agony of the lives of women who might have been Poets, Novelists, Essayists, and Short-Story Writers (over a period of centuries), who died with their real gifts stifled within them" (Walker 234). By including Walker and her theory of womanist prose into the existing consideration of women established in this study the community can reclaim women like Walker's grandmother who, through her artistic dedication to her fantastic flower garden taught Walker what it meant to deeply desire a mode for self-expression. As a result of her grandmother's example and influence Walker became a writer. It is by including these varied stories that the female canon grows into a vibrant catalogue of women's artistic accomplishments. Naturally, the steps that follow would be to embrace a greater variety of female writers, such as Gloria Anzaldua and Louise Erdrich, until we have established a representative coalition of women writers.

This lofty goal would require establishing a functioning literary theory of female community. In my analysis I adopted a pastiche of theoretical approaches: feminist theory, historical theory, sociological theory, and combined those with adaptations of existing literary theories. However, this creative

approach was the result of the lack of a coherent literary theory of female community. This theory would have to contend with the issues of what constitutes women's writing, how to incorporate men and women into community that is largely at the service of and advocating for women artists, and how to quantify successful community involvement when the participants and outcomes are as various as the types of women in the world. Luckily here again, Walker sets an example of how to move forward. Walker says that one of the definitions of what it means to be a womanist is:

> A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally universalist, as in: "Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige, and black?" Ans: "Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented." (xi)

Beginning with the idea of appreciating and cultivating "women's culture" and progressing to contend with inclusivity and selection in community this theory would naturally progress towards the verbalization of what female community is, how it functions, and what scholastic communities need to do in order to promote its growth in their own larger communities.

What was begun as a project to uncover the secret behind the different levels of literary success and acceptance of two women writers I loved to read

has grown into a certainty that supportive female communities are necessary for the healthy lives of women artists. In the future, I hope my scholastic contributions will explore these sites of interaction for women at greater length and depth. Ultimately, my desire is to advocate for these communities by bringing attention to their impact on their immediate participants, as well as their large ability to impact culture positively.

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