

F. Scott Fitzgerald and Willa Cather, via Edith Wharton The New New Woman: Intertextual Echoes

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Abstract In *The Beautiful and Damned* several intertextual references to Willa Cather's *The Song of the Lark* and to Edith Wharton's *The Custom of the Country* occur: this essay explores those regarding the New Woman, the flapper. Harshly criticised by the two women writers, she is more nuanced in Fitzgerald's second novel.

Keywords Intertextuality. *The Beautiful and Damned*. *The Song of the Lark*. *The Custom of the Country*. *The New New Woman*.

Various critical studies have demonstrated the influence that two powerful and successful women writers, Willa Cather¹ and Edith Wharton,²

1 In a 1925 letter to Cather, Fitzgerald apologised for a sentence in *The Great Gatsby* (1925) that is "parallel and almost similar" to one she had written in *A Lost Lady* (1923). We know from Fitzgerald's letters, that he very much liked "Paul's Case" (1905), *My Ántonia* (1918) and *A Lost Lady*. In another letter (1921) he ranked Cather with Mencken, Cabell, Wharton, Drieser [sic], Hergeshiemer, and Charles Norris as "the literary people of any pretensions" of his times. In a later one (1937), he wistfully wrote, "I feel as if I were a contemporary of Richard Harding Davis and Eleanor Glynn and yet my seniors by twenty years - Willa Cather, Ferber et al. seem to live zestfully in the present" (Duggan 1980, 79, 155-56, 79, 472). For some studies that centre on Fitzgerald's works in relation to Cather's, see: Brucoli, Matthew (1978). "An Instance of Apparent Plagiarism": F. Scott Fitzgerald, Willa Cather, and the first *Gatsby* Manuscript". *Princeton University Library Chronicle*, 171-8; Quirk, Tom (1982). "Fitzgerald and Cather: *The Great Gatsby*". *American Literature*, 54(4): 576-91; Bell, Ian F. (1995). "Newness of Beginning. The Violent Phantasies of Willa Cather and F. Scott Fitzgerald". Versluys, Kristiaan (ed.) (1995). *The Insular Dream. Obsession and Resistance*. Amsterdam: VU; Kundu, Gautam (1998). "Inadvertent Echoes or 'An Instance of Apparent Plagiarism'? Cather's *My Ántonia*, *A Lost Lady*, and Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*". *Etudes Anglaises*, 51(3), 325-7; Seguin, Robert (2000). "Ressentiment and the Social Poetics of *The Great Gatsby*. Fitzgerald Reads Cather". *Modern Fiction Studies*, 46(4), 917-40; Brodwin, Stanley (2003). "F. Scott Fitzgerald and Willa Cather: a New Study". Bryer, Prigozy, Stern 2003, 173-89.

2 In a 1924 letter, Fitzgerald wrote of Wharton, "she's a very distinguished grande dame who fought the good fight with bronze age weapons when there were very few people in the line at all" (Brucoli, Duggan 1980, 141). For some studies that centre on Fitzgerald's

exercised on F. Scott Fitzgerald. He attentively read their works as they provided him with many suggestions. Although in a half-serious article he once publicly acknowledged that "I am a professed literary thief, hot after the best methods of every writer in my generation" (Brucoli, Bryer 1971, 163), his talent allowed him to detect the novelty and sharpness that distinguish even the minor characters and events in the fiction of his two older colleagues, but, at the same time, to make them his own in a variety of subtle, different ways.

Pointing out the debt that, in my opinion, Fitzgerald owed to Cather's *The Song of the Lark* – a debt regarding both *The Beautiful and Damned* and, in a couple of significant details, *The Great Gatsby* – I will also suggest how, with regard to *The Song of the Lark*, Wharton,³ in turn, may have been an inspiration for Cather (O'Brian 1987, 280, 301) and possibly, through her, for Fitzgerald. These instances of intertextuality⁴ have previously gone unnoticed.

After the commercial success and, despite some dissenting voices, the critical triumph of his 1920 debut novel, *This Side of Paradise*, Fitzgerald was terrified of not being able to pull off a similar feat – in esteem and in financial returns.⁵ His second novel, *The Beautiful and Damned*, serialised in 1921-22, was published in book form in 1922. It is curious that for a writer so attentive to his immediate contemporaneity, its action not only spans eight years (from 1913 to 1921) but, thanks to the many flashbacks, it also goes as far back as at least 1888,⁶ thus comprising over thirty years. Indeed, at the very outset, Fitzgerald very much emphasises the year in which the action begins: "In 1913, when Anthony Patch was twenty-five..." (Fitzgerald 1922, 3).⁷ Intrigued by this highlighting, I speculate that he may have chosen the year 1913 in order to disguise, however naively, his debt to Cather's second novel of the Prairie Trilogy by preceding it (as far as fictional time is concerned) by two years.

works in relation to Wharton's, see: Duggan 1972, 85-7; Peterman 1977, 26-35; Killoran 1990, 223-4; Yang 2004, 67-72; Giorcelli 2002, 151-78.

3 As Cather acknowledged in her book of criticism, "Henry James and Mrs. Wharton were our most interesting novelists, and most of the younger writers followed their manner" (1953, 93).

4 Incidentally, in *The Beautiful and Damned* (437) Fitzgerald mentions an actual work by Wharton: *Ethan Frome*.

5 While *The Beautiful and Damned* was being serialized, Fitzgerald wrote to his editor, Maxwell Perkins, in these terms: "My deadly fear now is [...] not the critics but the public. Will they buy – will you and the bookstores be stuck with forty thousand copies on your hands?" (Mizener 1951, 138).

6 This is Anthony Patch's year of birth. In the novel there are also references to Anthony's grandfather, Adam.

7 All references from *The Beautiful and Damned* will henceforth appear parenthetically in the main text by the initials, *BD*, followed by page numbers.

The Song of the Lark was, in fact, published in 1915. Its narrative roughly encompasses, in a traditionally linear way, twenty-five years (from 1884-85 to 1909).⁸ In it, in an apparently marginal, but, in effect, crucial episode, Cather depicts a type of femininity on which from 1920, when his first collection of short stories⁹ came out, Fitzgerald based his claim to fame, having determined to turn it into his trademark: the new New Woman, the flapper.

The flapper was a development of the New Woman of the 1880s and, possibly, an extension of the Gibson girl of the 1890s. The New Woman, a definition popularised by Henry James (Smith-Rosenberg 1985, 176), had generally been a cultivated, independent, politically and socially progressive young career woman (often from the upper classes), who, with the new access to a University education and the new legal rights to own property – although with yet no right to vote –, used her iconoclastic frankness¹⁰ and utter freedom to exercise her choices even when it came to marital and sexual partners. The Gibson girl, instead, had been beautiful, flirtatious, athletic, pleasure-seeking and defiant of bourgeois norms, but less vocal and belligerent about her dislikes: she did not openly challenge prescribed feminine roles. She kept herself dainty, charming, and aloof, even if accessible, and “promised fertility if not maternal devotion” (Patterson 1995, 73). Although, by and large, society disapproved of the New Woman, fearing, with the crumbling of the separate sphere ideology and the pursuit of intellectual activities, both the collapse of western civilisation – especially if she sought divorce¹¹ – and a perilous shrinking in birth-rates, it was more lenient towards the Gibson girl, who had been legitimised at a period of social and political turmoil. To be sure, they were two different, but contiguous, modes of declining the new presence of woman in society.

When the flapper appeared on the British and American social scene in the late 1900s (around 1908-1910), she was smart, vibrant and unconventional. Theatrical in her poses, gestures, and pronouncements, she did not look on marriage and motherhood as the centres of a woman's life. As has been argued, “[a]n emerging new morality was already evident in the 1910s. [...] The emphasis on women's sexuality coincided with the trend of

8 Thea is eleven when the novel begins, which means that she was born in 1873-4; 1909 is the only date that appears in the first edition of the novel.

9 Entitled *Flappers and Philosophers* (1920).

10 See Ammons 1992, 121-60 and Tichi 1988, 589-606.

11 In 1909, Reno, in Nevada, was the first American city to grant divorce. At the beginning of *The Custom of the Country*, with the action set in 1900, Ralph Marvell's mother says to Undine: “In New York [...] a divorced woman is still – thank heaven! – at a decided disadvantage.” To which Undine answers, “in Apex, if a girl marries a man who don't [sic] come up to what she expected, people consider it's to her credit to want to change” (95-6).

women seeking more freedom in their social life" (Dumenil 1995, 131). It was only after the end of World War 1, in the '20s, however, that the flapper became socially prominent and was often portrayed in high literature.¹² Therefore, by presenting in 1915 this type of young woman – someone in many ways in contrast to *The Song of the Lark's* central character, Thea Kronborg – Willa Cather anticipated a key literary-cultural shift.

My speculation becomes more complex at this point because, according to Cather's novel's narrated time, the episode to which I am referring – the encounter and marriage of Fred Ottenburg with Edith Beers – must have taken place in the late 1880's (Cather 2012, 736).¹³ In those years the New Woman had already made her appearance, but Edith does not seem to possess all of her characteristics (she is not University educated, does not have a career, and is not politically progressive, for instance). Since in the late 1880s neither the Gibson girl nor the flapper were yet on the scene, I wonder whether, when drawing this character, Cather may not have been prompted by the new social type of young woman who was flourishing under her eyes: and thus whether she was not chronologically incorrect. Not only, but as two years before, in 1913, in *The Custom of the Country*, Edith Wharton had given life to a "predatory young American woman" (Lewis 1975, 345), Undine Spragg, I also wonder whether, in creating Edith Beers (whose first name recalls Wharton's!), Cather may not have had in mind this literary specimen of young womanhood conceived by a fellow woman writer whom she highly appreciated.

In devising Undine Spragg, whose career spans twelve years, from 1900 to 1912, Wharton was, however, more interested in focusing on the new barbarians (the unscrupulous *nouveaux riches*, men and women, from the provinces) who were invading and corrupting the refined (if hypocritical) Old New York gentry, rather than in depicting a new, emergent type of womanhood. Nonetheless, for social as well as for cultural reasons, Wharton was merciless in her portrayal of such a type, who stood "for everything in the new American female that Edith [Wharton] despised and recoiled from" (Lewis 1975, 350).

Fitzgerald's views on the matter were somewhat different. In the '20s, surrounded by flappers (and married to one), he was fascinated and exasperated by this exemplar of ostentatious, whimsical, voracious femininity. As an admirer of both Wharton and Cather, he may have wished to delve deeper than they did into this type to show its capricious, infantile, destructive, and yet also endearing sides, such as its explosive vitality and

12 Whereas in society columns and commercial literature the flapper had already been amply present.

13 All references from *The Song of the Lark* will henceforth appear parenthetically in the main text by the initials, *SL*, followed by page numbers.

unflinching creativity.¹⁴ In my opinion, in *The Beautiful and Damned*, Gloria Gilbert – the beautiful, elegant, self-centred and, ultimately, dangerous wife of Anthony Patch – has many traits in common with both Edith Beers and Undine Spragg. By starting his narrative in 1913, Fitzgerald may thus have wished to go back and examine the origins of the type and, contrary to actual chronology, appear as the first great writer to tackle the subject *in depth*. In effect, it is as if he was ordering his narrative to create the archaeology of a new fictional young woman.

Even if its action starts in 1913, there are revealing chronological slip-pages in *The Beautiful and Damned*, that show how, inevitably pulled towards his contemporaneity, its author made temporal leaps of about seven years. Tendencies in fashion are, on these matters, incontrovertible spies. At the beginning of the novel, for instance, when in real life women's hairdos were curly, waved, and hair was kept long, the narrator writes that Gloria dons her hair bobbed: "It was not fashionable then. It was to be fashionable in five or six years". And, to make this anachronism plausible, he immediately adds, "At that time it was considered extremely daring" (Fitzgerald 1922, 124).¹⁵ Indeed! And fashionable Gloria would not have donned it.

But let me first recollect some of the main characteristics of Wharton's protagonist. In Blake Nevius's view, Undine Spragg is "the selfish, luxury-loving, thoroughly emancipated 'new woman'", and, as such, she is a "monstrosity" (CC viii, x). Wharton herself avowed that, like other "vulgar people", Undine was "an engine of destruction through the illusions they [such people] kill and the generous ardors they turn to despair" (Wegener 1996, 110). The young, very beautiful, and spoiled only daughter of rich parents from the Midwest, Undine goes with them to New York in order to climb the social ladder. Incidentally, her name, while referring to the gadget through which her father made his fortune (hair-wavers), represents her personality: her vagaries fluctuate like her eponymous mythological water nymph, who lacked a soul. Grossly unlettered, but wilfully ambitious and gifted with a relentless energy and spirit of initiative, Undine thinks that the *right* marriage is the way to achieve respectability and power. In her narcissism, however, not only is she never really in love with any of her various husbands/lovers, but also comes to realise (against prevailing cultural tenets) that marriage is, in itself, an imprisonment. Her (supposed) first husband, Ralph Marvell, is an intelligent, gentle, but indolent, piti-

14 As Zelda – who was relentlessly trying to become an artist: a painter, a ballet-dancer, a writer – scathingly denounced in writing, Fitzgerald appropriated pages from her diary and letters to insert in this novel: "Mr. Fitzgerald – I believe that is how he spells his name – seems to believe that plagiarism begins at home" (Brucoli 1991, 388).

15 All references from *The Custom of the Country* will henceforth appear parenthetically in the main text by the initials, CC, followed by page numbers.

able, and not particularly affluent Harvard man from a very respectable Old New York family. Although he is not “blind to her crudity and her limitations”, he sees them as “a part of her grace and her persuasion” (CC 83), that is, as childish whims, and, consequently, addresses her as: “you foolish *child*” (CC 161; emphasis added). With him, much to her distress and even anger, Undine has a son whom she remorselessly neglects. In her greed and perpetual discontent, after becoming the kept woman of one of Ralph’s cousins, and then a widow after Ralph’s suicide, she marries a French nobleman, only to divorce him in Reno and remarry her (real) first husband, Elmer Moffatt (originally from her provincial hometown). Always dressed according to the latest dictates of fashion – Wharton was always anthropologically, sociologically, and historically extremely accurate –, Undine spends inordinate sums of money on clothes and jewelry, thus threatening to bankrupt the men whom she attracts. Money is, in fact, at the centre of all her worries: she never has enough of it. The true representative of her epoch of conspicuous consumption, like the addictive consumer, “she had always had the habit of going out to buy something when she was bored” (CC 521). Above all, “fiercely independent [...] She wanted to surprise every one by her dash and originality” (CC 19) and, in so doing, she rides roughshod over all kinds of social convention: from rejecting chaperons to drinking liquor in public (CC 290, 394). Many of the characteristics of the flapper are thus present in her.

As for Cather’s and Fitzgerald’s characters, we might well start with their names: Edith derives from Anglo-Saxon and signifies ‘riches, happiness, blessed’ as well as ‘war’, suggesting the idea of ‘blessed in war’.¹⁶ Similarly, Gloria, from Latin, alludes to the ‘splendour, praise, magnificence’ and honour acquired by having performed important deeds, as in war, for instance. Their very names are, therefore, imbued with the idea of conflict. In addition, both young women come from rich Midwestern families (both Edith and Gloria originally are from Kansas City, Missouri) and they both have business tycoons as fathers. Furthermore, both women meet their future husbands, both Harvard men, in New York. Whereas Cather, however, deals with Edith in just a few pages (six, in the definitive edition), Fitzgerald’s Gloria is, with her husband, at the very centre of *The Beautiful and Damned*.

In *The Song of the Lark* Edith Beers’s attitudes, her way of dressing and her way of speaking, make her anachronistically look and sound like a flapper. After their first encounter, Fred Ottenburg describes her – at that point the fiancée of one of his friends (in a similar fashion, Gloria is the cousin of one of Anthony’s friends) – as a “ripping beauty” (SL 368)

¹⁶ Her surname, Beers, recalls, of course, beer and may refer to the fact that Fred is intoxicated, first, by her and, later, by alcohol.

and muses that "She entertained him prodigiously." (SL 369). He then goes into more detail: "She was dark and slender and fiery. She was witty and slangy; said daring things and carried them off with *nonchalance*". In addition, she "seemed whimsical and picturesque", and, tellingly, her "*childish* extravagance and contempt for all the serious facts of life could be charged to her father's generosity and his long packing-house purse" (SL 368; emphasis added). Spoiled and selfish, Edith goes to New York to buy her trousseau before her marriage, but confesses to Fred that she was not "keen" on her fiancé and she was marrying him simply because "One had to marry somebody" (SL 370). Three days after their first encounter, and without the least scruple, she decides to elope and marry Fred Ottenburg in New Jersey.

It is above all her clothes, however, that mark Edith as a flapper, as someone, that is, who is dressed according to twentieth-century fashion. Revealingly, in fact, she is said to dart about "in magnificent furs and pumps and close-clinging gowns, though that was the day of full skirts" (SL 368). In this flashback regarding (supposedly) the fashion of the 1880s, the reference is incorrect on two significant details. First, in those years, skirts hung straight from the hips and an overskirt was often draped diagonally across the body, leaving the underskirt exposed, while the back was gathered in several low-hanging puffs. Therefore, these skirts could not be properly called 'full'. Second, like Fitzgerald on bobbed hair, here Cather is making a temporal leap: in her case, of almost two decades. In fact, if Edith wears "close-clinging gowns" and "Her satin dress was a mere sheath, so conspicuous by its severity and scantiness" (SL 369), she does not don garments of the 1880s, but what was in fashion at the time the novel was written. In effect, from around 1906, the French designer Paul Poiret had created an entirely new way of dressing women: a way that had been taken up and spread throughout the Western world. Doing away with corsets and petticoats, he swathed the female body in 'lampshade' tunics, draped dresses, and oriental-looking cloaks (like Japanese kimonos), which were often lined with, or made of, fur. His cloaks clung to the body and, as they allowed freedom of movement, they were like enveloping, fluid cocoons. Poiret's dresses - made of silk, velvet, lamé, and brocades, and in unusual colours - were strictly cylindrical with almost abstract, minimalist lines. Although his garments would never be as short as those in vogue in the '20s, they were certainly their forerunners in shape and cut, as his innovations would be absorbed and developed by subsequent designers (such as Coco Chanel). Not by chance, at the end of *The Beautiful and Damned*, when the narration has reached the '20s, Gloria appears "wrapped in a warm kimona" (BD 395). Let us also bear in mind that Poiret visited the United States in 1913 (a fatal year!), something that Cather and Fitzgerald, who were both knowledgeable about matters of design and fashion (although, at the time, he was only seventeen), may

have known. Not only this, but as furs were ultra-fashionable items of both the '10's - at the beginning of Fitzgerald's novel the narrator observes that there is "a great fluttering of furs along Fifth Avenue" (BD 31) - and the '20s - at the end of this same novel, "the girls' cloaks were delicate and beautifully furred" (BD 359) -, Edith, as if she were not a character of the 1880s, "darted about in magnificent furs" (SL 368), talks "over her fur collar" (SL 369) and holds her "muff" to her face (SL 370).

Like Edith, Gloria too - more appropriately, as far as chronology is concerned - loves furs and dons them as coats or stoles, as well as collars, trimmings, and muffs from the very beginning of and throughout the novel. As these few citations show, Gloria often wears fur: "Under her fur coat her dress was Alice-blue, with white lace crinkled stiffly about her throat" (BD 57); "Her fur-trimmed suit was gray" (BD 61); "She was in a shop now [...] moving lithely among the velvets and the furs" (BD 106); "her fur coat swinging fashionably with her steps" (BD 106). As time goes on, she also dons "a new brown dress edged with fur" (BD 281). When Gloria becomes poor, she longs for a "gray squirrel coat" (BD 374). The last time we see her, through the eyes of the "pretty girl in yellow", on the deck of the liner that will take her and Anthony to Europe, Gloria is wearing "a Russian-sable coat that must have cost a small fortune" (BD 448). Fur, with its softness, warmth, lustre and, above all, its animal origins, hints at the cruelty personified by both Edith and Gloria - indeed, the latter is seen by Anthony, in Keats' words, as a "*belle dame sans merci*" (BD 329).¹⁷ Significantly, Cather too compares Edith to an animal - and, precisely, to an active predator: "When she [Edith] wriggled out of her moleskin coat at luncheon, she looked like a slim black weasel" (SL 368-9). In Fitzgerald's case, toward the end of *The Beautiful and Damned* readers discover that he has emphasised fur so much, because he has a precise message to deliver: "At that time women [were] enveloped in long squirrel wraps [...]. They seemed porcine and obscene; they resembled kept women in the concealing richness, the feminine animality of the garment" (BD 389).

In another behavioural echo of the flapper, Edith smokes incessantly, as Gloria will. For his part, after just two years of marriage, having learned to detest his wife - "Her wastefulness and cruelty revolted him [...] Her grace was only an uneasy wriggle, her audacity was the result of insolence and envy, and her wit was restless spite" (SL 371-2) -, Fred finds solace in drinking, as Anthony will. When he meets Thea, Fred cannot remarry because Edith will not grant him a divorce.

There are other similarities, however, among the texts under discussion. Gloria, like Undine and Edith, is a young woman, full of "vitality" (BD 227). Just more so in the case of Gloria, who is said to dance "all afternoon

17 Fitzgerald had thought of making this the title of the novel.

and all night" (*BD* 39). Brazen and proud of her unconventional behaviour – just as Edith and Undine are of theirs –, Gloria has such "arrogance" and "independence" (*BD* 201) that, according to her mother, she "has no sense of responsibility" (*BD* 39) and, like a looter, she declares, "If I wanted anything I'd take it" (*BD* 192). Her behaviour goes thus completely against the Victorian code still dominant in many bourgeois milieus. For instance, she freely talks about her legs to a young man whom she has casually encountered at a party and who confesses that "She aroused a great desire to see them" (*BD* 48). This reference to legs (a part of the female body that was still taboo in polite society) indirectly recurs also in Cather's novel, when Edith enters a hansom showing Fred "a long stretch of thin silk stocking" (*SL* 369). Completely self-centred – Anthony perceives "her hard selfishness" (*BD* 112) and her "inordinate egotism" (*BD* 161) –, Gloria, like Edith and Undine, always talks "about herself" (*BD* 60).

Furthermore, as far as physical characteristics go, the colours of Gloria's hair (blonde) and eyes (grey) have a magnetic effect on Anthony (as Undine's on Ralph and her other husbands/lovers). So much so that, for Anthony, Gloria's dazzling beauty "was agony to comprehend [...] in a glance" (*BD* 57). Different as they are from those of the other two young women, after their first encounter Edith's dark hair and dark eyes have a similar effect on Fred. However, whereas Gloria's voice "wove along with faintly upturning, half-humorous intonations" (*BD* 59) and "was full of laughter" (*BD* 60), Edith's voice is "low and monotonous" (*SL* 369). In noting this, Cather forewarns readers that she will not appeal to a lover of music like Fred Ottenburg for very long.

In addition to all these congruities, echoes and similarities, at the beginning of *The Beautiful and Damned*, Gloria, rather like Edith, (and, basically, like Undine, if it were not for the wealth that marriages might bring her), is not interested in getting married.¹⁸ When she is asked by Anthony about such a prospect, she answers, "I don't want to have responsibility and a lot of children to take care of" (*BD* 64).¹⁹ As has been observed, "Playing the phallic Woman [...] comes with a heavy price: the denial of one's *actual* femininity, insofar as this consists in a heterosexual imperative to breed" (Nowlin 2003, 114).²⁰ In effect, "She [Gloria] knew that in her breast she

18 For most of *The Song of the Lark*, however, the same is seemingly true of Thea Kronborg, who, when she is first confronted with Ralph's proposal, answers that she rather wants to wake up "every morning with the feeling that your life is your own, and your strength is your own, and your talent is your own; that you're all there, and there's no sag in you!" (350). Since Thea, though, is following her artistic vocation, she is Cather's heroine.

19 Already in *This Side of Paradise*, Eleanor had said, "I have to marry, that goes without saying" (219).

20 According to the time's tenets, Gloria has masculine traits because she tries to become an actress in order to be economically self-sufficient.

had never wanted children. [...] her ironic soul whispered that motherhood was also the privilege of the female baboon" (*BD* 392-3). Differently from Undine – who, however, when she discovers she is pregnant, looks at Ralph with "a settled, a reasoned resentment" (*CC* 184) – Edith and Gloria have no children. Whereas we just infer that Edith is childless, as far as Gloria is concerned, all she wants from her relationships with men is to enjoy herself. As she says to Anthony, "A woman should be able to kiss a man beautifully and romantically without any desire to be either his wife or his mistress" (*BD* 113). In effect, the times' widely publicised form of sexual play was "petting, which included a variety of sexual activities short of intercourse" (Dumenil 1995, 136). Incidentally, it was again in 1913 that Margaret Sanger (birth-control activist, nurse and sex educator) began her campaign for contraception.

Not having children of their own, the three men – as far as Ralph is concerned, at least at the beginning of his relationship with Edith – convey their tenderness to their wives whom they consider "childish". Because she is often praised for her "childish" or "baby" mouth (*BD* 58, 72, 102, 400), and she is said to have a "childish heart" (*BD* 226) and even talks "as a very charming child" (*BD* 60), while her hair is endowed with a "childish glory" (*BD* 297) and her small hands are like those of "a child" (*BD* 62), Gloria succeeds in always winning over Anthony. As Fitzgerald had once said, these "childish" contemporary young women were a sort of mental baby vamps.²¹ In the case of Gloria, to her personal characteristics, we might add those of the fashion and the manners of the times: an androgynous (boyish) body – flat chest, short hairdo, short skirts – and flirtatious postures.

Finally, just as lines from various arias and from Wagner's operas abound in *The Song of the Lark*, lines from the songs of the '10s recur in Fitzgerald's novel. And if in *The Song of the Lark* we read much about singers and music teachers, at the very beginning of *The Beautiful and Damned* we are informed that Anthony's mother, a Boston 'Society Contralto', "was a lady who sang, sang, sang" (*BD* 6). In addition, Gloria has a "cool soprano laughter" (*BD* 106).

Beset by poverty, apathy, and deception, if Gloria and Anthony have a troubled married life, the same is true, for different reasons, for Cather's couple. And, as far as Undine is concerned, if her various marriages and affairs are a disaster, her last marriage does not promise to end up in a better way, since she is always striving for "'something beyond'" (*CC* 54).

In *The Song of the Lark*, Fitzgerald may have found further suggestions that he took up in his 1925 novel, *The Great Gatsby*. At the height

21 In 1921, in an interview, Fitzgerald said, "we find the young woman of the 1920s flirting, kissing, viewing life lightly, saying damn without a blush, playing along the danger line in an immature way – a sort of *mental baby vamp*" (Brucoli, Baugham 2004, 7; emphases added). The expression "baby vamp" recurs in this novel as well (*BD* 29).

of his career, and to mark his characters indelibly, he again seems to have remembered Cather's novel, and once more he converts a minor detail in *The Song of the Lark* into a memorable turn of phrase in his own work. When Edith is reproached by her aunt for ridiculing the singers they have heard at the opera, she very rudely retorts, "What's the matter with you, old sport?" (SL 369). She thus anticipates Gatsby's slangy, but more amicable,²² way of addressing other men. At the beginning of the 20th century, "old sport" was a British upper-class slang term and as such supports Gatsby's claim of having been to Oxford. But this way of addressing people may also indicate something decidedly masculine about Cather's seductive woman. Moreover, as Edith "ate nothing but alligator-pear salad [...] and took cognac in her coffee" (SL 369), by mentioning the name of a ferocious animal rather than providing the name of the fruit in question (an avocado),²³ and by having her drink hard liquor without inhibitions (like Undine), Cather indirectly stresses the fierce and ambiguous nature of this young woman: her spitefulness and her androgyny. Could it be that Fitzgerald perceived in Edith somebody he would later turn into Jordan Baker in *The Great Gatsby*?

In many ways, therefore, besides the generally recognised influences that Frank Norris, H.L. Mencken, James Branch Cabell and Theodore Dreiser exercised on Fitzgerald, it is as if he wrote *The Beautiful and Damned* expanding on, that is, giving a more complete picture of the new type of young womanhood featured or sketched by Wharton and Cather, respectively. Moreover, some of the characteristic traits of Cather's Edith seem to have lodged so deeply in Fitzgerald's mind that he skilfully reinterpreted them in the masterpiece that he was to write three years later.

What differs widely is the three writers' attitude toward this type of young woman: despicable for both Wharton and Cather, upsetting but fascinating for Fitzgerald. As he declared in an interview as late as 1927, "The girls I wrote about were not a type - they were a generation. Free spirits" and also "They are just girls [...]. [...] they are young things with a splendid talent for life" (Brucoli, Bryer 1971, 279, 281). Was it because Zelda was one of them? Was it to defend his choice of subject matter? Possibly both - and more.

22 To prove the point, Fred too uses this epithet 'old sport', but when affectionately addressing Doctor Archie (SL 460).

23 Incidentally, this is another anachronism since, as Moseley observes, avocados were imported from South America to the United States in 1895, that is, after the Ottenburgs' encounter (SL 736).

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