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# The (Re)Production Craze: Taylorism, the Modern American Family, and Non-Progressive Narratives in Edith Wharton's Late Fiction

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**The (Re)Production Craze: Taylorism, the Modern American Family, and Non-Progressive  
Narratives in Edith Wharton's Late Fiction**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement  
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English from  
The College of William and Mary

by

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In her 1927 novel *Twilight Sleep*, Edith Wharton presents the dissolution of the modern American family with her depiction of the Manford/Wyant clan, a group of wealthy Manhattanites whose apparent solidarity is compromised by two unsatisfactory marriages, a band of emotionally neglected children, and an aging man's plunge into crisis as he fails to adapt to modern society. This family begins its slow collapse twenty years before the novel's start, when the daughter of a successful Midwestern car manufacturer Pauline Wyant divorces her conservative and unfaithful husband Arthur Wyant and marries her divorce lawyer, the ambitious Dexter Manford. When Wharton's narrative begins in the 1920s, Pauline and Arthur's son Jim Wyant struggles to sustain his marriage to the thrill-seeking flapper Lita Wyant, while Pauline and Dexter's teenage daughter Nona Manford attempts to preserve her parents' marriage and her half-brother Jim's happiness.<sup>1</sup> Monitoring other characters' behaviors like a World War I "trench-watcher," Nona's responsibility for her relatives' wellbeing seems strangely dangerous, yet necessary as neither of her parents is interested in family care (237). Arthur Wyant, meanwhile, has become a nervous alcoholic, a recluse, and his ex-wife's charity case. Through the skewed and contradictory perspectives of her three narrators Pauline, Dexter, and Nona Manford, Wharton augurs the novel's disaster and exposes the central drama plaguing this unhappy family: as Pauline Manford denies the reality of all painful, emotional conflicts in hopes of creating an appearance of perfect family harmony, her husband Dexter Manford flirts with Pauline's daughter-in-law Lita Wyant, initiating a semi-incestuous, cross-generational affair that promises to break up the family's precarious stability.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A on page 79 for the Manford/Wyant family tree.

Despite the apparently inevitable dissolution of the Manford/Wyant family, the novel's disastrous climax remains shocking for its violence. Revealing the action through Pauline Manford's evasive narration, Wharton forces her readers to piece together the events: Arthur Wyant, after realizing that his son's wife Lita and his son's stepfather Dexter are having an affair, sneaks into Lita's bedroom at the family's perfectly-kept country home to confront the couple, planning to defend his son's marriage and his family's "honour" (300). Arthur attempts to shoot Dexter, but his shot misses its target and hits Dexter's daughter Nona, who, like Arthur, had entered Lita's bedroom to prevent the affair between her father and her sister-in-law. Although the family's apparent solidarity is saved by a quick-thinking butler's lie about an escaped burglar, this episode identifies the characters' unacknowledged and unmanageable behaviors as the cause for the family's dissolution. In the novel's last scene, Nona lies prostrate in a hospital bed as her mother Pauline plans an international vacation with Dexter and sends Jim and Lita on a trip to Paris. Through her characters' physical separation, Wharton suggests that the Manford/Wyant family effectively ceases to exist. Yet this splintering also paradoxically and superficially preserves family unity by allowing the characters to deny the import of the affair and the shooting it motivates: neither couple procures a divorce and all family members remain on impersonally polite terms. Wharton's conclusion is all the more disturbing because the Manford/Wyant antagonists remain nominally kin. Despite their unhappiness, these modern subjects seem unable to escape unsatisfying and even dangerous family membership.

With this dramatically violent, even melodramatic ending, Wharton culminates her enduring interest in the family as a powerful institution. Issues concerning the formation of family power, including marriage, adoption, and the inheritance of wealth, and challenges to this family power, such as incest, divorce, extramarital affairs, and illegitimate children, arise in

nearly all of Wharton's novels. Throughout these works, Wharton portrays family power ambiguously, as both adverse and conducive to individual characters' developments; she recurrently denounces families' abilities to govern their members' behaviors, while also crediting families for affording these members, on the basis of financial resources and social standing, opportunities for self-expression and self-determination. One of her most famous novels *The House of Mirth* (1905) exemplifies this ambiguity: while Wharton's protagonist Lily Bart seeks marriage into a wealthy family because she yearns for the social prestige and freedom she cannot enjoy as an orphaned dependent of extended family members, family power also partially determines her repeated failure to marry. As Lily relays in the novel's first chapter, the mother of her former marriage prospect had prevented the couple's engagement because Lily's independent spirit threatened family traditions. The potential mother-in-law wanted Lily "to promise that she wouldn't do over the drawing room [...] the very thing [she was] marrying for!" and so the relationship ended (10). In this novel, families function as unified groups, sets of allies with the determination to achieve a shared goal: the continuation of their family power and their elite communities.<sup>2</sup> While Lily imagines family membership to be liberating compared with the life of a single woman, her forceful exclusion from the family also suggests that a family can wield oppressive domination over individuals.

As Lily Bart's interest in redecorating her potential husband's home suggests, Wharton frequently links individual expression and family power with the built environment and

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<sup>2</sup> When Nancy Bentley argues that Wharton equates "table manners and tribal manners," to depict "exchanges of drawing-room culture [as] indistinguishable from acts of coercive force," she shows both how families in Wharton's novels maintain power over individuals through social rituals and implies more broadly how social institutions can impede individual progress and agency (*Ethnography* 69). Applied to Lily Bart, this ethnographic reading suggests that the character cannot pursue her individual goals, including family membership, because she submits to the system of manners and rituals that promote family power.

especially with domestic space.<sup>3</sup> Throughout *The House of Mirth*, for instance, Wharton pairs Lily's failure to attain social security through marriage and her resulting social descent with her inhabitation of increasingly shabby homes. Reading into this correspondence between Lily's social standing and her environment Wharton's presentation of "physical space as a means of class expression and control," Annette Benert contends that architecture in *The House of Mirth* represents forces that maintain social margins (117). Judith Fryer corroborates this suggestion when she argues that Wharton's female characters exercise social and family power by expelling adversaries from their communities and homes (138).<sup>4</sup> Wharton renders this power expression in space evident by tracking Lily Bart's social fall through her banishment from former friends' homes, most severely in Lily's public debarment from her rival's yacht that leaves her momentarily homeless. Finally, through Lily Bart's death in a decrepit, rented room at the end of the novel, Wharton suggests that the young woman's exclusion from family privilege and a family home partially determines her tragic end.<sup>5</sup> In Wharton's fiction, the walls of a home thus function not only to enclose a family's private behaviors, but also to delineate alliance with the powerful family unit.

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<sup>3</sup> Both Benert and Somers use the term "built environment" in their discussions of space in Wharton's fiction. Wharton's use of space to express, reflect, and structure her plots is a hallmark of her style that has been extensively analyzed and that is especially useful for examining her treatment of family life because of its inherent association with domesticity. Somers, Benert, Fryer, and Cohn all analyze Wharton's depiction of space with attention to her work as a home and garden designer and her first book *The Decoration of Houses* (1897), a treatise on interior decoration co-authored with designer Ogden Codman, Jr.

<sup>4</sup> Wharton also shows the manipulation of space as a means for challenging family power in other works. Her novels often include female characters who adapt to the oppressive, patriarchal power expressed by their husbands' and fathers' austere homes by creating self-expressive, personal space within the home, as Anna Leath does with her private sitting room in *The Reef* (1912), or by creating a sexually-open, more fluid environment outside of the home, as Charity Royall does with an abandoned cabin in *Summer* (1917).

<sup>5</sup> Lily's final chloral-induced dream of cradling an infant also suggests her need for family acceptance, but seems to promote a less oppressive family structure than the type exemplified by the novel's wealthy socialites. The baby she envisions is the child of an acquaintance, working woman Nettie Struthers, whose warm kitchen and forgiving husband suggest to Lily a more affectionate possibility for family life.

Wharton's chaotic and violent rendering of family power in *Twilight Sleep*'s climax diverges sharply with her treatment of the family in *The House of Mirth* and many of her other early novels in two important ways. First, while the family's oppressive power in her early works is the product of the family's unity, the family's destructive power in *Twilight Sleep* seems rather to stem from its disunion, from the conflicting ambitions of its members.<sup>6</sup> In this late novel, Dexter Manford seeks to remedy his marital dissatisfaction by seducing his step-daughter-in-law, Arthur Wyant attempts to maintain his own authority in the family by preventing that affair, Lita Wyant tries to end her dull marriage by sleeping with her husband's stepfather, and Pauline Manford yearns to forget this whole unpleasantness and exhibit the blissful image of family harmony. When Phillip Barrish reads this family's collapse as representative of the "inherently self-destructive inner nature of civilization and law themselves," he identifies the greater potential consequence of these individualistic behaviors: the dissolution of modern society as a whole (99). Though half-siblings Jim Wyant and Nona Manford assume caretaker roles for each other throughout the text, most characters in Wharton's novel pursue individual goals and consequently diminish the united family power present in Wharton's earlier works, suggesting the instability of modern society.<sup>7</sup> Wharton dramatically highlights the danger of the family's

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<sup>6</sup> Wharton provides a model of a strong willed, ambitious character insensitive to family unity in her 1913 novel *The Custom of the Country*. In this text, the Midwestern daughter of a newly wealthy businessman Undine Spragg climbs social ranks through a series of marriages, divorces, and remarriages. In her quest for social prestige, Undine trades family heirlooms, neglects her only child, and motivates her second husband's suicide. Contending that Undine uses the built environment, including houses, hotels, and theaters, as instruments of her prosperity, Benert posits that the self-centered character "offends not simply in her brashness and greed but in her transgression of the norms and mores of earlier twentieth-century Atlantic culture," but also earns readers' reluctant admiration for her thorough determination (126). In light of this observation, Undine's maliciousness seems to stem from her singularity, her unwillingness to accept social norms, and yet she also seems the product of her capitalist culture and represents the American ideal of upward mobility. Fryer's argument that Undine uses her body as capital in marriages that function as business transactions supports this notion of Undine as a capitalist ideal (112). Undine's ruthless behavior thus foretells new social customs that will develop as America becomes a more industrialized society.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example Nona's initial description of the half-brother she "could always count on" and Nona's dotting care as Jim as he confesses his marital troubles (17, 181). Saunders's and Bentley's interpretations of Wharton's next

internal antagonism through the fate of Nona Manford, the one character who works to preserve family unity and who at the novel's end suffers from "incessant weariness" and imagines a future in "a convent where nobody believes in anything" (311, 315). Aged before her time, shot through the arm as she sought to protect her family, this caretaker's development stalls as a result of the modern family's division. Family-oriented work, which promised individual and group power in Wharton's earlier texts, proves futile and dangerous in this late novel.

The family's means for governing and managing individual behaviors constitutes the second distinction between Wharton's early depictions of family power and that of *Twilight Sleep*. In the late novel, the family wields oppressive power by forcing individuals to stay in the family, not by excluding them from family membership. While Lily Bart cannot pursue her individual goals because she cannot join a family, and in *The Age of Innocence* (1920) Ellen Olenska's own family ostracizes her because she threatens to destabilize the family as she flirts with her cousin's husband, in *Twilight Sleep*, all the characters, and especially the young women, suffer the family's oppression when they remain bound to the self-destructive family.<sup>8</sup> The modern 1920s family unintentionally restricts Lita Wyant and Nona Manford by keeping the former in a traditional, unsatisfactory marriage and by restricting the latter to the self-sacrificial role of family caretaker. Consequently, family membership in *Twilight Sleep* seems only to entail inescapable confinement, not the opportunities for self-expression and self-determination that Lily Bart sought in her quest to marry into a wealthy family. Compared with her early novels,

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novel *The Children* as the author's praise for chosen families also seems applicable to the relationship of these half-siblings. (Saunders 91; Bentley, *Frantic* 243-4).

<sup>8</sup> Wharton shows how a family can control the actions of a man by forcing him to stay in the family in *The Age of Innocence* when Newland Archer's extramarital affair is discovered and regulated by his wife's family. Ultimately his wife's pregnancy, and its promise of future family responsibilities, forces Newland to end his affair. The experiences of Lita Wyant and Nona Manford seem more similar to Newland Archer's relationship with his wife's family than to Ellen Olenska's expulsion from her own family.



Wharton's picture of family power in *Twilight Sleep* is considerably less ambiguous, emphasizing only the restrictions it places on individuals' behaviors.

That the family's oppressive force centers on women in *The House of Mirth*, *The Age of Innocence*, and *Twilight Sleep* again evinces the importance of domestic space, traditionally figured as women's sphere of influence, in structuring social power across Wharton's fiction. An examination of Pauline Manford's home in *Twilight Sleep* therefore helps explain the two shifts of family power from the early to the late fiction, the transitions from family unity to family disunity and from oppressive exclusion to oppressive inclusion. In Wharton's early works, domestic space functions as a locale for self-reflection, self-expression, and privacy, all factors Wharton emphasizes in her first book *The Decoration of Houses* (1897), a design manual co-authored with interior decorator Ogden Codman, Jr. In *Twilight Sleep*, however, domestic space serves a much more public function. For example, Wharton emphasizes the modern home's outward orientation when she depicts the forty-something modern woman Pauline deriving a strange pleasure from emergency preparation in her country estate on the Hudson River Cedarledge: as sirens blare, ostentatiously dressed party guests expel startled shrieks, and a band of burly, perspiring firemen drive a new fire engine toward Cedarledge, Pauline's dinner party turns abruptly to chaos, yet the hostess stands strangely calm, stopwatch in hand, as she surveys the pandemonium. Suddenly, one guest begins to understand: "A fire? The engine ... the ... oh, it's a *fire-drill!* ... *A parade!* How realistic!" (251). This elaborate show, with all the excitement of an emergency and none of the danger, allows Pauline to exhibit her perfect control over herself, her staff, and her home. After offering the firemen a hot dinner, Pauline tells her guests that she purchased the engine to "provide a sense of safety for the neighborhood," but the guests' admiration for the spectacle seems a more potent motivation (251). As this scene

demonstrates, the modern home in Wharton's novel has a public value; it functions to display the homemaker's work, wealth, and social standing rather than to accommodate family members' personal needs. The Manford/Wyant women's restriction to the home and domestic duties therefore intimates that their oppressive inclusion in the family helps present a socially useful image.

By depicting Pauline Manford's home as a public venue for self-presentation, Wharton's text reflects a historical change concerning America's social elite: by the 1920s, many Americans were seeking to attain and display personal productivity to augment their social status and present themselves as useful contributors to modern society. While Old New Yorkers like Pauline's ex-husband Arthur Wyant and the families of *The House of Mirth* and *The Age of Innocence* seem secure in their social elitism and embrace leisure to announce their affluence, the *nouveau riche* Manfords seem anxious about their class status and seek to prove their social value through productive work. In *Twilight Sleep*, Wharton wrestles with the quest for productivity – in business and in the home – as a ubiquitous American cultural value. Popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the American passion for productivity was affirmed by Frederick Winslow Taylor's 1911 book *The Principles of Scientific Management*. By detailing his experiments at Bethlehem Steel Company that increased the output of each pig-handler from an average of twelve and a half tons per day to forty-seven and a half tons per day, this mechanical engineer persuaded industrial employers and the American public in general of the value of scientific management. Taylor encouraged employers to study the human body to determine the most productive strategy for any task and to select the worker physically best able to complete that task (39). He also prescribed a "subdivision" of labor, forcing each worker to perform a mundane physical task and reserving the mental labor of organization, coordination,

and supervision for managers (38). Taylor anticipated diverse applications of his theory in his introduction to *The Principles of Scientific Management*, declaring, “The same principles [of industrial management] can be applied with equal force to all social activities,” and naming home management, charity work, and education among the areas where scientific management could be useful (8). Taylor therefore envisioned a world in which productivity is the standard for all human activity, in which human minds and bodies must be as productive as machines. Many contemporaries complied: multiple societies and an entire magazine promoted Taylor’s theory and the terms “efficiency” and “productivity” became buzzwords, used even outside of their direct reference to industrial management (Tichi 79, 81).

Though the production craze is diverse, Wharton presents characters particularly susceptible to its influence: Pauline Manford, the Midwestern daughter of a newly wealthy car manufacturer, and her second husband Dexter Manford, the self-made lawyer born on a Minnesota farm, need to evince their social prestige to access elite New York culture. In *Twilight Sleep* and other late novels, Wharton presents Taylorized societies in which all facets of family life are reducible to a mechanical scale: human bodies function as machines, family homes as factories, and relationships as business arrangements. For Wharton’s characters, the production craze is not a culturally imposed value, but an internalized, psychologically powerful, and even unconscious motivator. By depicting the disastrous consequences of this production for both individuals and the family as a whole, Wharton contests Taylor’s recommendation for the indiscriminate application of industrial standards to private life and his implicit assumption that production begets progress, demonstrating instead that the production craze motivates pernicious, individualist behaviors that wreck family unity and paradoxically thwart individual success. In Wharton’s late novels, production is necessarily individual, eclipsing any concept of

cooperative or family production. Her characters endorse rival definitions of production, ranging from efficient homemaking, reproduction, and childcare to artistic creation and fame, and generate interpersonal dramas as they make use of, neglect, or compete against their family members to promote their personal productivity. Consequently the family's one shared value – production – ironically destroys their kinship. Taylor even implicitly acknowledged the essential individualism of production: though he sought to increase the productivity of an entire industry, his “subdivision” of labor focused on the output of individual laborers, on the amount of pig iron each worker hauled (38). Emphasizing this isolating characteristic in her depiction of Taylorism, Wharton suggests that by advocating scientific management as applicable to “all social activities,” Taylor actually promoted antisocial behavior (8).

Yet production-oriented behavior not only fails on a group level in Wharton's texts; the author further challenges the correlation between production and progress with non-progressive plotlines for individual characters. By the conclusions of her late novels, Wharton's characters fail to recognize the social dangers of the production craze, cannot find an alternative to participation in the production craze, or retreat from social life entirely when they recognize the discrepancy between production and progress. In *Twilight Sleep*, Wharton uses the climactic gun accident's aftermath to underscore this incongruity between real individual progress and the cultural notion of progress in productivity. The novel's final two chapters, relayed through Nona Manford's perspective, contrast this character's pain with her community's unchanged enthusiasm for productivity. Though speculative interest in the alleged Cedarledge burglary dwindles even before Nona recovers, the Manfords' neighbors make use of the shooting's danger to justify conspicuous emergency preparations in their homes, safeguards similar to Pauline's fire drill earlier in the novel: “Within twenty-four hours the Cedarledge burglary was an

established fact, and suburban millionaires were doubling the number of their night watchmen, and looking into the newest thing in burglar-alarms” (305). These millionaires’ investments in the “number” of guards and “newest” of technologies, not the quality of their home security, suggest their interest in publically displaying a productive response to the burglary. Nona’s injury and the Manford/Wyant family’s dissolution have no effect on modern society at large; production remains an extolled cultural value, regardless of its harmful effects on individuals.

While the individualistic behaviors advanced during the production craze may be useful for business practices, Wharton shows them to be maladaptive to family life, and to women’s lives particularly. Without the educational or professional opportunities to pursue personal productivity in an appropriate business or otherwise non-domestic setting, the upper-class socialite Pauline Manford of *Twilight Sleep* can only incorporate Taylor’s principles into her work inside the home. Because most of domestic work’s explicit goals are cooperative and social – including response to family members’ emotions and the creation of a comfortable family home – the application of Taylor’s implicitly individual concept of production to domestic work ultimately endangers family unity. Wharton’s presentation of Pauline, a woman who relentlessly applies Taylorism to her personal life and yet cannot manage or even acknowledge her relatives’ destructive behaviors, therefore underscores the problem of women’s limited opportunities for production outside of the home as this restriction problematically motivates her character to devalue cooperative work. Wharton’s production-oriented homemaker reflects a historical trend; believing that stringent organization and time management could relieve the stress of household maintenance and childcare, many women in the early twentieth century did embrace Taylorism

in the home.<sup>9</sup> High schools and colleges began offering home economics courses, the American Home Economics Association was founded in 1909, and magazines such as *The Ladies Home Journal* began to offer articles about scientific management (Ehrenreich and English 180; Rutherford 44).<sup>10</sup> By depicting the collapse of the Manford/Wyant family as partially determined by Pauline's enthusiasm for cleanliness, emergency preparation, party planning, and more generally the display of her personal productivity, Wharton seems to critique the home economics movement, yet also to sympathize with its followers. Through *Twilight Sleep*, Wharton suggests that when women must embrace industrial standards in the home to be valued as individuals in a production-crazed society they not only endanger the success of that domestic work, but also cheapen their genuinely productive work as family caregivers and home caretakers. Wharton thus identifies the problem of the production craze for family life and for women in its domestic location; through negative example, Wharton intimates that a balance between cooperative and personal production is only possible if the settings for these two types of production are distinct. An analysis of the Manford/Wyant family's dissolution in terms of the production craze therefore frames and complicates issues of gender, space, and family care that pervade Wharton's text.

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<sup>9</sup> Catherine Beecher initiated this trend of "managing" women's labor in the home with her 1841 book *A Treatise on Domestic Economy* in which she recommended making the study of domestic economy a part of every young woman's education (41). For an explanation of Beecher's work as a foundation for the twentieth-century's home management movement, see Janice William Rutherford's introduction to her book *Selling Mrs. Consumer*.

<sup>10</sup> Examining women's housework in this era, Ruth Schwartz Cowan argues that technological innovations for the home only eliminated the work traditionally performed by men and generated more work for women by raising standards of cleanliness. She further contends that these innovations contributed to the under-appreciation of women's labor by creating the appearance that modern housework was very easy. Cowan's research frames an important question for the home economics movement: if household technologies made more work for women, why were women enthusiastically embracing these new technologies and imagining the home as their sphere for efficiency? Considered in conversation with *Twilight Sleep*, Cowan's work suggests that it is the quest for recognizable work that motivates the home economics movement.

To study Wharton's treatment of the production craze, modern families, and women's opportunities, I will chiefly consider *Twilight Sleep* and supplement this analysis with reference to *The Mother's Recompense* (1925) and *The Children* (1928) to examine character types and establish a pattern of subjects and narrative techniques in Wharton's career. *Twilight Sleep* is particularly useful for an analysis of family life and the production craze because its interrupted narration across the characters Pauline, Dexter, and Nona Manford allows for an examination of both the interior motivations for productivity and the external effects of production-oriented activity. Wharton often contrasts Pauline and Dexter's evasive justifications for their production efforts with the more reliable narration of their daughter Nona, whose atypical investment in family unity renders her critiques particularly valuable for interpreting other characters' notions of productivity. This narrative style also omits the interiorities of Wharton's young couple Jim and Lita Wyant, making the younger generation's understanding of and access to productivity one of the novel's central issues. The ability to study both the incentives for and effects of the production craze is also generated by this novel's plot: through the slow but inevitable dissolution of the Manford/Wyant family, Wharton traces the various social pressures that contribute to and complicate characters' production activities.

Because conflicting definitions of production drive *Twilight Sleep*'s plot and Wharton's shifting narration allows for analysis of most characters' interiorities, my argument is structured around individual characters' notions and pursuits of production. First, I will examine Pauline Manford's attempt to expand the traditional women's sphere by applying Taylor's theories to her home life. Her inability to recognize the failure of these efforts or to find an alternative form of personal productivity make her seem an unnaturally static character although her actions are steeped in complex social motivations concerning women's work. Second, I will examine Dexter

Manford's attempt to be productive in the home through sexual means, a destructive behavior that promotes an antimodern, patriarchal family structure and consequently threatens his very modern family. This analysis of Pauline and Dexter necessarily addresses how adults use children to further their production efforts. Young women's misuse as tools for others' production, their accordingly confused notions of selfhood, and their failed attempts to pursue personal productivity outside the family are the subjects of my third section. I will conclude by addressing the difficulty of imagining American society's future in the aftermath of the production craze. Disputing the perceived equivalence of production and progress across her late fiction, Wharton portrays the production-obsessed society unintentionally foreclosing youths' opportunities for success and ultimately undermining the sustainability of modern American society.



## II. THE NEW WOMAN'S CENTRIPETAL FORCE

Edith Wharton presents in her character Pauline Manford of *Twilight Sleep* an exaggerated portrait of the New Woman, a social category that emerged around the turn of the century that referred to women who challenged men's social power by legitimating women's work and exploring their roles outside of the home through productive labor and political involvement.<sup>11</sup> Pauline attempts to expand the traditional woman's sphere into the public realm by funding her own fire company, employing scores of domestic laborers, joining various philanthropic organizations, and making a speech on reproductive issues that is recorded into newspapers. However, because this wealthy woman is highly concerned with her social status, Pauline also accepts the cultural ideal of domesticity, and production in the home remains her focus. By managing and exhibiting her two homes, a house in New York City and her country estate on the Hudson River, Pauline evinces her ability to manage her time, organize reconstruction projects, and coordinate her employees' labor – all markers of her wealthy, modern woman status. Of Cedarledge she admits,

Each tree, shrub, water-course, herbaceous border, meant not only itself, but the surveying of grades, transporting of soil, tunneling for drainage, conducting of water, the business of correspondence and paying of bills, which had preceded its existence; and she would have cared for it far less – perhaps not at all – had it sprung into being unassisted, like the random shadbushes and wild cherry trees beyond the gates. (213)

In this modern woman's world, a product is not valuable if it “mean[s] only itself,” or its natural function or beauty, but instead represents the purposeful human effort invested in that product. Both shadbushes and cherry trees produce edible fruit, but “random” and “wild,” they are worthless to Pauline. Yet the “acres of glossy lawn,” essentially useless replacements for the natural landscape, serve to evince Pauline's productivity to admiring peers. Taming nature in

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<sup>11</sup> See Patterson 1 and Stansell 28.

order to perform a version of home management, Pauline intentionally creates projects to display her administrative skill, ironically making her work wasteful and indicating the problematically abstract products of domestic work. Applied to the home, Taylorism does not expedite the output of tangible goods, but rather leads this modern woman to worship ideals like “efficiency” and “advancement” – intangible notions she can never satisfactorily achieve.<sup>12</sup>

Combined with her use of cosmetics, her voracious exercise, and her bathroom full of “mysterious appliances for douches, gymnastics and ‘physical culture,’” Pauline Manford’s enthusiasm for conspicuous labor helps her negate “natural” womanhood in favor of produced womanhood, a self-image that “means not only itself,” but also the work she presents and the work of presenting herself (23, 213). After Pauline’s ostentatiously orchestrated fire drill, her husband Dexter Manford comments, “She dominated them all, grave and glittering as a goddess of Velocity. ‘She enjoys it as much as other women do love-making,’” suggesting that the 1920s woman’s rejection of traditional womanhood and her enthusiasm for conspicuous work make her strangely unnatural (252). According to Dexter, Pauline’s enthusiasm for producing her home, her fire squad, and the spectacle of the drill renders her inhuman, gloriously goddess-like in her power, and yet disturbingly machine-like in her determination. Historian Christine Stansell’s examination of turn of the century New York bohemia and women’s place within this new artistic community confirms that the perception of the New Woman as unnatural was common. Stansell explains,

The appearance of the New Woman challenged patriarchal relationships that were so familiar, so threaded into the fabric of people’s expectations of themselves and others, that they seemed to many (and not only men) to be the essential stuff of human fellowship, not arrangements that normalized men’s power over women. (31)

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<sup>12</sup> Wharton demonstrates Pauline’s fascination with words and broad concepts throughout the text. See, for example, her fleeting fascinations with “personality,” “frustrations,” and “rejuvenation,” (97, 119, 271).

As Stansell's insight suggests, the New Woman seemed to endanger the modern family by challenging the supposedly "essential" division between men's work and women's work. Her unnatural womanhood seemed destined to destroy "human fellowship" and thus the sense of instability in the modern world seemed attributable to her selfish ambitions.

An interpretation of Wharton's "goddess of Velocity" within the context of American historian Henry Adams's idea of women's particular importance in tracing human development helps elucidate the social consequences of this seemingly unnatural New Womanhood (*TS* 252). In his frequently cited essay "The Dynamo and the Virgin" (1900), Adams recalls walking through the hall of dynamos at the Great Exposition of 1900 in Paris, amazed by the "wholly new" force of the forty-foot generator before him, and contrasts the dynamo's power with that of the Virgin, the moral force of antiquity whose power seems no longer viable in modern industrial America (355). Of the Virgin Adams argues, "She was goddess because of her force; she was the animated dynamo; she was reproduction – the greatest and most mysterious energies; all she needed was to be fecund" (357-8). In America, however, the Virgin's strength in sex is shameful; Americans, according to Adams, clothed the Virgin in fig leaves and replaced her with the dynamo as the "symbol of infinity" (354). For Adams, this shift of forces from the sexual to the mechanical makes the history of human development impossible to narrate because it obscures his sense of causation (355). Interpreted in light of Adams's observations, Wharton's image of "the goddess of Velocity" seems a mechanical Virgin, the inverse of the "animated dynamo" that Adams discusses (*TS* 252, Adams 357-8). Pauline's machine-like forward motion, her incessant drive to produce more work replaces the Virgin's sexual power as the measure of modern society's unstoppable "Velocity." In both Wharton's and Adams's texts, New Womanhood therefore promises a new type of human history, one structured not around women's family work

and reproduction, but rather on their individual work and production. For both authors, the force of modernity is based in New Women's ambitions and fears about modern society's future development are manifest in their perceived unnaturalness.

Wharton seems to lament the New Woman's "unnatural" ambition by highlighting the antagonism between Pauline Manford's personal production and her family's unity as the character ignores her husband's dangerous infidelity to focus her efforts on her own conspicuous work. However, a close examination of women's work across Wharton's fiction suggests instead that the author sympathized with modern women's need for legitimate and respectable opportunities for work outside the home. Although Pauline seeks to expand the traditional women's sphere, she still devotes most of her attention to work inside the home, demonstrating that despite her apparent newness the 1920s woman assumes the same domestic and familial responsibilities that Wharton's more "natural" or traditional female characters execute. A comparison of Pauline with *The Age of Innocence's* Mrs. Welland, a stodgy and conventional mother-in-law who embodies reluctance and leisure, evinces this point. As the staid conformist of 1870s old New York traditions, Mrs. Welland affects shock at the prospect of a niece's divorce and reluctance towards her daughter's engagement. Her most industrious venture is organizing a summer home suitable to her husband's "sensitive domesticity," work Wharton characterizes with mock heroism as she details the "almost insuperable difficulties" Mrs. Welland endures as a home manager in St. Augustine, Florida (169). Yet while Mrs. Welland exhibits leisure and Pauline Manford embraces work, their social duties are nearly identical, including household management, the entertainment of guests, and the prevention of a younger relative's divorce. Considering Wharton's depiction of the stasis of women's work between the 1870s and 1920s, the "unnaturalness" of Pauline Manford's modern productivity therefore seems

the result of its application to non-modern work. Without liberation from domestic duties and without access to educational or professional opportunities, Pauline's attempt to define modern, productive womanhood seems destined to fail. Interpreted in light of women's perceived ability to mark human development, this determined collapse of modern womanhood seems to promise the failure of modern, production-oriented society as a whole.

Despite her ambition, Wharton's New Woman therefore embodies stasis; unable to recognize the failure of domestic Taylorism or to find an alternative means for personal productivity, Pauline Manford repeats her greatest mistake – her focus on her own work and the consequent neglect of her family's emotional concerns – over and over again. In the novel's final scene, Pauline, though perhaps a bit more fatigued and wrinkled under her makeup, is still fervently devoted to conspicuous labor and supports wholeheartedly the pursuit of production for its own sake, regardless of its damaging effects on her family and especially her wounded daughter. As Nona observes at the novel's end, her mother is still “the usual, the everyday Pauline, smiling and confident in herself and the general security of things [...] more than ever resolutely two-dimensional” (307). Feeling personally rejuvenated thanks to cosmetic treatments and the work required to nurse her wounded child and plan two international trips, the “goddess of Velocity” cannot recognize that her productivity has actually rendered her inert. As Nona's wound suggests the failure of family progress, Pauline's inability to learn from the family's disastrous collapse and her failure to address the interpersonal tensions that motivated her husband's infidelity and her ex-husband's shooting of her daughter demonstrate the impossibility of individual progress during the production craze. Replacing cooperative efforts with the pursuit of personal productivity, the modern woman ironically stunts her own development by ignoring her family's radically changed status after Nona's shooting.

By depicting a modern woman who cannot progress despite making production her ultimate goal, Wharton reveals the social constraints that the New Woman must negotiate in her attempt to expand the traditional roles of caretaker and homemaker. In her analysis of naturalist literature's female characters and shifting definitions of "nature," Jennifer Fleissner provides a framework for women's behavior that helps explain Pauline's stasis in terms of both external and internal motivations. Women in naturalist fiction, Fleissner argues, do not exemplify the exaggerated plots of decline or triumph usually associated with the genre, but rather embody "ongoing, nonlinear, repetitive motion – back and forth, around and around, on and on – that has the distinctive effect of seeming like a stuckness in place" determined by compulsive behaviors (9). Society's movement toward rationalization, exemplified in the popular exaltation of production and efficiency, combines with the modern subject's desire to remain socially relevant in a rapidly changing world to determine women's socially sanctioned yet personally maladaptive compulsions. As Fleissner suggests, reading women's work in terms of compulsions "has the potential to name an understanding of agency in which individual will and its subjection to rationalizing 'forces' appears [...] deeply intertwined" (9). If Pauline's embrace of scientific management constitutes a compulsive renegotiation of "natural" womanhood to form modern womanhood, then Wharton's New Woman is both responsible for and the victim of the production craze; she is a subject that chooses to rationalize her life, but she is also subjected to the competing demands of the modern production craze and women's traditional domestic work that motivate and complicate that rationalization. Pauline's problematic stasis therefore depends upon the disparity between her will to be individually productive and the social restraints that bar her from pursuing her ambitions outside of home and family work.

In *Twilight Sleep*'s first scene, Wharton does present Pauline's obsessive embrace of scientific management in the home as a compulsion and suggests that the domestic location for Pauline's modern concept of production renders her work necessarily maladaptive. Showing Pauline's use of her boudoir as an office and detailing the woman's hectic morning schedule, Wharton describes Pauline's use of scientific management as an all-inclusive lifestyle and indicates that women's desire to change gender roles in the early twentieth-century made them particularly willing to incorporate Taylor's principles into their work. Yet Wharton also depicts the social constraints on women's work through Pauline's use of Taylorism on wasteful activities. At the novel's start, Pauline's secretary Maisie Bruss recites her employer's morning schedule:

7.30 Mental uplift. 7.45 Breakfast. 8. Psycho-analysis. 8.15 See cook. 8.30 Silent Meditation. 8.45 Facial Massage. 9. Man with Persian miniatures. 9.15 correspondence. 9.30 Manicure. 9.45 Eurhythmic exercises. 10. Hair waved. 10.15 Sit for bust. 10.30 Receive Mother's Day deputation. 11. Dancing lesson. 11.30 Birth Control Meeting at Mrs. ---- (9-10)

Conducting her time and body with extraordinary efficiency, Pauline packages all her activities, spiritual, physical and social, into fifteen-minute blocks of time and employs the labor of at least eight workers before noon. By hiring a secretary to type and read aloud this frenzied schedule, Pauline makes her work highly visible and her time highly valuable. As evidenced by a number of linguistic intersections of time and money that emerged in this era, an individual's time became associated with economic value in the Machine Age. Contending that Americans in the 1920s worked to replace sentimentalism with "razor-sharp" realism, Ann Douglas explains that people sought exactitude in their schedules as they began to "steal," "waste," "buy," and "spend" time (39). The New Woman's embrace of scientific management therefore declares the economic, productive value of women's work both inside and outside the home by associating

her time with monetary value. Likening her domestic work to professional labor with this schedule, Pauline Manford reveals her gendered desire to make work in the home respectable in her production-crazed society.

However, Pauline's use of Taylor's principles to organize her comically frivolous activities also intimates the fruitlessness of the woman's use of industrial standards in the home. Though Pauline's schedule generates the appearance of productivity, her fifteen-minute bouts of mental health treatment and physical exercise are too rushed to produce anything, except perhaps produced, unnatural womanhood. Furthermore, the Taylorized time-management methods Pauline's schedule evinces do not suit domestic work: Taylor's methods increased efficiency in factories because the seconds shaved off basic tasks were multiplied across hundreds of workers, rendering these savings significant. When one woman in her personal home embraces Taylorism, her activities become more self-centered and wasteful than efficient because the time she can save is trivial.<sup>13</sup> Wharton finally suggests that Pauline's obsessive ordering of her home management constitutes a serious dis-order when the secretary bars Pauline's daughter Nona from interrupting this schedule. Pauline's efficiency therefore inverts itself: these scheduled activities leave her less time for her child, not more. Though Nona needs to warn Pauline of the family's growing emotional unrest, this tightly scheduled lineup of wasteful activities takes precedence, demonstrating the New Woman's respect for individual production over familial production.

Presenting wasteful activities through Taylorized organization, Pauline's schedule highlights the contradictory social motivations that doom her pursuit of personal productivity to

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<sup>13</sup> Charlotte Perkins Gilman proposed a theory of cooperative housekeeping, a system in which multiple families would share the responsibilities of cleaning, cooking, and childcare or outsource these responsibilities to housekeeping "experts." See Kessler 45-7 or Gilman's utopian novella *Herland*. In theory, Taylor's principles would be more beneficial in this type of cooperative home than in the isolated family home.



fail: her rival allegiances to class and gender status. As the daughter of a Midwestern car manufacturer and the wife of a self-made divorce lawyer, Pauline's wealth is newly earned, impelling her to solidify the family's upper-class standing by displaying prosperity. Professing to trace modern economic life to its prehistoric roots, economist Thorstein Veblen contends in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1889) that wealth acquired passively is socially valuable because it suggests the authority to delegate work to others and productive labor therefore compromises the image of upper-class status (29). For the wife of a *nouveau riche* man, this standard forces her to compensate for the family's compromised reputation with "vicarious leisure and consumption" rather than production (81). According to Veblen's theory, a wealthy woman's household management and social activities, while masked as work, must "prove on analysis to serve little or no ulterior end" except to demonstrate that the family does not need her to do anything "gainful" or of "substantial use," an insight that accounts for Pauline's creation of unnecessary and ultimately wasteful work (82). Yet as a New Woman, Pauline genuinely loves conspicuous production, a twist on Veblen's term to designate Pauline's work that promotes her gender status rather than her class status. As her ambitious schedule and her design of Cedarledge's grounds to make nature "[mean] not only itself" demonstrate, Pauline creates opportunities for work in the home so that she can conspicuously display her personal productivity (213). Pauline's choice between modern womanhood and upper class status pivots on the choice between producing babies or producing work, on the choice between "natural," traditional womanhood and produced womanhood. Her inability to separate these two contradictory yet rational motivations makes her work simultaneously consumptive and productive and generates the "back and forth" motion that Fleissner uses to characterize naturalist women's compulsions (9).

Wharton presents the home as the battleground for these rival loyalties to class and gender status and all housework therefore exemplifies this non-progressive movement. A brief historical analysis of Christine Frederick, one of the most prominent advocates of domestic Taylorism, makes evident the tension between class and gender in the wealthy modern woman's home. As writer and homemaker who made a career by teaching other women how to apply Taylorism to their housework and what products to consume, Frederick is a particularly useful model for interpreting Wharton's character. In her 1912 book *New Housekeeping*, Frederick recalls telling her husband, "I'm going to find out how these experts conduct investigations, and all about it, and then apply it to *my* factory, *my* business, *my* home" (10). Referring to men like Taylor and his colleagues Frank Bunker Gilbreth and Henry Ford as "the experts," Frederick invited industrial theories into the home and compared the single-family home with the loci of production – the factory, the business (9).<sup>14</sup> Yet the more Frederick's advice column succeeded, the more her "business" in the home lagged. Eventually hiring domestic laborers to care for her children while she advised other women in the *Ladies Home Journal*, Frederick consumed others' labor, a domestic leisure that made her housework and production expertise questionable; her work outside the home ironically jeopardized her ability to do that work, as it depended on class status rather than gender-based ambition (Rutherford 102-107). As this historical example demonstrates, the New Woman's complicated negotiation of production and consumption

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<sup>14</sup> Gilbreth was an expert in motion study and the founder of the Society for the Promotion of the Science of Management, later renamed the Taylor Society (Price). With his wife and business partner Lillian Moller Gilbreth, he pioneered practical applications of Taylor's principles. See Spriegel and Myers for a collection of the Gilbreths' works. See Graham for information about Lillian Gilbreth's application of scientific management to the home. Henry Ford designed the Model T, the first mass-produced car, and designed his factories to promote optimal efficiency (Flink).

activities could jeopardize her class or gender status, and Pauline Manford's non-progress thus seems a plausible consequence of these rival allegiances.<sup>15</sup>

In Pauline's most revealing and contradictory moment, she inadvertently makes public her failed attempt to reconcile her class and gender allegiances when she makes a speech on women's "natural" relationship to work and motherhood. Hosting a National Mothers' Day Association meeting in her home, Pauline addresses her audience with a speech intended for a Birth Control League Banquet the following week. "Personality," Pauline proclaims, "room to develop in [...] that's what every human being has a right to. No more effaced wives, no more drudging mothers, no more human slaves crushed by the eternal round of housekeeping and childbearing," before realizing her blunder (98). Quickly correcting herself with the exclamation: "That's what our antagonists say – the women who are afraid to be mothers," Pauline saves her social standing, but exposes her hypocrisy (99). Proposing two ideologies for women's proper lifestyles, intended for two different "categories of people," as she later claims, Pauline exposes her conflicting yet sympathetic desires for both motherhood and work, an ambiguous position generated by her modern and yet solely domestic work (99). Proclaiming the desire to escape household drudgery and childcare, Pauline makes a feminist suggestion for women's possible productivity outside the home; yet naming motherhood a "glorious privilege" and mocking that feminist position, Pauline intimates that her wealthy family does not need her to work outside the home (99). As she does not confess these contradictory but understandable positions as her own feelings, but rather externalizes them by projecting them as the unambiguous best ways of living onto two groups of women, poor working women and upper class homemakers, respectively,

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<sup>15</sup> In her argument for Wharton's unique perspective on the domestic realm as a female author, Mary Suzanne Schriber attributes Pauline's failures to the "emptiness of the sphere to which woman is assigned," but the 1920s woman's conflict over whether or not the leave that sphere also seems to contribute to her stasis (167).

Pauline refuses to examine the ambiguity of her position as a wealthy New Woman in the modern social order and thus remains a static character. Revealing the impossibility of making humans as productive as machines, Pauline's duplicitous speech exemplifies and predicts the New Woman's stagnation.

That Pauline can publicly promote two types of production for two types of women demonstrates the competitions between women for social status necessitated by the production craze and underscores the danger of treating complex individual women as simplistic machines. The productive ethos seems not only to render individual women's lives non-progressive, but more broadly to stall the progress of women's rights by typifying and dividing women. Reading *Twilight Sleep* as a critique of contemporary reproductive politics, Dale Bauer provides a useful framework for thinking about produced social categories for women and Pauline's agency and self-expression. Bauer shows that eugenics in the 1920s meant not just curbing the birthrate of "undesirable" women, i.e. poor, working-class, and non-white women, but also promoting reproduction among desirable women, i.e. upper-class white women. Eugenicists advanced this distinction with "twilight sleep," a drug that placed women into a semi-conscious state to reduce the pain and memory of childbirth that Wharton uses as her title to satirize the fear of pain that characterizes her 1920s American society. Eugenicists argued that wealthy women were delicate and therefore needed the pain-killing drug to make their deliveries bearable, while working-class women, because physical labor had made their bodies "robust," did not need the drug (93). By using "twilight sleep," wealthy women could therefore promote this class stratification. Bauer cites Pauline's problematic role in promoting this eugenic position, but she also reads Pauline's contradictions positively, contending that they demonstrate the New Woman's refusal to fit into any simplistic, distinct category of womanhood that the eugenics movement defined. "To

produce babies like Fords is the first step toward the production of a ready-made culture with women. [...] [Pauline] refuses the traditional role of mother for a less glorified – but nonetheless her own – role” (103). Pauline’s refusal of “natural” womanhood for a more individualized “produced” womanhood does demonstrate her desire to multiply women’s roles; yet, this search for New Womanhood necessarily generates contradiction and stasis and underscores the difficulty of escaping traditional expectations for women’s work, especially when class distinctions undermine women’s unity.

Pauline’s inability to admit that her participation in the production craze accentuates the double bind of gender and class and generates her hypocrisy, even after her near disastrous speech, can be explained by what historian of American antimodernism T.J. Jackson Lears describes as modern American society’s “evasive banality,” the positivist world view that rebuffs any challenges to perceived progress (25). Examining the “omnipresent and often implicit” social institutions that shared an enthusiasm for progress, including Liberal Protestantism, corporate capitalism, and the therapeutic worldview, Lears explains the purpose of this positivism: “By denying the dilemmas posed by modernization, the official doctrines provided both a source of escape from unprecedented conflict and a means of legitimizing continued capitalist development in a liberal polity” (8, 25). The production craze denoted not only a social drive toward production, but also an unerring confidence in the value of production, even if the negative ramifications of the production were glaringly obvious. Interpreted in light of this pervasive positivism, the physical and spiritual activities that pack Pauline’s schedule – her fifteen-minute bouts of “mental uplift,” “psycho-analysis,” and “Eurhythmic exercises” – demonstrate her dedication to “evasive banality,” to ignoring progress’s pitfalls through therapeutics. Considered in conjunction with contemporary reproductive politics’ typification

and division of women, this requisite confidence in modern society may also have discouraged women from questioning their traditional domestic roles and therefore may have promoted women's political oppression. In addition to the rival considerations of gender and class, this progressive positivism generates a society in which women's progress through the exploration of non-domestic activities is foreclosed despite their interest in production (9-10).

While Pauline's speech on reproductive politics to a large crowd of acquaintances presents this dangerous division of women as abstract and impersonal, Wharton reveals its tangible consequences on the Manford/Wyant family when she shows Pauline Manford (Manford) pursuing personal productivity as a family manager and making use of her daughter-in-law Lita Wyant's body to achieve this end. At the start of *Twilight Sleep*, Pauline arranges for Lita to give birth while using "twilight sleep," the expensive drug that denoted upper class, "civilized" status and made women forget the pain of childbirth. With this scene, Wharton suggests that because of their particular relationship to reproduction, Taylorism-obsessed women can transform childbirth into a function of modern production; as mothers and caregivers, women can almost literally make human bodies as productive as machines. Lita's unconscious, unnatural, and machine-like body becomes Pauline's ideal for women's unambiguous production because it can painlessly and efficiently output a tangible good: a child. While "twilight sleep" allegedly offered women a choice about their deliveries, critics argued that it undermined women's agency over their own bodies by placing childbirth entirely under male doctors' authority.<sup>16</sup> Wharton presents both positions of the twilight sleep debate by contrasting the drug's effect on her two female characters and consequently exposing the dangers of the production craze to women's relationships within families. By organizing the younger woman's delivery,

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<sup>16</sup> For more information on the Twilight Sleep debate, see Bauer 92-3 and Eichorn 30-47.

Pauline can embody the choice-element of the “twilight sleep” debate and assume a privileged status akin to that of a doctor or manager. The drug also allows Pauline to combine her class and gender allegiances: she can evince their family’s wealth by purchasing the costly drug and she can use the drug to make childbirth a form of efficient production. Only Lita, who “drifted into motherhood” “lightly and unperceivingly,” experiences the disempowering effects of the drug (18). Pauline’s most successful attempt to produce unambiguously thus depends on dehumanizing her daughter-in-law, a problem not only for women’s solidarity, but also for her family’s unity.

The assumption underlying Pauline’s management of Lita’s childbirth – that children are the products of women’s work – is also a danger to the modern family’s sustainability. Because most products of women’s domestic work are abstract, including concepts like “efficiency” and “improvement,” the tangibility of a human product is attractive to the New Woman who wants to prove her ability to produce. However, by imaging children as products and therefore likening them to inanimate objects, Pauline further dehumanizes her kin and makes her family management a strange bastardization of ideal family care. Wharton implies that Pauline enjoys managing Lita’s body more than she celebrates her grandson’s birth to indicate the dehumanizing effect that Pauline’s exaltation of bodies over emotions has on her relatives.

Visiting her daughter-in-law and newborn grandchild in the hospital, Pauline exclaims,

It ought to be one of the loveliest, most poetic things in the world to have a baby,” Mrs. Manford declared, in that bright efficient voice which made loveliness and poetry sound like the attributes of an advanced industrialism, and babies something to be turned out in a series like Fords. (18)

Under Pauline’s “advanced industrialism,” both Lita’s working body and the infant’s produced body, compared both to a Ford and to a “wax-doll,” function as machines and attest to Pauline’s ability to manage and produce in the Machine Age (18). Pauline consequently lacks empathy for

these relatives she imagines as machines. Pauline ignores Lita's marital dissatisfaction and steadfastly opposes her desire for a divorce from Pauline's son Jim Wyant, though Pauline herself procured a divorce from a Wyant man as a young woman. Similarly, Lita's son, a nameless product of the Manford/Wyant family, seems to spend little time with his mother or grandmother, though Pauline advocates for the nursery's meticulous hygiene. Pauline's idealization of an emotionless, perfectly manageable family, the result of her maladaptive embrace of Taylorism in her personal life, therefore seems likely to oppress these children's maturation into emotionally complex and stable adults because they are treated as mass-produced goods.

Wharton indicates that this dehumanization in the Manford/Wyant family signifies a problem within American society as a whole when she shows Pauline exalting human bodies over human emotions outside the context of childbirth. Before Pauline is aware of her husband Dexter's budding infidelity, she prepares to meet with him to discuss the family's problems – the financial assistance of a distant cousin, their daughter-in-law Lita Wyant's restlessness, and, implicitly, the balance of power within their marriage – and Pauline explicitly admits that she wishes to homogenize people, eradicate these emotional concerns, and make “manageability” the standard for all humanity. She conjectures, “if she had had the standardizing of life, [she] would have begun with human hearts, and had them turned out in a series, all alike, rather than let them come into being haphazard, cranky, amateurish things,” a proposal to reduce human hearts to physical products rather than symbolic chambers of human emotion (168). As an advocate of domestic Taylorism, Pauline has become so accustomed to using the scientifically proven best way to perform any task that the unpredictability of human emotions and problems frustrates her highly organized plans. Consequently, Pauline fantasizes about expelling these deviations,



aiming to make humans identical and predictable. Wharton's violent ending to *Twilight Sleep* suggests that emotional problems will always disrupt this perfectly manageable dream world and that Pauline's attempt to treat humans as stoic machines will only prevent her from realizing her family's and her society's real problems. Wishing to dehumanize all humans, the "goddess of Velocity" evinces the most disturbing, antisocial consequences of the production craze (252).

Pauline's compulsive, semi-voluntary participation in the production craze generates a series of conflicting motivations, circular causations, and inexpressible ambiguities, all of which drive her toward stagnation and ironically make her by the novel's end a "more than ever resolutely two-dimensional" character (307). To trace the causes for Pauline's behavior is incredibly tortuous: she participates in the production craze in order to advance her gender status as a New Woman, but she also participates in consumptive and wasteful activities to demonstrate her family's upper-class status. She both chooses and is subject to these rival allegiances of class and gender, and the wealthy woman's only means for reconciling these two goals is to treat human bodies as machines she can manage. Yet because she values the human body for its ability to produce physically over human emotions which can only complicate an otherwise manageable world, Pauline cannot recognize or admit her family's emotional distress, which ultimately leads to the novel's climactic shooting of Pauline's daughter Nona Manford. After this disaster, Pauline cannot even admit that she has missed the clues to her family's distress because the positivist worldview of the production craze motivates her to ignore the negative repercussions of her work. In addition, her daughter Nona's injury affords Pauline an opportunity for conspicuous labor, to arrange for Nona's medical care and to plan an international vacation to escape the family's emotional problems. Ultimately, the upper class 1920s woman's exclusion from non-domestic forms of production underlies or aggravates all these conflicting motivations:

unable to separate her personally productive labor from her family life, the New Woman unintentionally transforms modern family life into a dysfunctional and wasteful business arrangement.

### III. THE PROFESSIONAL FATHER'S STAGNATION

Wharton presents in her character Dexter Manford of *Twilight Sleep* a portrait of an archetypal New Man, a social category that emerged around the turn of the twentieth century that referred to self-made, *nouveau riche* working men. Born a Midwestern farm boy but turned a successful New York lawyer, Dexter derives a “calm sense of mastery” from his professional work at the novel’s start and constantly strives to improve himself through personal study and physical exercise (53). Yet producing only professionally and intellectually is not satisfactory for the true New Man: applying the tenets of the production craze to his family life, Dexter’s sense of productivity also assumes a dangerously sexual manifestation. The prospect of more children, who bear their father’s name and attest to his ability to produce by simply existing, unconsciously drives Dexter to initiate the sexual affair that endangers the unity of his already existing family. Thus Wharton presents a gender inversion with her production-crazed couple: while the New Woman Pauline Manford’s plan for production involves professionalism and conspicuous work, the New Man’s idea of production increasingly turns toward the family despite his ability to produce individually outside the home. The man’s gender transgression proves dangerous because although Dexter’s pursuit of productivity focuses on the family, the New Man’s behaviors are necessarily individualistic and non-cooperative, driven by his fantasy of producing rather than the social reality of his familial obligations.

Dexter expresses his unconscious craving for paternity through an antimodern fantasy about farm life, a dream that transforms the reality of his complicated, modern family into an imaginary traditional family with an undisputed patriarchal line.<sup>17</sup> At one of his wife’s formal

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<sup>17</sup> Historian T.J. Jackson Lears defines antimodernism as “the recoil from an ‘overcivilized’ modern existence to more intense forms of physical and spiritual existence” that became prevalent in the late nineteenth century in the

dinner parties, Dexter attempts to escape the ultra-modern society Pauline brings into their home with a regressive fantasy in which he imagines an ideal family life. To Dexter, the guests, a heterogeneous clan of divorcees, opera aficionados, and young artists, represent the “unnatural” characteristics of modern society that his wife Pauline embodies, and he dreams of a more natural setting and a more traditional woman:

What he really wanted was a life in which professional interests as far reaching and absorbing as his own were somehow impossibly combined with great stretches of country quiet, books, horses and children – ah, children! Boys of his own – teaching them all sorts of country things; taking them for long trudges [...] all the boys and girls (girls too, more little Nonas) grouped around, hungry and tingling from their long tramp – and a woman lifting a calm face from her book: a woman who looked so absurdly young to be their mother; so – (71-2)

Through this daydream, Wharton first signals to her readers the sexual affair that forms the center of the novel’s drama; fantasizing about the “absurdly young” woman, Dexter’s eyes are drawn to Lita Wyant, his step-daughter-in-law, the wife of his wife’s son Jim. Importantly, Dexter’s fantasy about Lita is embedded within the language of productivity, preceded with mention of his “far reaching and absorbing” professional desires. Wharton suggests that for the New Man, a woman is valuable only if she serves his purpose of productivity and Dexter begins to pursue the young woman as a sexual partner, ignoring his middle-aged wife whose stylish and relentless pursuit of her own productivity would interfere with Dexter’s goals. While antimodernists generally countered the progressive ethos, Wharton here suggests that Dexter may combine his infatuation with the young woman and his antimodern fantasy to achieve his goal of being a productive modern man.

Garnering more of Dexter’s attention in this dream than his infatuation with Lita and his professional interests are children – children to instruct, to play with, to return home to. Lita, in

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United States and in Europe (xiii). Opposing the ideology of progress, antimodernists sought the return to the ostensibly simpler traditions of an agricultural society.

this interpretation of Dexter's dream, becomes of secondary importance, only useful to the man in his mid-fifties because of her youth and fertility, her ability to produce the children that will display his productivity and therefore augment his social power. Because of his unconscious desire to produce sexually and his more obvious longing for sexual pleasure, Dexter initiates the semi-incestuous, intergenerational affair that threatens the unity of the Manford/Wyant family and ultimately results in a gun accident, the dispersal of the family across the world, and Dexter's inability to produce professionally or sexually. While critics of *Twilight Sleep* have frequently neglected Dexter's significance in the novel, an analysis of the New Man's role as producer demonstrates the centrality of issues like paternity and masculinity to the eventual dissolution of the family in this text.<sup>18</sup> Through Dexter Manford's obsessive urge to produce more children via a woman's fertile body, Wharton depicts the ethos of progress as dangerous to the modern family because it emphasizes possible production over the reality of the emotional ties that bond family members and because it can justify inappropriate sexual desire. Thus while Dexter's and Pauline's specific definitions of productivity differ – her idea including conspicuous labor that expands the woman's sphere beyond domesticity and his definition centering on the reproduction of children – the couple's production-oriented activities achieve the same end: a disregard for the emotional components of family life.

Dexter also shares with his wife a non-progressive plotline; yet while Pauline's movement is compulsively circulatory, Dexter's trajectory is definitively downward because he has no hope of producing professionally, intellectually, or sexually after the family's dramatic

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<sup>18</sup> Critics of *Twilight Sleep* have frequently identified Pauline Manford as the central figure of Wharton's text and interpreted this character's hypocrisy and frivolity as markers of Wharton's satire on modern society without analyzing Dexter's role in that society. For example, Janet Beer Goodwyn problematizes Pauline's role as a home producer while regarding the New Man's labor as self-evident and ignoring the problems embedded within male productivity. Goodwyn terms Pauline's actions "a desperate parody of the New York Living of her husband," referring to Dexter's work as "the real thing" (95-6). I argue that Wharton questions specifically this notion of the man's "real" work.

discovery of his affair with Lita. At the end of the novel, caught having sex with his stepson's wife by his daughter Nona, Dexter appears "powerless and motionless" when his affair is exposed to the family (300). Later, Wharton reveals that although Dexter was once a successful lawyer, he lost his professional vigor after the discovery of his sexual liaison: "Manford's professional labours had become so exhausting that the doctors, fearing his accumulated fatigue might lead to a nervous break-down, had ordered a complete change and prolonged absence from affairs" (305). Dexter's attempt to use "the whole of him" to be productive has been disastrous, and he suffers from neurasthenia, a disease characterized by fatigue, depression, and enervation (71).<sup>19</sup> By depicting the productive lawyer's retrogressive transformation into a feeble, non-productive patient, Wharton again contradicts Taylor's belief in the various applications of scientific management to private life and demonstrates that even a professional man cannot be as incessantly productive as a machine.

Wharton demonstrates that Taylorism, when expressed through the man's fantasy of reproduction, makes human bodies both the agents of production and the goods produced, cyclical roles that exploit women by making the female body a tool for sexual productivity. Accepting unreservedly that productivity is the measure of human value, Dexter seeks unconsciously to use his own body and Lita's body to (re)produce more human bodies. As a result of this mode of thinking, Dexter, like the industrial managers who hired laborers for their physical abilities, selects Lita as a sexual partner because her body can produce children while his wife's body, about forty-five years old, is likely or soon to be sterile. Dexter's disparate impressions of Lita before and after her son's, his step-grandson's, birth make evident that he is attracted to the young woman for her fertile body. Dexter was not enamored with Lita before she

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<sup>19</sup> See Bederman 84-88 and Lears 47 for descriptions of neurasthenia.

became a mother, describing her as “positively ugly” (106). After she gives birth, however, the fifty-something-year-old man finds her appealing and he recalls that “as [Lita] lay in her pillows, a new shadowiness under her golden lashes, one petal of a hand hollowed under the little red head at her side, the vision struck his heart” (106). Wharton’s sensuous language in this passage highlights Dexter’s infatuation with the image of the mother and the son; her attention to color and shadow and the term “vision” emphasize that the middle aged man is attracted to Lita for her ability to produce a romanticized visual representation of sexual vitality.<sup>20</sup> It is Dexter’s mental manipulation of Lita’s image that makes this scene most ominous: after Lita’s “twilight sleep” induced, unnatural, and unconscious childbirth, Dexter constructs her as the image of natural maternal care. Dexter’s newfound affection for his daughter-in-law suggests that he imagines Lita can help produce the image of his personal productivity by birthing his fantasy children, and the young woman’s fertile body therefore becomes the tool for the middle-aged man’s imagined production.

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<sup>20</sup> Wharton implies again that this infant’s image suggests to Dexter the idea of patriarchal vitality when Dexter rehistoricizes Lita and her son and imagines that they resemble the Mother Mary and Jesus. After Lita floats into Cedarledge’s breakfast room, Dexter notices, “Her boy was perched on her shoulder and she looked like one of Crivelli’s enigmatic Madonnas carrying a little red-haired Jesus” (233). Given the position of the child high on the mother’s shoulder, the Carlo Crivelli painting is likely his *Virgin and Child* created in the late 1480s in Macerata. This painting shows the Virgin looking out at the viewer while the Child, in what the artist’s biographer deems “one of Crivelli’s tenderest representations of the Infant Christ,” looks up at his mother (Lightbrown 381). Dexter believes Lita is consciously making herself into this “vision” of maternal care, but it seems unlikely that the flapper Lita would have the knowledge of Renaissance art to self-consciously emulate this image (*TS* 106). However, the particular religious figure Dexter sees in Lita’s son implies the man’s construction of this similarity. The Son of God reveals his Father’s power by being that father incarnate; this child represents God’s plan and authority.

Dexter’s unconscious belief that Lita uses her son’s promise of patriarchy to allure him complicates Emily Orlando’s interpretation of men’s exploitative use of art in Wharton’s works. Tracing artistic representations of women through Wharton’s fiction, Orlando argues that male observers in her novels “repackage” women through art and “infuse them with various ideals or virtues” to meet their own “whims, wills, and wishes” (3). Orlando particularly reads Lita as “the tragic consequence of an American culture that elevates women to pedestals only to deny them power and voice,” and argues that Wharton portrays this dancer as a false “artist,” really as a body for manipulation by the male observer (196). While Dexter does inscribe his ideal of “country quiet” onto this woman and makes use of her body for his own goals, as Orlando argues, the man also impresses his needs and values upon the body of the baby boy (*TS* 71). While he invalidates the flapper’s cultural authority by making Lita the passive representation of his ideals, Dexter also assigns artistic agency to the young woman by arguing that she has consciously recreated Crivelli’s painting. In this scene, the passive being that he infuses more powerfully with his own ideal of patriarchal power is the child carried in the woman’s arms, the silent, nameless baby boy.

In the flapper's body, Wharton presents the perfect mix of activity and passivity that allows the New Man to inscribe his sexualized value of productivity upon it, stripping the modern woman of her alleged social freedom. Lita fits the flapper category perfectly: perpetually bored and incorrigibly forthright, this slender girl defends her freedom and enjoys her nights dancing and drinking with "mixed" company.<sup>21</sup> Although Lita is rarely interested in her own baby and would loathe the solitude of country-life, an analysis of her dancing demonstrates how Dexter can adapt her to his antimodern fantasy. As an accomplished dancer, Lita makes her body highly visible, urging her many spectators, including her step-father-in-law, to admire her sexual and agile frame. On the same night that Dexter imagines Lita as a domesticated wife in a farmhouse, the flapper displays her readiness for a more modern form of production, the Hollywood movie business, by dancing in front of a crowd. By noticing Lita's supple body, Dexter's perceptive daughter Nona is able to recognize the impending affair between her sister-in-law and her father.<sup>22</sup> Nona observes that even when Lita has the conscious ability to direct her body's movements, a privilege not available to her under the influence of "twilight sleep," external forces still seem to control the young woman's body. Nona notes that Lita's

sole affair was to shower radiance [...]. Her face was a small still flower on a swaying stalk; all her expression was in her body, in that long *legata* movement like a weaving of grasses under a breeze, a looping of little waves on the shore. (74-5)

Lita's energetic movement on the dance floor demonstrates her willingness and ability to use her body productively; with this dance, she even secures from her partner an audition with film director Serge Klawhammer, an opportunity to use her body to produce movies, not children, and

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<sup>21</sup> See Ann Douglas's book *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* for a description of flappers. See also G. Stanley Hall's "Flapper Americana Novissima" and H.L. Mencken's "The Flapper," both in Martha H. Patterson's *The American New Woman Revisited*.

<sup>22</sup> Critic Phillip Barrish identifies Nona as "Wharton's most powerful attempt to take the flapper seriously as a thinking, feeling, and [...] realist sensibility" because, although she socializes and dances with Lita, suggesting the body-orientation typical of the flapper, Nona earns "a unique intellectual status" as the only character willing to recognize her father's incestuous desire (98).



to secure financial independence with her dancing. While Lita seems to wield social agency in this scene, Wharton makes this agency ambivalent by emphasizing Lita's mental detachment from the actions of her body and employing passive natural imagery. Like "grasses under a breeze" and like only "*little waves*," Lita's actions seem to Nona to be part of larger movements over which she has no control; Nona's commentary intimates that Lita's body can be manipulated to meet another character's needs. Later in the evening, Lita evinces her lack of agency by forgoing her audition with Klawhammer, instead spending the night with Dexter. The young woman and her body therefore seem perfect for the New Man's needs: active enough to be sexually attractive, but passive enough to be manipulated for his purposes.

While Dexter manipulates Lita's body to accord with his antimodern fantasy about farm life and children, his fantasy also reveals his anxiety about his own body as a producing agent. Wharton shows how production for the middle-aged social professional is illusive: Dexter's work does not require physical labor, nor does it boast tangible products. Because the New Man wants to progress in every way possible, his inability to use his body at work denies him a physical mode of progress and damages his sense of self-worth. Wharton intimates that Dexter is attracted to an antimodern farm life as a corrective to his professional life because it provides for this physical means of production. A celebration of agricultural labor prefaces Dexter's fantasy about the "absurdly young" woman, marking the precedence of productivity in his mind. The dream transports Dexter far from his office and his mental work into a premodern world where he can physically prove his manly ability to produce.<sup>23</sup> The New Man envisions:

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<sup>23</sup> Gail Bederman explains that the term "manly" at the turn of the century connoted "all the moral, worthy attributes which the Victorian middle class admired in a man," such as independence, strength, and bravery (18). I use this term here because Dexter yearns for pre-modern notions of the admirable, productive man's power. "Manliness" diverges from "masculinity," which refers to traits any man, admirable or not, possessed (18).

Farming on a big scale, with all the modern appliances his forbears lacked, outdoing everybody in the county [...]. Using his brains, muscles, the whole of him, body and soul to do real things, bring about real results in the world. (71)

Dexter values continual improvement and implies that he could better improve himself and the world as a rural laborer. Although Dexter wants to escape the modern industrial society, he nevertheless wants to transport modern technology and the competitive spirit of capitalism into the agricultural environment, demonstrating his continued adherence to the ethos of progress. Considered in light of his professional dissatisfaction, Dexter's desire to use "the whole of him" to create "real" products aligns his dream with T.J. Jackson Lears's theory of antimodernism. Lears suggests that antimodern practices helped people adjust to the modern world, writing, "antimodern seekers nevertheless adapted those [premodern] symbols to modern ends," including the modern notion of productivity (xiii). For a wealthy Manhattanite in the 1920s, an antimodern fantasy might allow for mental escape from urban chaos without the sacrifice of modern productivity and its accompanying social prestige. Applied to the character Dexter Manford, Lears's theory suggests that his dream of the farm will ultimately help Dexter become a better modern producer by restoring his enthusiasm for legal work with physical labor, though Wharton focuses on the consequences of antimodernism for the family, not its potential usefulness to the individual man.

As a divorce lawyer, Dexter's professional labor generates the modern society he wants to escape; he facilitates the dissolution of traditional families, transforming patriarchal simplicity into complicated modernity. Reading *Twilight Sleep* as a modernist text that reveals the isolating effects of divorce and marriage on Wharton's characters, Jennifer Haytock contends that divorce "rips pieces of people away, leaving behind something less than honest," revealing "those differences and gaps between individuals" and the "lack of unity within the individual" (224,

216). While Haytock's sense of "lack of unity" refers to Pauline Manford's inability to understand her own motivations and her husband's actions, this idea can also be applied to Dexter's disdain for his own work and his longing for any alternative form of production. Haytock further argues that the dreadfulness of divorce in *Twilight Sleep* stems from the fact that it "does not serve financial or social gain but rather concerns an impossible quest for self-fulfillment" (219). For Dexter, however, it is precisely because divorce has an economic value that he cannot achieve self-fulfillment as it makes him the financial beneficiary of disjointed modernity. Earning a living by "rip[ping] pieces of people away," and facilitating the dissolution of the traditional family, Dexter himself becomes un-whole (Haytock 224).

This un-wholeness is reinforced by professional labor's dissociation of the mind and body, which causes Dexter to feel unfulfilled in his labor and explains his desire to use "the whole of him" in his farm life fantasy. Scientific management segregated mental and physical labor within the factory, reserving the former for the management and the latter for the workers (Taylor 38); according to Wharton's novel, this distribution of labor is not only tiresome for the physical laborers, but also for the upper-class men who feel dissociated from their bodies. Combined with his anxiety about his age, which can be interpreted as a fear of impending impotence, Dexter's dissatisfaction with his professionally useless body demonstrates how Taylor's prescription for a "subdivision" of labor can motivate an upper class man to pursue sexual production as a means to make his body functional (38). Looking in mirrors and complaining about his graying hair, Dexter reveals his anxiety about his body in the office and shows his antipathy for the dissociation of mental and physical labor. For example, after speaking to his office's typist, Dexter "always got up, squared his shoulders, and studied himself critically in the mirror over the mantelpiece, and hated her the more for having caused him to do

something so silly” (102). As a consequence of his physical non-productivity, Dexter self-consciously adjusts his body position in the presence of a woman, aware that sedentary labor and middle age have made his body embarrassingly useless.

A brief examination of Wharton’s next novel *The Children* helps establish the severity of the modern man’s need to produce in all aspects of life and the ultimate impossibility of this task as it makes evident another reason for a New Man’s yearning for sexual production: the perceived immortality through childbearing that professional success cannot promise. Depicting forty-six-year old Martin Boyne, a prosperous engineer who uses his body and mind in his work, but who tries and fails to establish familial productivity after devoting his youth solely to professional pursuits, Wharton underscores that professional accomplishments cannot quell the true modern man’s yearning for productivity because his work’s products are too temporary; only children can promise to evince a man’s productivity into old age. After unexpectedly befriending the children of his college friends Cliffe and Joyce Wheater on a transatlantic steamship, Martin begins to imagine he can achieve familial productivity as guardian to this ultra-modern, complicated group of seven children. The group includes four full Wheater siblings, three of whom were conceived before Cliffe and Joyce’s divorce while the fourth was born after their remarriage. The other three children are the results of Cliffe’s and Joyce’s marriages to other partners during their separation. Cliffe has a daughter Zinnie, his child with movie star Zinnia Lacrosse, and Joyce adopts her former stepchildren Astorre and Beatrice, her second husband Prince Buondelmonte’s two children from his first marriage to a lion tamer.<sup>24</sup> These modern parents are sexually over-productive as they gain social status through their remarriages and their children certainly need the care Martin hopes to provide: none of the

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<sup>24</sup> See Appendix B on page 80 for the Wheater family tree.

children receive formal education, their parents provide only material gifts, not emotional care, and they constantly fear separation from one another if Joyce and Cliffe divorce again. Martin's encounter with the Wheeler children therefore seems to promise him the ability to be productive in all areas of life, professionally and familiarly, even without conceiving biological children.

However, throughout the novel, Martin vacillates between the desire to manage this ultra-modern family and to produce his own more traditional family, as demonstrated by his attraction to the Wheeler's oldest child, sixteen-year-old Judith Wheeler. Because only producing biological children promises immortality for a father, merely caring for children cannot satisfy the New Man's need to produce sexually. Martin variously constructs Judith as a child, a member of the group of functionally orphaned Wheelers, and as the children's mother, a marriageable woman who could help him produce children. Martin's early attraction to the Wheeler clan embodies this conflict. Like Dexter Manford's initial infatuation with Lita Wyant, Martin's pursuit of familial productivity starts with the sight of fertile young woman cradling a healthy baby boy:

His attention had been drawn to a young woman – a slip of a girl, rather – with a round, flushed baby on her shoulder, a baby much too heavy for her slender frame, but on whose sleepy countenance her own was bent with a gaze of solicitude which wrung a murmur of admiration from Boyne. (3)

The two figures Martin observes are the Wheelers' eldest child Judith and their youngest child Chipstone, but because Martin does not yet realize that they are his friends' children, he assumes Judith to be the child's mother and is impressed by her maternal care. While this moment initiates Martin's confused attraction to the teenage Judith, his gaze in this scene is not directed toward the girl's unique beauty but rather toward the healthy color and weight of the boy she carries (6). This scene simultaneously suggests that Martin unconsciously considers Judith a potential producer of his own children and that he is more invested in the children's "warm

animal life,” their infantile camaraderie that makes Martin forget the pressures of modern life (45). As Julie Olin-Ammentorp contends in her reading of Martin’s guardianship as a mid-life crisis, a quest to find immortal meaning for his mortal life, the middle-aged man is attracted to Judith both as a sexual partner and as his ally as they care for the younger children. Martin’s changing attraction to Judith throughout the novel therefore represents his search for a definition of familial productivity, either as sexual reproduction or as care for and companionship with a group of children.

In the final chapter of *The Children*, Martin Boyne embodies a plotline nearly as non-progressive as his predecessor Dexter Manford’s. After Judith refuses marriage to Martin by misinterpreting his proposal as an offer of adoption, the embarrassed New Man returns to Brazil for “three years of work and accomplishment” (335).<sup>25</sup> On a brief vacation to Europe, Martin encounters the Wheater family at a resort, and, peering into the hotel’s ballroom, spots his once-beloved Judith dancing with a man about her age, surrounded by her peers. Wharton dramatically highlights the difference between Judith’s current life with her would-have-been life with the

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<sup>25</sup> Wharton suggests that Martin will respond to the failure of his family production with professional work earlier in the novel by showing his misuse of a cradle, the children’s misguided gift to celebrate Martin’s brief engagement to his oldest friend. Although both Martin and his fiancé are in their mid-forties and likely incapable of conception, the Wheaters assume the couple’s marriage will result in a large family. Sneaking the cradle into Martin’s apartment, the children leave Martin a note that reads: “Because you have been like a father to us we hope and pray you will soon be a real father to a lot of lovely little children, and they will all sleep in this cradle” (255). While the children are quite obviously mistaken in this hope, they nonetheless have recognized Boyne’s secret desire to produce a family. Flustered by this bizarre yet poignant gift, “Boyne sat and laughed and laughed until a nervous spinster in the next room banged on the wall and called out venomously: ‘I can hear every word you’re both saying’” (256). Even the spinster assumes that this middle-aged man is not alone and the fact that this woman on the other side of the wall mirrors his fate seems to contribute to Martin’s strange laughing fit. Martin’s patriarchal fantasy has been recognized, exposed, and his childless, spouseless fate emphasizes the neurotic nature of his fantasy. When Martin places his work boots in the cradle, appropriate symbols of his productivity as an engineer, and Judith consequently reprimands him for the cradle’s misuse, Martin responds with uncharacteristic anger: “‘Well hang it, you know – I’ve nothing else to put in it just at present,’ he cried defiantly” (267). Judith questions his bachelorhood, a status encouraged by the travel inherent in his work as an engineer, and Martin fervently defends the productivity of his professional labor. Yet Martin’s anger displays not only his belief in his right as a productive man to replace work for children, but also his frustration at not being productive in all areas of life.

man outside by contrasting the “blur of light and colour,” the “splashes of brightness” in the ballroom with the “faint wind from the sea that drove the wet air against [Martin’s] face,” masking his tears (345). All the productive pleasure Martin has earned in his professional labors are eradicated in this moment when he sees the woman that could have advanced his fantasy of patriarchal production dancing before him with a much younger man. Wharton ends her book with the image of Martin again returning to his engineering job, though without the suggestion that his professional productivity can again conceal his failure to produce familially. The novel’s final words read: “Two days afterward, the ship which had brought him to Europe started on her voyage back to Brazil. On her deck stood Boyne, a lonely man” (347). Crossing the ocean four times throughout the text in an unsuccessful quest to be productive in all areas of his life, Martin Boyne’s circuitous journey emphasizes the failure of his pursuit of productivity to promote personal progress.<sup>26</sup>

In light of this successful architect’s failure to produce or manage effectively, Dexter Manford’s need to produce children to compensate for his already disappointing professional work seems even more vital for his modern manhood. Through Dexter and Martin’s shared fascination with baby boys, Wharton may be referring to contemporary psychologist G. Stanley Hall’s theory for improving men’s professional work with the reproduction of children. Noticing a pervasive fear of decreasing vitality among American men in the early twentieth century and a correlation between professional success and sexual effeteness, Hall believed that the overcivilization of American culture threatened upper class, white manhood by restraining men’s

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<sup>26</sup> Even a reading of Martin’s torment at the end of the novel as true anguish from unrequited love for the teenage Judith can also underscore the value of productivity in modern society. Interpreting *The Children* as Wharton’s praise for chosen families, Judith Saunders frames Martin’s decision to return to South America for an engineering job instead of marrying teenage Judith Wheater as an altruistic renunciation of his evolutionary fitness. To consider this analysis in terms of the productivity craze then amplifies Martin’s altruism; Martin not only sacrifices his immortality in future generations when he accepts renounces marriage to Judith, but he also surrenders his current social power because he does not achieve familial productivity.

sexual impulses and sublimating these energies into business activities. By channeling sexual energy into professional work, this overcivilization ironically turned men into neurasthenic, effete patients and therefore poor laborers. Hall's suggestion for mitigating the symptoms of neurasthenia included the production of male children who could help the New Men adjust to the modern world and revitalize their abilities to work as professionals. Contending that boys recapitulated the entire history of human development, Hall argued that by playing with their sons, grown men could salvage their primitive, animalistic, and sexual power.<sup>27</sup> According to this theory, the overcivilized adult man would, as historian Gail Bederman explains, "rediscover [his] lost passions in the primitive emotions of his sons" and these recovered passions would reenergize him for productive work (95). Hall would argue that Dexter Manford's failure to ever father a son of his own is lethal to his ability to produce professionally, but that Dexter's antimodern fantasy about children promises to make him a better professional laborer.

In *Twilight Sleep*, Dexter's dream of agricultural life therefore seems to adhere to the adaptive function of antimodernism that Lears suggests by introducing sexual virility as an alternative for the man's professional productivity because this physical mode of production can remedy his dissociation from his body. A close reading of Dexter's dream reveals that, in parallel with Hall's theory, Dexter's fantasy focuses on the production of male children in particular, suggesting that biological sons are best able to attest to their father's productivity. Dexter fantasizes, "Ah, children! Boys of his own – teaching them all sorts of country things; taking them for long trudges [...] all the boys and girls (girls too, more little Nonas) grouped around, hungry and tingling from their long tramp" (71-2). He longs for "boys of his own" and although

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<sup>27</sup> Hall encouraged rambunctious and unrestrained play for boys because these "primitive" experiences would allow them to circumvent the neurasthenia suffered by their fathers. Girls, he believed, were naturally more docile. See Bederman 97.



he envisions more daughters, female children seem to be afterthoughts for Dexter; it is only with boys that he plans to engage actively, to teach them and hike with them. Dexter's active plans involve using the "whole of him" in his interactions with these boys, suggesting that male children could indeed make this modern man join his body and his mind, augmenting his future productivity (71). As a result, these imaginary sons also seem innately more productive than Dexter's imaginary daughters, perhaps because these imagined boys would be able to propagate the cycle of male productivity. To the New Man, the pursuit of sexual production seems a practical and long-term solution to his dissatisfaction with professional work, but Wharton depicts this pursuit as temporarily pleasurable but ultimately disastrous to the man's and the family's progress when it induces symbolic incest.

Although Dexter has fathered Nona and raised his stepson Jim, this fantasy suggests that biological sons would be more valuable to him than these children of his modern marriage to Pauline. In the 1920s, the New Man did not require a male heir to inherit his fortune; psychological need, not economic need, generates Dexter's desire for sons. Dexter seems to want to establish a satisfyingly simple, patriarchal family structure with the production of male children, recoiling from the absurdly divorce-laden society in which Pauline's secretary "must make out a list of people as long as a crossword puzzle, to prevent [Pauline] calling people by the wrong names"(30).<sup>28</sup> Dexter's dream provides an alternative to this modern reality and represents what literary critic Floyd Dell termed a "patriarchal attitude of mind," the modern person's neurotic desire to restore patriarchal society (48). In his book *Love in the Machine Age* (1930), Dell argued that American society in the early twentieth century was transitioning out of

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<sup>28</sup> Between 1867 and 1929, the number of divorces in the United States increased by two thousand percent while marriages only increased by about four hundred percent (Cahen 21). By 1929, eighteen percent of all American marriages ended in divorce (Cahen 15). For an analysis of marriage and divorce practices in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century America, see May.

a patriarchal system, characterized by the authoritative father, the prevalence of arranged marriage, and the escapist opportunities like adultery, and into a modern society, characterized by love matches, children's independence from their parents, and social equality between men and women. Dell argues that middle-aged individuals at this time instinctively clung to patriarchal customs because they were "confused by the contradictions between the precepts upon which they have been brought up and the mores to which they seek to adjust themselves," resulting in psychological immaturity (50). Dexter's fantasy constitutes a specifically production-oriented version of the patriarchal attitude of mind; an apt term for the middle-aged man's fascination with male children is fantasy of patriarchal production. This phrase emphasizes not only the New Man's desire to produce goods on a successful farm, but also to produce children and to produce a patriarchal family structure. To Dexter, the fantasy of patriarchal production either represents a plausible response to the modern social structure he loathes by combining his vision of using "the whole of him" with the desire to be productive according to modern standards or represents a delusional negation of modern social standards for a more comforting fantasy (71). In either case, the fantasy of patriarchal production allows the modern man to exalt a self-centered desire that endangers his family's unity.

Infatuated with the image of the baby boy, Dexter recklessly fails to consider the potential consequences of the fantasy of patriarchal production, such as: What would happen if Lita did become pregnant? Would he claim the child as his own or keep his semi-incestuous affair a secret? How would his daughter Nona react to having a half-sibling mothered by her closest friend and sister-in-law? The predictable failure of Dexter's adjustment to modern life through sexual production displays what Phillip Barrish identifies as the novel's "catastrophic real" that only Dexter's daughter Nona can acknowledge: the "inherently self-destructive inner

nature of civilization and law themselves” (99). Reading Dexter as a symbol of civilization because of his roles as father and lawyer, Barrish sees Dexter’s incestuous desire for Lita as representative of modern society’s propensity to implosion. This interpretation helps elucidate Wharton’s critique of the production craze by connecting the family’s problems with broader social problems, but Barrish’s theory requires an important qualification. While Barrish is invested in Nona’s recognition of the reality her relatives ignore, it is essential to note that the *fantasy* of paternity motivates the reality of self-destructive sex. At the end of *Twilight Sleep*, Wharton depicts Dexter Manford as incapable of producing professionally or sexually, dramatically highlighting the failure of the antimodern fantasy to serve any modern purpose. Because the tenets of the production craze value potential production over familial relationships, the New Man’s pursuit of sexual production does not help stabilize the modern family and, conflicting with G. Stanley Hall’s theory on male enervation, sexual production does not revitalize the aging man as a professional laborer. Taking an extended vacation from professional affairs and traveling with his wife to Egypt, the “powerless and motionless” Dexter Manford retreats from the pursuit of production and passively submits to the “spinning and spinning” “artificial activity” of his wife’s modern world that he once reviled (300, 71). While the man’s professional labor can help the modern family carve out a respected social position in the chaotic society, his pursuit of sexual productivity threatens to break up his family, revealing what Haytock terms “those differences and gaps between individuals” and therefore reducing the father’s social power (216). Furthermore, because the New Man’s idea of production requires his misuse of a young woman’s body as a tool, the interpersonal complication that determines his failure, even his idea of physical production is indirect; Dexter cannot correct his dissociation from his body by becoming the middle manager for a young woman’s childbirth. When the

fantasy of patriarchal production collides with the realities of sex and family care, Dexter Manford loses the ability to produce or progress.

At the novel's end, the fantasy of patriarchal production generates a physical threat to the Manford/Wyant family because it forces a competition for patriarchal authority between men. In the patriarchal system Dexter seems committed to restoring, there can only be one authoritative father. However, divorce is absurdly common in Wharton's portrayal of modern New York society, a trend that disrupts the linear patriarchal structure, forces father figures to battle for patriarchal status, and makes male children particularly valuable as possible connections to a more traditional family order. Based on these assumptions, the chaotic gun accident represents a competition between Dexter Manford and Pauline's first husband Arthur Wyant to be the joint family's authoritative father, a goal they both frame in terms of family values but seems more powerfully motivated by their respective quests for personal productivity.<sup>29</sup> The New Man's retrogress at the novel's conclusion, his inability to produce either children or labor, represents the production craze's wasting of individuals. Yet the social effects of Dexter's Manford's production efforts are even more damaging: when the family's caregiver and Dexter's daughter Nona is shot trying to prevent her father's affair, the Manford/Wyant family essentially disbands.

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<sup>29</sup> This competition is symbolically enacted even before the novel's violent ending when Dexter Manford and Arthur Wyant individually claim a John Singer Sargent portrait of Jim Wyant as a young boy. When Arthur Wyant visits Pauline at Cedarledge, the country home they shared as a married couple twenty years earlier, the Old New York man realizes the transfer of his patriarchal authority to his ex-wife's second husband and demands of Pauline: "Damn it, am I in my own house or another man's?" (293). This question assumes greater import as he searches for the portrait of Jim that once hung over his writing-table. Uncharacteristically flustered, Pauline reveals that the portrait had years earlier been moved to Dexter's office, excusing the movement by reminding Arthur, "You know how devoted Dexter is to Jim" (287). Though Pauline's excuse appeals to cooperative family care, the painting's movement from one man's workspace to another's man's workspace highlights the boy's image as a representation of individual, male productivity. When Arthur later views the portrait of Jim, "it went through and through him," and the aging man's emotional response suggests he may regret losing patriarchal power after his divorce from Pauline. (292). Arthur's intrusion into his ex-wife's husband's office in order to gaze at this image of patriarchal productivity thus expresses a potentially dangerous intention to recover this lost power.

In *Twilight Sleep*, Wharton critiques the disjointed modern family as a worthless institution incapable of producing cooperatively or aiding individual members, yet she also condemns the traditional, idealized family as a maladaptive solution to these modern family problems, a dual critique that pessimistically presents any concept of family progress in the 1920s as unfeasible.

## IV. YOUNG WOMEN'S CONSUMPTION AND RETROGRESS

In the 1920s, Americans became fascinated with youth culture. Associating young people with everything that seemed new – jazz music, sexual freedom, and changing family structures—members of the older generation feverishly examined youth's behaviors and frequently judged them as hedonist, disillusioned, and heedless of authority.<sup>30</sup> These critics frequently bemoaned that 1920s youth behaved as a group, naming them a homogenous generation with shared goals and interests, foremost among them scorning their parents. In a 1926 *New York Times* article titled "The Mass Training of Youth," an editorialist suggested that industrialism's rule over the home was to blame both for this sameness across youth and for their debauched activities: "The home is no more. Once an industrial plant of the first order, producing its toys and its music, its teaching and nursing, its cooking and its very spanking first-hand, [the home] now imports them all." According to this narrative, 1920s youth were raised as consumers rather than producers, trained to be both faddish and greedy. The unknowable consequences of the younger generation's mass upbringing disconcerted this critic, and she questioned, "Can any one undo it all, or would he if he could?" This lingering question suggests that the dual functions of production and consumption, contradictory and yet necessary for each other's existence, generated an irreversible change in human society at the start of the twentieth century. The progress of 1920s youth, the children of production-obsessed New Women and New Men but raised in conspicuously consumptive homes, seemed entirely unpredictable and yet intimately connected to America's potential prosperity. In her analysis of 1920s youth's role in the process

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<sup>30</sup> See Fass 17-25 and Dolan 11-15, 42. Fass and Dolan both explain that this fascination centered on non-immigrant, white, middle and upper class youth. As Fass explains, critics only addressed black youth culture in terms of the allegedly demoralizing effects of jazz on white youth (22). Griffith critiques Wharton's exclusive focus on white youth, interpreting *Twilight Sleep* as a product of Wharton's racism and her antipathy for jazz culture.

of social change, Paula Fass confirms that that editorialist above was not alone in the belief that contemporary youth culture promised a radically different national future. Fass identifies two prominent viewpoints on youth: that of “traditionalists,” who imagined young people’s behaviors generated and reflected social disorder, and that of “progressives,” who imagined youth’s rebellions against traditional culture promised to improve society (15). Believing young people’s promise paralleled the future of American society, neither traditionalists nor progressives questioned that youth culture did represent something wholly new and foreign to their parent’s society.

Yet for all their apparent originality – their attendance at all-night cabarets, their tawdry new fashions, their outspokenness – young people in Wharton’s late novels seem vacuous copies not only of one another, but of their parents as well. These characters do not embody innovation and advancement, but instead seem destined to repeat almost exactly the lives of Wharton’s middle-aged protagonists, whose progress through production is itself stunted. In her 1925 novel *The Mother’s Recompense*, Wharton makes this view evident through the voice of her protagonist, forty-something Kate Clephane, who at the novel’s start returns to the New York City home and the child she left nearly twenty years earlier to escaping her husband’s self-righteous oppression. Upon her reunion with her now grown daughter Anne Clephane, Kate finds “a new, an absolutely new, Fifth Avenue,” but the street’s inhabitants strike her as strangely familiar (32). Meeting again her deceased husband’s family, Kate suggests that the newness of modern society is only a façade for tradition when she remarks that “the faces were the same, or so alike that they seemed merely rejuvenated issues of the same coinage” (201). By employing the image of the coin, Wharton links this social monotony to booming American businesses that seemed to promote progress, and intimates instead that even the youngest

Americans were only copies of their conformist kin as a result of industrialism. Kate announces her belief in youth's masked conventionality even more explicitly as she observes a crowd of young people dancing and remarks,

Again the sameness of the American Face encompassed her with its innocent uniformity. How many of them it seemed to take to make up a single individuality! [...] She saw again, with gathering wonder, that one may be young and handsome and healthy and eager, and yet unable, out of such rich elements, to evolve a personality. (71)

That these young people have all the raw materials to develop a personality and yet remain “unable” to “evolve” suggests an impediment in their environment. Considered in light of her likening of the American and the coin, Wharton seems here to suggest that children raised during the production craze, in business-like homes and amongst consumer goods, possess only confused notions of selfhood and consequently resemble the mass-produced products made in actual factories. While Wharton's contemporaries imagined youth would generate a new era of American culture, the author depicts young people who do not embody progress, but rather repeat their parents' lives or disappear from society entirely. Young characters' inability to escape their parents' production craze magnifies Wharton's challenge to the correlation between production and progress: when children cannot progress, the interconnected dissolutions of the family and of American society are absolute and irreversible.

Because women's limited opportunities largely determine the modern family's failure under the production craze, as Pauline Manford's replacement of family-based activities with the pursuit of individual productivity makes evident, the prolonged stagnation of young women in particular portends disastrous consequences for the American family's future. In *Twilight Sleep*, Wharton never indicates that Nona Manford or Lita Wyant have any academic or professional opportunities, but repeatedly invokes the cultural expectation that these wealthy young women will marry, thus locating these young women's suppression at the intersection of business,



educational, and gender prejudices. Analyzing young women's willing embrace of retrogressive family roles in Wharton's late novels, Melanie Dawson suggests that the cultural discourse of the 1920s provided the family with the means for domesticating modern women; Dawson contends that Wharton "interrogates the impossibility of [women's] personal success within a culture that views monogamy and motherhood as liberated choices," citing the pseudo-science sexology and the stagnation of the post-suffrage women's movement as manifestations of this antimodern view. Raised in societies that laud domesticity, marriage, and childcare as modern, Wharton's young women internalize conservative family values and eventually become complicit in their own suppression. When combined with the individualizing effects of the production craze, this exaltation of women's traditional work grants the modern family the unintentional and unconscious power to oppress young women's development, prolonging the dangerous trend of blending cooperative duties with individual pursuits of productivity. At the end of *Twilight Sleep*, Lita Wyant, like her mother-in-law Pauline Manford, cannot escape the confines of the home, and returning unhappily to her husband and child, she surrenders her dream of becoming a professional dancer. Throughout the text, Lita cannot even control the most tangible and personal facet of her life – her body – because her mother-in-law Pauline and her stepfather-in-law Dexter both make use of it for their own productions. A similar fate befalls Anne Clephane, the young flapper and aspiring artist of Wharton's previous novel *The Mother's Recompense*, who likely forgoes her artistic endeavors when she marries a suave and manipulative older man. Interpreted in terms of the production craze, these modern women's traditionally feminine roles suggests that their confinement to the home somehow aids or represents other characters' production efforts; young women, with their fertile bodies to propagate patriarchal power, their consumptive activities to demonstrate the family's class status, and their family care that allows men to

produce outside the home, are more useful to the modern family in a traditionally domestic rather than ambitiously modern subjects, and consequently these young women lose any sense of independent selfhood.

Even Wharton's narrative style in her late novels denotes the problem of women's confinement to the home and consequently of American society's future prosperity. With the exception of Nona from *Twilight Sleep*, whose narrative generally centers on observations of others' actions, Wharton does not provide readers with an examination of young women's interiorities. Frequently scrutinized by adult characters, the motivations for flappers' behaviors constitute a major question in Wharton's late novels. Examining the prevalence of absent children in Wharton's fiction, Jean Franz Blackall argues that the childless author depicts young characters in a *tableau vivant* style to avoid misrepresenting youth while examining family issues. Blackall asserts, "By translating the character of the child into an assertive but unseen or mute presence [...] [Wharton] redirects our attention as readers to the complexity of adult responses to that fact that children must be reckoned with" without compromising the realism of her fiction (4). Blackall's insight explains Wharton's stylistic choice to depict very young characters like the Wheeler children in *The Children* through the eyes of an adult narrator, but it seems less applicable to her representations of twenty-something youth like Lita Wyant of *Twilight Sleep* or Anne Clephane of *The Mother's Recompense*. If considered in terms of production and progress, Wharton's narrative neglect of these young women's interiorities seems to echo her character Kate Clephane's argument that young Americans fail to "evolve a personality," or a mode for self-expression independent of older characters' production efforts (MR 71). Wharton depicts this blankness, this shocking lack of newness in youth culture, as

ominous because it suggests production-crazed American society cannot progress because it exalts current production over future prosperity.

In *The Mother's Recompense*, Wharton provides a subtle critique of the production craze by suggesting an association between the non-progressive plight of twenty-one-year old Anne Clephane and Machine Age technologies, and this text thus serves as a foundation for her more extensive critique in *Twilight Sleep* two years later. Depicting Anne Clephane and her mother Kate Clephane as identical in appearance and mannerisms, Wharton intimates that their similitude signals an effacement of the younger woman's personality when she portrays even the most forceful aspects of Anne's character as reflections on her mother's life. Though describing Anne as strong-willed, financially independent woman, Wharton suggests a source for this independence in her mother's Kate's defiant flee from her husband and Anne's father John Clephane and from Old New York conventions about family life and sexuality. When Kate laments her daughter's choice of husband to a family friend, the confidant explains to the mother that Anne's determination will outweigh any relative's reservations. Kate interprets, "What he was trying to say was that, on the whole, given the girl's self-will, and taking into account her ... well, her peculiar heredity [...] the family had probably adopted the safest course in accepting the situation," crediting Anne's "violence of feeling" to her own rebellions (199). However, an interpretation of Anne's "peculiar heredity" that does not invoke Kate's defiance of Old New York conventions is also possible; Anne's strong will can also be read as obstinacy, a steadfast adherence to conventionality that aligns her "violence of feeling" far more with her father's traditionalism. An understanding of Anne's "heredity" as ambiguous, as either a repetition of her mother's rebellions or a manifestation of her father's traditions, emphasizes the idea that women exert only limited agency: Kate gave Anne her looks, but quite possibly nothing of her

personality, and Anne seems not a fully developed person, but only the product of her parents' ideologies. Wharton's plot further dramatizes Anne as a repetition of her mother: at the novel's end, when Anne marries Chris Fenno, an army major about ten years her senior and her mother's former lover, unaware of the other couple's relationship. Anne's non-progressive narrative therefore follows a repeated life, but because Anne does not escape the oppression of a patriarchal marriage as her mother did, her life exemplifies not just stasis, but retrogress.<sup>31</sup>

Repeatedly employing the image of a revolving staircase in *The Mother's Recompense*, Wharton suggests that young women's new interests like cabaret, cosmetics, and jazz represent only the false appearance of progress. Wharton intimates that flappers' continual searches for thrills evince not their boldness or novelty, but rather their stagnation and monotony as a result of the production craze. When the novel's protagonist Kate Clephane reflects upon her surprisingly smooth transition back into New York society, she develops a theory on the cyclical nature of modern American life based upon an escalator's movement. Though Kate does not realize its applicability to her daughter, this image perfectly represents Anne's function as a repetition. After speaking with an old friend about New York City customs, Kate muses

Like every one else about her, he was caught up in the irresistible flow of existence, which somehow reminded her less of a mighty river tensing seaward than of a moving stairway revolving on itself. "Only they all think it's a river..." she mused. (57)

Through Kate's observation, Wharton depicts the replacement of nature's power with the rationalization of modern technology, suggesting that modern industrial America recycles traditional ideas and behaviors, masking their conventionality with flashy fashions and scandalous entertainments. Her image of the escalator insinuates that younger generations will

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<sup>31</sup>Analyzing *The Mother's Recompense* within the genre of sensationalism, Heller names Kate Clephane's silence about her sexuality and affair with Fenno a literary boon because it "gives birth to words, rich interior monologues" and reads Anne as a less interesting version of her mother, an "ignorant and unintellectual" "innocent blank slate" because she never knows of her mother's liberated sexuality (139).

not improve American society because their modern lives – their mass enthusiasm for all the “new” thrills that technology and consumptive culture seem to promise – ironically doom them to repeat their parents’ lives. Even Anne, whose interest in art and conservative dress distinguish her from her flapper peers, cannot escape the fate of her generation; the power of production and consumption cycle over youth culture thus seems absolute and unavoidable.

Despite the novel’s semi-incestuous ending, Anne and Kate Clephane’s sameness has frequently been read as a positive representation of women’s mutual understanding. Susan Goodman interprets the similarity between the mothers and daughters in Wharton’s fiction as the author’s method for fictionally reconciling her relationship with her own mother. Of *The Mother’s Recompense* she writes, “Kate Clephane and her daughter are antagonists because they are in many ways twins,” offering readers, if not the characters, the opportunity to see a mother and daughter’s overlapping perspectives as they each work “to fashion an identity that is consistent with societal definitions of motherhood” (129). Examining the novel’s potentially feminist purpose, Nicole Tonkovich reads Kate and Anne’s relationship as an egalitarian and self-sufficient unity that allows the “physically indistinguishable” women “an exclusive and potentially homoerotic attachment that excludes heterosexual exchange” and transgresses the standards of the novel of manners, a genre based upon the masculine world of capitalist exchange (17). Though these readings are useful for imagining non-traditional relationships between mothers and daughters in Wharton’s late fiction, in the context of Wharton’s frequent invocation of Machine Age technology and the women’s shared lover Chris Fenno, the mother and daughter’s unity seems largely based on the male-centered institutions of the patriarchal family and industry, a foundation that renders the women’s similitude ambiguous at best. When Anne Clephane cannot fashion an independent sense of self or means for personal production

because these institutions constrain her opportunities, her life's resemblance to her mother's past seems a necessary repetition, not a willfully generated form of female-centric egalitarianism.

Employing symbols of modern technology and mass production, Wharton depicts the problematic merger of these two women's lives from the novel's start, criticizing the effects of industrialization on personal life when it makes people as interchangeable as mass-produced goods. When Kate Clephane first returns to New York City, she recognizes her daughter by seeing herself and her late husband in the young woman's face; Kate imagines when she looks at Anne, "There was her whole youth, her whole married past, in that small pale oval [...] and John Clephane's straight rather heavy nose" (29). Though Kate praises the young woman's eyes as "her own" and "such an improvement on anything we had in stock," her exclamation as a whole frames Anne as a canvas for her parents' imprint, and this observation serves as an omen for Anne's future marriage to her mother's lover in her father's home (29). Simultaneously, the daughter recognizes her mother from "a funny old photograph," and Wharton suggests that this media technology that became widely popular around the turn of the century contributes to the pair's resemblance (29). In his study of photographic metaphors in realist literature, Stuart Burrows argues that as a medium for mass dissemination, photography contributed to the creation of resemblances between people and types within realist and naturalist literature (3). According to his theory, as photography became popular, the mass-produced images within photographs seemed more real than the subjects photographed and the world's worth therefore depends more on its representation than on its reality (5). Burrows reads references to photography in realist literature as suggestive of modern subjects' increasing "indistinguishably," a phenomena that generates identity crisis because it forecloses opportunities for originality and creativity. That Anne Clephane looks like Kate Clephane and

Kate looks like a photograph of her younger self shows these women's images to be partially a function of a mass-market culture that "typifies" people. In light of Burrow's theory, Wharton's description of Anne and Kate's reunion with reference to photography suggests that Anne cannot escape her mother's reproduced identity in a culture that tacitly prides itself on mass-production.

In this world where people seem increasingly indistinguishable from one another, any opportunity for self-expression is highly valuable. Yet Anne repeatedly fails to express her individual tastes when afforded these opportunities, intimating the production craze's profound depersonalizing effect on the young woman's interiority. In many of Wharton's early and most famous novels, a woman's personalization of domestic space expresses her tastes, desires, and agency, a process especially valuable in a patriarchal society that does not typically allow women these possibilities. For example, in *The House of Mirth*, wealthy women like Bertha Dorset and Judy Trenor can exert social power by designing domestic space and controlling who enters it. Yet despite living in a more modern setting than these earlier characters, Anne Clephane cannot find a creative way to express her personality and agency through space because the production craze's encouragement of male production in all areas of life, including domestic life, forecloses this traditionally feminine venue to the young woman. Upon Kate Clephane's return to her late husband's home, she discovers that Anne has not redecorated, leaving the house exactly as John Clephane wished twenty years earlier. Kate observes of Anne's home: "In that fluid city, where the stoutest buildings seemed like atoms forever shaken into patterns by the rumble of Undergrounds and Elevateds – the house was the very one which had once been Kate's" (32). Considering Wharton's description of New York City as unstable and "shaken," it is tempting to read this passage as a positive preservation of stability in this overwhelmingly modern world. However, through Kate's memories of her late husband's home,

Wharton suggests that Anne's preservation of her father's home constitutes a problematic submission to patriarchal power, implies that the young woman behaves as mass-produced, non-progressive subject, and represents a reduction of women's opportunities for self-expression in modern industrial society. Kate's reveals the patriarchal power embodied within the home's design when she names describes it as

Her house, since she had been its mistress; but never hers in the sense of her having helped to make it. John Clephane lived by proverbs. One was that fools build houses for wise men to live in; so he had bought a fool's house, furniture and all, and moved into it on his marriage. [...] And here it all was again, untouched, unworn... (32)

Interpreted in terms of this memory, Anne's house seems not only the product of a man's decoration, but perhaps more dangerously the product of her father's ability to purchase goods and labor. Moreover, Kate's reflection that the home is not only "untouched" by a young woman's designs, but also "unworn," unused and uninhabited, reflects the modern young woman's inability to use the home not only as a place to assert agency, but also as a place to live, a place to develop and express a personality.

Although her decision not to redecorate her father's home suggests that Anne passively accepts her mass-produced personality, the young woman does actively attempt to express herself through the redecoration of her personal bedroom. However, because this room's confused decoration only represents the woman's struggle to establish and express an original identity negotiated through patriarchal power and industry's mass production of youth, it gives little indication of her personal tastes and interests. When Anne's mother Kate enters the young woman's bedroom, she declares that "The nursery, having changed its use, had perforce had to change its appearance," a sentence that constructs the room itself, not Anne, as the active force in its redecoration (33). The room is a clash of modern, faddish design – with deep colors, sparse design and Asian-influenced decorations – and masculine influences – with a "sober" aesthetic,



an “ungirlish” lack of sentimental trifles, and a row of unused books (33). This clash of styles represents Anne’s attempt to establish a non-clichéd feminine identity by incorporating masculinity, the dominant influence in the rest of her home, into the room’s décor. Kate’s hesitant remarks on the room suggest that this blending does not succeed in creating a new female identity, but only demonstrates the 1920s young woman’s confounded sense of self:

Not particularly original; but a sober handsome room and comfortable, through so far from ‘cosy.’ Kate wondered: “Is it her own idea, or is this what the new girl likes?” She recalled the pink and white trifles congesting her maiden bower, and felt as if a rather serious-minded son were showing her his study. [...] She didn’t believe many of the new girls had rooms like this. (33)

That the room is “comfortable” but not “cosy” underscores its formality and inappropriateness for a young woman and Wharton here suggests that Anne can be distinguished from other young women only by denying her femininity. In light of Wharton’s proclamation in *The Decoration of Houses* that any room “must not be ‘a library,’ or ‘a drawing-room,’ but the library or drawing-room best suited to the master or the mistress of the house which is being decorated,” Anne’s impersonal room seems only to express her lack of self-knowledge (17).

The problem of male influence over Anne’s life emerges not only in her attempts at self-expression, but perhaps more importantly in her attempts to produce. The one very personal item in Anne’s room is “a rough but vivid oil-sketch of a branch of magnolias” and Anne’s artistic ambitions seem to promise her progress beyond traditional family goals (34). As Anne’s stodgy grandmother’s exclamation that “she had never heard of anybody in the family having a studio” intimates, Anne’s art seems a healthy transgression of family conventions, even if it is essentially representational and not a very radical venture in terms of 1920s culture (39). However, a close examination of painting in Wharton’s text suggests that the influence of Anne’s father and husband-to-be and their ideas about production likely motivate the woman’s interest in art. First,

Wharton reveals the Clephane family's taste for copied paintings – “John Clephane's parents had travelled in the days when people still brought home copies of the Old Masters” – an interest in art that centers on preservation, not originality, and seems an apt reflection of Anne's repeated life (36). Second, by describing Anne's painting through Kate's narration, Wharton immediately compels readers to associate Anne's work with the girl's fiancé and the mother's ex-lover Chris Fenno and his artistic productivity. For Kate, discussing Anne's painting “called up a time when the vocabulary of the studio was forever in [Kate's] ears,” during her relationship with Chris, and the two women's conversation thus seems mediated by an absent man (34). Finally, Wharton's description of Anne's studio may support this interpretation: during the novel's two scenes set in the studio, Anne entertains party guests and flirts with her fiancé. The domestic pursuits and the absence of detailed description about her art indicate that Anne's interests have made her more successful in finding a husband than achieving artistic productivity. Read in conjunction with this male interest in painting and her mother's interest in the man who paints, even Anne's productive interest seems determined by society's movement as a “stairway revolving on itself” (57).

Based upon these assumptions about male influence on Anne's personality and production, Anne's passion for a much older army major with few financial resources and a dilettantish interest in art becomes understandable and sympathetic. The young woman's propensity to male influence, combined with the cultural exaltation of marriage and the confused notion of individuality among “mass-produced” youth, have likely make her malleable to this older man's needs. Anne willfully marries Chris Fenno, likely submits to his oppressive personality as her mother did to her father two decades earlier, and forgoes the opportunity to produce artistically outside the home. Through this character, Wharton demonstrates that by

internalizing her own subjugation, the 1920s youth embodies not just stasis, but retrogress.

Because her individual progress is arrested and confused by her father's patriarchal influence and industrial America's mass production of youth, Anne becomes a being produced by her family rather than a person who produces.

In her next novel *Twilight Sleep*, written two years after *The Mother's Recompense*, Wharton uses her character Lita Wyant to build upon the examination of young women's self-definition and expression during the production craze that she began with her depiction of Anne Clephane. In Wharton's later novel, the flapper's fall from radical potential to self-effacement is more devastating because Lita not only submits to the influence of male characters and male-centric industrialism, but she actively propagates the systems that oppress her. With a forthright personality reminiscent of Anne Clephane's "violence of feeling," Lita Wyant yearns to embrace new social customs that would allow her to work outside the home and end her disappointing marriage, and this woman therefore seems to embody the promise of social change that 1920s contemporaries imagined in youth (*MR* 199). Lita's plan to work as a dancer and actress, a modern career that would allow her to represent young women's changing roles, constitutes a challenge to traditional family order and the separation of the man's public sphere and the woman's domestic sphere. Her perpetual search for thrills and her perpetual boredom with the opportunities available to her – "Always the same old everything!" – hints at this desire to change social customs and discover new means for self-expression (194). Though Lita admits that she wants to divorce her husband Jim Wyant because he fails to entertain her, the young woman's real desire for a "new deal," new opportunities including sexual freedom and an independent income, poses a broader threat to traditional, patriarchal social customs (33,195). A question posited by Lita's more conservative sister-in-law Nona Manford makes this threat

apparent: “What would a woman like Lita be likely to do if she suddenly grew tired of the life she was leading?” (32). Considering that Nona’s own mother secured a divorce twenty years earlier, her question’s implications reach beyond the immediate problem of Lita’s unhappy marriage to Nona’s brother Jim Wyant and point moreover to Lita’s potential, as a woman who seemingly cannot be satisfied in *any* marriage, to radically alter the structure of society and family life.

However, by the novel’s end, Lita’s radical potential has entirely dissipated: unhappily married to Jim and denied the opportunity to audition for a Hollywood film, Lita is trapped in the traditional roles of wife and mother, responsibilities for which this restless, thrill-seeking flapper is particularly ill-suited. Satisfied that her marriage to Jim maintains the image of tradition, the Manford/Wyant family never addresses the reason for Lita’s marital unhappiness – unhappiness so profound that she sleeps with her stepfather-in-law likely in hopes of ending her marriage. After the family discovers and tacitly ends her and Dexter Manford’s affair by ignoring its discovery, Lita largely disappears from the text that has centered on the surveillance of her actions. Wharton’s last mention of Lita offers a clue about the dissolution of her radical potential: she and Jim are embarking on a “journey” to Paris, “where they would arrive in time for the late spring season, and Lita would see the Grand Prix, the new fashions and the new plays,” consumptive activities that provide Lita with the stimulation she needs to forget her marital discontent and prevent her from expressing her potentially radical goals (305). This final glimpse at the young woman’s life hints at the role of the production craze in her restoration to a traditional family: by providing Lita with the means to purchase goods that appease her boredom, the family transforms this potential producer into a passive consumer. Consumption is the only activity for which Lita’s family and society have trained her. Raised by an aunt whose

idea of production centers on performative decoration by making her home look exactly like a Viking dwelling and who purchases “rugs woven on handlooms in Abyssinia” to achieve this goal, Lita’s first model for a woman’s productivity depends on the consumption of expensive goods (132). Likewise, even Lita’s training for her would-be productive dancing is consumptive because she purchases dance lessons from the stylish spiritual leader the Mahatma. While her male peers may receive education and professional training, Lita only has the potential to purchase goods and it is consequently unsurprising that the family can appeal to this habit to abate her radical, productive desires. Though these consumptive activities hinder Lita’s personal progress, this is not their worst effect: the woman’s consumption propagates the production craze by creating a demand for mass-produced goods, thus promoting the dysfunctional application of industrial standards to personal life.

An analysis of Lita Wyant’s home decoration demonstrates how the male-centered institution of industrialism’s influence on the formerly feminine domain of the home confuses the consumptive woman’s self-identity and self-expression. Like Anne Clephane’s impersonally inherited home, Lita’s impersonally purchased, faddish living room gives no indication of her individuality and represents her only as a generic member of her social set. Consequently, the home’s flashy decorations, the “walls of pale buff silk,” and eclectic adornments like a “kakemono of a bearded sage,” reveal a likeness between the home’s owner and the mass-produced objects that adorn its walls (31). Discussing the two-year-old decoration of her home, Lita names her room “the typical *cliché* drawing-room [of] every one of the couples married the year [she and Jim] were,” demonstrating an awareness that the room only represents her as a member of her generation and implying that by hiring a fashionable interior designer she remained largely uninvolved in the design process (34). Like managers who embraced scientific

management, modern decorators produced thousands of identical living rooms for a particular cohort of consumers, making these homes as well as these women resemble the products of efficient, Taylorized factories. Wharton specifically berates the passive consumption of fashionable home designs in *The Decoration of Houses*; discussing the faults of mass-produced and poorly constructed furniture, Wharton explains “all this showy stuff has been produced in answer to increasing demand for cheap ‘effects’ in place of the unobtrusive merit and design,” (26). In the case of the character Lita Wyant, however, the decision to purchase goods seems dependent on her culturally encouraged desire to be fashionable and identical to her peers, not financial concerns. Lita’s choice to purchase a standard home design rather than to personalize her domestic space therefore represents her submission to the masculine world of business and the individual sacrifice of self-expression required by a consumer culture.

That Lita’s own consumption contributes to her containment to a traditionally feminine domestic role at the end of *Twilight Sleep* is ironic given that her flashy home is unsuitable for cooperative family life. With uncomfortable chairs, poor lighting, an unkempt nursery, and no working clocks, Lita’s home is hardly conducive to family gathering or childcare. Business-like and impersonal, the home, as Nona perceives, “looked, for all its nervous attention to ‘values,’ complementary colours, and the things the modern decorator lies awake over, more like the wait-room of a glorified railway station than the setting of an established way of life” (31). The similarities between Lita’s home and a train station imply that this home functions as an interim between more exciting, public spaces; the home is only a place for sleeping, the flapper’s “habitual escape from boredom between thrills” (240). Ann Douglas’s insight into the relationship between “terrible honesty,” the goal of 1920s youth to expose the “horrors of life” that Victorian customs attempted to mask, and domestic space helps explain the flapper’s

creation of a seemingly public home (33); Douglas describes, “To live in a house or apartment is apparently to be in a hazardous showcase situation. Your home is as liable to what Freud called ‘slips,’ unwanted giveaways of secret agendas, as you are” (34-5). By designing a home and embracing it as a representation of herself, a modern woman risked exposure as not modern enough, as a dishonest fraud. By making her home a complete “showcase,” an entirely public place and intended for performance, not personalization, Lita may avoid the horror of hiding a “horror” of her life (Douglas 33). By valuing her modernity over her individuality, Lita forgoes an opportunity to express her personality through space and promotes herself as a mass-produced woman. Moreover because her personal goal of “terrible honesty” clashes with family progress by refusing the Wyants a comfortable and personal home, Lita’s living room further shows the individualizing effects of the production craze in the home to be dysfunctional.

Not only is the impossibility of family progress indicated in this gaudy and impersonal home design, but it also represents the foreclosure of Lita’s individual progress in consumptive culture that has made personhood and especially womanhood a commodity. Drawing a connection between Lita and “the only life” in her drawing-room, “the agitations of the exotic goldfish in a huge spherical aquarium,” Wharton depicts consumer culture’s devaluation of individual life and a woman’s production (31). Because Wharton likens Lita twice to the fish, naming her “goldfish-coloured hair” and her appetite for “goldfish food,” the fate of these live decorations reveal the physical and moral dangers of the flapper lifestyle (33, 35). Nona observes that the goldfish “were but transients, since Lita insisted on having the aquarium illuminated night and day with electric bulbs, and the sleepless fish were always dying off and having to be replaced” (31). Lita’s incessant pursuit of stimulation, Wharton implies, not only will damage her physically, but will make her life purchasable and disposable, an aesthetic product to be

consumed. While Lita's acquaintances seem to value her for the spectacle she provides as a beauty and a dancer, this passage intimates that because Lita behaves as a generic member of her social set, she is interchangeable with any other flapper, and the consumerist society she enacts with her replacement of the fish will not mourn the loss of the young woman either.

The danger of passively consuming rather than actively producing becomes even more evident when Wharton shows Lita's consumption be a compulsion, making her complicit in her own restriction to the home. While Lita seems to realize that her drawing-room only suits her as a generic young woman, not as an individual, she proposes to remedy this problem by repeating the same mistake: purchasing a design rather than personally decorating her home. Complaining to Nona of her monotonous life in her typical house, Lita laments, "The first time Tommy Ardwin saw it – you know he's the new decorator – he said: 'Gracious, how familiar this all seems!' and began to whistle '*Home Sweet Home*'!" (34). Nona recognizes Ardwin's song as subtle advertisement, chastising her sister-in-law, "But of course he would, you simpleton! When what he wants is to be asked to do it over!" but Lita ignores this insight and remains hopeful that he could "reconcile [her] to this house" (34). Because Ardwin is both a dancer and a designer, his presence highlights the woman's choice between the home and the public world, a choice a man does not need to make. Lita's plan to create another "typical *cliché* drawing room" by hiring the popular "new" decorator reveals her preference for production outside the home (34); uninterested in making a home "the setting of an established way of life," Lita fails to develop a sense of personal taste and forgoes an opportunity for self-expression (31). Considered in light of Lita's other repeated purchases, "perpetually having her jewelry reset" and rapidly spending checks her mother-in-law offers to ward off her boredom, Lita's consumption does seem an unmanageable habit (85). The influence of the production craze on the child's upbringing renders



the adult Lita's potential as a radical working woman innocuous when the purchase of goods can appease her and make her an accomplice in her own oppression. By purchasing goods, Lita has essentially trapped herself in a commodifiable identity of traditional womanhood and thus allows other characters to manipulate her actions.

Tracing the development of modern womanhood from Pauline Manford to Lita Wyant further reveals that 1920s young women embodied retrogress, not progress, and underscores the antagonism between the production craze and women's progress. Because Pauline's divorce from a Wyant man and her desire to expand the traditional woman's sphere through productive work both serve as models for Lita's behaviors, an analysis of these women's motivations and successes provides insight into their respective social opportunities. Lamenting her marriage to Arthur Wyant, Pauline reveals her desire for conspicuous production: "She didn't know exactly what she had expected, her own ideal of manly achievement being at that time solely based on the power of getting rich faster than her neighbours – which Arthur would certainly never do" (25). Leaving the old money New Yorker for a successful divorce lawyer, Pauline successfully expands her economic and social opportunities by securing a divorce and marrying a more ambitious man. The similarity between Pauline's complaints about Arthur and Lita's reason for asking for a divorce from Jim, her desire for "a new deal," reveals these women's shared ambition to be productive in modern society (195). When Lita perversely reenacts her mother-in-law's life by forging a relationship with Dexter, a dramatic attempt to sabotage her marriage that shockingly fails when she is distracted with consumptive activities, her attempt to become a free modern woman seems only a poor imitation of a mother figure's life. Furthermore, although both women display compulsive activities, Pauline's compulsion centers on production while Lita's is limited to consumption, a shift that further limits the flapper's agency. Considering Lita's fate

alongside Anne Clephane's more oppressed repetition of her mother's life, Wharton's presentation of young women who cannot enjoy even their mothers' limited freedoms contradicts the cohort's claim to newness and liberty. With women's opportunities to progress subsumed by the production craze's advocacy for comprehensive male productivity, young women's lives become cyclically determined by production's malicious twin: consumption.

## V. CONCLUSION

Recovering from the near-disastrous speech in which she promotes contraception to the National Mothers' Day Association, *Twilight Sleep*'s Pauline Manford exhibits perhaps her most profound and yet short-lived moment of self-reflection. Agonizing over how she could lose control – the very standard that Taylor's theory of scientific management demands – Pauline's faith in the production craze falters. She questions, "What was the use of all the months of Taylorized effort against the natural human fate: anxiety, sorrow, old age – if their menace was to reappear whenever events slipped from her control?" (98). Pauline's skepticism not only interrogates her own behavior, but wields import for her society as well: what is the value of a modern, industrialized society if it cannot help individuals to progress beyond pain, loss, and mortality? What the function of "produced" selfhood if nature, with its irrational promise of decline, will always govern human life? With her inquiry into the "use" of Taylorism, Pauline Manford momentarily recognizes the discrepancy between production and progress and professes the problem that plagues Wharton's late novels: for families and individuals, the production craze generates only waste. In light of Pauline's surprisingly shrewd question, the future for her society that tacitly prides itself on production and progress but cannot advance human life in any significant manner seems bleak.

Though Pauline cannot maintain her skepticism for long, again signaling the psychological power of production, and almost immediately resumes her pursuit of personal productivity by copying her unexpectedly successful speech for local newspapers and joining an International League of Mothers, her brief moment of self-doubt is a useful model for thinking about production and its effects in Wharton's late novels. Applying Pauline's inquiry, "What was the use?" to all production-oriented efforts in these novels helps measure and predict the

prosperity of American society in the aftermath of the production craze (98). An examination of production's effects on the younger generation, quite literally the future of American society, particularly intimates the impossibility of real progress in a society that exalts individual and immediate production. For example, what is the use of Pauline's attempt to expand the traditional women's sphere with scientific management and conspicuous work if the women of the next generation occupy even more oppressive, traditionally feminine roles? Despite providing women like Pauline individual opportunities for work, the production craze still propagates male familial authority and more broadly a patriarchal social structure. While Lita Wyant's unwilling return to wifedom and motherhood at the end of *Twilight Sleep* repudiates the flapper's claim to sexual and social freedom, Nona Manford's family care augurs an even more dismal future for women's liberation. Though her parent's individual pursuits of productivity make necessary the nineteen-year old woman's family-oriented work, which include her attempts to prevent her father's infidelity, to abate her sister-in law's growing marital unrest, and to foster her mother's ignorance of the semi-incestuous affair, Nona also semi-willingly surrenders herself to this domestic work and imagines it as her duty. At the novel's start, she declares her distaste for individualistic production and laments the alternative of family-oriented work that she prematurely assumes:

There were moments when Nona felt oppressed by responsibilities and anxieties not of her age [...] Somebody in every family had to remember now and then that such things as wickedness, suffering and death had not banished from the earth. [...] [Perhaps] children had to serve as vicarious sacrifices. (45)

The logical fallacy of the young woman's function as a "sacrifice" for the older generation's productivity is obvious: because young women quite literally propagate and determine society's future, Nona's surrender of her progress endangers society as a whole. Her sacrifice does not make her a martyr, but a waste. The novel's last line is Nona's vaguely suicidal wish to join "a

convent where no one believes in anything,” where wickedness, goodness, family care, and individual production all become nil (315).<sup>32</sup> Because Nona entirely focuses her life’s work on family care, the family’s dissolution effaces her sense of self and Wharton seems to suggest that the attempt to balance individual and family production is near impossible in a production-crazed society.

Yet the damage of the production craze on the younger generation is not reserved for young women. Though male children of the production craze enjoy relative freedom to explore their own interests compared with their sisters – for example, Jim Wyant explores his various interests in dog breeding, chemistry, and violin as a young man – they nonetheless suffer emotional and sometimes physical neglect from their production-crazed parents. By showing the production craze’s damaging effects on all youth, not just young women, Wharton further emphasizes the danger modern America’s self-destructive ideologies. In *Twilight Sleep*, both Jim Wyant and his infant son suffer as a result of the family’s neglect. At the novel’s end, Arthur Wyant forgoes a fishing trip with his son Jim to violently defend Jim’s marriage to Lita at Cedarledge by preventing Lita’s affair. While Arthur intends for his actions to maintain family unity, he fails to consider or investigate Jim’s ideas about his own marriage, denying the young man agency and thus endangering his family authority. Similarly, Jim’s son, the baby whose

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<sup>32</sup> Judith Wheeler, Nona’s complement in *The Children* who cares for her six younger siblings, step-siblings, and half sibling as their parents socialize and flirt in Venice, endures a similarly oppressive fate. In the novel’s last scene, Judith lives with only one of her younger siblings, the rest either living with a biological parent, studying in another country, or dead. The now adult Judith engages in courting rituals at a hotel gala, but given her lack of formal education or social etiquette, opportunities she sacrificed to care for her younger siblings, Judith’s marriageability is surprisingly low for her socioeconomic status. While Judith Saunders notes in her evolutionary reading of *The Children* that caring for her biological siblings allows Judith Wheeler to propagate her genes into future generations, the critic also concedes that the parent-child role reversal in this text decreases the teenager’s chances of finding a “high quality, high investing” mate (88). Judith not only seems unfit for marriage, but her lack of a basic education makes her unsuitable for any non-domestic, professional work as well. See, for example, her letter to Martin on page 89 in which she details the activities of her siblings, a suggestion of her self-sacrifice, with comically bad spelling.

image sparks Dexter Manford's fantasy of patriarchal production, is never addressed by name and is rarely cared for by any family member.

In her next novel *The Children*, Wharton dramatically displays the worst consequences of a boy's symbolic value to the family: when the family dissolves, the boy's representational value expires, and the boy dies. Throughout the novel, the Wheaters' youngest child Chiptone is lauded as the family's pride and joy and all the novel's characters attribute to this well-fed, rosy baby the belief that he will transform their disjointed family into a traditionally simple one. Cliffe and Joyce Wheeler, the novel's central set of parents, enjoy shared investment in their youngest child, a connection that leads the children's nurse to describe the boy as "our hope, our consolation" that the couple will remain married and the children will remain together (21). The parents' excitement seems to justify these hopes: when Cliffe and Joyce are reunited with the children in Venice, Cliffe grabs

his last-born out of Judith's arms, and the others had to wait, a little crestfallen, yet obviously unsurprised, till the proud father had filled his eyes with the beauty of his last achievement. 'Catch on to him, will you, Joyce? Look at old man Chippo! Must have put on another five pounds since our last meeting [...]!' (49)

Although the father Cliffe immediately cradles his son, claiming the boy as his own, he is willing to share enthusiasm for Chip with his wife. While the other children seem only placeholders in a patriarchal lineage, the healthy baby boy is their mutual achievement, temporarily the marker of their productivity as a couple. Chip's exaggerated growth, his continual transformation into a bigger and better product of the Wheeler marriage, also seems to help Cliffe and Joyce imagine themselves as a productive and socially powerful couple, an assurance that may encourage them to stay together.

But because Cliffe and Joyce's notion of productivity is essentially individual, they break up the family when the opportunity to produce more children with other partners arises,

endangering the children's wellbeing and progress. The father especially seems unconsciously anxious to extend his family power by initiating new lineages: Cliffe produces a biological child during his second marriage while Joyce only adopts more children in her second marriage. When Cliffe and Joyce Wheater's second divorce dissolves the modern family and forces the children to move across Europe again, Chipstone Wheater dies of meningitis at just five years old.

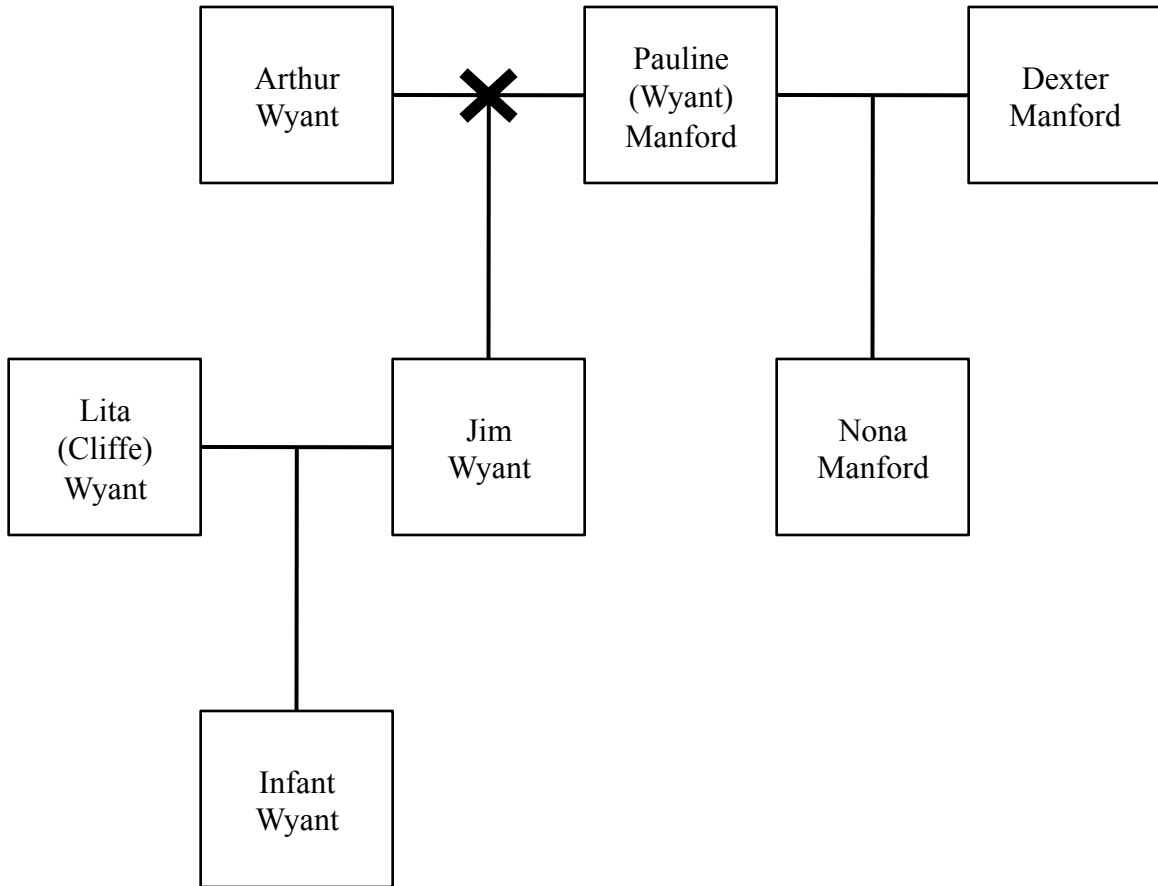
Reading *The Children* anthropologically and naming the Wheater children "practically wild" nomads traveling from hotel to hotel, Claire Preston describes Chipstone "the token child over whom parents bicker for custody, the totem of the children's tribe who cannot be yielded up" (166). Her term "totem" is especially useful for understanding the young boy's symbolic role for the family; invested with a power he does not actually possess – the power to unite a disjointed family – the totem becomes useless when this perceived power falters. Chipstone then must be "yielded up" as his function for the family ends. Through the child's death, Wharton dramatically portrays the production craze's dual disaster for the family: ultimately fruitless individual pursuits of productivity motivate the family's dissolution, foreclosing a child's opportunities to progress even to physical maturity. If male children represent future production and immortality, then, to apply Pauline's Manford's term, what is the "use" of idolizing or producing them if their wellbeing is largely ignored for individual pursuit of production, endangering their lives and therefore the immortality they symbolize?

The misuse of young women as tools and boys as symbols represent obvious and tangible consequences of the production craze, yet Wharton's adult characters remain devoted to production throughout her late fiction. When the production craze becomes so psychologically powerful that modern subjects will embrace its tenets even in the face of its obvious destruction, American society seems not only destined to repeat its mistakes and thus embody social stasis,

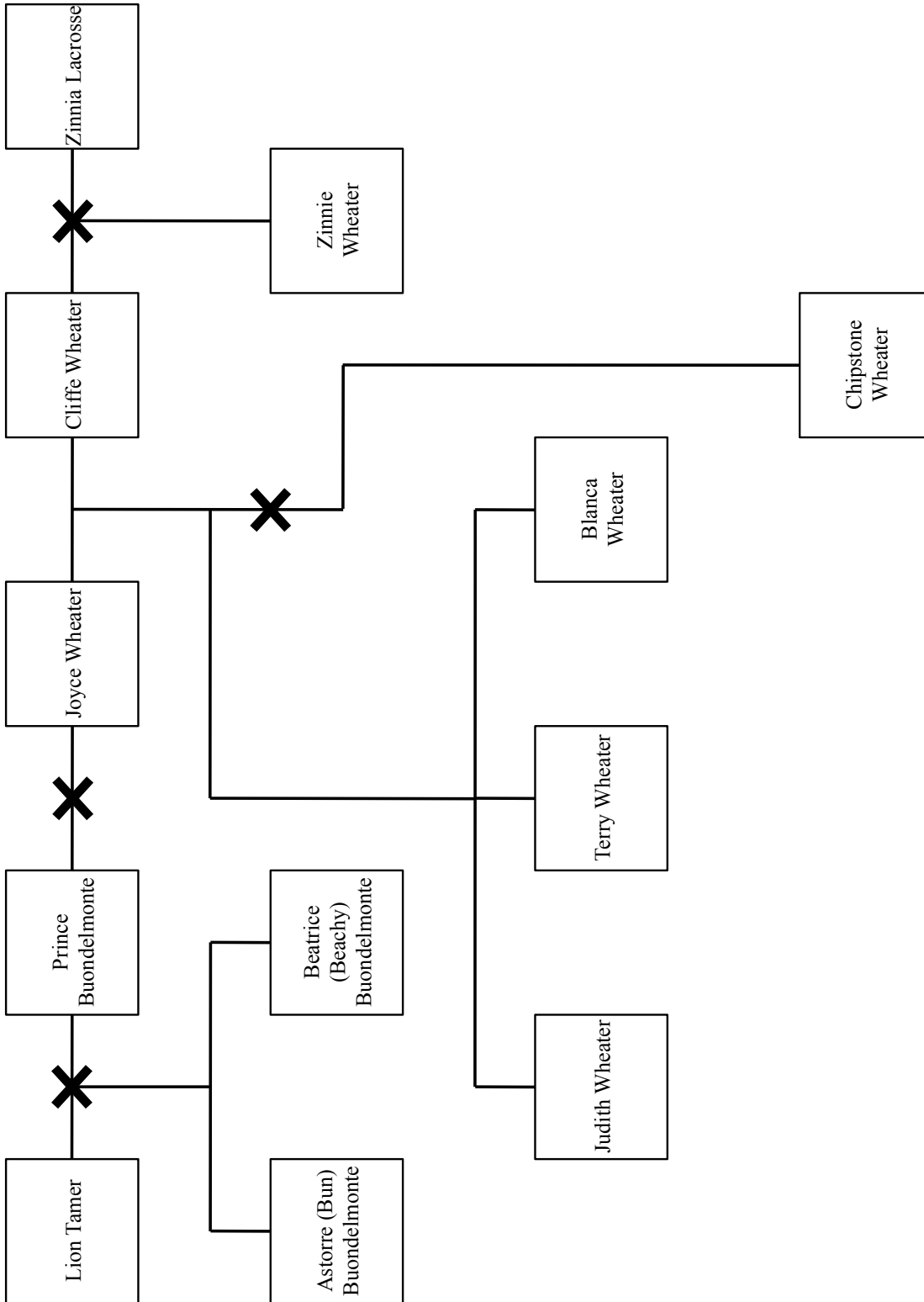
but rather seems doomed to regress. When children's lives, bodies, and behaviors are entirely subsumed by their parents' very temporary pursuits of production, these young characters become hopeless and accept their positions as sacrifices. Thus while Wharton's young characters may embrace personal definitions of production – ranging from movie stardom and marriage to education and business success – their notion of progress remains illusive. As Wharton presents it, the cultural acceptance of Taylor's proposal that scientific management can be applied to all human life functions not only as an antisocial trend, but more devastatingly as a society-wide death wish.



Appendix A: *Twilight Sleep* Family Tree



Appendix B: *The Children* Family Tree -Lacrosse



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