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Queering the Metanarrative of Domesticity: Chosen Families in Late Nineteenth- Century American Women's Literature

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Queering the Metanarrative of Domesticity: Chosen Families in Late Nineteenth- Century
American Women's Literature

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in English

by

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Abstract

My primary purpose in this project is to dispel the notion that the white, bourgeois, patriarchal, nuclear family believed by millions of US citizens to have once monopolized the United States's cultural landscape through an examination of how women authors in the United States constructed families in literature immediately following the Civil War. Not only do the novels under examination reflect diverse representations of families, but they also reflect those images from diverse perspectives. I will use a Marxist lens to explore class and ideologic interpellation; a renegade global feminist lens to explore failure and differential consciousness; a queer and sociological lens to explore trauma and visions of utopia; and a critical race lens to explore the legal and political policies related to the construction of family to reveal a broader vision of how American families were constructed near the turn of the 20th century, and to dispel any myths about a past reality that many believe is now lost because of postmodern interventions, political correctness, and corporate diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. United States citizens have been constructing families in their own way for a very long time, and while there is no shortage of evidence of the intended ideal, there has been little evidence of alternatives to that ideal, particularly on women's studies' syllabi. The novels under examination are *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin; *Hagar's Daughter: A Story of Southern Caste Prejudice* by Pauline Hopkins; *Interweaving* by Lida Churchill; and *Wired Love: A Romance of Dots and Dashes* by Ella Thayer. Each chapter will analyze the construction of family within the novel compared to the bourgeois American ideal, examine the racial and economic barriers to achieving the ideal construction of family, explore the potential harm to individuals in constructing the ideal family, and demonstrate a more robust method of teaching women's lived experiences in American literature survey courses.

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Dedication

To my Daughter, Natalie: I love you all the way to the moon and back.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter One Medusa Rising: The Perils of the Bourgeois Family in Kate Chopin's <i>The Awakening</i>	29
Chapter Two Aunties: The Persistence of African-centered Family Structures in Pauline Hopkins's <i>Hagar's Daughter: A Story of Southern Caste Prejudice</i>	55
Chapter Three <i>Interweaving</i> : The Wayward Young Woman's Guide to Success	83
Chapter Four Wayward Women and Bohemian Men in Ella Thayer's <i>Wired Love: A Romance of Dots and Dashes</i>	109
Conclusion	132
Bibliography	145

Introduction

In the summer of 2020, the 45th President of the United States tweeted: “I am happy to inform all of the people living their Suburban Lifestyle Dream that you will no longer be bothered or financially hurt by having low-income housing built in your neighborhood” (Zimmer). While he was referencing the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing Act (AFFHA), he was also demonstrating the continuing politicization of the metanarrative of domesticity. Political analysts view the presidential tweet as a Hail Mary directed at his voting base in a desperate bid to achieve a second term of office by reinforcing divisions based on a conflation of race and class. The narrow margins in voting for the Senate and House of Representatives in 2020 demonstrated the continuing power of the metanarrative of domesticity.

The so-called American Dream, or the American Ideal, or the very awkward “Suburban Lifestyle Dream” has been marketed in various ways in the United States since the ratification of the US Constitution and heteronormative, homogeneity has always characterized it. Ben Zimmer wrote in *The Atlantic* that by “couching” the issues of AFFHA “in terms of the ‘the Suburban Lifestyle Dream’ [the president] plays into a caricature of an idealized homogenous past” which “was always a lie” (Zimmer). Suburbia has come to be one characterization of the United States although the suburbs did not become a part of the American Dream until after World War II. The ‘burbs were marketed as a space where men could soothe their shellshock and ease back into the “regular” world of work, gas prices, and political enfranchisement and where women could regain their “rightful” place as administrators of the home and managers of the children after their wartime stints in non-traditional roles. Suburbia is the symbol of bourgeois achievement, United States’ affluence, and heteronormativity.

For many US citizens, though, suburbia symbolizes racism, classism, and other forms of marginalization. Suburbs were formed by white, bourgeois families after World War II fueled by new legislation related to the GI Bill and other benefits for veterans of the war. However, the United States government and institutionalized racism in banking and real estate denied African American veterans access to help create suburbs. The suburbs, and everything for which they stand, have been challenged in the decades since World War II by the Equal Rights Movement, when bourgeois white women began rebelling against the perceived sanctity of and their prescribed roles within the suburbs in the 1960s and 1970s. In the 1980s, the AIDS epidemic challenged the heteronormative idealism of the suburbs when 87% of white, middle-aged men were diagnosed with the infection by 1992 (“HIV and AIDS”). In our current moment, the persistent challenges, begun in the late 1990s, from marriage equality, the obliteration of the gender binary, Black Lives Matter, and Anti-Fascists continue to expose the falsehoods of suburbia. It is no longer a question that the American Dream is a fiction. The question now is how the myth of American exceptionalism and the American Dream still have so much power over the United States’ imagination.

The short answer is because the myth is so embedded in the concept of an “American identity” that it is difficult to untangle it from the nation’s origin stories. Even the short answer begs more questions than this project can ever hope to answer. However, because the suburbs are so central to the American Dream and notions of family, perhaps an examination of what American families actually look like may help. My primary purpose in this project is to dispel the notion that the white, bourgeois, patriarchal, nuclear family believed by millions of US citizens to have once monopolized the United States’s cultural landscape through an examination of how women authors in the United States constructed families in literature immediately

following the Civil War. Not only do the novels under examination reflect diverse representations of families, but they also reflect those images from diverse perspectives. I will use a Marxist lens to explore class and ideologic interpellation; a renegade global feminist lens to explore failure and differential consciousness; a queer and sociological lens to explore trauma and visions of utopia; and a critical race lens to explore the legal and political policies related to the construction of family to reveal a broader vision of how American families were constructed near the turn of the 20th century, and to dispel any myths about a past reality that many believe is now lost because of postmodern interventions, political correctness, and corporate diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. United States citizens have been constructing families in their own way for a very long time, and while there is no shortage of evidence as to the intended ideal, there has been little evidence of alternatives to that ideal, particularly on women's studies' syllabi.

The first chapter will examine Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, and focus on the structure of the white, bourgeois, patriarchal nuclear family. *The Awakening* is the most mainstream text offered in women's studies surveys. Popular interpretations of this novel have remained relatively unchanged since the 1990s. I intend only to rehash those interpretations of the novel as a matter of providing context for the environment of women's studies. My analysis will focus on the protagonist's class and how the expectations of performing her gender and class alienate her from realizing her own self. This chapter will also explore the ways in which liberal feminist theory and academia generally have interpreted this novel from a position of privilege, ignoring the covert messaging of said interpretations to students who study this novel.

The second chapter will examine *Hagar's Daughter: A Story of Southern Caste Prejudice* by Pauline Hopkins and focus on the juxtaposition of the white, bourgeois, patriarchal nuclear

family with African-centered family structures to further illustrate the way class positionality influences family structure. This novel's narrative structure offers a clear demonstration of how US economic and political policies continue to chip away African cultural heritage through (de)construction of the family, first through human trafficking and enslavement and followed by institutionalized racism. Also, this chapter will analyze how the loss of cultural heritage, particularly as it relates to centralized family structures, is a multigenerational trauma. Through close examination of the secondary characters in the novel, a strong, centralized family structure with African origins demonstrates a better potential for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness if allowed to flourish outside of systemic racial injustice than the white, bourgeois model of patriarchal, nuclear family.

I would like to follow Kevin Gaines's model from his text and make a note on language use here. I intend to refer to US chattel slavery as human trafficking and enslavement because the latter more accurately reflects the reality. Chattel Slavery, as a term, is a means of white-washing a disgusting chapter of United States' history, and by choosing to use the term, I feel a sense of voluntary participation in that white-washing. It is not my intent to do any work which will make the idea of kidnapping, transporting, buying, selling, raping, murdering, and otherwise attempting to break the free will of human beings palatable for any audience. According to Zoe Spencer and Olivia N. Perlow, "the dominant recollection of historical events, including accounts of white violence serve as ...master narratives embedded in fallacies that serve to justify white supremacist violence, exploitation, and oppression" (156). The imperial and national master narratives in the United States constitute dominant culture's recollection of historical events in an attempt to make sense of these events for large groups of people. The term "chattel slavery" is an economic one, related to private property. Focusing dominant culture's

recollection of events revolving around “chattel slavery” enables a dehumanization of those events. Slavery in the United States was well established by 1776 and continued until 1865. Even before landing on the shores of the United States, millions of African lives were expended in the Middle Passage, and the term “chattel slavery” completely ignores the Middle Passage. The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade was not officially abolished until 1808 between the United States and Great Britain (“Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade-Estimates”). The United States spent a greater amount of time involved in the Middle Passage of the slave trade than it did not; therefore, excluding the Middle Passage by virtue of language choices is dehumanizing, white-washing, and perpetuates the myth of American exceptionalism.

In Chapter Three, I will examine Lida B. Churchill’s novel *Interweaving*, focusing on a blended family of biological kin and fictive kin. The class positionality of secondary characters in the novel illustrates a continued desire, even in alternative constructions of family, for economic viability. However, unlike the previous two novels, which are more mainstream in terms of a canon of women’s literature, *Interweaving* cannot be found on many women’s studies’ syllabi. While this novel still promotes the ideology of American exceptionalism, it does so from a Quaker perspective, envisioning a utopic space where care and concern for others is viewed as more than just charitable acts but deep investment in the success of others. *Interweaving* demonstrates various versions of romantic and platonic love, uncoupling itself from the metanarrative of domesticity’s central focus on heterosexual, romantic love.

Finally, in Chapter Four, I will examine Ella Thayer’s novel *Wired Love*, and focus on fictive kin among the working class. This novel is also not part of the mainstream canon of women’s literature but offers the most illustrative version of what the American family can be outside of the bourgeois model. It demonstrates how ideology can be alternatively interpellated

in a manner tailored to meet the economic situations of each member of the chosen family.

Wired Love illustrates how family can be reproduced in spite of the economic barriers facing the working class at the turn of the 20th century.

Before this examination, though, I will provide a contextual analysis and definitions of concepts that provide the premise of this project. The metanarrative of domesticity is a complex web of master narratives that need to be defined and the interconnectedness of legal and political policies, literature and other art, social behavior, gender and class performance, and ideology require explanation.

The American Dream and the Metanarrative of Domesticity

The American Dream is intimately tied to the myth of American exceptionalism. The idea that the United States is a beacon atop a hill, shining forth its virtue and excellence for the world to see and follow best encapsulates the meaning of American exceptionalism. One need only look at the current disparity of wealth distribution in the United States to know it is a myth, although there is no shortage of other examples before one even looks at US foreign policy. The myth originated with the forced relocations and exterminations of indigenous peoples at nearly the moment white Europeans set foot on the North American continent. In the United States, spreading “civilization” to the indigenous populations, forced assimilation, and extermination are only exceptional in their horror. Ideology is nothing more than a set of beliefs people share. White, Christian colonizers believed Manifest Destiny and the “settling” of the west was a Divinely ordained obligation. American exceptionalism is born into an ideology when people began answering the hail of westward expansion, identifying themselves as white, Christian, “American” settlers. They became labeled as pioneers. The hail these men and women responded to was not just a religious one because to be an “American” settler meant one was also

answering the hail of a newly formed nation and creating a national identity. “Settling the West” was both a divine obligation and a national imperative.

Historian Stephen Kern uses a term to describe the interwoven nature of ideologies. Kern refers to them as master narratives:

master narratives make sense of experience for large numbers of people ... pull together major developments that were the foundation of historical understanding and a source of meaning (9).

Kern explores ten master narratives during the Modernist era in Great Britain – personal, courtship, family, urban, national, imperial, capitalist, liberal, religious, and artistic. His groupings are made based on “the increasing number of people involved ... and ... the increasing nature of the activities involved” (9). Kern tracks those master narratives that experienced popular exposure in the mainstream. In other words, socially conditioned behaviors that exemplify an ideal or model of courtship become a master narrative through the industry of conduct and etiquette manuals instructing those behaviors and the production of works of art that glorify the prescribed behaviors in the conduct and etiquette manuals; and networked connections develop when the prescriptions for courtship overlap prescribed behaviors for marriage and family conduct. I have taken this definition a bit further for the purposes of this project. When multiple master narratives overlap to such a degree that they can define a social phenomenon and begin to influence legislation and jurisprudence, they have become a metanarrative: a means of making sense out of a broadly encompassing phenomenon. For example, what I call the metanarrative of domesticity is a confluence of networked master narratives about family, courtship, marriage, nation, and empire. It can be used to explain how economic policies can be driven by the concept of separate spheres or how “traditional family values” make their way into courtrooms as determining factors about constitutionality or justice

in the United States. My focus will be on the courtship and marriage narratives of the United States and how those narratives are woven into the narratives of nation and empire. What are the national and imperial narratives for a country that takes great pride in its apparent lack of global imperialism compared to nations like Belgium, France, and the United Kingdom?

Kern defines national narrative as being “about the integration of people into ethnic, cultural, and ultimately political units with a sacred originary moment mired in legend” (13), and the imperial narrative “is the story of the increasing territorial, financial, political, and cultural dominion by nations in Europe and America over other areas”(14).¹ The American Revolution and the ratification of the United States Constitution obviously constitute the “sacred originary moment” of the United States, and the swampy bog surrounding that sacred moment is the exclusion it is founded upon. The sanctioning of human trafficking and enslavement and the exclusion of women and non-landowners from political participation disrupts any notion that the United States was founded on equality for everyone. In the United States, the national and imperial narratives overlap to such a degree that they can be considered the same narrative. Prior to the Civil War, the U.S. government had already begun executing its plan of organizing people for better supervision and control.² The national and imperial narratives in the United States overlap because both were concerned with westward expansion or internal colonization. That expansion successfully created a more unified nation on the continent and greater opportunities

¹ The full definition Kern gives for the national narrative includes “...and continuing progress toward a future of increasing territorial control, financial prosperity, social stability, political authority and cultural supremacy” (13).

² In 1830, the Indian Removal Act went into effect, forcing the relocation of indigenous populations in the Southeast. After the Civil War, the United States government resumed its westward expansion. In 1862 and 1889 respectively, the Homestead Act and the Indian Appropriations Act enabled things like the Oklahoma Land Rush in 1889, where U.S. citizens made a mad dash to competitively stake out claims for private land in a territory initially set aside for indigenous populations from the 1830s relocation effort. Throughout the 1880s, and 1890s, the United States government delayed land retention claims made by Mexicans, who had been annexed to the US as a result of the Mexican-American War, from California and other parts of the US Southwest in violation of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848).

for a growing population of immigrants. However, westward expansion also included, not unlike the colonization efforts made by Belgium, France, and the United Kingdom, brutal and often violent assimilation tactics used against indigenous people, the economic, political, and legal disenfranchisement of a newly-annexed Mexican population, and the economic exploitation of Asian immigrants to build the infrastructure to support economic expansion in the West.

The overall nation-building project of any state is the organization of its members into political units, and those political units can be based on shared ethnicity, shared religion, class, and through families. The purpose of this organization is, according to Kern, to secure national financial stability and geographic territory aimed at future prosperity (11-13). These pursuits help establish a sense of national identity, secure access to resources, and facilitate eventual counting and taxing the citizenry to aid in the perpetuation of the state. The perpetuation of the state becomes a part of the fabric of national identity.

The Courtship and Marriage Master Narratives

Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse claim “the dominant ideology of the American nineteenth century believed in essential differences between women and men” (xiii). Based on the acceptance of these essential differences between men and women, separate social spheres emerged, creating a “women’s sphere” which served as a space for women to enact their performance of the social conventions linked to womanhood – maternity and domesticity (xiii). Nancy Cott points to the emergence of a “women’s sphere” shortly following the American Revolutionary War. If the “mens’ sphere” is concerned with business and government, then the “women’s sphere” is concerned with all things domestic. Feminist scholars refer to it as the “cult of domesticity” (Cott 2). As women grew more literate in the United States, an entire genre of writing grew up around them in the form of etiquette and conduct manuals, which were

deemed suitable for a woman's education.³ Cott claims that the cult of domesticity could also be referred to as a "social ethic" where "mother, father, and children grouped together in the private household ruled the transmission of culture, the maintenance of social stability, and the pursuit of freedom" and that "the 'cult' both observed and prescribed specific behavior for women" (2). In other words, these texts worked in support of the national and imperial narratives in the United States as much as the social behaviors and fiction about the same behaviors to organize, supervise, and control the body politic. These manuals were focused on acquiring attractive skills to find a husband as well as more practical skills about maintaining a household. According to Cott, by the 1830s, young women could "apprentice" themselves in other people's homes doing domestic chores (28). The manuals were sometimes authored by women, but in the early stages of its development, the genre was dominated by male authors who were also often members of the clergy. As a result, much of the early literature of domesticity is imbued with Christian concepts like charity, temperance, prudence, as well as more Puritanical or Calvinist values like chastity, hard work, and the spiritual gains from physical deprivation and suffering. As time progressed, the economic market became more technologically advanced and as more women became literate, sentimental Romance fiction also became an integral part of the literature of domesticity because it fictionalized the values transmitted from the etiquette and conduct manuals.

The Family As Political Unit

Cott claims this literature of domesticity constitutes a "canon of domesticity" which operated on several levels to reinforce women's separate sphere. She indicates further that the canon of domesticity encouraged separation between work and home "by linking it [the

³ For more on this, see: Nancy Armstrong *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (1987) and Nan Johnson *Gender and Rhetorical Space in American Life, 1866-1910* (2002) as well as Cott.

separation] to a specific set of sex-roles” (Cott 67). Importantly, Cott points to the underlying values motivating the rhetoric of domesticity, such as the comfort and compensation for hard work that a well-managed, bourgeois, home was meant to provide its inhabitants, as well as “a morality that would encourage self-control” by both men and women (69). This underlying motivation is also linked to the ideology of American exceptionalism enabling westward expansion. In fact, Cott continues that the canon of domesticity reinforced the national and imperial narratives and the ideology of American exceptionalism by encouraging “women, through their reign in the home ... to sustain the ‘essential elements of moral government’ to allow men to negotiate safely amid the cunning, treachery, and competition of the marketplace” (69). The affection of family and the smooth running of the household were meant to be a spiritual salve for men after spending the day in the hellish trenches of “the world”. In lieu of full enfranchisement in the political process, women’s role in American exceptionalism was to provide a haven of morality and practical diligence for her husband, so that he could perform all the worldly responsibilities of an upstanding United States citizen. In this way, the growth and progress of the whole nation rested on whether or not women could provide the appropriate respite or haven for their husbands. Because marriage laws rendered women completely economically dependent on their husbands and because women were alienated from the political process, the success of their husbands was about their own economic survival and marriage served as a conduit for vicarious citizenship.

Class As Political Unit

The canon of domesticity outlines the courtship and family narratives, which are based on the same ideology of American exceptionalism that fuels the national and imperial narratives. Another link between the United States’s national and imperial narratives with the narratives of

courtship and family is the concomitant rise of the bourgeois in the United States. Cott contends that “the canon of domesticity expressed the dominance of what may be designated a middle-class ideal,” and claims “the chief aim of women’s vocation was the rearing of moral, trustworthy, statesmanlike citizens” (93-4). She suggests this ideal and the canon were successful at restoring social order after the American Revolution and establishing an “American republic ideology” (95). The emergence of the bourgeois in the United States begins with the technological advances in manufacturing. “Industrialization ... occurred first in textile manufacture, which was originally women’s and especially unmarried women’s household work” (35). As industrialization, merchant capitalism, transportation, and literacy improved, the responsibilities in the home also changed. Married women began performing less labor in the home and more managerial duties because as the distribution of wealth enabled more disposable income, it also enabled more young women to look for “apprenticeships” in household skills. Thus began an industry of domestic help prior to the end of the Civil War. According to Cott,

the replacement of family production for direct use with wage earning, the institution of time-discipline and machine regularity in place of natural rhythms, the separation of workplaces from the home, and the division of ‘work’ from ‘life’ were overlapping layers of the same phenomenon (59).

The phenomenon Cott refers to is the changing nature of the women’s sphere prior to the Civil War. The emergence of a bourgeois class might have been easier to track without the disruption of the Civil War because Reconstruction and the integration of paid labor in the South meant that there were no longer clear lines of economic hierarchy in the United States for quite some time. However, by the end of Reconstruction and into the beginning of the Jim Crow era in the South, the existence of a bourgeois class is undeniable, as reflected in the writings of Black Americans that emerged in the postbellum era.

The National and Imperial Master Narratives

Before we can discuss the ways in which Americans of color shouldered the solidification of a bourgeois class in the United States, we have to explore the ways in which the national and imperial narratives lace together with the courtship and family narratives in relation to an American identity. Cott alludes to an American republic ideology which partly defines the interconnected nature of the narratives but does little to explain how preoccupied US citizens were with the conception of a national identity. Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman were leading antebellum figures attempting to establish a national identity. Emerson searched for a uniquely American philosophy that eventually became Transcendentalism. He also gave us the first basic tenet of an American identity with his essay “Self-Reliance,” which functions as a kind of road map to self-sufficiency, self-motivation, self-improvement, efficiency, and sometimes extreme views on individualism.

Who is an American? Separation from Great Britain was once the unifying element of American identity: rebels versus redcoats. Beyond the Revolutionary War, the search for an American identity became a widespread preoccupation. Peter Coviello argues that authors in America at this time were “confronted with a basic problem: how to establish a conceptual ground, *not territorialized by the state*, on which the coherence of a national citizenry might be imagined” (3).⁴ Coviello continues:

If there is any common denominator linking the many different canons, modes, styles and genres of antebellum literary endeavor, it would appear to reside in the conviction that the American state, however promising it might have once

⁴ It is important to note that the cultural paradox of equality and slavery disabled any *credible* input the state might have made towards the construction of an American identity, but the attrition of the Civil War and ensuing economic instability forced Americans to rely on the state to guide and direct the construction of an American identity nonetheless. Particularly the works of Emerson and Whitman demonstrate a tension in the United States prior to the Civil War that revolved around the will of the people and the will of the state in determining who was an American.

seemed, no longer provides for, accommodates, or adequately expresses the substance of American nationality (3).

Arguably, what made these authors look beyond the state in the creation of a coherent national identity was the paradox of American exceptionalism and slavery. If the United States was to be a state founded on life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, a shining beacon of virtue, and this foundation myth was to guide the construction of the American identity, then how did it mean to reconcile that foundation myth with the reality of human trafficking, enslavement, and widespread disenfranchisement? Even though great writers like Whitman and Emerson attempted to define an American identity, the paradox remained a constant thorn. The outbreak of war provided the necessary resolution of that paradox but disabled the process of defining a national identity independently from the State. However, Emerson's "Self-Reliance" had already become a part of identity construction that could not easily be shaken off. Emerson claimed

Nature suffers nothing to remain in her kingdoms which cannot help itself ... The genesis and maturation of a planet, its poise and orbit, the bended tree recovering itself from the strong wind, the vital resources of every animal and vegetable, are demonstrations of the self-sufficing, and therefore self-relying soul ... Let us stun and astonish the intruding rabble of men and books and institutions, by a simple declaration of the divine fact (100-1).

Emerson's notion of self-reliance and self-improvement lingers in concepts of American identity and is a fundamental element of American exceptionalism. Self-reliance and self-improvement spawned ideologies of racial uplift, the politics of respectability, and upward mobility. These ideas all conspire to create an American Dream, which became a singular, unifying goal for citizens and immigrants.

The Metanarrative of Domesticity and Uplift Ideology, or The Politics of Respectability

Kevin K. Gaines asserts "black ministers, intellectuals, journalists, and reformers" sought to uplift "African Americans' material and moral condition through self-help" in an attempt to

“rehabilitate the race’s image by embodying respectability, enacted through an ethos of service to the masses” in order to combat racism and refute claims “that African Americans were biologically inferior and unassimilable” (xiv). Gaines further suggests that “the attempt to rehabilitate the image of black people through class distinctions trafficked in claims of racial and gender hierarchy” (xiv). Gaines claims that:

black opinion leaders deemed the promotion of bourgeoisie morality, patriarchal authority, and a culture of self-improvement ... as necessary to their recognition, enfranchisement, and survival as a class (3).

Gaines clarifies that uplift ideology was also about establishing a “positive black identity in a deeply racist society ... a source of dignity and self-affirmation” (3). Gaines admits it is difficult to define racial uplift ideology but does concede that the term “held mixed meanings for African Americans” (1), that it “speaks of a personal or collective spiritual – and potentially social – transcendence of worldly oppression and misery” (1). Gaines claims that “elite blacks believed they were replacing the racist notion of fixed biological racial differences with an evolutionary view of cultural assimilation, measured primarily by the status of the family and civilization” (3-4).

Measuring cultural assimilation based on family and civilization is an important aspect of this project, but first we have to unpack the definition of family at the turn of the nineteenth century. Claudia Tate’s study of Black women’s domestic fiction in the 1890s is a useful source of information in understanding the link between an American identity, the metanarrative of domesticity, and the rise of the American middle class. Tate identifies

the idealized domesticity [in the novels under her examination] ... as a fundamental cultural symbol of the Victorian era for representing civil ambition and prosperity ... a symbol that Black women writers in particular used to promote the social advancement of African Americans (5).

The literature of domesticity, confined to white women before the Civil War, began expanding after the Civil War to include Black women writers. These additions to the canon of domesticity continue to convey the same underlying values of temperance, prudence, charity, and a prescribed morality based on Calvinist theology. In addressing the formulaic nature of Black women's domestic fiction, Tate claims that:

The story of ideal family formation was especially well suited to this first audience because its formulaic plot line encoded bourgeois constructions of the successful individual, community and society to which the audience subscribed (Gaines 7).

It is important to remember that the concept of the ideal family was first imagined in the essential separation of men and women, and the roles assigned to women were primarily constructed by white male members of various denominational clergy. The fact that Black Americans following the end of the Civil War adopted the values and concepts of family and civilization created by white women within the cult of domesticity as an attempt to ease racial tensions as well as create a positive Black identity only reinforces how powerful the ideological hail of domesticity was (and arguably still is) for American enfranchisement. In other words, the rhetoric of the "ideal family" and its connection to political and social enfranchisement were so effective that it was adopted as a means of uplifting an entire race even though the white, bourgeois prescriptions of the ideal family contradicted African heritage.

Patricia Hill Collins suggests that "defined as a natural or biological arrangement based on heterosexual attraction, instead this monolithic family type is actually supported by government policy" designed primarily to legitimate the offspring as "natural" U.S. citizens (46). Collins reinforces the notion that the master narratives of courtship and family create a network with the national and imperial master narratives. For Collins, the concept of ideal families is linked directly with labor, and primarily the separation of men's and women's spheres which

dictated how labor was divided. Collins goes on to state that “prior to U.S. enslavement and African colonization, women in African societies apparently combined work and family without seeing much conflict between the two” (48), meaning that in those societies, labor was divided in ways other than biological difference, thus dispelling any notion that gender-specific labor is “natural”. The white construction of an “ideal family,” born out of the confluence of national, imperial, courtship, and family narratives in the U.S., transmitted specific values, which Collins sees as market-driven and exchange-based. I would add that not only are those values meant to scaffold capitalist economies, but they are also meant to scaffold the colonization of the West.

Class Performance

Julie Bettie suggests that performance “refers to agency and a conscious attempt at passing” while performativity “refers to the fact that class subjects are the effects of the social structure of class inequality, caught in unconscious displays of cultural capital that are a consequence of class origin or habitus” (51). Much academic work has been done on the performance of race and gender, but very little work has been done regarding class performance. According to Bettie, “little attention has been paid to thinking about class as a performance or as performative” largely because study on performance has tended in the past to “ignore its materiality” (51). Understanding class this way has also often been confused with theorizing about race. Bettie goes on to suggest that the materiality of class is its “economic and cultural resources” and “cultural and political discourses that naturalize and sanction kinds of class relations and normalize institutional class inequality [that] produce class subjects” who then “produce discourses that naturalize and normalize class inequality” (51). Cultural and political discourses become material by helping to “produce class subjects (poor, working, middle, rich, etc) and material inequalities” through interpellation and repetition (51). In other words, some of

the elements of the metanarrative of domesticity are the cultural and political discourses Bettie refers to that create class subjects, who then, after interpellation and repetition of those discourses, repeat the transmission of those discourses. If bourgeois virtues like temperance, prudence, self-reliance, and self-improvement are the values occupying much of the canon of domesticity, and those values are being rebroadcast to the margins of society as means of political, social, and economic enfranchisement, then successful performance of those values also becomes inexorably linked to citizenship. Bettie also suggests “heteronormativity and the politics of respectability are part of the narrative of national belonging” (xxxv). These are also transmitted through the metanarrative of domesticity.

Upward mobility and the politics of respectability both reinforce class divisions in the United States. According to Catherine Rottenberg, “the possibility of climbing the class hierarchy is contingent upon the individual’s readiness to emulate certain norms that are produced, reinforced, and circulated by and through the American Dream” (69). This description differs from my own claim in that I am arguing that the American Dream is itself a part of the ideology of American exceptionalism and is produced, reinforced, and transmitted via the metanarrative of domesticity. Rottenberg’s choice of the verb “emulate” is also critical to note here because emulation is a conscious performance of, for example, the repetitive rituals the ideology of American exceptionalism requires for interpellation. Thus, upward mobility and the politics of respectability are predicated upon the successful performance of bourgeois values. The element of social obligation within social reform efforts of the era is also a symbol of the moral uprightness embedded in the values of temperance, prudence, charity, chastity, and the spiritual reward of physical suffering such that failing to rise above poverty was equated with moral failing. Rottenberg continues: “those who do not take advantage of the promises the

American Dream holds out to them are coded as pathetic or failures” (70). We will see this in my examination of *The Awakening*. Too often, when women are represented in literature of the era as not performing the bourgeois values well or at all, we tend to see them as victims of the patriarchy, and we attempt to rehabilitate them into resisters and transgressors.

We often assume that women in the nineteenth century were as conscious of their oppression as we are. It is true that women like Margaret Fuller and Elizabeth Cady Stanton were conscious as were women like Pauline Hopkins and Ida B. Wells. However, in the case of the former, being conscious of the cultural and political trends in their lifetimes was a luxury that education and some measure of wealth offered while in the case of the latter, violent race relations made consciousness of cultural and political trends a survival skill. In between these two extremes were working women and rural women, who may not have possessed the education to stay abreast of political trends and who may not have had the time to spare a thought about them. Having the ability and the requisite tools available to consider one’s own positionality was a privilege for white bourgeois women and a necessity for women of color. We often view women’s behavior that goes against the acceptable norms as modes of resistance and transgression when in all likelihood they were more often modes of survival or getting by. As this project will expose, many women who could not be rehabilitated into the resistance/transgression paradigm get lost. This feminist push to rehabilitate nineteenth century working and rural women into resisters and transgressors ignores their lived experience of class. Our contemporary push to rehabilitate these women into soldiers for the feminist cause is no different an injustice to them than the nineteenth century push to rehabilitate women in poverty into mirror images of bourgeois women.

Contemporary Feminist Thought, or Policing the Resistance

The fact that contemporary feminism presupposes a set of shared experiences is not a new criticism. In 1977, the Combahee River Collective let the world know clearly what was lacking in the second wave US women's movement. In 1984, bell hooks claimed that the assertion of universal women's oppression "implies that women share a common lot, that factors like class, race, and sexual preference, etc. do not create a diversity of experience that determines the extent to which sexism will be an oppressive force in the lives of individual women" (5). She continues, stating that "the usurpation of feminism ... has been to a very grave extent justified by feminist theory as [it] has so far been conceived" (9), meaning that the ignorance of the intersections of race and class and gender has been permitted not only to continue within feminist movements and theoretical approaches but has also endowed that continuation with the justification that we all share a common struggle against a common oppression. In 1989, Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced intersectionality theory, which does take diversity of experience into account when outlining diverse forms of oppression; however, its use in academia seems limited to discussions of the intersections of race/gender and race/gender/sexuality.

According to Susan Archer Mann, "the question of the origins of women's oppression generated one of the signal debates of the early second wave", and at that time, "understanding the origins of women's oppression [w]as a prerequisite to understanding how to transform and end that oppression" (116). In other words, it was crucial for feminist theory and activism to uncover the myriad, insidious ways misogyny had become embedded in Western culture. Things that remain hidden cannot be successfully challenged. The main problem with this, as pointed out by both Collins and hooks, is that not all women experience the same forms of oppression, and even if they do experience the same forms of oppression, they do not always experience

them in the same way. The elements of lived experience that differentiate the responses to oppression have been clearly identified as race, class, gender and sexuality, but the imposition of class is the least plumbed. There continues to be a dearth of work that analyzes the impress of class on women, regardless of ethnicity, race, or sexual identity or sexual orientation. However, viewing race and gender/sexuality while ignoring class divisions is a flattening of difference.

Catherine Rottenberg claims that, unlike race and ethnicity, class identities have, through the myth of American exceptionalism and the American Dream, become accepted as mutable: “the American Dream discourse has helped to erase or at least camouflage systemic sources of class inequality, since it has promoted the belief that anyone can move up the class ladder” if only they work hard enough (Rottenberg 8). Julie Bettie claims “the failure of social theory to theorize women as class subjects is repeated in and perhaps assisted by political discourse, where women’s class location and identity is often obscured in contemporary discourse on ‘the family’” (34-5). She further explains that “by shifting the focus away from women’s economic well-being to the morality or immorality of family structure,” class is seen as “gender-blind” and ties the material existence of women to their “attachments with men” (35). Morality *should* not have anything to do with economics; however, national discourses about poverty often label moral turpitude as the culprit rather than the imposition of institutional economic and racial inequities and barriers. A feminist theory that might expand to include Black feminist thought and begin looking at the similarities “of working-class experiences women might have across race” could lead to a better understanding of how “race operates independently of class” (Bettie 37-8). I would suggest that this expansion of contemporary feminist thought would also do good emotional labor in healing the rupture in the U.S. women’s movement between white women and women of color. Ignoring the impact of class positionality on sex, gender, and race enables the

conflation of race/ethnicity with “working-class”, but even more dangerously, reinforces the conflation of whiteness with citizenship, and according to Bettie “this ill-gotten conflation of whiteness and citizenship is a disturbingly pervasive ideology” (41). I argue that the disturbing pervasiveness is a calculated move based on the myth of American exceptionalism and has its origin moment in internal colonization, assimilation, and economic expansion. It continues to be a pervasive ideology because of blind adherence to the terms of “American” identity and the reinforcement of the myth of American exceptionalism even through critiques of that myth. The terms of “American” identity are self-reliance, self-improvement, efficiency, and individualism tied theoretically and practically to values like prudence, temperance, chastity, and the spiritual rewards inherent in physical suffering.

Marxist Lens

My premise is that, through the metanarrative of domesticity, specific behaviors are prescribed and transmitted, particularly targeted at women, in relation to family structure in the United States. The metanarrative of domesticity labels these prescriptions as ideal mostly through the body of educational literature about how to perform the ideal. The ideal is another symbolic representation of the myth of American exceptionalism and political, economic, and social enfranchisement. While white, bourgeois women constitute the model of this ideal, the metanarrative of domesticity is broadcast to all women regardless of institutional and systemic racial and economic inequities. The transmission of the ideological interpretations of the ideal has been so effective that another ideology, uplift ideology, was created to reinforce the ideal. Fundamental to this premise is Louis Althusser’s theory of interpellation. Althusser’s theory makes it possible to view the metanarrative of domesticity as an Ideological State Apparatus.

According to Althusser, “ideology has a material existence” because it “exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices” (258). In determining the relationship of the individual to an ideology, Althusser suggests “the ‘ideas’ of a human subject exist in his actions...[which] are governed by the *rituals* in which these practices are inscribed, within the *material existence of an ideological apparatus*” (emphasis in original, 259). In other words, the individual enacts his acceptance of or belief in an ideology through repeated or ritualized practices. For Althusser, “ideology serves to explain how it is that capitalist relations of production are reproduced without constant and explicit use of force” against workers who reproduce “the conditions of their exploitation” (DuBrin 178-9). Obviously, people are not going to reproduce their own oppression knowingly, so “ideology is materially subsumed into a broad understanding of the ‘state’” (DuBrin 179). According to DuBrin, Althusser claims that the broad understanding of the state includes Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) “such as family, religious institutions, schools, political parties, unions, media, art, sports, and legal institutions” (179). Because the metanarrative encompasses literature and other forms of art as well educational materials, it does itself become an ISA.

Each apparatus has its own set of rituals meant to reinforce the ideology that is a prerequisite for the rituals. In other words, if you believe in democracy, you reproduce this belief every time you vote. If you believe in God, every time you attend church or pray, you are reproducing the belief. The act of believing combined with the repetitive performance of the rituals further reinforces the ideology. Bear with me as I explore an example relevant to this project: If I believe that I must work in order to survive, then I will get out of bed every day and go to work. I may even get out of bed every day to go work at a job that makes my head ache and my stomach churn because the belief is strong enough to countermand any impulse to care

for myself and take a day off. When that belief, the need to work in order to survive, is combined with another belief, say, taking a day off just to rest is lazy, then I am doubly disinclined to care for myself by taking a day off. The internalized messaging of this particular example of ideological interpellation is “If I don’t work, I won’t survive, and if I don’t survive because I didn’t work, I did not survive because I was lazy”. If my body, my mind, or my spirit are in danger of breaking because the work is toxic or debilitating, then I find myself in the middle of a conundrum whose only solution most likely requires some form of cognitive dissonance. This is an oversimplified example, to be sure, because it ignores the other ISAs involved in work ideology, such as utility companies, banks that hold mortgages, or landlords who own property. For the metanarrative of domesticity to hold the sway it does in the United States’s imagination, the citizens must believe in the inherent nobility of the United States, that it is exceptional among other nations. This belief is reproduced over and over again when citizens repeat the myriad rituals like voting, working, marrying, having children, buying cars and homes, and maintaining credit scores.

Julie Bettie’s ethnographic study, *Women Without Class*, of teenage, *mestiza* girls in the working class offers an exceptional framework for understanding the ways in which many intersectional lenses continue to conflate race and class. Bettie explores the nexus of race and class, illuminating the nuances of class identification in a group of high school students who sit proudly at the nexus of race, class, and gender in the United States. *Performing Americanness* from Catherine Rottenberg does not fit neatly in any category here because Rottenberg explores class and racial/ethnic positionality. Her book compares African American and Jewish American literature from the early twentieth century focused on passing. She explores the nature of ideological interpellation with the American Dream and American exceptionalism from a

uniquely Jewish perspective, where passing is a much easier task but no less fraught with danger. Her work can easily fall into the Marxist or renegade feminist or critical race categories.

Renegade Global Feminist Lens

J. Jack Halberstam's *Queer Art of Failure* explores how failing to successfully repeat the rituals of interpellation and reproduction create a path to liberation from the trouble that can come from the stultifying repetition of what are often gender-blind, race-blind, and sexuality-blind rituals that often do not have any redeeming value for individuals. He asserts

“academics, activists, artists, and cartoon characters have long been on a quest to articulate an alternate vision of life, love, and labor ... through the use of manifestoes, a range of political tactics, and new technologies of representation, radical utopias continue to search for different ways of being in the world” (2).

Halberstam refers to “shadow feminisms”, or renegade feminisms, that “take the form not of becoming, being, and doing, but of shady, murky modes of undoing, unbecoming, and violating” (4). He suggests that a renegade feminism is “a refusal to become woman as she has been defined and imagined within Western philosophy” (124). Renegade feminism would focus on how women fail to uphold ideals as a space of potentiality, a space where the ideal is what one makes it and not one that has been passed down generationally, often through mothers. The question of the necessity of mother is central to the novels under examination in this project. Edna Pontellier loses her mother when she is young. Jewel is separated from her mother for most of her life, believing she is dead. Ina Ellerton and Bert Hilton are both orphans, and there are no mothers at all in *Wired Love*. The absence of a mother as a kind of failure to measure up to the ideals transmitted in the metanarrative of domesticity is a crucial element of this project because that absence demonstrates a potential for positively reshaping life, love, and labor in ways that potentially liberate the characters.

Also, as fundamental to this project as Althusser is, so is Chela Sandoval. Within *The Methodology of the Oppressed* is what I have deemed to be the central key to escaping the cognitive dissonance inherent in ideologic interpellation and to unlocking the departure from being defined by Western philosophy. Sandoval's work has its own utopian impulses but focuses mainly on decolonizing theoretical work. Sandoval claims that even "methodology of the oppressed is a misnomer" and that the process she develops is "a methodology of renewal, of social reconstruction, of emancipation" (9). Rather than face the possibility of cognitive dissonance, Sandoval offers differential consciousness, a way of looking at the world through a historically subordinated lens, to "generate a hermeneutics of love in the postmodern world" (10). In particular, Sandoval's differential consciousness enables a reading of *The Awakening* that is hopeful by illuminating even the most apparently inconsequential things like bees and gardens and dogs. It enables a reading of *Wired Love* that demonstrates liberation through failure. Sandoval's and Halberstam's theories about intentional disregard for Western logics work well together to create a unique lens which could also offer a turn away from neoliberal feminist theories.

Queer and Sociological Lens

In thinking about liberation and potentialities, I am also deploying Jose Esteban Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia: The Then and Now of Queer Futurity* because it helps to frame what is possible once failure has been achieved. Muñoz's conceptualization about queer ephemera and the utopic benefits of gestures and performance also illuminate discussion about the nature of women's friendship and queer love for *Interweaving*. In connection with Muñoz's exploration of queer utopias is Lucy Sargisson's *Contemporary Feminist*

Utopianism because of its practical approach to understanding the differences between utopia and perfection. Sargisson is a sociologist and political scientist whose practical approaches to theory have translated to women's political and social activism in the United Kingdom.

Critical Race Lens

Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, and Cheryl Harris provide the framework for analysis in Chapter Two relative to the ways in which African family structure, a significant part of African cultural heritage, was obliterated by human trafficking and enslavement. These scholars also provide insight into the ways the legal and political machine in the United States continues to disrupt natural and organic family formation for Black Americans through legal and political policies. The loss of generational families for African-Americans is a traumatic event that is rarely discussed in mainstream academia. A few scholars of color, Dr. Joy DeGruy, Regina Davis-Sowers, and Nicole St. Mil have undertaken, through sociology and social work, addressing the trauma of enslavement and its continued impact on Black families in the United States.

With an interdisciplinary spirit, I have put together a theoretical lens that moves analysis beyond assessing the level of women's oppression, beyond analysis that rehabilitates women into conscientious resisters to patriarchy and extends to show women thriving within patriarchal structures that they themselves have rearranged and redefined to better suit their ambitions and account for their economic situations. Like many of the women I know, the women in these novels rearranged and redefined not to change the world, but to make their own lives more livable. Fighting with an abstract ideology, like patriarchy, is an exercise in futility, and rural and working-class women

have little time for futility. Families that function according to the needs of individual members rather than serving as a ritualized demonstration of adherence to ideology are what make nations great. Citizens who cooperate with one another, love one another, and offer mutual aid to one another are what make nations exceptional. Mutual aid is also a core concept in building families out of fictive kin. Chosen families are not new in the US. They are not a symptom of postmodernism. They are arguably more natural and organic than the patriarchal nuclear family structure or biological kinship. In the next chapter, I will show how the patriarchal nuclear family structure can even be detrimental to the needs of its individual members.

Chapter One

Medusa Rising: The Perils of the Bourgeois Family in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*

Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* was published in 1899 and has since been published in eleven different languages, including Arabic and Farsi.⁵ Since its re-emergence in the 1970s as part of the feminist push to bring women's writing to the mainstream of academic study, *The Awakening* has been given due diligence in scholarly examinations of race, place, psychology, Victorian marriage, friendship, the failings of language, patriarchal oppression, and the *künstlerroman*. Much work has also been done on the ambiguous ending of the novel: Does Edna commit suicide? Does she die of an accidental drowning? Does Edna die at all? There is enough textual evidence to support any of these readings. Early critics panned the novel, suggesting that Edna's adulterous behavior could only end in death. Elaine Showalter wrote that *The Awakening* can "be read as an account of Edna Pontellier's evolution from romantic fantasies of fusion with another person to self-definition and self-reliance" (1). Some liberal feminist scholars suggest Edna is a heroine, whose alleged suicide marks out her own "resistance" to the patriarchy by exercising the only agency she had in the Victorian era while others suggest that Edna's suicide is a failure of language or literary genres to support a clear feminine perspective for how Edna should choose to live her life. To suggest this novel is an account of the protagonist's self-definition that ends with her suicide seems antithetical to liberal feminist aims of liberation or empowerment. It is equally disingenuous to suggest that Edna stands in for Simone de Beauvoir's "emancipated woman": "a female who insists on the active transcendence of a subject rather than the passive immanence of object, on an existentialist authenticity obtained through exerting a conscious choice, giving her own laws, and making her

⁵ The Kate Chopin International Society. <https://www.katechopin.org/kate-chopin-different-languages/#awakeningtranslations>

own destiny” (Seyersted 27). Per Seyersted continues to suggest that Edna, in “the supreme exertion of her freedom...takes her own life” (28). What all of this scholarship overtly highlights is the stultifying existence of women under patriarchal oppression; however, this scholarship simultaneously exists on a slippery slope where it can be read as covertly encouraging suicide as a heroic act of agency in the face of patriarchal oppression.

In 1988, Showalter claimed this “radical” piece of fiction was “generally recognized ... as the first aesthetically successful novel to have been written by an American woman” (1). Showalter also claims the novel “broke new thematic and stylistic ground ... writing about women’s longing for sexual and personal emancipation” (2). Showalter goes on to suggest that women writers in the postbellum period had a vastly different cultural milieu than prior to the Civil War. Showalter attributes this difference in women’s culture to women’s demands for “entrance to higher education, the professions, and the political world” (4). Showalter oversimplifies the cultural changes in women’s culture, and thereby ignores Nancy Cott’s earlier work on economics and changing job markets for women prior to the Civil War. It is difficult to avoid reading Showalter’s oversimplification as an innocent one because without the thorough examination of changing economics in a post-enslavement economy her analysis quite aptly reinforces a liberal feminist narrative that a majority of women near the turn of the twentieth century were fully cognizant of their political and socioeconomic positionality. It also serves to reinforce a fifty-year-old analytic narrative about the novel: that it is one of self-definition and self-reliance that ends in suicide rather than a novel about class identity.⁶

The market economy in the United States was a much stronger influence in the lives of US citizens and was more directly responsible for the changing shape of women’s culture. The

⁶ Although Showalter’s analysis is more than thirty years old, I am using it here because Showalter’s extensive body of work set a tone for how this novel, in particular, has been taught and analyzed through a liberal feminist lens.

end of slave economy in the United States changed the way class division looked. In other words, the lines of class division no longer had a racial marker between the upper, middle, and working classes and were no longer as stable and static as they had been during slave economy. Many antebellum wealthy white Southerners became economic equivalents with newly freed African Americans after the Civil War. Women's cultural milieu did change after the war, but not for the simplistic reasons Showalter suggests. Some women did make demands on education and political participation, but the majority of women were still attempting to keep their families together, fed, sheltered, and spiritually secure. To suggest that women's culture changed because women, *en masse*, before 1900, were making demands for inclusion and education is a romantic fantasy. It is more likely that women's cultural milieu changed because of shifting economic classes, economic demand for labor in industrialized centers, and repeated attempts to clearly mark divisions between the bourgeois and the working class.⁷ To ignore the implications of economics and class in an analysis of the novel suggests that death was, universally, the only option for any woman who pursued self-definition and self-reliance. One important implication made by economics and class in the novel is that the bourgeois is represented as a vacuum, existing statically between two poles where identity can be constructed. A renegade feminist reading of the novel does not take the ending for granted, excavates the less obvious symbols of patriarchal authority and female agency, and examines the relationship between economics and social standing while also looking beyond human interactions to find meaning in solitude.

Edna Pontellier is a middle-class wife and mother. She is described through her husband's gaze as strong, shapely, and silent. He looked at her "as one looks at a valuable piece of personal property" (Chopin 882). She is the mother of two young sons, who falls in love with

⁷ Cott details various economic and political changes that influenced women's cultural milieu.

an unmarried man, and as she awakens to the realities of her bondage to marriage and motherhood, experiences an existential crisis of sorts that remains unresolved at the end of the novel. I would like to suggest that instead of focusing on whether she dies at the end of the novel, or whether that death is accidental or intentional, we focus on Edna's awakening to her class positionality and her move toward the margins of bourgeois society. Viewing the novel this way allows Chopin's ambiguous ending more space for a perhaps less toxic reading of female agency in the Victorian era.

Edna's Traditional Sorority and Her Move Toward the Margin

Edna takes a fateful walk with Adele Ratignolle in the early part of the novel, on Grand Isle. The walk begins with descriptions of "yellow chamomile," "vegetable gardens," "orange and lemon trees," and "dark green clusters" glistening "from far away," conjuring a kind of fecundity which mirrors descriptions of Madame Ratignolle as "always talking about her 'condition'," "a chubby matron", and a "sensuous Madonna" (891-894). Madame Ratignolle is pregnant with her third child and thinking about having a fourth child. Ratignolle is one of the "mother-women." "They were women who idolized their children, worshiped their husbands..." forever effacing "themselves as individuals" (888). She can only be described by "old words ... that have served so often to picture the bygone heroine of romance and the fair lady of our dreams" (888). She is plump, graceful, "flaming and apparent" in her beauty, with lips like cherries. She is a woman who knits full-bodied "drawers" for her children that cover all but their eyes (888). In contrast, Edna is described as "not a mother-woman" (888). Edna's body is described as "long, clean and symmetrical"; the casual observer might miss the "noble beauty of its modeling," and "graceful severity of poise and movement" (894). Edna does

not mind her skin tanning in the sun, while Adele is "more careful of her complexion" (894). Finally, "the more feminine and matronly figure" is a phrase reserved for Adele, as though the two - feminine and matronly - are inextricable (894).

The conversation they eventually begin when the silent walk is over is about a memory Edna has of being a "little unthinking child" in a Kentucky field (896). This memory causes Edna to realize that for the first time since then she feels as though she were "walking through the green meadow again: idly, aimlessly, unthinking, and unguided" (897). Adele's response is matronly: she squeezes Edna's hand, calls her a poor darling, and Edna's mind begins to wander back to her sisters and her friends from school. The narrator explains that Edna lost her mother when she was very young. These thoughts lead her to memories of a "dignified and sad-eyed cavalry officer" who she once loved, and then another man, "but he, too, went the way of dreams" (897-8). These thoughts lead her eventually to considerations of her marriage to Leonce and thoughts about her children. Adele's motherly affection leads Edna on a circuitous route to thoughts about her own motherhood, when she begins to disconnect from Adele.

Edna's walk with Adele demonstrates the kind of sorority that we might consider traditional for white bourgeois women. Women bonded over the trauma of childbirth and the melancholy and joy of raising children. Showalter explains that they "looked to motherhood for their metaphors and justifications of literary creativity" (3). Showalter describes in detail how the literature of the era "celebrates matriarchal institutions and idealizes the period of blissful bonding between mother and child", and she casually mentions how these "covert appeals to female solidarity ... could be a subversive critique of patriarchal power" (3-4). Although Showalter gives this insight, she moves on immediately to discussions of the novel's aesthetics. Covert appeals to female solidarity based on a conception of "universal" motherhood is

indicative of one of the ruptures in US feminism. By presuming motherhood is on every woman's agenda, it also indicates a larger failure in US feminism. Clues to the larger failure lie in liberal feminism's definitions of solidarity and sorority, because they are not the same. Basing social organization on a universal concept that is not really a universal concept and calling it solidarity is disingenuous. Ideas about "sisterhood" plague liberal feminism because of their flattening of difference as well as their stagnating impact on the political aims of women. Even though it is one sentence in the midst of a discussion about the forms and genres of literature, it requires some unpacking because it is an example of how the metanarrative of domesticity, with its foundation in the myth of American exceptionalism, co-opts contemporary scholarship beginning in the 1980s.

These "covert appeals to female solidarity" are anything but subversive critiques of patriarchal power, even if we disregard the problems with "sisterhood". Reinforcing sorority based on motherhood creates a static space where women must continuously reenact bourgeois values that are tightly bound to conceptions of motherhood: prudence, charity, temperance, and physical suffering equals spiritual reward. The metanarrative of domesticity ignores the economic and racial barriers for most women. In other words, the majority of women in the United States, now and in the 1890s, could not afford to have someone come daily or weekly to help care for children and do housework and cook meals for the family. The majority of women in the United States, now and then, balance housework, meal preparation, childcare, and employment with economic obstacles. The protestant work ethic, prior to being coined by Max Weber, encompassed diligence, usefulness, and frugality, and exceptionalism. Reinforcing an idea of kinship and shared goals based on motherhood also simultaneously creates an inbuilt hierarchy of women who "do" motherhood according to the bourgeois model, like Madame

Ratignolle and Madame Lebrun compared to Mademoiselle Reisz and Edna. This kind of thinking – that female solidarity based on motherhood is subversive - is how the metanarrative of domesticity perpetuates itself even into literary analysis.

When the criticism is solely focused on the patriarchy, it is simultaneously ignorant of its own drive for conformity, the pressure to perform, and the hierarchy of women whose goals are biologically driven over women whose goals are not biologically driven. bell hooks asserts that:

women ... are not taught a different value system [from men] ... they do not conceptualize power differently [than men] ... Feminist rhetoric pushing the notion of man as enemy and woman as victim enables women to avoid doing the work of creating new value systems ... the suggestion that women must obtain power before they can effectively resist sexism is rooted in the false assumption that women have no power (87, 92).

Not only does this imply that women have no power until they wrest it from the cold dead hands of men, but it also suggests that seizing any kind of power is in itself an act of agency. This is how some liberal feminist scholarship can justify valorizing Edna for killing herself. J. Jack Halberstam also insists that we ask where we can find “feminist a

The Judgment of the Mother-Women

Edna is under continuous scrutiny by Madame Ratignolle and Madame Lebrun. Adele tells Robert “She [Edna] is not one of us; she is not like us. She might make the unfortunate mistake of taking you seriously” (Chopin 900). “One of us” has often been read as Edna’s lack of belonging within this Creole culture. Edna is often shocked and dismayed by the Creole women’s behavior: they all share a racy novel on Grand Isle and Adele is constantly discussing childbirth and childbearing which Edna finds unsuitable topics of conversation in public. However, when Adele suggests Edna is not “one of us”, it is unclear if she means Creole or bourgeois. I would argue that the text more clearly points here to Edna’s initial movement away from the center of this bourgeois group. Adele continues by stating: “if your attentions to any

married women here were ever offered with any intention of being convincing, you would not be the gentleman we all know you to be” (900). Adele does not refer to Robert as a Creole gentleman, but just a gentleman.⁸ The narrator expresses no specific link to Creole culture, and in fact, Robert and Adele completely drop their French usage for this part of the conversation, which may signal a move away from aspects of Creole culture. The second criticism occurs near the end of the chapter when Robert’s mother, Madame Lebrun, comments on how Edna always waits too long to get the children ready for lunch (903).⁹ These two episodes, where Edna is judged for her behavior by Adele and Madame Lebrun, demonstrate the hierarchy of mother-women. These women, Adele and Madame Lebrun, are positioned at the top of the hierarchy because they are consistently praised for their skills as mothers, their value as human beings is regularly reaffirmed by their community solely by their faultless mothering.

The narrator relates a conversation between Adele and Edna that further demonstrates Edna’s ideological move away from Adele. Edna tells Adele that she “would never sacrifice herself for her children, or for anyone” and that she would “give up the unessential; I would give up my money, I would give my life for my children; but I wouldn’t give up myself” (929). Earlier in the novel, the narrator tells us that Edna was already aware of her own duality: “at a very early period she had apprehended instinctively, the dual life - that outward existence which conforms, the inward life which questions” (893). Edna is clearly only just coming to terms with what it means to have an inner and outer life, and her distinctions are still rudimentary. Edna does, though, thoroughly apprehend that her desires differ from her reality. Adele does not seem

⁸ Vague comments related by both the narrator and other characters about Alcee Arobin suggest he is not the kind of gentleman that Robert is, and again, there is no mention in the text that this is specifically an aspect of Creole culture. See also, pp 979-80 (Chopin)

⁹ Madame Lebrun says later on Grand Isle of Edna: “Sometimes I am tempted to think that Mrs. Pontellier is capricious” (909), which will, along with the other two criticisms, become very important in the discussion later about Edna’s father, husband, and physician.

to take note of the distinction between self and life, but clambers for definitions of “unessential” and “essential” which does seem congruous with her final statement to Edna: “but a woman who would give her life for her children could do no more than that – your Bible tells you so” (929). The metanarrative of domesticity, which is scaffolded by religious values, does not support the distinction between self and life for women. The metanarrative of domesticity privileges conformity over diversity. Self-actualization is a subjective act that defies conformity and uniformity. The self can be whatever it wants to be, but the life of a woman, according to the metanarrative of domesticity, should look like Adele’s or Madame Lebrun’s lives rather than Edna’s or Mademoiselle Reisz’s lives. Adele cannot be the model of womanly existence if she is also making a distinction between who she is fundamentally (self) and her role in society (life). In spite of her instinctive understanding of this distinction, Edna seems to be aware that her options for an outer life are quite limited.

A New Kind of Sorority with Mademoiselle Reisz and Edna’s Blossoming “Failure”

The narrator describes Mademoiselle Reisz as a “disagreeable little woman, no longer young, who had quarreled with almost every one, owing to a temper which was self-assertive and a disposition to trample upon the rights of others” (905). She is also described by other characters as awkward, imperious, homely, disagreeable, unpopular, and lacking any fashion sense. Although the text does not offer any instances of Mlle. Reisz trampling the rights of others, she does not perform her class identity in a way that garners any respect from her peers. Mademoiselle Reisz is bourgeois, or her presence and eccentricities would not be tolerated on Grand Isle, so it seems a logical assumption that her awkward, imperious, and disagreeable nature is by choice. This choice, then, seems like a flagrant disregard of gendered class

performance . Mademoiselle Reisz represents such an undesirable option for female existence that she is never given a first name.

Mademoiselle Reisz is an artist, a pianist. Edna has her first “quick vision of death” after hearing Reisz play the piano, when she finally learns to swim (908). When Edna again meets with Mlle Reisz, she has been swimming again, ruminating about her feelings for Robert who has abruptly left Grand Isle. Edna attempts to make small talk with her¹⁰. Mlle Reisz proceeds to give Edna an unvarnished impression of Robert and his brother which the narrator tells us Edna finds venomous (930). Her encounter with Mlle Reisz leaves her feeling depressed, and so, back into the water she goes, leaving Mlle Reisz on the beach alone Mlle Reisz waits for her to finish and they have an amiable walk back to the cottages and agree to visit one another in New Orleans. Even though the narrator goes to great lengths to secure as undesirable an image as possible of Mlle Reisz, her interactions with Edna and Robert show her to be routinely amiable, kind, compassionate, and humble. Her “venomous” unvarnished opinion about Robert is that he is a good man for taking care of his family.

Mlle Reisz is coded in every way as a failure of bourgeois womanhood.¹¹ Her existence is predicated upon her ability to reinforce, by contrast, the existence of characters like Mme Ratignolle and Mme Lebrun. Both Madames Ratignolle and Lebrun represent the successful

¹⁰ Much of the content of etiquette and conduct books at that time instructed women in the canons of politeness. Aspects of politeness range from small talk to varnished opinions of people, places, and things, and deference to men. Politeness is a way of performing refinement and elegance. Politeness signifies class and education but should never be confused with kindness – which is often not a performance. Politeness is a set of behaviors designed for the sole purpose of exhibition. “Being polite” was often how bourgeois women earned their sense of accomplishment. It is worth noting here that Mademoiselle Reisz’s decision to remain while Edna swims alone illustrates the difference between conceptions of politeness and kindness. Not leaving Edna, a new swimmer, to swim alone in open water is a kindness from Reisz in spite of her lack of politeness.

¹¹ I want to note here that “bourgeois womanhood” and “bourgeois motherhood” are one and the same. In order to perform womanhood appropriately for the bourgeoisie, one should be planning and preparing oneself for marriage and children or embedded fully in her marriage and her children. So, even young, unmarried women are expected to be in preparation for this life of marriage and maternity. The only distinction between success and failure at this performance seems to be a lack of desire on the part of the performer rather than a lack of access to the tools and knowledge for fulfilment of that desire.

accomplishment of bourgeois motherhood, and therefore can stand as the enforcers of the metanarrative of domesticity.¹² Halberstam argues that “where feminine success is always measured by male standards, and gender failure often means being relieved of the pressure to measure up to patriarchal ideals, not succeeding at womanhood can offer unexpected pleasures” (4). We cannot forget the root of the metanarrative of domesticity is connected to male clergy and Protestant and Calvinist morality – male standards. Mlle Reisz seems to have found some unexpected pleasures in her failure, most notably, her solitude and her artistry. Halberstam’s “shadow feminism” suggests that failures like Mlle Reisz’s constitute a “refusal to be or to become woman as she has been defined and imagined within Western philosophy”, or I would add, the metanarrative of domesticity (Halberstam 124). This failure is attractive in some way to Edna, because when she is faced with an “appalling and hopeless ennui”, she returns to Mlle Reisz for comfort.

Once Edna returns to New Orleans, she experiences restlessness, irritability, and discontent with many aspects of her life. She decides to give up her six-year practice of accepting visitors on Tuesdays. She becomes destructive in response to Leonce’s disappointment in her changes. She throws her wedding ring on the floor, tries to smash it with her boot heel, and smashes a vase (934). Edna experiences feelings of antagonism towards the world right outside her veranda and is uninterested in her own sketches. In her restlessness, she takes her sketches to Adele’s. Edna wants Adele’s opinion about her skill, yet the narrator explains: “She knew that Madame Ratignolle’s opinion in such a matter would be next to

¹² As enforcers of the prescriptions of behavior within the metanarrative of domesticity, Ratignolle and Lebrun first reprove Edna’s mere approaches to failing on Grand Isle, but actively reproach Edna’s new lifestyle in New Orleans by not attending her dinner party. In her final act of policing, Adele exhaustedly pleads with Edna, in between labor contractions, to “think of the children, Edna” (995).

valueless ... but she sought the words of praise and encouragement that would help her to put her heart into her venture”(Chopin 937). Even as Adele gives those words of praise and encouragement, Edna feels complacent about them. She leaves feeling depressed rather than comforted by the “glimpse of domestic harmony” represented by Mr. and Mrs. Ratignolle during her visit (938). Edna leaves the Ratignolle’s feeling pity for Adele instead of feeling better about herself.

Edna seeks Mlle Reisz after her meeting with Adele in the same endeavor to hear praise and encouragement that will help motivate her to continue painting. As she continues her ideological motions away from the center of her bourgeois group, the only other direction she thinks she has to go is toward Mlle Reisz. Immediately, they give one another their unvarnished opinions: Mlle Reisz says she thought Edna was like “those women in society” because “I really don’t believe you like me,” and Edna tells Mlle Reisz “I don’t know whether I do like you or not” (944-5). Both women welcome this candor. Edna is searching for something throughout this section of the novel. Her restlessness and irritability signal her dissatisfaction with her current life. She is looking for another way to exist, a way to be who she has already become – a bourgeois mother and wife – but also proceed with a further becoming – an artist. She has yet to fully realize the social and economic barriers that disable her ability to be a bourgeois wife, mother, and artist at the same time.

The Colonel, the Husband, and the Doctor – The Patriarchy and the Medical Establishment

Around Edna’s walk with Adele, the narrator explains that Edna “was not a woman given to confidences” and that “she had lived her own small life all within herself” (893). Yet, she confides in Adele about a summer’s day when a young Edna abandoned herself in a Kentucky

meadow. She tells Adele “I was running away from prayers, from the Presbyterian service, read in a spirit of gloom by my father that chills me yet to think of” (896). Edna’s father, the Colonel, comes to visit Edna and Leonce, and the narrator explains “she was not very warmly or deeply attached to him, but they had certain tastes in common, and ... were companionable” (950). Along with his “military bearing”, he also carries a very high opinion of himself, according to the narrator, evidenced in how he responds to Edna’s sketches. He seizes ownership of Edna’s creativity as the result of his own genes and parenting: “convinced as he was that he had bequeathed to all of his daughters the germs of a masterful capability, which only depended on their own efforts to be directed toward successful achievement” (950). In other words, Edna’s skill as an artist is a foregone conclusion because she is his daughter. Most importantly, though, is the picture of parenthood glimpsed through the Colonel’s responses to Edna’s children and his interactions with Edna.

Edna convinces her father to sit for a portrait sketch, which he does “as he had faced the cannon’s mouth in days gone by,” but when Edna’s sons gawp at him, he resents them (950). He kicks them away, as if they were small dogs, “loathe to disturb the fixed lines of his countenance, his arms, or his rigid shoulders” (951). Edna is kept busy during his visit “serving him and ministering to his wants” and attending horse races with him, and she feels she is becoming more “thoroughly acquainted with him” (951).¹³ Edna spends her visit with her father getting reacquainted, showing signs of affection and kindness, but the visit ends with a “warm, and almost violent dispute” about Edna’s decision not to attend her sister Janet’s wedding (954). The Colonel “reproached his daughter for her lack of filial kindness and respect, her want of sisterly affection and womanly consideration,” finally announcing that neither of her sisters would likely

¹³ It is at the horse race where Edna meets Mrs. Highcamp and Mrs. Merriman, both of whom attend her birthday party later in the novel, her new “fashionable acquaintances” (959).

forgive her (954). He tells Leonce that he is too lenient with Edna: “Authority, coercion are what is needed. Put your foot down good and hard; the only way to manage a wife. Take my word for it” (954). In short, the Colonel is arrogant, self-absorbed, rigid, lacks compassion, and connected to Edna in only the most superficial ways, ways that reflect positively on him. He does not see Edna as a human being, but rather as an extension of himself.

Leonce is somewhat different from the Colonel in that he does seem to be concerned with Edna’s behavior, even if that concern only comes down to his own financial integrity and not necessarily Edna’s wellbeing. He is appalled when Edna gives up her responsibility to accept social calls on Tuesdays because it violates his sense of propriety: “we’ve got to observe *les convenances* if we ever expect to get on and keep up with the procession” (932). His most effusive outburst comes in response to Edna’s ever-increasing “capricious” behavior: “Then in God’s name paint! but don’t let the family go to the devil. There’s Madame Ratignolle; because she keeps up her music, she doesn’t let everything else go to chaos. And she’s more of a musician than you are a painter” (939). In response to her desire to move out of the family home with a stipend from him, Leonce writes her “a letter of unqualified disapproval and remonstrance”, and the narrator explains his primary concern was “he begged her to consider first, and foremost, and above all else, what people would say ... He was simply thinking of his financial integrity” (977). The text makes it clear where Leonce’s priorities lie. He also only sees Edna as an extension of himself.

After his own emotional outburst, Leonce pays a visit to Dr. Mandelet; however, this is more an act of Leonce’s well-known cleverness and acumen than it is his concern for his wife. Leonce makes a special trip to visit Dr. Mandelet because Edna is not acting well: “she’s odd, she’s not like herself. I can’t make her out, and I thought perhaps you’d help me” (947). In

response to the rapid changes in her behavior that Leonce describes, as well as his descriptions of his own lack of control over his anger at her behavior, Mandelet's first question is about Edna's social life: "has she been associating of late with a circle of pseudo-intellectual women – super-spiritual superior beings?" (949). The two men discuss Edna as if she were a racehorse or a breed of cattle or a slave, mulling over her "stock" and "breeding" (948). The doctor only has a prescription for Leonce after he learns that Edna has decried weddings as "the most lamentable spectacles on earth" (948). The doctor tells Leonce that women like Edna are "especially peculiar. It would require an inspired psychologist to deal successfully with them ... most women are moody and whimsical. This is some passing whim of your wife ... which you and I needn't try to fathom" (949). In this one scene, Chopin captures the dangers lurking for women, even respectably married women, in exercising their independence. After asking about the "superior spiritual beings" Edna might be associating with, Mandelet's suggestion that only an "inspired psychologist" can hope to treat women like Edna ("pseudo-intellectual", whimsical, delicate, moody, organized, and sensitive), has sinister undertones (948-9). The various enforcers of the bourgeois model of motherhood notwithstanding, the most effective and long-lived tool of the patriarchy is the U.S. medical establishment. Even in our contemporary moment, the medical establishment is still used to great effect to limit women's independence and autonomy.

In 1892, Charlotte Perkins Gillman penned *The Yellow Wallpaper*, demonstrating the stultifying and insanity-inducing effects of medical and familial interventions like the one Leonce is proposing for Edna. Edna's restlessness, irritability, and discontent coupled with her "capricious" behavior are precisely the kinds of symptoms of an excess of nervous energy often descried as hysteria. It is not unreasonable to assume that what Edna must eventually face in

response to her changing behavior is medical intervention. Luckily, Dr. Mandelet does not appear too eager immediately to do more than observe her behavior for himself. Unfortunately, vulnerability to this kind of harmful medical intervention, as with the narrator in Perkins' short story, is a symptom also of her class identity. Electricity was a relatively new technology, and access to it as a medical treatment was likely limited to those who could afford it even while experiments about its efficacy were more than likely performed on indigent women.

Concurrent with the widespread use of telegraphy and electricity, the fields of neurology and psychology were also emerging during the Victorian era. Knowledge of electricity offered useful metaphors about knowledge of the body such that electricity became a central metaphor for the human central nervous system. The operation of the central nervous system was viewed as an electrical one, and therefore, the energy produced from the central nervous system was referred to as "nervous energy" (Sconce 46-8). Because women who seemed to be excessively whimsical or moody or capricious were seen to have an excess of "electricity", they were considered to have dysfunctional nervous systems. Jeffrey Sconce continues that, for Spiritualism, this imbalance of women's "nervous energy" made women more suitable for mediumship; however, for the medical establishment, this excess of energy made women vulnerable to complicated disorders of the nervous system, including hysteria: "Physicians increasingly favored electrical etiologies in the late nineteenth century ... as physicians adopted electricity as a popular treatment for a variety of physical complaints ... it became especially important in treating mental and nervous disorders" (52-3). Electroshock therapy became a widely accepted and widely used treatment for hysteria. Its practice was continued well into the twentieth century. Very likely, Mandelet's "inspired psychologist" would have been using some form of electricity in the treatment of women's nervous disorders by 1899.

Leonce's concern for Edna's behavior stems from his sense of propriety, financial integrity, and his own inability to manage his emotions in response to Edna. He very clearly links his social standing to his financial integrity in his letter to Edna. Leonce takes out a small notice in the local newspaper announcing that the family's home was "undergoing sumptuous alterations" in order to explain Edna's move just to save appearances (977). Edna tells the children later in the novel about all the workmen present at the family's home, so we can assume he has not just taken out a notice but has also undertaken the alterations as well – just to save appearances. "Appearances" here refers to his social standing – his secure bourgeois position. His target audience for the notice are his friends and business associates, and the notice itself is meant to curb gossip. Leonce is a man who will spare no expense of time or money to save appearances, and we have to assume that declaring Edna "hysterical" and exposing her to electroshock therapy is not outside the realm of possibility.

Edna as Class Subject and Identity

There is no denying that the patriarchal oppression Edna suffered existed for real women in 1899, but the reality of how her class positionality contributes to that oppression must also be included in the analysis. It must be included because of the metanarrative of domesticity's exclusively bourgeois model of womanhood juxtaposed with the real economic and social obstacles the majority of women in the United States experienced. It must also be included in the analysis of the novel because of the rupture in US liberal feminism mentioned above, the one that ignores the realities of economic and racial barriers to successful enactment of the bourgeois model of womanhood. Edna's suffering, while valid and important, is not the same kind of suffering under oppression that women of color, rural women, or poor women in the United States experienced. In light of the economic and racial disparities in the United States, the

appearance of Edna's suicide vacillates between the ridiculous and the luxurious. It is a privilege indeed to be able to walk out into the ocean and end your life when you know that your children will remain with their father in a fine home with a household staff. It is not something to be valorized in any case.

Edna gives up some of the trappings of her bourgeois lifestyle when she moves into her small house – the fine family home, the household staff, and the social calls. These can be seen as the unessential parts of existence that Edna tells Adele she is willing to give up for her children. The elements of her bourgeois life that she retains are significant in better understanding her instinctive distinction between life and self and how embedded her bourgeois life is within her sense of self. Her “pigeon-house” is in the same affluent neighborhood as her Creole mansion. She only stops receiving social calls but she continues making social calls and hosting and attending dinner parties. She accepts a stipend from Leonce for a time, and the narrator reveals that some of this money is her inheritance from her mother. Edna's actions appear chaotic but are directly linked to her growing understanding about the difference between life and self. She is also growing in her understanding of the economic and social barriers to becoming an artist who is also a bourgeois wife and mother. Her visibility to her peers, seeing and being seen, functions as one of the fundamental aspects of successful execution of the bourgeois model of womanhood. In order to know if she is executing the performance well, she needs to be seen by her peers, so that when they come to her parties or receive her social calls, she can experience a sense of accomplishment. Because of her instinctive awareness of the difference between self and life, Edna is still determining what is essential and what is unessential about her life. Underneath her desire for independence and for “something to happen,” Edna fears being invisible or unessential herself (958). After attending the horse races

with her new friends, Edna is invigorated, hungry, eager, and excited about her future (958). The fruits of visibility Edna seeks are reinforcements of an identity that Edna has yet to lay claim to for herself. She exhibits a hopefulness for her future here in contrast to the restlessness and discontent she exhibited earlier.

Edna does possess artistic talent, although it is clear that her talent has not been nurtured up to this point. The bona fide artist in the novel, Mademoiselle Reisz, tells Edna “to be an artist includes much; one must possess many gifts – absolute gifts – which have not been acquired by one’s own effort. And, moreover, to succeed, the artist must possess the courageous soul” (946). Mlle Reisz more realistically suggests, though, that persistence, talent, and temperament count for something. It is Mlle Reisz who first calls Edna an artist. Until Mlle Reisz calls her an artist, Edna’s identity is limited to bourgeois wife and mother. When Mlle Reisz calls her an artist, it opens up other options for how Edna will continue to make distinctions between self and life. Until the point where Mlle Reisz calls her an artist, there has been a disconnect in Edna’s identity between life as bourgeois wife and mother and an artist-self. In a way, Mlle Reisz has given Edna a kind of permission slip for considering herself an artist, but Mlle Reisz’s own marginal existence in Edna’s bourgeois community suggests that life for the artist is less than desirable. Edna’s sexuality and identity no longer seem to be the foci of her awakening. Instead, Edna is waking up to the reality that the demands of gendered class performance do not allow the life and the self to coincide in any meaningful way.

Peter Ramos suggests that “identity, as we know it, is at base a social construction, a practical fiction one inhabits, more or less intentionally ... In many ways the definition of any particular identity seems arbitrary” (147). Like many turn-of-the-century women, Edna’s sense of self lies underneath layers of “Leonce’s wife”, “Etienne and Raul’s mother”, “the quadron’s

mistress”, “the Colonel’s daughter”, “Janet’s sister”, “Adele’s friend”, and “Robert’s lover”. She has had little authority in determining the borders of her identity, as was the case with most Victorian women. Ramos continues to suggest that adopting an identity like a practical fiction “still leaves room, even in an otherwise restrictive society, to willfully modify one’s social role or identity” (147). Ramos, like many others, suggests that Edna simply needed to navigate society better. Like Mlle Reisz, Edna needed to learn how to turn her so-called true self on and off, depending on her social environment. However, adapting one’s so-called true self based on the environment is an accommodation of other people’s expectations rather than the real experience of one’s own self in the world. Adele and Mlle Reisz represent opposite available identities for Edna. Part of her appalling and hopeless ennui resulted from a rejection of the available identity Adele offers. Adele is the model American bourgeois woman, and as such, she is the yardstick by which Leonce repeatedly measures Edna. It is very clear this is not an identity Edna wants to adopt for herself. However, Edna does not view Mlle Reisz any differently than anyone else in the novel; Mlle Reisz remains “that personality which was offensive to her” (961). Chopin has created a set of binaries in terms of available identities for Edna: one that is impossible to achieve in Edna’s mind and another which appears offensive to Edna. Both women, Adele and Mademoiselle Reisz, offer identities which are still rooted in their class positionality. Although Mlle Reisz has fewer creature comforts than Adele or Edna, she is still performing an acceptable bourgeois female identity.

Mademoiselle Reisz is not performing bourgeois motherhood with any degree of success, but she is performing the role of female artist quite successfully. That she is a capable pianist is only a partial testament to her continued but marginal acceptance. The other part of her marginal enfranchisement is her acceptance of her Othering. Were Mademoiselle Reisz not amiable, kind,

and compassionate (at least to Edna and Robert), in spite of the wild rumors of her trampling the rights of others, she would not have even the marginal acceptance she does. Mrs. Merriman, Mrs. Highcamp, and Miss Mayblunt are other versions of mother-women and Other. Mrs. Merriman and Mrs. Highcamp have older children which enables much more freedom for both. They are both well-versed in and compliant with the social expectations of married bourgeois women. Miss Mayblunt is younger than Edna and Adele, has no children, is not married, and the narrator tells us she writes under a *nom de guerre*, who seems to be on her way toward an existence like Mlle Reisz's, but she is described as vivacious and gregarious with no similarities in descriptions of Mlle Reisz. These women never rise to the level of imitation for Edna because, when her spirits are low, she seeks the familiar and comfortable in Adele and Mademoiselle Reisz. She never takes her hopelessness to Mrs. Merriman, Mrs. Highcamp, or Miss Mayblunt because they are her new friends. There is much that can be said about the familiar and the comfortable, especially for women who feel isolated, and Edna is suffering more from her isolation than from her late nineteenth century womanhood or an identity crisis.

Anarchy in *The Awakening* and The Question of the Ending

The suggestion that a woman's only form of agency in the late nineteenth century was to become a mother-woman, voluntarily live as a social pariah, or commit suicide recklessly ignores a whole range of other possibilities and negates the existence of thousands of other women, especially working women and women of color, who had even fewer alternatives but managed to, in many cases, flourish in spite of patriarchal authority. Moreover, the contradiction inherent in reading the ending as a suicide while also claiming Edna as a model transgressor invites neoliberal readings of Edna not being "enough" to manage her own identity crisis. These readings, especially when they are suggested to students as "prevailing theories," put women in

an impossible situation where they must make themselves “enough” to fit into a culture still dominated by patriarchal authority or make themselves “enough” to fight that authority. In either case, the message is clear: on their own, women are not enough. *The Awakening* does offer a realistic glimpse into the dangers for married women of medical intervention, the ties between financial security and social standing, and the limited options for identity construction for women. However, the novel does, like its liberal feminist readings, invite a neoliberal assessment that Edna just is not enough: not courageous enough, not ethical enough, not clever enough, and not motivated enough. But the thing that is really lacking, that really is not enough, that isolates Edna, is the lack of community. A community is a structure, sometimes like a family, made up of people who share goals, interests, and affection. There is no one in Edna’s line of sight who shares her goals and interests. There is no other woman in her environment who is like her: a bourgeois wife, mother, and artist. Edna is an outsider in every sense of the word in her own life.

The community Edna is a part of is revealed to be shallow and judgmental. The constant scrutiny of Leonce, Adele, and Madame Lebrun, and the public criticisms of Mademoiselle Reisz reveal a group of people who do not genuinely care about one another, matronly gestures of affection notwithstanding. Like Leonce, the community is only concerned with maintaining its status—each member’s financial integrity depends on the cohesion and stability of the group. New members do not seem welcome, and there does not seem to be room for existing members to evolve. Edna finds herself moving toward the margins of this community first because she could not find a way to relate fundamentally to anyone in her group. This goes back to her rudimentary distinctions between life and self. This also goes back to the notion that, with Mademoiselle Reisz, Edna feels she can be somewhat unvarnished.

Edna's self is rooted in her own desires for human connection, for visibility. For Edna, this connection of self and desire is not necessarily about her fantasies of romantic or sexual connection. Edna has no connection to anyone – not her children, not her husband, and none of her “friends”. The closest Edna ever gets to an unequivocal connection with another living thing is her brief episode with Etienne's and Raul's dog while Leonce is away on business and the children are at his mother's. This episode occurs before she moves into her “pigeon-house”. She is attempting to garden, and the dog keeps interrupting her. Initially, she tries to shoo the dog away, like her father did with her children, but she eventually gives in and plays in the garden with the dog and shares her supper with him. The dinner she shares with the dog is a perfectly cooked steak, good wine, and candied chestnuts, which she eats in her nightgown (Chopin 955-6). Through this interaction with the children's dog, Edna is able to exist fully as her self without external pressure or guilt. She recognized that, during this period of solitude, she painted better when she was “devoid of ambition” and not striving for a sense of accomplishment (956). This period of solitude also enables her to make the decision to move into her “pigeon-house”. Isolation and solitude are vastly different. Solitude connotes interior intent while isolation often connotes an external force of separation from others. After the move, Edna is painting more and more, enough to give up the stipend from Leonce, yet she still fails to fully recognize the productive benefits of solitude because she still longs for Robert.

In the penultimate chapter, Edna is called by Adele to come witness the birth of her most recent child. Dr. Mandelet is also present. The dramatic scene of a woman in labor, especially given the detachment Edna has undergone from her own children dominates the critical landscape. However, Edna makes some very astute and life-changing realizations as Dr. Mandelet escorts her home. He attempts to engage her in a conversation about what ails her –

which he has assumed is something hormonal or an extramarital affair. He tells her “youth is given up to illusions ... and Nature takes no account of moral consequences, of arbitrary conditions which we create, and which we feel obliged to maintain at any cost” (996). She responds: “perhaps it is better to wake up after all, even to suffer, rather than to remain a dupe to illusions all one’s life” (996). Edna very much wants to live, and her response here indicates that she is trying to determine what kind of suffering she is willing to live with. She has been living a life of illusion and has been suffering. However, waking up to her authentic self has unknown consequences that she fears may cause worse suffering.

It seems Edna has undergone a “dark night of the soul” during which she has contemplated all that she has lost and all she has gained. She may still have a very rudimentary understanding of the distinction between self and life, and the text never reveals whether she reaches a clearer understanding or not. In the final chapter, she stands naked on the beach and experiences a rebirth: “she felt like some new-born creature, opening its eyes in a familiar world that it had never known” (1000). As she rises in the water, she thinks about how she overcame her terror of swimming, and as she sinks in the water, she thinks about her husband, her children, her father and sisters. Rising up in the water is a woman who overcomes fear, while the woman defined by who she is married to and what she does sinks into the water, symbolic of the ebb and flow of her whole awakening throughout the novel – caught as she has been between who she is and what is expected of her (her self and her life). She is drowning the woman attached to her life and birthing the woman who embraces her self. The final lines of the novel are dedicated to sounds and smells, a dog, bees, and a garden, and this dedication indicates that she will return to the shore, to her clothes, to the hastily prepared meal she has asked Victor to make, and to her “pigeon-house” with determination to continue her art. This recognition of dog, bees, and

garden link back to her one authentic moment with the children's dog when she was free to be herself. There is still the threat of medical intervention by Leonce, but it is unlikely, given their last conversation, that Dr. Mandelet will participate in any kind of medical intervention that might harm Edna. She accepts that her desire for Robert is fleeting, and she has been aware of her monotonous agitation and boredom (958). Leonce is gone; the children are gone; Robert is gone. There is nothing left to impede her acceptance of an identity that she creates for herself in the chilly waves of the Gulf of Mexico.

Reading the ending this way leaves a blank slate where Edna, and any woman, can write her own identity into existence. Chela Sandoval asserts that "the language of lovers can puncture through the everyday narratives that tie us to social time and space ... and romantic love provides one kind of entry to a form of being that breaks the citizen-subject free from the ties that bind being" (139-140.1). Sandoval calls this form of being a "utopian nonsite, a no-place where everything is possible – but only in exchange for the pain of the crossing" (140.1). Falling in love is not the only entry point for this space; loss of romantic love can also be an entry point. In other words, love does not need to be reciprocated for love to change the lover. For Sandoval, "being engulfed by love" allows entry into this no-place because there is nowhere left for such a one to be.¹⁴ Sandoval goes on to suggest that "new kinds of citizen-subjects can happen only when we become capable of refusing the individuality which has been imposed on us" (160.1). As Edna stands naked on the shore, she has nowhere left where she can exist as she is. The Gulf becomes a nonsite, a no-place, where everything is possible. The entire novel, then, becomes Edna's pain of the crossing. Unable to make loving connections, platonic or romantic, she is left

¹⁴ Sandoval is unpacking Roland Barthes' *Incidents, The Pleasure of the Text* and *A Lover's Discourse*: "when one becomes engulfed by love, entry to this other place of meaning is permitted because there is no longer 'any PLACE for me anywhere, not even in death'" (140.1).

with nothing but potential. When she has been depressed, she often goes into the water and comes out feeling restored, as she did when she did not like the way Mademoiselle Reisz was talking about Robert. Sandoval also suggests that entry into this place combined with the fact that love is not bound to ideology leads directly to revolutionary love and the end of “Western love” (142.3). In other words, in this place of boundless possibility, Edna is more likely to emerge from the water with a new dedication to her art. The illusion of “Western” love has evaporated in her wakefulness. This is not to suggest, as some scholars have, that Edna emerges from the water as the Venus, another male standard liberal feminism has adopted as part of the infiltration of the metanarrative of domesticity, but rather like the Medusa. Betrayed and abandoned by her fellow women in their own adoption of the bourgeois model, equally oppressed and threatened by patriarchal authority, Edna is likely to emerge from the water capable of turning men to stone with just a look, and perhaps, getting her own dog.

Chapter Two

Aunties: The Persistence of African-centered Family Structures in Pauline Hopkins's

Hagar's Daughter

If a renegade feminist lens can examine the ways class identity imposes a binary of isolation/assimilation on bourgeois white women, then it should also be able to expose the impositions of isolation/assimilation at the nexus of class and race. In the previous chapter, I asserted that the oppressive force for Edna was her isolation from community and friendship that made it nearly impossible for her to find representation for her ambitions and drives, which led to her frustration, ending with a fateful swim in the Gulf of Mexico. Patriarchal pressure came from her family of origin, her nuclear family with Leonce, and her acquaintances with Mademoiselle Reisz, Madame Ratignolle, and Madame Lebrun. A lack of community and guidance disabled Edna's potential to navigate institutional and social barriers so she could eventually realize her dreams. In this chapter, I will examine Pauline Hopkins's *Hagar's Daughter, A Story of Southern Caste Prejudice* (1901-1902), and look at the ways in which class identity and racial markers serve to isolate the protagonist. The politics of respectability, racism, and prejudice create unique barriers to companionship, romantic love, and the pursuit of happiness, dispelling the myth of American exceptionalism because a nation founded on human trafficking, enslavement, systemic racism, and institutionally sanctioned racial violence is only exceptional in its horrors. Yet, Hopkins's novel offers a glimpse of alternatives to the pursuit of the Western ideal of romantic love and companionship through its representation of kinship networks with African origins.

Hagar Sargeant is an only child who falls in love with her parents' neighbor, Ellis Enson. The two marry and have a daughter. Ellis is a wealthy New England landowner with a ne'er do

well brother, St. Clair. Upon hearing of his brother's marriage and child, St. Clair fears for his inheritance and concocts a plan with his gambling partner, Walker, to ensure his position as his brother's heir. The scheme involves claiming Hagar was bought by the Sargeants, procured as an infant by Walker from a slave market. Ellis pays Walker the going rate for slaves, and he and Hagar plan to leave the United States and live in Europe. However, Ellis is mysteriously beaten and left for dead while Hagar and her daughter are taken to a slave market in Washington D.C. from which they escape just before Hopkins breaks the novel into two sections. The second section of the novel occurs twenty-six years later, and focuses on the reunification of mother and daughter, husband and wife, and the perils of prejudice and racism.

The Myth of American Exceptionalism and Black Families

The "ideal" and "traditional" concept of family "has been defined as a natural or biological arrangement, based on heterosexual attraction ... [and] also assumes a relatively fixed sexual division of labor" (Andersen 235-6). We know now that this conception of the American family relies on heteronormativity and is viewed both as something to be preserved no matter the cost and, sometimes, as a violent form of sexualized oppression. Stephen Kern posits that the master narrative about courtship suggests that "women learned to attract a man and wait for him to court while learning to sew, cook, play piano, dance, read, and teach children – skills for marriage and motherhood" and that women were "more committed to the morality of love based on honesty, fidelity, and commitment, while men made moral choices in the public sphere" (10). Thus, the formation of family out of this courtship prescription reinforces divisions based on gender and develops the master narrative of family which provides "a source of meaning for individuals in a single family and for families across generations" (Kern 11). The meaning offered is not fixed and could be the goal and the reward of living a successful life; it could be

the means by which property is legitimately retained across generations; for immigrants, it could be a link to Old World customs and traditions; for Black Americans, it could be the means by which political enfranchisement could be achieved and simultaneously provide a certain amount of distance from enslavement.

It is important to remember that the national and imperial narratives in the United States are about organizing people into ethnic and cultural groups so that the nation as a whole can ensure and pursue ever-increasing territorial, financial, political, and cultural dominion (Kern 13-14).¹⁵ Family structures offer a way to facilitate organization of the body politic. The continued pushback against marriage equality in the 21st century suggests that the family narrative continues to offer meaning politically, economically, and socially for many US citizens. This pushback also offers evidence of an established link between the courtship/marriage narratives and national/imperial narratives. The adjective “traditional” is often used to define the kind of nuclear family which is set up as the model American family, according to the metanarrative of domesticity. “Traditional family values” is a term still widely bandied about in the United States Congress. Hard line conservative economic proposals typically rely on shared concepts of “traditional family values” for support and those values are also called upon in opposition to progressive economic proposals. The tangled web of family, courtship, economics, and political and social enfranchisement function with and in the service of the national and imperial narratives in the United States. Traditional family values are big business in Washington. The pushback against the Affordable Housing Act referenced in the Introduction also relies on a shared conception of traditional family values that are uniquely white, bourgeois, and nuclear. In

¹⁵ See also: Belge, Ceren. “State Building and The Limits of Legibility: Kinship Networks and Kurdish Resistance in Turkey.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. 43.1 (February 2011). Pp. 95-114; Levine, Nancy E. “Alternative Kinship, Marriage, and Reproduction.” *Annual Review of Anthropology*. 37 (2008) pp. 375-389.

a “traditional-family-values” framework, one threat posed by offering affordable housing is this: low-income families are stereotypically seen as black or brown, fatherless families, and the proximity of dwellings for fatherless families will depreciate the value of existing private properties, which presumably are owned and occupied by white families with fathers. The perceived depreciation of private property is interchangeable here with the depreciation of “traditional family values.”

Prior to the Civil War, the institution of marriage belonged solely to dominant white culture. Claudia Tate asserts that “domestic groups among slaves often did not correspond to the typical white family household ... [and] that slave economy ... regarded them [Black mothers] as breeders, like farm livestock” (25). Enslaved people may have been permitted to marry, but those marriages were never legally recognized or socially honored by dominant white culture, and economics on the plantation superseded any familial bonds within the enslaved population. Tate suggests an enslaved mother may have appropriated the identity of mother from dominant culture, but she was never perceived as mother by dominant culture, even beyond emancipation: “Black women were public commodities of exchange whose market value was exclusively indexed as the production of material wealth” in contrast with white women, who were “a formidable social construction of absolute purity, piety, domesticity, and gentle submissiveness” (Tate 25). This antebellum view of black women reinforced postbellum regressionist propaganda that said that African Americans were intellectually inferior, “lazy, ugly, intemperate, slothful, lascivious, and violent, indeed bestial” (Tate 10). Thus, marriage became the most expedient means of dispelling the myths surrounding regressionist ideology. Tate points out that both black and white people in the postbellum and Reconstruction era were “aware of the social value invested in marriage as a sign of meritorious citizenship ... indeed,

marriage was the sanctioned sign of civilization” (91). It is important to understand the link between economic policy, political policy, and the family because so much economic policy in the United States is designed to appear as though it exists in service to conceptions of family and because Hopkins’s novel juxtaposes family construction with economic privilege. That Ellis Enson is able to give Walker cash money to keep his family intact clearly demonstrates the bourgeois connection between money and family. The reality is that prescribed family structures are necessary for the perpetuation of both economic and political policies that favor private property interests.

One way of proving this assertion is to look at the ways in which economic and political policies ignore the needs of Black families. Patricia Hill Collins asserts:

black families have been historically disadvantaged by racially discriminatory public policies concerning work, marriage, and family, with correspondingly negative effects on their economic security. Any changes to assumptions about marriage and family, especially those that emanate from the White House, thus have potentially far-reaching implications for African Americans as well as American families overall (128).

Collins also points to some public policies that are handed down from Washington in support of this theory of interconnectedness: “homeowner tax credits for married couple families, access to employer sponsored health care benefits policies for spouses and children, the structure of school calendars and school days” as well as education tax credits for families with members enrolled in universities and including the 2020-2021 Covid Relief Stimulus packages (125). Heterosexual married couples, especially those with children and those who privately own property, are given preferential treatment in tax codes, health care benefits, housing opportunities, and school district choices. All of these policies are designed to effectively reward participants for performing very prescriptive roles as American citizens.

Collins also suggests that the idealized form of American family – married man and woman living in a privately-owned home with their own biological children – is not reflected in most real American families although the idealized form remains the “mainstay of the American Dream” (125). Collins also suggests that “conceptions of families and economic security are so intertwined” that narratives about desirable and undesirable families constitute a “fundamentally moral discourse” (125). In other words, in the 21st century, families constructed of divorced parents with blended children, or single-parent homes *that are economically successful* are permitted to become part of a rapidly evolving idealization for family structure while families in poverty, whatever their construction, are stigmatized as moral failures (125).¹⁶ Economics appears to be the link between the national/imperial narratives with the courtship/family narratives: The family is acceptable no matter the construction *as long as the family is economically viable*. A family construction that is not economically viable is the result of moral turpitude.

Intergenerational Trauma, The Politics of Respectability and Estranged Access to African-Centered Family Structures

In Hopkins’s novel, Aunt Henny claims a young Marthy as her daughter, but it is unclear in the text if this is a biological relationship. It is unlikely to be a biological relationship because most plantation economies often separated parents from their biological children. Aunt Henny also claims Hagar Sargeant as her daughter. It seems that, for Aunt Henny, the character of “daughter” is less about biological affiliation and more about sentiment and concern. I will discuss at length later in this chapter how the novel copes with the way kidnapping, human trafficking, and enslavement disabled emancipated African Americans from enjoying

¹⁶ This concept recalls Catherine Rottenberg’s assessment of moral turpitude when performances of middle-class values fail to gain approval within social circles.

multigenerational families. Not only were emancipated African Americans cut off from their antecedents, but they were also separated from extended biological relatives in their immediate families. Joy DeGruy defines the intergenerational trauma of human trafficking and enslavement in the United States as Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS), and further states it “is a condition that exists when a population has experienced multigenerational trauma resulting from centuries of slavery” and continued experiences of oppression and institutionalized racism (DeGruy 121). PTSS is characterized by its symptomatic similarities with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD); however, the symptoms of PTSS are directly related to the institutions of trafficking Africans for the purpose of enslavement in the United States. Intergenerational trauma, also known as multigenerational or historical trauma, “occurs across generations, ... [and] has potential biological effects” (Barlow 902). Further, Thomas Degloma posits that intergenerational trauma emerges “as a macro-level collective memory and cultural identity” (107). In other words, “given their social location ... individuals can develop Post Traumatic Stress Disorder despite the fact that they did not directly experience the traumatic event at issue” (Degloma 109). Degloma further states “individuals suffer derivative consequences of trauma ... because of their genealogical relationships and/or cultural heritage, despite the fact that they did not directly experience the traumatic event at issue” (111). In other words, across both space and time, social and familial networks enable multiple generations to experience the negative psychological consequences of human trafficking and enslavement long after the practice has ended. The negative psychological impact of enslavement is compounded in the present for African Americans by continued institutionalized racism and oppression.

Noelle M. St. Vil uses a trauma-informed perspective to explore the ways in which the trauma of enslavement and institutionalized racism Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS)

impacts marital relations in African Americans. The metanarrative of domesticity is outside the scope of St. Vil's study, but her conclusions and implications suggest that "the African American experience in the United States disenfranchises many African American families from obtaining this family structure [PNFS]" (144). The point of the study is to begin a conversation about how African-centered social work can meet the specific needs of African American families in the United States. St. Vil claims that the adoption of a Eurocentric family model within the realities of enslavement and institutionalized racism have forced African Americans to adapt to trauma, and that "adapted attitudes and behaviors may be unhealthy to successful functioning in daily life" (140). The trauma she defines is that during slavery, the "slave master was the head of an African American family ... and the slave family lived under looming threat that they, their partners, or their children could be beaten, raped, killed, or sold at any time" (140). St. Vil concludes that many African Americans "endure economic challenges, manage demands of parenting, and maintain good mental health" when they can embrace "extended family living and nontraditional gender roles" (143). For St. Vil, "African-centered social work ... relies on African philosophies, history and culture" and is diametrically opposed to the metanarrative of domesticity which embraces white, bourgeoisie philosophies, history, and culture. St. Vil's solution is also a practical means of opposing racial uplift ideology and the politics of respectability, which embrace the patriarchal nuclear family structure.

African Americans adopted the white bourgeois model of family structure through the politics of respectability as well as the metanarrative of domesticity. The politics of respectability represents the drive to adopt bourgeois morality and patriarchal authority. Promoting an ideology that mirrors white bourgeois morality enabled African Americans during Reconstruction to distance themselves not only from the projections of white supremacist propaganda but also from

the familial and generational trauma of enslavement. The primary vehicle for this uplift ideology is the family. Kevin Gaines points to a lack of public agency in the face of white supremacy as the primary motivation for focus on the family and the home. Gaines also suggests “conformity to patriarchal gender conventions of sexual difference, and male protection and protected femininity” became “a popular aspiration for African Americans, central as they were to uplift’s vision of respectability” (78). Gaines goes further to state that “educated blacks idealized matrimony as a platonic sharing of racial uplift responsibilities” and that marriage was “closely associated with moral superiority” (78). Within racial uplift ideology, the “perfect family” serves multiple functions. It is, first, a site of memory in terms of reinventing an ethnic memory, by creating both a private and a public arena where rejection of the white supremacist propaganda can be practically put to service in the performance of respectability (Roach 26). Second, the “perfect family” is a vortex of behavior where “cultural self-invention” can begin to create an entire class that did not previously exist (Roach 28). African Americans, after enslavement, were not part of the bourgeoisie, and it could be argued they were never intended to become a part of the bourgeoisie. However, through constructing families modeled by existing white bourgeois domestic ideologies, along with performing other attitudes and behaviors modeled by the bourgeois and transmitted via the master narratives, African American created a bourgeois class that was uniquely their own. This “Black middle class” was uniquely their own because of the scaffolding provided by the politics of respectability in the same way that upward mobility scaffolds the working-class. Simultaneously then racial uplift creates a distance from the past (enslavement) and provides a bridge to the future (full enfranchisement).

Not only does racial uplift help distance African Americans from enslavement and help them realize full enfranchisement, it also enables families to be organized according to the

bourgeois model of patriarchal nuclear families and thereby begin the creation of multigenerational families. In the first half of Hopkins's novel, Aunt Henny's acceptance of Marthy as daughter brings her grandchildren through Marthy in the second half of the novel. Marthy's children, Venus and Oliver, refer to Aunt Henny as both Aunt and Granny. In DeGruy's framework, racial uplift is deployed in the service of adopting white bourgeois ideals which are largely unattainable because systemic and institutionalized racism reinforces the adaptive behaviors that lead to socialization that is in itself racist. Racial uplift does not account for the loss of meaning for Black families across generations because enslavement disabled access to generational families for newly emancipated people. Because human enslavement and trafficking were sanctioned cornerstones of US economy for generations, and because kidnap, rape, and murder are foundational aspects of enslavement, many African and enslaved families had no lineage. Entire generations of families were obliterated and lost to time. There were no governmental agencies designed to reunite families torn apart by enslavement. Part of the trauma of enslavement was the consistent loss as well as the constant anticipation of loss: loss of partners, children, parents could happen at any moment. However, emancipation had little impact on relieving the inherent anxieties of this anticipation because consistent loss continues to persist in the 21st century because of systemic and institutionalized racism. Racial uplift offered a means to begin generational Black families but did little to ease the continued loss and continued anticipation of loss in Black communities.

Rachel Nolan suggests that "as the promise of earlier Reconstruction-era policies faded, African Americans confronted a new context of discrimination ... employment restrictions, political disenfranchisement, and extralegal violence" (5). By 1916, racial uplift was already being critiqued by Black women writers and educators. Nolan examines Angelina Weld

Grimké's play *Rachel*, and suggests it offers its own critique of and protest against racial uplift in relation to class conflict. Nolan points out that while racial uplift was meant to be perceived as incorporating "the struggles of all black Americans," it made assumptions about class that "shored up, in Gaines's words, 'a moral economy of class privilege, distinction, and even domination'" (5). Nolan continues that "for black women, securing a position within this economy involved capitulation to black patriarchal leadership" and bourgeois morality. However, *Hagar's Daughter* was published more than a decade prior to *Rachel*, and Hopkins's characters are willing to capitulate to white bourgeois morality. There is not just a willingness on the part of the characters; there are several instances where characters give inspired monologues championing this capitulation at least as it related to marriage and family unity. There is continuous exposition about the divinity of marriage and family. However, these evangelical moments are not representations of ignorant devotion. They are embedded in a chaotic structure full of plot twists, suspense, and identity crises.

The Novel's Structure and The Loss of Black Intergenerational Families

Although the novel's structure is largely driven by its serialization, the broken nature of the narrative reveals some of the traumatic anxiety and anticipation of loss women of color experienced before and after the Civil War. Aunt Henny's building of family, first with Marthy, and then Marthy's children illustrates the ways in which many emancipated African Americans coped with the loss of antecedents and immediate family as a result of human enslavement. Beyond the practical breaks for serialization, the novel is broken into two parts. The first part of the novel begins at the time of the South's secession. The audience is introduced to Hagar Sargeant and Ellis Enson and their newborn daughter; Aunt Henny; Marthy; Isaac Johnson; Walker; and St. Clair Enson. The first and arguably most important twist in the plot occurs in

the first half of the novel: Everyone learns that Hagar descended from slaves, was purchased as a newborn by the Sargeants and raised to be their daughter. Ellis pays Walker for Hagar, then he and Hagar plan to depart for Europe but not before Ellis is set upon by an unnamed party, beaten and left for dead. Hagar and her child are taken to a slave market where Hagar escapes and flees with her child, throwing herself and her child from a bridge. The second part of the novel begins twenty-six years later. The Civil War has been over for twenty years, and the audience is introduced to Washington society. There is no mention of either Enson brother, Walker, Hagar or her daughter. In spite of the dizzying effect of the missing twenty years, all the plot twists, and the mistaken identities, the audience can find assurance from repeated appearances by Aunt Henny and Marthy. The twenty-six year break leaves a blank space in the narrative, but one where the most significant part of the story's impetus exists: the emancipation of Black Americans from enslavement.

St. Clair and Walker come to the Enson family home under the guise of meeting Ellis's new wife and daughter. However, Walker takes Ellis aside to tell him that he "procured" Hagar as an infant for the Sargents, and that she must be returned to the South now that the Sargents are dead. Ellis never asks for proof of this instead offering to pay the sum Walker would earn returning her to slavery in order to keep her with him. The institution of slavery is the only grounds Walker has for claiming a bounty on Hagar in the beginning of the novel. No other evidence of the truth of Walker's claim is ever requested or offered. Yet Hopkins chose not to include any part of the Civil War in the novel. Because Hopkins opens the novel with the declarations of Southern secession, it is clear the empty space is preserved for the Civil War. The empty space enables the identity crises that follow in the second part. The passage of so much time, specifically over the period of the war, illustrates not only the upheaval and trauma

of slavery and its ignominious ending, but also the long-term impact of the disarray and turmoil resulting from a nation at odds with itself. Ellis Enson is in fact alive and well, has changed his name to Henson and works as a detective for the Secret Service. St. Clair Enson has changed his identity to Colonel Benson, a former hero of the Union Army. Walker has become Madison and a father to a strangely beautiful daughter, Aurelia. Hagar Sargeant arrives in Washington society as Estelle Bowen, wife of powerful California Senator Zenas Bowen and stepmother to his daughter, Jewel. Jewel is the darling of Washington debutantes, a most eligible young lady. In the various social interactions of these characters, recognition only occurs very slowly. Henson investigates Benson but does not recognize his own brother. Aunt Henny has suspicions about Estelle Bowen but does not share those with anyone. On the surface, all of the altered identities and missed opportunities for recognition, along with the narrative break in time, appear to be convenient and clever plot devices. However, they offer a deeper reflection on the familial cost of enslavement and emancipation to Black American families.

Even though this novel holds the institution of marriage and family in the highest regard, families are blurry with no tangible biological boundaries. From the beginning of the novel, Aunt Henny refers to Marthy as her daughter, but there is no clear evidence that there is a biological connection at all between the two women. The only biologically clear family is between Marthy, Isaac and their biological children, Venus and Oliver. Yet even this family formation exists outside anything that might be considered traditional in that Isaac is never home and rarely sends enough money to be of real aid to Marthy and the children. Venus, Hagar/Estelle, Jewel, Marthy, Oliver, and Isaac all refer to Henny as Aunt Henny. This created family, or fictive kin, capitalizes on a kind of family formation that might be initially seen as an attempt to staunch the hemorrhaging of Black families during enslavement and after

emancipation. However, the phenomenon of the Aunty originates in African culture, and is a part of African culture that both became a necessity and remained unassailable during enslavement and after emancipation.

According to Dahleen Glanton, the term “aunty” in the Black community is “a more complex matter” than biological designations because she is often more than just a mother’s or father’s sister to her nieces and nephews. Glanton suggests “she is often the backbone of the African American family ... telling it like it is... living on her own terms ... and when her family needs her, she is the first to stand up and let you know that she’s got your back” (Glanton).

Laylah Amatullah Barrayn and Catherine E. McKinley see the term as an “honorific across most Black cultures, a recognition of feminine power rooted in indigeneity” (Photoville). Michael Harriot suggests that Aunties perform a variety of functions from helping with homework and dating to cooking and singing in the choir. Harriot lists some of the most famous Aunties in history, including Harriet Tubman, Rosa Parks, Aretha Franklin, and Michelle Obama. It is clear that the term “aunty” is not limited to biological relationships, but connotes a strong family-like tie to a kinship group, whether fictive or biological and leadership within that kinship group.

Glanton claims

It is obvious why the black community as a whole would try to embrace this woman as its symbol of strength. Strong women always have been a staple for survival within the African American community. When black men have been unable to fulfill leadership roles — whether it was because they would not or could not due to societal circumstances — black women held families and communities together (Glanton).

This is, it seems, the kind of woman Hopkins had in mind when constructing Aunt Henny and Venus.

Aunties – Henny and Venus

As previously mentioned, Henny's and Marthy's characters offer the audience a mooring in a turbulent sea of mistaken identities and plot twists. Aunt Henny is the same kind of stabilizing force in the family. Regina Davis-Sowers suggests that "aunting is not a homogenous activity...the role is enacted by women of various racial and ethnic groups [and] depends on many features" (234). Davis-Sowers continues, saying that "research consistently indicates that women are relegated as primary caregivers for children and as the keepers of family traditions in Black families" (232). When asked about the role of Black aunts, respondents in Davis-Sowers's study indicated they are "the same as mothers, second mothers, and extensions of parents" (243). Finally, Davis-Sowers asserts that "Black families as a social institution" are constructed on the premise that "Blacks take care of their own and do not ask for or expect outside help to resolve issues within their families" (245). She attributes this construction to a "collective memory of cultural traditions and gendered expectations" (244). In her study, Davis-Sowers recognized that the underlying fundamental theme of the decision of aunts to raise their nieces and nephews is the aunties' perceived lack of agency and a sense of urgency in meeting the needs of children. In other words, aunties see themselves as having no choice but to raise their nieces and nephews to avoid having them placed in state-sponsored care. Davis-Sowers's proposition can also aid in understanding the construction of Black families in the postbellum and early Reconstruction era.¹⁷

Aunt Henny is positioned as that woman who will pass on the cultural traditions and keep the family together. It is, in fact, Aunt Henny who creates the family in which she is now the revered Aunty. Henny was charged with caring for Hagar as a child. It is Aunt Henny who

¹⁷ The work of Davis-Sowers and St. Vil can potentially reshape the literary canon as well as reorder Eurocentric social work.

“spent most of her spare time praying and coaxing Hagar out of the apathy into which she had fallen” (Hopkins 63). It is Henny who directs the continued care of Hagar as an adult because Marthy is overwhelmed with emotion watching Hagar’s life as a white woman come to a vicious and cruel end.

Aunt Henny sees to the survival of her family in various intentional ways. When Marthy is too emotional to properly see to the care of Hagar, it is Aunt Henny who instructs Marthy. Aunt Henny buys hoodoo charms for Hagar and her daughter and instructs Marthy to take care of them. Henny claims to have been “born wif a veil” which references her ability to foretell the future and commune with the dead.¹⁸ It is this belief in the folklore of the veil that prompts Henny to tell Marthy the legend surrounding the birth of St. Clair Enson, wherein the Devil appeared to witness his birth. Henny’s retelling of this story demonstrates passing on traditions, rites, and beliefs. Henny retrieves Ellis Enson to alert him to his brother’s arrival in an attempt to stem the tide of misery St. Clair seems to always bring with him. Aunt Henny advises Venus and Oliver, her grandchildren. She is also witness to a terrible crime in which Benson (St. Clair Enson) murders a Miss Bradford at the Treasury Department, where Aunt Henny has a job as a cleaner.

Part of the plot in the second half of the novel is that Benson tries to force Jewel to marry him. He tries to woo her while she is betrothed to Cuthbert, and his attempts grow in intensity. He eventually plots with Isaac and Madison to have Jewel’s betrothed, Cuthbert, accused of the murder of Miss Bradford that Henny has witnessed Benson commit. At Benson’s instruction, Isaac kidnaps Henny to keep her quiet and kidnaps Jewel so she won’t raise any suspicions about Benson’s numerous attempts to interfere with her betrothal. Venus, however, goes to the Secret

¹⁸ For more information, see Carroll Y. Rich’s “Born with the Veil: Black Folklore in Louisiana.” *The Journal of American Folklore*. 89:353 (1976). *American Folklore Society*.

Service with her own suspicions about her father Isaac, and gains permission to pose as a young man to do some amateur sleuthing to uncover the place where Aunt Henny and Jewel are being kept. Together, in the trial of Cuthbert Sumner, Venus and Henny expose Madison and Benson as the Confederate traitors Walker and St. Clair Ellis, providing the catalyst for Ellis and Hagar to reveal their true identities, and bring about justice for Cuthbert Sumner and Jewel.

The question remains whether having Black Aunties in Aunt Henny and Venus made any significant difference for Jewel, Hagar's daughter. It certainly makes a difference for the better in Hagar's life. Hagar is reunited with her first love and the father of her child, and although she has been with her daughter all along, the events set in motion by Aunt Henny and Venus also provide Hagar with the identity of her daughter in Jewel. The revelation of the biological relationship between Hagar and Jewel gives both Hagar and Ellis some closure over the events that took place prior to emancipation. However, this victory is bittersweet because Jewel cannot be protected from prejudice and racism. Once Jewel learns that Hagar is her mother and that "the child follows the condition of the mother" (Hopkins 56), she is inconsolable:

She shrank as from a blow as she pictured herself the astonishment, disgust and contempt of her former associates when they learned her story ... moans burst from her overcharged heart...(Hopkins 281).

Because Cuthbert could not get the white supremacist propaganda of "the grinning, toothless black hag that was her foreparent" (Hopkins 271) from his mind, he misses his opportunity to marry her before she dies abroad from a fever. When Aunt Henny and Venus learn of the truth about Jewel, they share confidences with one another. Venus, the young apprentice Aunty, knows the loss of Cuthbert will break Jewel's heart and that she will never be the same. Henny advises Venus that "It's my 'pinion dat it's already broke, honey" (Hopkins 281). Venus was to

wed Cuthbert's valet, John Williams, but agrees to postpone the wedding until Sumner and Jewel can be reunited. Venus sets aside her own desires to help make a difference in Jewel's life.

Venus had already been setting aside most of her wages for her younger brother, Oliver. She is no stranger to familial sacrifice. At the time the novel was published, Venus Johnson might have been any young, African American woman, finding a way towards her own education and the fulfillment of her own ambitions. Pauline Hopkins herself was able to surmount some of the institutional barriers to an education and a career as a writer and editor. There would have been institutional barriers for Venus, but finding a path to her own life's purpose would not have been impossible. Instead, she chooses domestic work as reliable employment, and the skills she learns for that work came from her mother and Aunt Henny. As a domestic worker in the Bowen household, Venus overhears a confrontation between Benson and Estelle (Hagar) about Estelle's true identity. Because Henny has passed on all the stories relevant to the family, Venus understands that her father Isaac is in some way cursed or predestined to do bad and evil things. When Aunt Henny and Jewel both go missing during Cuthbert's trial for the murder of Miss Bradford, Venus takes it upon herself to set things right. She goes to the Secret Service office to tell Detective Henson (Ellis Enson) what she knows of her father, Isaac.¹⁹ She sacrifices any loyalty she might have to her own father in order to protect her family. She claims she is going to "see him [Isaac] out on this case or my name ain't Venus Johnson! I'll see if this one little black girl can't get the best of as mean a set of villains as ever was born" (221). Venus gets permission and advice from Henson to dress like a young man and make inquiries about an empty house where she believes Henny and Jewel are being held

¹⁹ She does not know that Henson also knows about Isaac.

prisoners. She endangers her own life to save her kin. Venus has made a choice between her biological father and her blended chosen family.

Davis-Sowers suggests that the “perception of lack of agency highlights individuals’ often-profound inability to see a multitude of choices when faced with family problems” (239), and certainly during enslavement and through Reconstruction limitations were actual, not just perceived. Davis-Sowers’s work “extends the findings of Black feminists on female relatives in women-centered networks,” but she rightly points out that not enough scholarly work has been done in this area. Aunt Henny has most assuredly created a woman-centered network between herself, Marthy, and Venus. That Isaac is rarely with the family, rarely helps with the mortgage, and often brings trouble for everyone places him on the outside of this woman-centered network while young Oliver is an integral part of the network. When Isaac kidnaps Aunt Henny and Jewel, he is not only on the outside of this network, but a direct threat to it.

Davis-Sowers explains further that “the personal identities of Black aunts also represented a strong sense of self-efficacy and the conviction that they were capable of making a difference” (239). It is undeniable that Venus has a strong sense of her own ability to effect change in the fact that she dressed as a young man to gain information and locate her missing family members. Davis-Sowers’s goal is to bring more attention to the unacknowledged, gendered kin work that Black aunties perform, which contributes to the “continuance and stability across generations” of Black families although it does constrain the “choices Black women make for their own lives” (246). Respondents in Davis-Sowers’s study claimed they believed “that members of families have a duty to support and help other family members ... that all adult members of families were especially obligated to meet the emotional, financial, and psychological needs of children within their families” (Davis-Sowers 240). All these conclusions

and implications of Davis-Sowers's study indicate that the continuance and stability of the family supersedes the importance of individual goals for many women of color. A strong, centralized African family structure offers more safety and stability to women than the white, bourgeois US model does; however, the disruptions to the African family caused by enslavement and Reconstruction disable the full potential of that safety and stability. The novel reflects this reality with Jewel's untimely death.

Desire, Passing, and the Property of Whiteness

Much scholarly work on identity and passing has been about searching for the ways in which passing itself either subverts or reinforces "hegemonic norms of race" (Rottenberg 33). Near the end of the 1990s, though, more nuanced work on passing and identity began to look at the ways in which passing interrogated and problematized identity as a stable construct. For Rottenberg, "norms that constitute the dominant social order ... are produced and circulated by the relations of power existing within a given society" (35). She also points out that norms "are to be understood as *regulatory ideals*" (35). In a white supremacist society, whiteness is a regulatory ideal; it is the norm, and the associated privilege is interconnected with legal and political assumptions about the superiority of whiteness. Thus power in that society shifts to people who appear to be white. Rottenberg explains that "racial identity and classification seem to be constituted through skin color" (38). However, passing disrupts this power relationship because, as Rottenberg points out, "race is assumed to manifest itself in the visible ... [but] ... once there is an assumption of whiteness, pigmentation does not signify in the same way" (39) as evidenced in literature as well as life. Therefore, "melanin ... is not the manifest truth of race" (39). For Rottenberg, the "category of race has never been about skin color; rather, it has been about social differentiation and demarcation, power and control" (40). Rottenberg asserts that

because “whiteness is always privileged ... subjects are immediately assumed to be white in the absence of any telling marks of ‘color’ (40). Rottenberg continues: “in order to maintain its own racial purity and superiority, racist discourse must constantly invoke and reinforce the ‘nonwhiteness’ of the other subject, whom it concomitantly encourages to live up to norms of whiteness” (41). Rottenberg also points out that during the Reconstruction era (and beyond), lynching served as a regulatory practice for enforcing racial boundaries, such that violence and the threat of violence compelled racial identification based on the regulatory ideals of whiteness.

Rottenberg explains that “a compelled primary identification thus ensures that subjects recognize themselves in and through regulatory ideals” (45). This reinforces the differences imposed by the regulatory ideals which are determined, constructed, and circulated through relations of power, which are predominantly located in whiteness. Rottenberg concludes that, of course, individuals are capable of identifying with the marginalized race and finding success in the United States; however, she does note that often in racist regimes, access to privilege means denying the most salient, and often most meaningful, aspects of blackness.

Although Rottenberg relies heavily on Foucault and Butler to formulate her assertions about whiteness, much of critical race theory finds its way into her analyses. Cheryl Harris argues that “American law has recognized a property interest in whiteness that, although unacknowledged, now forms the background against which legal disputes are framed, argued, and adjudicated” (277). In other words, “assumptions, privileges, and benefits of being white have become a valuable asset” to be protected by those who possess it and desired by those who do not (277). During enslavement, indentured servitude (of whites) was still ongoing in the United States. However, the terminus for indentured servitude did not always coincide with the servant’s death. To ideologically separate white servitude and slavery, skin color became the

marker: “Racial identity was further merged with stratified social and legal status: ‘black’ racial identity marked who was subject to enslavement” (278). Harris continues: “property as conceived in the founding era included not only external objects and people’s relationships to them, but also all of those human rights, liberties, powers and immunities that are important for human well-being” (279-80). At the dawn of the United States, only white landowners were politically enfranchised, so that the implication here is that even prior to nationhood, social stratification between white-black and free-enslaved was already underway. Harris continues: “In a society structured on racial subordination, white privilege became an expectation and ... whiteness became the quintessential property for personhood” (281). Whiteness was a prerequisite for access to “freedom of expression, freedom of conscience, freedom from bodily harm, and free and equal opportunities to use personal faculties” (280). Enslaved people were alienated from the fruits of their labor but were also alienated from the personal liberty to marry whom they chose, to keep and raise the children of that union, and to extend their family generationally. Harris explains that “because fundamental personal rights are commonly understood as unalienable, it is problematic to view them as property interest” (281). However, Harris points out too that the law, in the form of legal precedents, has enforced the alienability of some forms of property, like marital property, intellectual property, and “the conception of reputation as property” (282). “Whiteness as property is also constituted through the reification of expectations in the continued right of white-dominated institutions to control the legal meaning of group identity” (287). In other words, it is the law that once defined Africans as an inferior race of human being, provided legal justification for enslavement, and it is the law that now attempts to erase racial difference altogether. *Plessy v. Ferguson* is an example of the law subordinating racial identity in that the United States Supreme Court found that Plessy’s ejection

from the Whites Only railcar was not a violation of the Fourteenth Amendment.²⁰ In other words, the Supreme Court implied that the right of the State of Louisiana to segregate train cars superseded the right of a Black man to sit where he chooses, such that this legal precedent established gradations of liberty based on racial identification. The decision in *Plessy* created space for separate but equal legislation that was not undone until the Civil Rights movements in the 1950s and 1960s.

The desire alluded to in both Harris and Rottenberg is not concerned with the desire to be white but rather with the desire to have access to the privileges of whiteness. What happens, though, when passing is about someone else's desires? The Sargeants purchase Hagar, rather than adopt her, to be their child. The Sargeants' desire for a child superseded Hagar's own natural desire as an individual to determine how she will be perceived by the world, but also how she will grow to understand her own self. The novel is never explicit about the "adoption". The only proof of it comes from Walker, a known liar and profiteer. However, everyone accepts it as truth, and somewhere during the narrative break in the novel, Hagar makes an active decision to continue passing. Her passing enables her to marry Zenas Bowen and be reunited with her daughter. The revelation of her passing does not seem to make as big a ripple in Washington society as the revelation of Jewel's involuntary passing does.

Jewel is a debutante darling, a newcomer to Washington society. She is young and beautiful, "full of the joy of youth and perfect health" and she presented a "bright image to the eye" (83). Cuthbert describes her as a "fair fragrant lily," a "saint, his good angel, and he loved her truly with all the high love a man of the world can ever know" (83). During conversations

²⁰ "Plessy v. Ferguson." *Oyez*, www.oyez.org/cases/1850-1900/163us537. Accessed 2 Mar. 2021. The Fourteenth Amendment guarantees access to life, liberty, and property for any and all individuals born or naturalized in the United States. Plessy challenged Louisiana segregation laws of railway cars on the point that segregation was in fact a denial of access to liberty for Black Americans in 1896.

overheard at the Bowen's ball, remarks about women and beauty lead to the following exclamation by a party-goer: "we do not inquire too closely in one's antecedents in Washington, you know; be beautiful and rich and you will be happy here" (Hopkins 114). However, this is not really the truth, as the ending of the novel reveals. Or rather, it is only true if none of the antecedents are African Americans. Aurelia Madison is another recent debutante, who was at boarding school with Jewel. Both women are equally beautiful and well-liked in society. At the Bradford murder trial, when it is revealed that Aurelia is of "African descent" and that Walker, her father, was also a conspirator in the assassination of President Lincoln, the inquiries into antecedents in Washington become a matter of public record.

Cuthbert is acquitted of the murder of Miss Bradford and the verdict means that the path is clear for him and Jewel to marry, but more is revealed after the trial. Hagar goes into her former husband's trunk and finds a note and a photo wrapped in a shawl which reveals that Jewel is Hagar's biological daughter. Zenas Bowen and his first wife had found the baby near the river where Hagar leapt from the bridge with her. The note Hagar finds tells the story of how Zenas and his first wife took the infant in as their own. Using Harris' metric for determining the insult or offense in passing, lack of knowledge about one's own ancestry hardly matters. It is not the assumption of whiteness that injures dominant culture, according to Harris, but the assumption of the privilege attached to whiteness. Jewel, the descendant of African slaves, would never have found herself the darling of Washington society. Jewel, the descendant of African slaves, would be making the same difficult choices Venus has to make between her own desires and the stability and strength of her family.

Cuthbert, Jewel's betrothed, offers the best example of how she, a descendant of African slaves, would not be permitted access to white privilege. Cuthbert is sympathetic to Mrs. Bowen,

but “the social position of Mrs. Sumner [Jewel, potentially] demanded a prompt separation,” meaning that in order to be his wife, Jewel would have to distance herself from Hagar socially (Hopkins 266). In a Washington newspaper, an editor wrote “Mrs. Bowen has our sympathy, but we cannot, even for such a leader as she has been, unlock the gates of caste and bid her enter” (266-7). Cuthbert and Jewel talk about Aurelia Madison’s African descent. Cuthbert exclaims: “with the knowledge that we now possess of her origin, we can no longer wonder at her wicked duplicity” (268). Jewel asks Cuthbert to explain the sweet perfection of her “step-mother” and Cuthbert replies: “those characteristics [sweetness and perfection] are but an accident of environment ... I have always heard that the Negro race excelled in low cunning” (268-9). Jewel replies: “true...but then there are Venus and Aunt Henny.” Still, Cuthbert is only thankful that Hagar is not her biological mother. As for Aurelia’s fate, “no one desired to inflict more punishment on the unfortunate woman, and when she left the court room that day she vanished forever from public view” (272). Cuthbert donated to Black colleges and universities, he sat in on a panel discussion about the “Negro question” while at Harvard, and he once even “contributed a paper to a local weekly in which he had warmly championed their cause,” and the narrator explains that “horses, dogs cats, and Negroes were classed together in his mind as of the brute creation whose sufferings it was his duty to help alleviate” (265-6). This is the sum of Cuthbert’s opinions and beliefs about race relations. This is perhaps the biggest reason Jewel is inconsolable about the revelation of her own African descent.

Whether satirical or not, these representations of the way Cuthbert believes he is using his privilege for good demonstrate exactly what Harris refers to as the property of whiteness. He is likely doing more than most in relation to the advancement of the race, but he is doing so in exchange for protecting a valuable asset: his own whiteness. Furthermore, Rottenberg defines

privilege as “the *hegemonic linking or collapsing of identification*” (122). She also asserts that “privilege operates ...to naturalize certain categories of identification ... it is relative and always is constituted in relation to the existing social hierarchies” (122). In other words, passing as white is an attempt to identify with whiteness, requiring the adherence to norms specifically linked to whiteness and enabling receipt of access also specifically linked to whiteness, thereby reinforcing the denial of access to anyone who is not white, and overall reinforcing the perceived superiority of whiteness. Although passing also subverts the significance of whiteness, it is not the subversion that opens up subjects to violence, disavowal, and exile. It is the assumption of privilege that the dominant culture reacts against. The greater threat to a white supremacist society is the assumption of privileges deemed inaccessible, not the dupe itself. Because Hagar is also performing the required behaviors for women of her class, Washington society is more able to experience sympathy for her upon discovery of her African lineage. Aurelia Madison might have garnered this kind of sympathy had she not been implicated in the scheme to murder Zenas Bowen and the scheme to frame Cuthbert Sumner, and if not for her relationship with two Confederate traitors.²¹ St. Clair Enson is shot and killed attempting to escape prison and Walker dies in the state penitentiary. Both men receive “just desserts” for their roles in the conspiracies. What makes Aurelia’s crime of passing more egregious than Hagar’s? Aurelia attempted to use the privileges of whiteness in the same way that St. Clair and Walker did – treason, teachery, and deceit for the purpose of personal gain. Not only did Aurelia attempt to access white privilege by passing as white, she attempted to access white *male* privilege by behaving as though she

²¹ During Colonel Benson’s attempts to interfere with Jewel’s betrothal, her father, Zenas Bowen is killed in an accident. The accident is shrouded in cloudy details in much the same way as the perceived death of Ellis Enson, when his body is found beaten in the beginning of the novel. The natural assumption is that Walker, St. Clair, and Isaac had something to do with both incidents, and Aurelia’s involvement in the latter death was not brought up until the trial of Cuthbert Sumner and only as speculation on the part of unnamed persons in the courtroom.

were above reproach. The overarching message in the difference between Hagar's and Aurelia's passing is that all can be forgiven, even attempting to pass as white, as long as the other ideals of whiteness and femininity are being met. Hagar was demure, supportive, morally upstanding, and upwardly mobile, which means she is exiled with sympathy, whereas Aurelia is cunning, manipulative, and treacherous, so she disappears forever without sympathy.

The question remains as to whether extended family has aided Jewel in any way. She won her love, Cuthbert, lost him to Aurelia, gained him back, lost him again to the murder accusation, gained him again through his acquittal, and lost him again when her ancestry was revealed. She does not regain him again before she succumbs to death. During the trial, she is kidnapped by Benson, Madison, and Isaac. It is Venus Johnson who secures her rescue, but neither Aunt Henny, Marthy, nor Venus can do anything to countermand the prejudice Cuthbert suffers. In the end, having an extended family in the background only helped a little. As evidenced by the disparate treatment of Hagar's and Aurelia's passing, the novel still adheres to the prescripts of the metanarrative of domesticity. This means that any kind of family structure that appears non-traditional or lacks economic viability must exist in the background if it exists at all. This novel does demonstrate a kind of family that departs from the white, bourgeois model, a family that has more potential for integrity and stability. What hampers this family structure is the social, cultural, and economic consequences of racism. Venus is truly the heroine of the novel because of her bold action, her unwavering affection for Hagar, Jewel, Henny, and her young brother, and her unshakable belief in the US legal system. She possesses all the qualities of an Auntie. The Afrocentric model of family, even one that faces cultural, social, and legal opposition, is still a better model of family than the white bourgeois family model demonstrated in *The Awakening*.

In the following chapter, I will move away from the mainstream literary canon to examine the novel *Interweaving* by Lida Churchill, which places a wayward, rural women in the foreground.

Chapter Three

Interweaving: The Wayward Young Woman's Guide to Success

“Summer loving had me a blast; Summer loving happened so fast; I met a girl crazy for me; I met a boy cute as can be” –

“Summer Nights” by Casey Warren and Jim Jacobs, *Grease* (1978)

In this chapter, I will examine *Interweaving* (1892), a novel by Lida Abbie Churchill, which rarely makes its way into surveys of American women's literature. While Churchill authored many other novels and short stories and enjoyed success during her lifetime, she and her works have been largely absent from academic study (Yandell 82). The protagonist, Ina Ellerton, is a young, rural woman, orphaned and raised by her grandparents and her Uncle Mark. Ina falls in love with Henry Matthewson, gives in to her desires and his deception, and is left broken-hearted and bewildered with a damaged reputation. She falls ill, and in her grief, does not recover for several months. She eventually asks her Uncle Mark for help in learning a trade. Mark finds her a teacher and she learns telegraphy, which enables her to work, support herself, and leave the farm. Her experience with Henry inspires her to author a book for girls that will help other young women avoid the same fate. She meets Rex and Bert Hilton, who become part of her family and aid her in the production of her book for girls. *Interweaving* sometimes reads very much like the historical romance novels popular during the 1890s and authored by men: Ina rescues a train full of passengers from a washed-out bridge; Uncle Mark nearly dies rescuing Henry Matthewson from a terrible storm; Henry dies rescuing a young girl from a flood. Churchill blurs traditional and stereotypical images of masculinity and femininity throughout the novel, yet the entire story is scaffolded by American Quaker beliefs. Ina does marry in the end

of the novel, but not until after she and Bert, her best “girl lover,”²² realize their ambitions to help other young women survive the double standards of Victorian sexuality.

Churchill confronts the efficacy and veracity of the master narratives of courtship and marriage by writing her own novel about a woman bamboozled by those ideologies, whose protagonist becomes a writer solely because she wants to challenge that belief system. The novel itself lacks the sophisticated writing style of Chopin or Hopkins, and therefore, is difficult to appreciate aesthetically. The action often overwhelms the narrative, and is more contrived, at times, than the most sentimental romances. Each character’s journey, every act of love, courage, and forgiveness is couched in the Quaker language of the *Inward Light*, giving the novel a more didactic feel than Hopkins’s novel. Ina is rural and poor, as are most of the characters except Rex and Bert Hilton. Ina confronts the metanarrative of domesticity from a much different class position than either Edna Pontellier or Hagar Sargeant, yet Churchill represents her as having more options for undercutting her participation in the interpellation of the ideology of romance, courtship, and marriage than either Edna or Hagar. Edna and Hagar are limited in their abilities to circumvent participation in the master narratives of courtship and marriage because of their class positions and because of systemic racism and prejudice.

Kay Yandell suggests that Churchill imagines “idealized women’s worlds, consciously constructed to remain free of husbands and children” somewhat similarly to the women-centered networks Davis-Sowers’s illuminates ((97). The one main difference is that children are often the foci of Davis-Sowers’s women-centered networks. For Yandell, the novel’s idealized

²² When Bert introduces herself to Ina at the telegraph office where Ina works, she tells her: “I am Bert Hilton, and – your girl lover”. Ina asks her to explain, and Bert says “I am really in love with you, so of course I need no other proof that a girl really loves one of her own sex sometimes” (79-80). Ina says she does not know what true love is, and Bert says “I’ll teach you” and she tells Ina she is not a knight, and she couldn’t save Ina from drowning, but that she is “true, and kind, and constant . . . if you’ll take me for your lover, and like me a little, I feel sure I can make things pleasanter for you than they would otherwise be” (80). Ina agrees to take Bert as her girl lover as long as Bert promises never to lie, which Bert does promise never to do.

women's world is one where "girls' can fall in love with each other more passionately than they can love men ... [and] live as spouses or families who dedicate their lives to each other"(97). What Yandell refers to as the "telegraphic virtual" or "technotopia" where women can fall in love with each other, live as married persons, and pursue spiritual and artistic growth is also a queer space, the utopic no-place (94) is also Sandoval's no-place engulfed in love and that entry into can only be had through love. *Interweaving* has an abundance of familial love, romantic love, platonic love, and Godly love. The master narratives of courtship and family are turned upside down in the novel with uncles functioning like Aunties, girl-lovers, Quaker values, and young women engaging in swashbuckling action. In this chapter, I will explore how the characters fail to uphold the ideological standards transmitted through the metanarrative of domesticity, and how those failures are also the novel's greatest gift: in them lay an opportunity for its original audience to envision alternative modes of being for U.S. women.²³ For modern scholars and teachers, the novel's "failure" adds nuance to the way we envision and teach the lived experiences of women, particularly rural and working class women, in the late nineteenth century. I will also examine the blurred gender roles and the non-traditional family structures in the novel, both of which link directly to the class positionality of the characters.

Literary Context

First, I would like to provide context for novels about working class women in the 1890s. In 1893, Stephen Crane published *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* about a young woman living in the Bowery. Maggie is young and beautiful, living in abject poverty. Like Ina Ellerton, Maggie believes in the romantic ideology transmitted via the master narratives of courtship: that if she is coquettish enough, demur enough, and passive enough she will attract the attention of a suitable

²³ For those studying American masculinities, the novel also offers a vision of different modes of being a man in the United States near the turn of the century.

male partner who will then propose marriage and whisk her off into a new life of purpose. Maggie believes in this even though her lived experience of marriage and family is as far from the ideal transmitted as one can get. Her own mother and father are both violent alcoholics, who brawl with strangers and abuse each other and their children. Maggie is part of the urban working class, living well below the poverty line. She has limited access to basic education, like reading and writing, and no access to cultivating skills like piano or singing. Therefore, her means of answering the hail of domestic ideologies are stunted by poverty, resulting in a haphazard repetition of the rituals that allow interpellation. She is skilled in protecting her younger siblings from her parents' violent outbursts, and she does find work as a seamstress. The tools she has to navigate through adulthood arise from a life of familial trauma resulting from both poverty and alcoholism. All she has seen in her life is ugliness, violence, and a wholesale rejection of bourgeois values like temperance and chastity. Maggie, like Ina, succumbs to the advances of a young man with bad intentions, but Maggie has no Uncle Mark. Like Edna Pontellier, Maggie has no one in her life who sees the world as she does, or who wants from the world what she wants. Instead of wandering out into the Gulf of Mexico, however, Maggie wanders around the dark streets of New York City, and eventually her body is found floating in the Hudson River.

Crane's novella is a searing indictment, written from a journalistic perspective, of the prejudicial nature of social reform movements near the turn of the century that were equal parts voyeuristic exploitation and Protestant proselytizing. Early social reform movements, especially in New York, attempted to impose Protestant values on Jewish and Catholic immigrants, disregarding their own religious belief systems and cultural practices, and did not offer any of the necessary tools, like education, honest labor, and economic parity, that would enable the social

reform sought. This practice of superficial imposition is particularly devastating for working-class women because repetition of the rituals required for interpellation of the ideologies of courtship and marriage requires education, leisure time to cultivate some artistic aptitudes, and households already in “proper” working order for instruction are often unavailable to women living in poverty. For many working-class women, the superficiality of social reform in the 1890s served as a kind of allowance for haphazard repetition of the rituals of courtship and marriage. For example, Maggie’s mother believes herself to be superior to unmarried women just because she is married. She uses this belief to justify throwing Maggie out of the house so Maggie’s tarnished reputation does not reflect poorly on her. The master narratives of courtship and marriage suggest that marriage is the goal for women of any class, and so, Maggie’s mother can envision herself as having lived up to the ideal of marriage even though she is a violent alcoholic whose abusive husband is rarely present. Maggie’s Bowery environment is a kind of wild arena where everyone fends for themselves. The novella serves to illustrate the spectrum of women’s lived experiences near the turn of the 20th century.

Technological and industrial progress enabled a broader transmission of the ideals of courtship and marriage in the 1890s with the telegraph and the railroad expanding print media’s reach. Wider audiences enabled national conversations about old ideas and helped to generate new ones. U.S citizens saw opportunity in the face of advancing technologies and industries. According to David Nye, most Americans viewed advancing technology and industry as liberating, artistic, and miraculous (46). The expansion of the West and the reach of print media also helped increase literacy across the nation, by opening opportunities for schoolteachers, journalists, and authors. Increased literacy meant that rural and working-class citizens could now participate in national conversations and that participation helped to more accurately

represent their living and working conditions to a wider population. Jacob Riis published *How the Other Half Lives: Studies among the Tenements of New York* in 1890, which helped to galvanize the body politic toward a Progressive Movement embodied in Theodore Roosevelt's presidency in 1901.²⁴ Arguably, national conversations about social amelioration and economic equity also included ideas about alternatives to marriage and maternity which would have also found their way across the nation, to wider audiences, helping to reshape the reflection of women's lived experiences in fiction on a national scale.

Some evidence of this claim lies in the kinds of novels published immediately following the turn of the 20th century. For example, Willa Cather's 1913 novel, *O Pioneers!* offers some evidence for the transmission of more accurate representations of women's lived experiences. The heroine, Alexandra Bergson, delays marriage in favor of taking over the family farm after her father's death. She has two perfectly capable brothers, but her father recognized a business savvy in her that her brothers lacked. By the end of the novel, Alexandra eliminates a kind of swine flu that wreaks havoc on the neighboring farms, carries the family farm through drought, expands their acreage, and becomes something of a local celebrity in Nebraska for her agribusiness acumen. Another of Cather's novels, *Song of the Lark* (1915) is still more evidence for my logical assumption about the transmission of ideas concerning alternate ways for women to move through the world to the one way prescribed by the metanarrative of domesticity. Thea Kronburg also delays marriage to pursue her musical aspirations. Although she does accept an offer of marriage at an early age, her betrothed dies in a tragic accident. The money left to her from his death enables her to pursue her musical training and evade marriage until after she has had a successful musical career and enjoyed international fame. Both of Cather's heroines

²⁴ For more information, see: Greenberg, David. "Theodore Roosevelt and the Image of Presidential Activism." *Social Research*. 78.4. (2011). 1057-1088.

demonstrate a determination to have a different kind of life than the one prescribed by domestic ideologies. Authors like Charlotte Perkins Gilman (*Herland*), Sarah Orne Jewett, and others writing after the turn of the century produced more and more novels about women doing something other than preparing for marriage. The wider spread of information through various forms, the increasing national conversations about social reform and economic equity, and increased national literacy made possible through technological and industrial progress combine to expand and more accurately represent the experience of being a woman in the United States.

The Context of Our American Friends

It seems counterintuitive to suggest that the internal colonization of the United States and its horrors paved the way for women to have greater access to the means and ways of ignoring the hail of domestic ideologies. However, it is not that westward expansion opened up possibilities for women to pursue goals other than marriage that did not previously exist; rather, westward expansion enabled wider communication of the alternatives already in practice in regions of the United States. The possibilities for pursuing goals apart from marriage were already in existence prior to westward expansion, and American Quakers offer one example of how some women in the United States chose to opt out of the prescription of ideal American womanhood. American Quakers continued the European Quaker tradition of Protestant skepticism, seeking a simplified Christianity that required interior nurturing and “inward renewal” (Steere 11). Quakers value the knowledge gained from experience rather than book-learning or indoctrination. Among the greatest sins for Quakers is self-absorption, because inward development and laical knowledge rely on interpersonal experiences. According to Douglas Steere, it is important to Quaker practice that the individual be concerned with the creation and maintenance “of fertile as well as spiritually-centered minds” (33). The Quaker

movement differs from Catholicism in that communication with God requires no intercession, and it differs from classical Protestantism in that it does not emphasize charismatic evangelism. Quakers have no clergy or clerical hierarchy, and Quaker women have historically enjoyed equal opportunities within the fellowship of Friends. Fellowship plays an important role in the Quaker movement because the concentration on inward development requires continued engagement with the outside world. However, private, daily devotion is one of the cornerstones of Quakerism. Quakers were not permitted at this early time to marry outside the faith; however, Quaker marriage was as egalitarian as the Meetings tended to be: husbands and wives were encouraged to continue their own personal inward development, and encouraged to aid one another in that endeavor. This means that, after much private and daily devotion to understanding the will of God, Quakers might be moved through the world for one spiritual reason or another, and this impetus for movement through the world is referred to as their “inward leadings.” Steere suggests that this inward development is so critical to the faith and belief system that Quakers are prepared to risk their personal property and freedom “to be faithful to their inward leadings” (25). This means that a Quaker husband would have risked the loss of his social and fiscal capital in order to encourage and promote his wife’s pursuit of artistic production.

This egalitarianism and concentration on the laity inevitably led to splinter groups of Quakers around 1850. In 1848, one such splinter group, Progressive Friends, became involved in social activism for “racial and economic justice, women’s rights, inter-racialism, and internationalism” (Hewitt 2). Quakers became involved in the abolition movement prior to the Civil War, temperance, conscientious opposition to combat, and women’s suffrage²⁵. Nancy

²⁵ Which differs dramatically from Friends in the United Kingdom. Caroline Stephen, paternal aunt of Virginia Woolf, who provided the income required for Woolf to have a room of her own, was a Quaker woman radically

Hewitt claims that “an emphasis on ethical behavior and practical righteousness” meant that many Quakers “were drawn to organizations that were open to everyone” and many more Quakers rejected their titles and privileges, refused to keep alcohol in the home, boycotted slave-produced goods, including textiles and food, and aided “fugitive” slaves (Hewitt 3). While many conservative Quaker women were concerned with protecting and defending the morality of society from the “destabilizing forces of modernity” (Bush 35), many more Quaker women were catalyzing “a form of radical unintelligibility in their deviation from the vision of submission and quiet domesticity that governed the mainbranch Protestant worldview” (High 640). The egalitarian nature of Quakerism meant that, in meetings, women enjoyed as much rhetorical space as men. Whether they were drawn to social activism or not, Quaker women posed a real threat to the metanarrative of domesticity and its transmission mostly because of Quaker egalitarianism, particularly in marriage. Women who could be self-determined based on their own interpretation of God’s will offers a template for how women could be self-determined without the will of God as well. For example, Hewitt’s subject is Quaker activist Amy Kirby Post, whose husband aided, funded, encouraged, and partnered with her to raise a family, and was himself active in Post’s many social projects.²⁶ For Post and her husband, “the concept of separate spheres...barely existed ... instead, personal, familial and communal forms of activism were deeply enmeshed, allowing her to fulfill her social commitments as she cared for her growing family” (Hewitt 8). The life of Post reveals that her relationship with God was central

opposed to women’s suffrage for various reasons. Many Quakers remained conservative about many women’s issues, even in the United States. But Stephen is a striking example of how some Quaker beliefs support the notion of separate spheres for men and women. For more information: Julia Bush. “Caroline Stephen and the Opposition to British Women’s Suffrage.” *Quaker Studies*. 15.1 (2010). Pp. 32-52.

²⁶ Post’s husband also had a career of his own as a pharmacist.

to her existence but was not necessarily central to her activism, which was driven more by democratic principles.

The significance of Quaker culture to this project is self-evident: prior to the Civil War, there already was an alternative to interpellation of the ideologies of courtship and marriage in action in the United States. Because this alternative way of living was primarily situated among Quakers, it gets little mainstream attention. Quakers have rarely enjoyed positive representation in literature, pop culture, or historical narratives. Quakers are often confused with and misidentified as Puritans, who were inimical to Quakers. Contributing to this “bad PR image” were writers like Jonathan Swift and Cotton Mather. Jonathan Swift equated women’s inspired utterances to public flatulence, while Cotton Mather equated Quaker women’s spirituality to contagion, asserting that women’s self-directed spirituality resulted in pregnancy miscarriage and infant mortality (High 663-4). Ean High suggests negative depictions of Quakers result from the “anarchist and gendered threat” that Quaker women in particular, “represented to the various proxies of religious and civil authority” because Quakerism galvanized women to “seize authority in daily life ... and to expand and explode the roles of women in religious life” (640). American Quakers played important roles in constructing a United States identity, particularly the Progressive Friends, by motivating, galvanizing, managing, and continuing various means of social and political activism designed to enact more democratic social constructs and legislation in favor of the most marginalized U.S. citizens.

In *Interweaving*, Bert makes several references to John Greenleaf Whittier, a famous American Quaker poet (1807-1892), who was a strong supporter of women writers, the abolition

of slavery and capital punishment in the United States.²⁷ Whittier proposed that literature should have an uplifting moral quality to it, a belief he shared with Sarah Orne Jewett, whose novel *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896) also provides a glimpse into alternatives to marriage and family for women. In that novel, the relationship between the narrator and Mrs. Todd demonstrates another way women create chosen families and ignore the hail of domestic ideologies. The story cycle revolves around the ways Mrs. Todd aids her community, her family, and the narrator. As the narrator encounters individual members of the community, Mrs. Todd provides each resident's history on the island, and through Jewett's use of gardening imagery, grounds each encounter the narrator has in an earthy reality. The contradiction between Jewett's support of the uplifting moral quality of literature and her creation of characters who depart wildly from the mainstream Protestant view of how women should spend their time suggests that the alternative lifestyle most often promoted by Quaker women prior to the Civil War had become more acceptable throughout the nation toward the end of the 1890s, as well as more secular.

Wayward Young Women, Queer Failure, and The Death of Mother

Despite the wider spread of information and the more accurate representations of the lives of women, the double standards for men and women inherent in the master narratives of courtship, marriage, and family persist. The definition of "wayward young women" has hardly changed since the late nineteenth century and typically refers to unmarried mothers, but often covers a whole host of behaviors that ultimately define wayward young women as women who

²⁷ For more information, see: Cohen, Michael. "Whittier, Ballad Reading, and the Culture of Nineteenth Century Poetry." *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory*. 64.3. (2008). 1-29; and Weber, Carl. J. "Whittier and Sarah Orne Jewett." *The New England Quarterly*. 18.3. (1945). 401-407.

do not perform their gender according to the prescripts of domestic ideologies. It is not only the act of producing a child out of wedlock that would have earned a woman the label of waywardness. Nearly any behavior that did not conform to the prescriptions of the metanarrative could earn a woman the label; a woman is wayward when she resists repeating the rituals associated with courtship and marriage. The Protestant worldview that is the cornerstone of the master narratives here equates virginity with purity and ignores its relationship to primogeniture. Fundamentally, “purity” is directly linked to the male conception of private property.²⁸ Therefore, waywardness implies an ignorance, a rejection, a dismantling, and ultimately a disrespect of private property.

Interweaving opens with the ending of Ina’s love affair with Henry, but it is also the beginning of Ina’s adulthood, her own awakening, as it were. Ina falls in love with Henry Matthewson over the summer. He allows her to believe he is in love with her and then coerces her into “disobedience” only to leave her when summer is over. The narrator only refers to what occurred between Henry and Ina as “her mistake” or “her disobedience”. Ina believes herself to be wretched, deserving of an upbraiding for her mistake, believes her experience has rendered her wayward. Saidiya Hartman defines wayward as

a practice of possibility ... it obeys no rules and abides no authorities ... is an ongoing exploration of *what might be*; it is an improvisation with the terms of social existence, when the terms have already been dictated, when there is little room to breathe, when you have been sentenced to a life of servitude...it is the untiring practice of trying to live when you were never meant to survive (Hartman 228).

²⁸ “Because ... virginity signifies not merely chastity but a number of intangible qualities that come to be associated with moral virtue ... virginity becomes not merely a chaste vessel through which virtue and rights pass, but rather a sign of virtue ... virginity and chastity of women matter only – or mostly – to people who have rights to pass on ... virginity and virtue become middle-class values” which separates the middle class from the aristocracy or upper class in the United States, and the lower class. (10-11). Harol, C. *Enlightened Virginity in Eighteenth Century Literature*. Palgrave Macmillan, US. 2006. *ProQuest Ebook Central*

One of the most successful modern adaptations of this story as old as time is the 1971 musical and 1978 film, *Grease*: Sandy, the good girl, has a summer love affair with Danny, the bad boy, which costs her enrollment in a Catholic school and lands her at Rydell High. However, Sandy eventually leans into her wayward girl status and becomes the reigning Queen of the Pink Ladies. The way that Sandy leans into that wayward woman status is an example of how failure can be, as Hartman suggests, “the social poesis that sustains the dispossessed” (227). In other words, Sandy takes her tragic love affair with Danny and makes herself into a heroine, a queen. Like Sandy, Ina also wants to remake her tragic experience into something heroic, by writing a book for girls to help them avoid making the same “mistake”.

Like many American girls, Ina was given fantastical expectations that she would have an active part in shaping the world. These expectations arise out of the novels she reads. The narrator discloses Ina’s love of Sir Walter Scott’s historical fiction. Ina consumes Scott’s tragic heroines who reshape the world through their love of and willingness to die for exceptionally virile and physically attractive men. Ina is not unlike real girls and young women who knew how to read because, as Amy Kaplan suggests, historical romances like Scott’s were quite popular in the 1890s. The popularity of these novels suggests another link between imperialism, nationalism, courtship, and marriage because, also as Kaplan suggests, historical fiction novels “refigure the relation between masculinity and nationality in a changing international context” with romantic plot twists (661). In an environment where increased literacy, increased opportunities for women, stronger efforts to enfranchise people of color, the inclusion of rural and working-class voices in national conversations, and with no more continent to conquer, white, bourgeois masculinity began to lose its cultural capital. The emergence of the “New Woman”, who could choose to delay or entirely forego marriage and the “New South”, where

the economy was no longer structured on chattel slavery, white masculinity needed to be redefined. Kaplan asserts that, in light of these changes “culture at large was in the process of redefining white middle-class masculinity” from the conservative, sober embodiment of self-control into the model of “vigor and prowess” (662). She suggests that “the chivalric rescue narrative” is about men reacquainting themselves with their virility not through bloody conquest of “barbarians” but rather through masculine spectacle and the feminine gaze. In other words, when heroes were physically attractive and performed virile acts of chivalry, men were able to draw women’s attention away from the “barbarians” thereby securing existing “civilization” and expanding its reach.

Kaplan continues by suggesting that historical fiction elicits “the desire for liberation ... through adventure and athletic activity, even as they channel that desire into the support of imperial conquest” (675). Churchill chose not to channel that desire into supporting imperial conquest, channeling instead a female masculinity. In a madcap episode, Ina rescues a train full of passengers from a washed-out bridge, in the middle of the night, in the middle of a storm, in her pajamas. What is spectacular is that Rex and Bert Hilton happen to be on the train she rescues, and at the end of her harrowing rescue, Rex carries her to safety, and Bert nurses her back to health. Early in the novel, Ina may have exhibited behavior that indicated she identified with the heroines of her favored historical romances, but this train rescue indicates that she has begun to identify with the heroes.

Wayward young women are only legible because of the illegibility of the Protestant standard of femininity. In other words, waywardness can only be defined in direct relationship with Protestant morality. For most women, the contortions of personality, desire, and expression required to be a legible example of Protestant ideal femininity can be life-threatening, and we

only need to look at the prevailing scholarship on *The Awakening* to understand how. J. Jack Halberstam asserts “where feminine success is always measured by male standards ... not succeeding at womanhood can offer unexpected pleasures” (4). For Ina, her initial failure at living up to the ideal leads to a mutually beneficial relationship with Bert that enables her to achieve her dream of writing a book for girls. For Bert, her continuous failure yields the relationship with Ina and leads to the opening of a home for other women like Ina. For Madge Munroe, Ina’s telegraphy teacher, her failure to live up to the domestic ideal of womanhood enables two promotions, her choice of telegraph offices to manage, and a loving relationship with Mark and the Winters. These women have failed to become models of the ideal woman transmitted through the metanarrative of domesticity but are like Halberstam’s “unprofessional force of fugitive knowers” (8) and Hartman’s anarchists and renegades.

If, as Halberstam suggests, successful performance of bourgeois femininity props up “the dominance of man within a gender binary”, then any passive resistance to it is a failure to be woman according to the dominant culture (144). Churchill does not just reimagine waywardness into a life-affirming space of potential, but she also explores ways in which men’s lives can also be reimaged into lives of possibility. For example, Henry Matthewson, in an attempt to win back Ina’s affections after he has lost Madge, rescues a little girl from drowning only to die from complications resulting from the rescue. In novels that adhere to the ideology of the master narratives of courtship and marriage, Henry’s rescue of a little girl should absolve him of his previous wrongdoing and win him the object of his desire. However, Churchill still holds him accountable for his treachery. Churchill’s choice to have Uncle Mark do emotional labor for both Madge and Ina by confronting Henry fails to adhere to the dominant principle of the master narratives of courtship and marriage because emotional labor is “women’s work”. An aspect of

the ideology of separate spheres is about women doing emotional labor for men so that men can focus on the compromises of morality that being “in the world” allegedly requires. According to the ideology of separate spheres, women are often solely responsible for maintaining a morally upright household and raising morally upright children while men are rarely held accountable for any participation, or lack thereof, in the moral uprightness of their families.²⁹ When the children fail to uphold Protestant morality, it is often the mother who is to blame for failing to “properly” raise her children.

Another way the novel fails to live up to the bourgeois ideals of domestic ideologies is in its lack of bourgeois veneration of the mother. In his discussion of Jamaica Kincaid’s novel *Autobiography of My Mother*, Halberstam suggests “Xuela inhabits another kind of feminism, again a feminism that does not resist through active war on colonialism, but a mode of femininity that self-destructs and in doing so brings the edifice of colonial rule down one brick at a time” (133). He refers to this as a kind of masochism and antisocial version of feminism where women refuse to participate in the “Oedipal models of generationality” (124). He calls this the unbecoming of woman, and while it is not altogether as passive as he insists, it is a radical departure from venerating the mother-daughter relationship.³⁰ In other words, the act of becoming a woman involves learning the rituals that perpetuate domestic ideologies – becoming a suitable marriage partner, becoming a wife, becoming a mother while at the same time *becoming* is a word once used to describe a woman’s beauty. The act of unbecoming connotes willful evasion of learning the rituals that perpetuate domestic ideologies therefore rendering

²⁹ In Chopin’s novel, Leonce leaves for his club every time the children enter the narrative, even if they are only being described as being put to bed, or cleaning up for dinner.

³⁰ Halberstam references cutting as a means of unbecoming, which is self-destructive in a very literal way, and that sort of destruction is only passive externally, to the view of others. Internally, however, this means of self-destruction is extremely active, assertive, and somewhat aggressive. This is not the kind of passive resistance this project focuses on.

oneself unattractive as a marriage partner. The connection between becoming/unbecoming and Oedipal models relies on the relationship between mother and daughter. Mother teaches daughter the rituals that must be repeated for interpellation of the domestic ideologies. In fact, mother-teaching-daughter is itself a ritual of ideologic reproduction. An unbecoming can occur when mother has rejected the call of the metanarrative of domesticity and refuses to teach the daughter, but what Halberstam is referring to, and the way that I am using it here, is daughter refusing to learn and repeat the rituals taught by mother. Ina Ellerton never knew her mother, but her grandmother stood in as mother. Ina accepts the instruction from her grandmother and answers the hail of domestic ideologies until Henry Matthewson breaks her heart. Then, she rejects the ideology of domesticity and begins her unbecoming by going to her uncle for help, learning a trade, leaving home, and going to work. However, the most important way the novel fails to uphold domestic ideologies is the way Churchill turns family structure upside down by having uncles and male cousins do the work of Aunties.

Alternative Family Structures

Both Ina and Bert were raised in alternative family structures. Ina's mother, May, died after childbirth, and Ina's father, Hugh, abandoned Ina to her grandparents. Rex and Bert Hilton are cousins who live with Rex's parents. Bert's parents died while she was an infant. Both Rex and Ina's uncle Mark are well into their thirties, unmarried, and living with their parents. Mark's family structure is one born of necessity and demonstrates a fairly common familial organization for rural and working-class families at the time. Childbirth was a dangerous endeavor, and in rural communities, the potential dangers increased exponentially.³¹ In and of themselves, these family structures are unremarkable except for the fact that they, paired with the Quaker

³¹ It is not made clear in the text how Bert's parents died.

worldview in which they exist, offer visions of the kinds of alternatives to patriarchal bourgeois nuclear family structure. For example, Bert's aunt and uncle have treated her with a fair amount of leniency in terms of her upbringing. She is a free spirit and no one in her family has pressured her to perform her gender according to the metanarrative of domesticity. However, there is no doubt that Bert is loved unconditionally by her family.

Although the text never pinpoints Bert's age, it does appear that she is naïve and her inquisitive and open nature seems like a result of innocence. Henry sees Bert as naïve and carefree and wants her to understand that adults have "real" cares and concerns in the world, and that her way of thinking is unrealistic for adults. Bert's response demonstrates a wisdom and experience that seem beyond her years:

And it seems to me ... that the owners of those lives make much of their own misery ... Don't you see that we must be miserable, because we ourselves have put away what made us happy? We have only one frock ... one life, one heart, one principle of life. If we will *play* in the mud we must have soiled and spoiled frocks (174-5).

Bert is also pragmatic and honest. When she recognizes that Henry is attempting to atone for his poor treatment of Ina and is falling in love with her, Bert goes to Rex for aid in keeping Henry and Ina apart:

In a poor man's home, with a poor man's children about her, don't you see how she would put all her thought, all her vitality, all her youth and health and strength into the work just around her, and become a prematurely old woman with her *great* work undone ... while it is, and always will be, the best and noblest thing for the majority of women to make and keep holy, sweet homes, to rear and send into the world strong and beautiful men and women, there is many a woman whose best work for herself and the world must be done with pen or brush in hand; with the nurse's cap or the Red Cross badge on; in lecture halls; *anywhere* where the *very best* that is in her will come out and spread itself for the benefit of humanity (204-5).

Bert gives voice to a common concern for women and the physical demands of childbirth, childrearing, and household labor. When Bert suggests that her love will make life more pleasant

for Ina, she is referencing the fact that Ina will never have to endanger or damage her body with childbirth, housework, or childrearing.

Madge Munroe, Ina's telegraphy teacher, is also acutely aware of the cost of being a wife and mother. Madge initially refuses Ina's uncle Mark's proposal of marriage not long after Ina leaves the farm. The Munroes lived on a large farm, were a "band of laborers," and the narrator claims:

If any of the wives or daughters of farmers read my story they will readily understand why the work in that farmhouse was never quite done, and why all its inmates seemed to be always tired ... Joseph Munroe was not a bad-hearted man, but one whose hand-to-hand fight with poverty had embittered his soul (33-4).

Madge observed the "pale, worried-looking face of the mother who was continually trying to make one dollar do the work of two ... she remembered, too, how often there had been disappointed young countenances because something ... was denied" (33-4). She had one older sister, Elizabeth, who married a farmer and repeated the cycle, but she also had another older sister, Amy, who "left home to become a telegraph operator in a distant state" (35). Madge follows her sister Amy, and in three years, earns a promotion and a comfortable salary and time to teach other young women the trade. Poverty had more intimate impact on Madge's life as her parents died within one year of each other while she was still a girl, and the family was ordered and managed by older brothers and sisters. This structure was less beneficial than Bert's or Ina's, though: "it was a lonely, unsatisfactory life those children led with no wise head to direct, and no strong hand to lighten their burdens; and at last they decided to give the place up to Elizabeth's husband" (35). Madge refuses Mark's marriage proposal because "this man was as poor as was her father when her mother married him for love" (43). Her concern was "how care crowded out love and want had taken the place of enjoyment" for her parents (43). When Madge

does finally accept Mark's proposal, it is after she has realized her professional ambitions and after she has witnessed multiple instances of Mark's kindness, tolerance, and caregiving.

Uncle Aunty

Ina's uncle Mark gives me an opportunity to discuss the ways in which the metanarrative of domesticity also prescribed behaviors for men and how those prescriptions also take little account of the impact of class. The ideal man is meant to provide a home for his wife and children, an income to sustain this home and adequately provide for the necessities of himself, his wife, and his children. However, it was more widely accepted that a man could delay marriage under the auspices of improving his economic lot in life so that he could adequately provide for a wife and children. The circumstances under which a man might choose to delay marriage never rendered him wayward in any sense. In fact, delaying marriage to improve his economic situation was often viewed as courageous or noble, especially in light of the changing definition of masculinity occurring in the 1890s.

Along with wayward young women being successful and girl lovers, Churchill further confronts the ideologies of domesticity by offering varied images of men. Ina's uncle Mark and Bert's cousin Rex perform the functions of an Aunty in *Interweaving*. Both men have focused their lives on the care and maintenance of the children already in their families rather than adding more children. Mark is a poor farmer, like his father, but unlike his father, he does not go out in search of a wife. Mark also uses his work to have daily devotion with God in the Quaker sense. He cares for his aging mother and father daily. As Ina grows up, he is also responsible for her daily welfare. He helps Ina learn to read, reads with her, and often functions as an intermediary between Ina and her grandmother. When Ina recovers from her heartbreak, it is Mark she goes to with the truth of what happened. It is Mark who goes to his parents to explain and endorse her

desire to learn telegraphy. Mark searches for and retains a teacher for Ina. He also knows who Henry Matthewson is, and still saves him from drowning at Silver Beach, nearly losing his own life in the process.

Mark fails to live up to the standard for manhood prescribed by the metanarrative of domesticity because he does still live at home with his parents and he has no means to provide adequately for a wife and children, but this failure opens up a new world of possibilities for him just as Ina's failure does for her. His failure strengthens his faith in God and presents him with a unique opportunity to support his niece by helping her learn a trade and find a job. Mark nearly dies in his one act of virile chivalry, saving Henry from drowning. Henry has proposed to Madge and while Madge is considering the offer, he falls asleep on a boat that is dragged away from shore by an incoming storm. Mark knows who he is, knows he has proposed to Madge, and knows what he did to Ina, and saves him anyway. When Henry comes to the hospital to thank him, Mark extracts a promise from him. By saving Henry and nearly dying in the process, Mark has embodied the idea of new masculinity that Kaplan refers to. His actions, and the truth from Henry, cause Madge to sit by his bedside until he fully recovers. Madge's attentions are drawn away from the barbarous Henry, who lied and cheated to make his way through the world and toward the noble but quiet and unassuming Mark. The promise Mark extracts from Henry is that Henry must tell Madge what he did to Ina so that Madge can make an informed choice about whether to marry Henry or not. Madge chooses not to marry Henry.

Queer Hope

According to Lucy Sargisson and Lyman Tower Sargent, "utopias ... stem from discontent with one's society [and] ... typically manifest as a critical narrative about values, norms, and/or conceptual cornerstones of the society" (1-2). Sargisson claims that "a primary

function of feminist utopian thought is, unsurprisingly, to criticize patriarchal society” (17). She continues that “utopian writing can also be read ...as an intellectual expansion of possible futures, not necessarily as a plan of campaign for action” (42). Within the ambiguous space between Bert and Ina, there is an opportunity, as Sargisson suggests, “to anticipate the possibility of radically different ‘nows’ (hence utopia as a paradigm shift in consciousness)” (52).

Sargisson refers to utopia as “the good place that is no-place”, which appropriately describes the relationship between Bert and Ina: a good place that has no name, no ready definition or explanation, and is mutually and practically beneficial for both women. Following Jose Estaban Muñoz’s conception of queerness as the not-yet-conscious, the ambiguity can be read as queer rather than simply hetero- or homosexual. I read the ambiguity in Bert and Ina’s relationship as a queer potential rather than a lesbian certainty.³²

Muñoz also suggests that “hope is spawned of a critical investment in utopia, which is nothing like naïve but, instead, profoundly resistant to the stultifying temporal logic of a broken-down present” (12). The novel enacts a critical assault on the concept of waywardness and a woman’s capacity for ambition as well as marriage. Sargisson claims that:

politics is, in feminist analyses, read in terms of the distribution of power, be it power structures in a society that may affect the distribution of wealth and resources, or power relations between and within different groups and classes or between states... All feminist utopias ... are concerned to some extent ...with the exploitative relations between patriarchy and nature” (17).

Madge’s reticence to marry Mark, Bert’s special brand of wayward, and Ina’s waywardness all make political statements, in Sargisson’s terms, against the exploitative nature of matrimony for women. There are a few implicit suggestions in this assessment: that marriage is not a natural

³² The Boston marriage was quite popular in North America in the 1890s; however, Bert’s and Ina’s relationship does not seem to fit the mold of a Boston marriage, primarily because Mark and Rex both function as intermediaries and chaperones for the young women prior to their trip abroad and Bert is not fully financially independent from her family.

state for all women; that what was “broken” about Churchill’s present was the assumption that marriage was natural for all women; that ambition is unnatural for women; and finally, that love can only be conceived of as being between a man and a woman.

Muñoz suggests that “a queer utopian hermeneutic would thus be queer in its aim to look for queer relational formations within the social” (28). However, Muñoz also suggests “queerness is rarely complemented by evidence, or at least by traditional understandings of the term ... [and] the ways in which we prove queerness and read queerness, is by suturing it to the concept of ephemera” (65). The “ephemeral evidence” for a romantic relationship between the two women exists in the interactions between them through gesture, which Muñoz claims transmits “ephemeral knowledge of lost queer histories and possibilities within a phobic majoritarian public culture” (67). After Ina publishes her book for girls, she and Bert go back to Ina’s grandparents’ farm to give one of the books to Ina’s grandmother. In the light of the moon in Ina’s old bedroom, Bert kneels in front of her and places her hands on Ina’s lap and tells Ina she wishes she could hear her say “I love you” in a very specific way, which Ina does. After the two young women return from their trip abroad, Ina is accepted as part of the Hilton family. The two young women move into a home together in Philadelphia:

a home, not with printed rules and stiff regulations ... Love made the rules and love kept them. When there was trouble ... love was still there finding a way out of the difficulty. The house had no especial name. Homes seldom do, and this was in no sense an ‘institution’” (262).

These kinds of gestures are abundant in the novel, but these two instances are especially significant because of the timing, the language, the setting, and the surrounding action.

It is significant that Ina and Bert have a shared moment in Ina’s old bedroom, where Ina spent so much time in between heartbreak and renewed determination, where all of her girlish fantasies were devised and historical romances read, and where she ultimately feels most at

home. She has returned to this room as a mature woman who is healing and has achieved the goal born out of the pain endured in this room. The two women have made the trip for the sole purpose of personally giving Ina's grandmother a copy of the book, which is a symbol of Ina's transition from girlhood to womanhood. Ina has been Bert's girl-lover for more than five years before they return from their trip abroad, yet it is not until this time that Bert's aunt and uncle formally accept Ina as part of the family. In stories featuring wayward young women, Victorian audiences would have understood the "trip abroad" as a euphemism for secretly giving birth out of wedlock. However, in this instance, the trip abroad is for Bert's health. She falls gravely ill after the flood, perhaps with tuberculosis. She had been bedridden for many days and Ina had not left her side, praying daily for relief for Bert. The narrator explains in reference to Ina's all-night vigils at Bert's bedside

divine love working through human love. The saving, mighty force sent through familiar channels that nothing might jar or seem amiss ... The unusual made to seem usual ... Unfamiliar things performed through familiar agencies" (248).

The love Ina and Bert demonstrate for one another is the usual and the familiar, but that this love exists between two young women is perhaps what is unfamiliar and unusual.

The Victorian era was certainly a time of phobic public culture as authors were not even plumbing the depths of heterosexuality on the page. The "true" nature of the relationship between Ina and Bert is open to interpretation, and in any case, in Muñoz's sense, it is "lost." Muñoz suggests that "being lost, in this particular queer sense, is to relinquish one's role (and subsequent privilege) in the heteronormative order" (73). Accepting this kind of loss "is to accept the loss of heteronormativity, authorization, and entitlement" (73). These losses constitute failures to adhere to heteronormativity or authority or entitlement. Both Ina and Bert have let go of a matronly authority and the resulting privileges that marriage and motherhood

would have provided them through the domestic ideologies. Failure to uphold the ideal of heteronormative romantic relationships, failure to uphold the prescribed ideal of manhood or womanhood, and failure to abide by prescribed ideals of family all suggest a waywardness, in Hartman's configuration of waywardness. For Hartman, Muñoz, and Halberstam these failures constitute future potential for redefining love and family in contrast to the definitions prescribed by domestic ideologies. For Sargisson, there is a space created upon recognition of the failure where the terms of love and family can be redefined. The utopic spaces both Sargisson and Muñoz discuss exist because of failure and loss.

Conclusion

In her unsophisticated way, Churchill does what Chopin and Hopkins cannot do. She strikes a blow at the patriarchy in its Achilles' heel: heterogeneity. The patriarchy seeks homogeneous people, particularly homogeneous women, to perpetuate itself. The metanarrative of domesticity prescribes the rituals that must be repeated in order to perpetuate the patriarchy. *Interweaving* not only demonstrates alternative ways of being for women in the 1890s that were physically and spiritually fulfilling, outside of the so-called American ideal, but its obscurity in academia also mirrors the same kind of potential present for both Ina and her uncle Mark. The novel's academic obscurity is a place of potential for Halberstam's and Hartman's renegade scholars to begin reshaping the academic landscape by teaching a more robust image of women's lives in the nineteenth century. Scaffolding her work in American Quaker beliefs kept Churchill somewhat safe from the harshest critics of her time but also adds depth and contour to a story of feminine love and female masculinity the world is more prepared to plumb now. The alternative family Ina comes from demonstrates there was no fixed patriarchal nuclear family structure that is often believed to have been the only kind of family structure in the nineteenth century. This

alternative family structure also demonstrates that they were not always marginalized because of the widespread acceptance between the Winters and the Hiltons of the love shared by Ina and Bert.

Chapter Four

Wayward Women and Bohemian Men in Ella Thayer's *Wired Love: A Romance of Dots and Dashes*

In 1879, Ella Cheever Thayer published *Wired Love: A Romance of Dots and Dashes*. Like Churchill's novel, Thayer's exists in academic obscurity, and according to Kay Yandell, like Churchill, Thayer wrote plays, short stories and novels that enjoyed success during her lifetime (82). The novel is the love story of Nattie Rogers and Clem Stanwood, telegraphers who meet "on the wire." Their courtship more resembles an early 21st century Internet romance than a 19th century romance because they only communicate over the telegraph for weeks, using handles instead of real names, and their budding romance takes place in a quasi-public space for other telegraphers to witness. *Wired Love* was written earlier than *The Awakening* (1899), *Hagar's Daughter* (1901) and *Interweaving* (1892). This is important because it reveals that telegraphy work for women in 1892 had been a reality for quite some time already and thus cannot be considered a novelty in *Interweaving*.³³ Because of its early publication date, *Wired Love* retains some measure of the sentimentality inherent in Romance fiction; however, it envisions a future potentiality that does not revolve around marriage and motherhood. The novel retains its hopefulness and love-centered storyline while allowing for manifestations of hope and love to appear differently than the metanarrative of domesticity prescribes.³⁴

³³ According to Thomas Jepsen, "the presence of women in railroad depots working as station agents, ticket agents, and telegraphers was taken for granted in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries" (141).

³⁴ The novel and its early publication date also signify the existence of other "forgotten" works by women from 1865 to 1900 which also imagine new forms of existence for women. See also, *The Hidden Hand or Capitola the Madcap* by E.D.E.N. Southworth and published in 1858; *The Rebel*, a memoir of the life of Leonor Villegas de Magnón, who was a political critic, conspirator, and participant in the Mexican Revolution, detailing her life in the 1860s and 1870s, which was not published until 1994. Thayer also published two plays: *Lords of Creation* and *Amber, a Daughter of Bohemia* in 1883. Although it is outside the scope of this project, I assert that the existence and popularity of these novels during the lifetimes of their authors paved the way for writers like Willa Cather and Charlotte Perkins Gillman in the twentieth century. It is area ripe for closer and fuller examination.

Churchill's and Thayer's novels tell different stories about the lived experiences of women before the turn of the 20th century than the tales of interminable woe told by Chopin or Charlotte Perkins Gilman, where women only have to fear the oppression brought on by their ties to marriage and motherhood. The interminable woe in that version of women's history relates as much to class positionality as it does to gender. The narrator in *The Yellow Wallpaper* and Edna Pontellier are not also concerned with where the money will come from to feed themselves or how they will pay for a place to live. However, because of the dearth of scholarship on gender performance and class, novels like Thayer's and Churchill's are often left out of examinations of women's lived experiences in the survey of American literature. It is important to at the very least acknowledge there is evidence that women were confronting patriarchal oppression in ways that do not simply document their suicide or descent into madness. For example, the rest cure that plagued Perkins Gilman, forming the basis for *The Yellow Wallpaper*, is not a curative treatment available to women like Nattie Rogers or Ina Ellerton, because they could not afford it. Because living in poverty is often viewed as a moral failing in the United States, Ina Ellerton's experience of patriarchal oppression was quite different from the experience of patriarchal oppression for a bourgeois woman, who can be viewed as a victim of that oppression with limited culpability in her own fate.³⁵ A young wayward woman who began her life in poverty was viewed as the epitome of moral turpitude, a young woman solely responsible for her own fate. Focusing on these limited views of oppression for women near the turn of the century, ignoring the influence of class positionality, means we have an incomplete and somewhat disingenuous picture of women's lived experiences. Although the working-class women in this project benefit from white privilege, they still suffer the hardships of poverty and scarcity. Their

³⁵ See Rottenberg and Bettie as well as Collins and hooks in Chapters One and Two

poverty often contributes to their failure at upholding the standards prescribed in the metanarrative of domesticity. Moreover, as I demonstrated in Chapter Three, that failure provides opportunities to thrive outside the mainstream, and allow them to define the world on their own terms and imagine utopia. Women capable of redefining their reality often begin with how they define home and social relationships.

Lucy Sargisson's transgressive utopianism and Chela Sandoval's methodology of the oppressed serve, together with José Esteban Muñoz's hopeful futurity and J. Jack Halberstam's theory of failure and queer time and space, as my lens for analyzing the ways in which individuals redefine their own realities in conjunction with and in opposition to the status quo. Lucy Sargisson asserts that transgressive utopianism "is wild, unruly, rule-breaking thought that is politically driven and that expresses a profound discontent with the political present" (3). In practical terms, Sargisson proposes that transgressive utopianism "breaks rules and confronts boundaries ... challenges paradigms ... creates new conceptual and political space" (4). This conceptual and political space filled with potential, for Sargisson, is the space where the imagination can transcend an unsatisfying present which lacks potential. Muñoz claims that "concrete utopias are the realm of educated hope ... [and] hope along with its other, fear, are affective structures that can be described as anticipatory" (3). For Muñoz, the conceptual and political space created by imagining utopia is the Blochian concept of the not-yet-conscious. No matter the name given this imagining space, both Sargisson and Muñoz see this space as filled with potential because of the opportunity for imaginative explorations it offers

For J. Jack Halberstam, the most efficient means of finding this space is through failure: "failure allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behavior and manage human development with the goal of delivering us from unruly childhoods to orderly and predictable

adulthoods” (3). Bypassing the prescriptions of the metanarrative of domesticity constitutes a failure under capitalist democracy, and Chela Sandoval asserts that “a methodology of emancipation ... constitute[s] a singular apparatus that is necessary for forging twenty-first-century modes of decolonizing globalization. That apparatus is ‘love,’ understood as a technology for social transformation” (2). As noted in the examination of *Interweaving*, love is the technology that enables Bert to announce herself as a “girl lover” – not just the love she feels for Ina but the love that Bert’s family extends to Ina is a challenge to the paradigm of the metanarrative of domesticity. *Interweaving* touches on this nexus of failure and hope in the face of the prescriptions of domestic ideologies, exploring various kinds of love: unrequited love, sisterly affection, ambiguous female friendship, same-sex love, and the love of uncles and male cousins. While Ina Ellerton benefits from the insulation that the Hilton’s money provides as she navigates her way from wayward young woman to successful young woman, the women in *Wired Love* have no such insulation.³⁶ *Wired Love* imagines definitions of home and social relationships that are untethered from the dominant social order because the characters’ poverty necessitates altering the meanings of home and relationships, expanding the notion of love to include love that emerges simply due to proximity and love that can fill in the gaps left by economic marginalization. Before I can fully examine the hopefulness and love present in *Wired Love*, I must briefly revisit ideologic interpellation.

Because much of the metanarrative of domesticity does not distinguish between bourgeois women, women of color, or working women, interpellation is often asymmetrical for working-class women. As stated previously, interpellation requires the repetition of rituals, and

³⁶ Bert and Ina’s relationship can be viewed as an excess of eccentricity, and in the nineteenth century, eccentricities among the wealthy were often socially acceptable. Had Bert and Ina been living in Maggie’s Bowery, their love would not have been tolerated, casually ignored, or accepted by anyone.

for prescribed bourgeois femininity, the rituals include an education and time to pursue artistic aptitudes, like music, recitation, painting, and singing. Wealth undergirds the successful enactment of these rituals – wealth enables leisure time and access to education. Wealth is not required, however, to foster a sense of upward mobility that enables the transference of the ideology. In other words, working-class women adopt the ideology of the metanarrative in aspirational ways, just as Black women adopt the politics of respectability. However, for both groups of women, the *praxis* of the rituals is often not transferrable at all. In Chapter Two, I examined the ways in which Black families, beyond enslavement, were required to alter the rituals based on the limitations of systemic racism and prejudice through things like passing and creating families where there were no biological relationships. In this chapter, I will examine ways poverty impacts the adoption of rituals that reproduce domestic ideologies. More specifically, *Wired Love* takes one of the most popular rituals that reproduces domestic ideologies, the family meal, and alters it to account for the poverty in which these characters live.

The Hotel Norman and Its Residents

Nattie lives at the Hotel Norman, which is a rooming house lived in and operated by Mrs. Simonsen, a middle-aged widow. Nattie rents a room from Miss Kling, another resident of the Hotel. Quimby, a law clerk, Cynthia “Cyn” Archer, a stage performer, and Jo Norton, an artist, also rent rooms from Mrs. Simonsen, as do Mr. Fishplate, a widower, and his daughter Celeste. The Hotel Norman is likely a single-family home converted for single-room occupancy residents. It is not a boarding house. Paul Groth explains that the difference between a rooming house and a boarding-house rests with the class position of the residents. Unskilled laborers typically occupied boarding-houses, and because this work was usually dirty, smelly, and carried on from sunrise to sunset, boarding-houses were occupied mostly by men. Because much of this

labor was casual and general, low-wage, unskilled workers tended to follow the work, making them somewhat itinerate residents (136-7). According to Groth, rooming houses like the Hotel Norman attracted “an army of low-paid but skilled white-collar and blue-collar workers,” primarily young men and women who were more permanent residents(104). Rooming houses were attractive to young working-class men and women because of their “easy access to work places, and a surrounding neighborhood with mixed land use, including stores, bars, restaurants, and clubs” (109). The novel’s narrator distinguishes the Hotel Norman from a boarding-house as the “lesser evil than living in that most unhomelike of all places, a boarding-house” (12). The description of the Hotel Norman also suggests it is a rooming house in an urban environment:

It must be confessed that there are more pleasing views than sheds in greater or less degrees of dilapidation, a sickly grape-vine, a line of flapping sheets, an overflowing ash barrel; sweeter sounds than the dulcet tones of old rag-men, the serenades of musical cats (11).

Even though the residents appear to be at the upper economic end of the working class, they are still living in poverty, on top of one another. We know they were living in poverty because the bourgeois and city planners still viewed rooming houses like the Hotel Norman as “social embarrassments, cultural concerns, and architectural eyesores,” much like the tenements described by Jacob Riis (165).

Nattie is a low-paid skilled white-collar worker as a telegrapher, and her situation is not unlike Madge Munroe’s in *Interweaving*: Her father died when she was still a girl, leaving his wife and three children in poverty. Nattie learns telegraphy so she is not a burden to her mother and siblings, but there is also a reasonable assumption that, like Madge, she does not want to marry just to unburden her mother or become stuck performing household duties in someone else’s home, tethering her to poverty: “Compelled by the failure and subsequent death of her father ... Nattie chose the more independent, but harder course” (13). Nattie wants to become a

writer, and choosing the harder, more independent course for her is a means of getting out of poverty and living a rewarding life. It is unclear what her father failed at before he died, but one can reasonably assume it was that he failed to adequately support his family, much like Madge Munroe's father had. Unlike Ina, Nattie has not experienced the heartbreak of unrequited love or manipulation. She only knows the traditional path is not the path for her given her dreams "of fame as an authoress" (12). Except when she is working in the telegraph office, Nattie is restless and dissatisfied with her present circumstances, and vacillates between hopefulness and disillusionment.

The novel opens with Nattie's initial telegraphic introduction to "C". She cannot keep up with the velocity of the message because she is also being questioned by a customer. Nattie agitatedly responds to the customer in haste, with a frown, a scowl, and despair. Her constant requests for "C" to repeat the telegraphic message are met with sharp teasing: "Had you not better go home and send down some one who is capable of receiving this message?" Nattie's response is quick and equally sharp: "Do you think it will help the matter at all for you to make a display of your charming disposition?" (5). Her frustration, anger, and embarrassment only fuel her determination to succeed, and so begins her new friendship with her invisible friend, "C". After weeks of continuous communication about books and philosophy over the telegraph, "C" tells Nattie he will be away from his office for a day, without much detail. Nattie had earlier explained to the nosy customer that all the telegraph operators could "hear" each other's conversations if they chose to listen in. On the day that "C" is out of his office, a garish man appears at Nattie's telegraph office, introducing himself as "C". Nattie is disheartened by his appearance and his untoward attitude and gives up her invisible friend. She is at first angry about the realization that an operator she was falling in love with sight unseen turned out to be

“the most disagreeable specimen in the business” (47). She goes to her friend, Cynthia Archer, to relay the “disgusting details” (47). She eventually receives a final message from “C” that he is leaving the telegraphy business forever. Thus, her short-lived, long-distance romantic relationship ends, or so she thinks.

Cynthia Archer is a friend of Nattie who also resides at the Hotel Norman. She is introduced by Mrs. Simonsen as “studying to become an opera singer, that she occasionally now sang at concerts, meeting with encouraging success, and further that she possessed the best references,” to which Miss Betsey Kling responds with disdain: “no young woman of modest and retiring disposition would seek to place herself in a public position” (28). Of herself, Cynthia claims to be “something of a Bohemian” (31). Cynthia has an upbeat personality, encourages her friends at the Hotel Norman to chase after their dreams, and is genuinely adored by all except Miss Kling.

Unlike Mademoiselle Reisz, the unmarried artist in *The Awakening*, Cynthia is often described as romantic, charming, energetic, and warm. She has a passion “for the lyric stage” and “shall make music [her] life’s aim”, and she has her own money to enable her pursuit of this passion (30). The narrator describes Cynthia as “one of those people who live always in the sunshine, and seem to carry its own brightness around with them” (32). Cynthia shares Ina Ellerton’s wayward experience, and near the end of the novel, she confesses to Jo that she once loved a man who did not love her back except for a day, and she has therefore devoted herself to her music. Cynthia is a graceful, beautiful, artistic, and unapologetic young woman. In bourgeois society, Cynthia would be an outcast, a wayward woman. The evidence of this lies in Miss Kling’s continuous disapproval of her; however, at the Hotel Norman, Cynthia is a binding

force for the other tenants, providing a welcoming environment for them all to get to know each other and spend time together.

Among the other residents, Quimby is an amiable, single, young man, described as “neither elegant nor talented, and is often very awkward, but he is honest and kind-hearted ... honest, blundering Quimby ... who was so clever, but like all clever people, such a dreadful bore” (13). Celeste Fishblate is often attempting to get Quimby’s attention, while his attention is always on Nattie. He is clumsy, tripping over a bucket in the hallway, alarming the other residents, constantly tugging at his collar, and stammering over his words. He introduces Cynthia and Nattie in the hopes that this will bring him closer to Nattie.

Mr. Fishblate and his daughter Celeste are also residents. He is a widower described as “an unquestionably disagreeable specimen of the *genus homo*, with a somewhat startling habit of exploding in short, but expressive sentences – never using more than three consecutive words” (13). Celeste is often referred to as “poor Celeste” because of the way she persists in trying to capture Quimby’s attention and how much she is monitored by her father. As Celeste pursues Quimby’s attention (and affections), Quimby pursues Nattie’s attention and affections while Mr. Fishblate pursues what he sees as Quimby’s nefarious designs to lead his daughter into waywardness. As may be expected, hilarity ensues; however, Celeste does end up engaged to Quimby through his own clumsiness. He believes Nattie is waiting in Cynthia’s darkened room for Cynthia to return home. Instead of turning on the lights or attempting a conversation, he blurts out a marriage proposal. It is Celeste who is sitting in Cynthia’s darkened room waiting for Quimby! Celeste holds him to the proposal as does Mr. Fishblate.

The narrator introduces Miss Kling as “a spinster – not because she liked it” (11) whose principal object in life (outside of searching for her other half) “was to keep watch and ward over

the affairs of the occupants of the neighboring flats and see that they conducted themselves with the propriety becoming the neighbors of so very genteel and unexceptional a person as Miss Betsey Kling” (11). She sits in constant judgment of Cynthia for various perceived infractions of the metanarrative of domesticity: having too many trunks, wanting to perform on a stage, having “a more than average share of good looks, and [going] out and [coming] in at irregular and unheard-of hours” (28). After Nattie’s expectations are disappointed by her first meeting with “C”, she comes home with a “very long face”, and while Miss Kling wonders “as to the cause, [she] took a grim satisfaction in the fact. For Miss Kling liked not to see cheerful faces; why should others be happy when she had not found her other self?” (46). She is a miserable woman on all counts.

Because of Miss Kling’s constant interference and snooping, Nattie and Clem install a telegraph in the Hotel Norman, connecting Nattie’s room with Quimby and Clem’s once Clem has temporarily moved in with Quimby. However, Miss Kling uncovers the deception and confronts the two. Up to this point in the story, Nattie has been under the impression that Clem and Cynthia are in love, and it is the final confrontation with Miss Kling that reveals Clem is and always has been in love with Nattie. While Cynthia and Nattie are having a conversation, Miss Kling bursts in Nattie’s room to confront her about the telegraph. Miss Kling mentions her disdain for the company Nattie keeps, which Cynthia claims is none of Miss Kling’s business. Miss Kling insults Cynthia: “since you force me to speak out, Miss Archer, I will say that in my opinion no truly modest and proper girl would become intimate with those who pad their legs and paint their faces, and show themselves to the public” (111). At this point in her tirade, Clem enters the room, which sends Miss Kling into her final tirade against Nattie:

I have heard of young females so much in love that they would run after and pursue young men, but never before of one so carried away and so lost to every

sense of decorum, as to be obliged to have a wire run from her room to his, in order to communicate with him at improper times ... your conduct and that of your associates is such, that I can no longer allow you to remain on my premises. (112)

Miss Kling is bitter, resentful, and unhappy about her lot in life. She vacillates between ruminating over her loneliness and repeatedly inserting herself into the private lives of the other residents. Although she is the primary antagonist in the novel, Miss Kling reveals much more about the material reality of working-class spinsters during the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Interpellation and Spinsterhood in the Working Classes

In order for a woman to answer the hail of domestic ideologies, she must be able to recognize herself in the ideology, but she must also be recognized in order for reproduction or interpellation. A lack of education or limited literacy and a lack of time to pursue aptitudes makes her unrecognizable. In other words, a rural or working-class woman may readily identify with domesticity, but without access to education or free time, she will be unable to successfully reproduce the ideology, like Maggie's alcoholic mother who sees herself as a superior woman. Her ability to perform the rituals required for interpellation is hamstrung by her lack of access. For example, Miss Kling fully understands that chastity, charity, prudence, usefulness, and sobriety are expectations for women designed to secure good marriages; however, her ability to practice these ideals is hampered by her lack of education and her lack of education is the direct result of her class position. For her, there is no real way to be charitable because she is barely making ends meet. Charity, for Miss Kling, does not encompass generosity of spirit. Similarly, her understanding of prudence does not include discretion or circumspection. Without a bourgeois education, Miss Kling can only repeat the rituals of the bourgeois ideology superficially and based on her own undereducated interpretation. It is important to fully grasp

this uneven transference because of the variable nature of women's lived experiences in the last decade of the nineteenth century.

Zsuzsa Berend asserts that "nineteenth century women took ideals to be an ultimate, unchanging, God-ordained reality, while the existing reality was seen as imperfect and transitory" (935-6). The Progressive nature of the late nineteenth century that was characterized by abolition, Transcendentalism, universal suffrage, the Second Industrial/technological revolution, and social reforms, like the Temperance movement included an expansion of the women's sphere although the ideology of separate spheres persisted. Women could add self-reliance and self-improvement to the repertoire of the ideal womanly behaviors prescribed by the metanarrative of domesticity.³⁷ The proliferation of rooming houses is one material piece of evidence for the claim that self-reliance and self-improvement served as ideal reasons for delaying marriage for both men and women as the nineteenth century came to a close. Reconfiguring notions of self-reliance and self-improvement around becoming a more attractive partner can be viewed as a compromise initiated by women with the master narratives of courtship and marriage. Women like Madge Munroe, who left the family farm and the drudgery of rural poverty, and Nattie Rogers, who struck out on her own to realize dreams of fame as an author, demonstrate this negotiation. One way self-reliance and self-improvement are reconfigured to service the metanarrative of domesticity is through the Protestant ideal of usefulness.

Berend suggests that "the insistence on self-reliance should be placed in the evangelical tradition going back to the First Great Awakening" because the "self was perceived as the

³⁷ The concept of self-reliance is not interchangeable with concepts of self-development, self-improvement, or self-direction, which are somewhat interchangeable in the last half of the nineteenth century for women. It is not until nearer the 1920s and 1930s that all of the latter coalesce, for women, to mean self-determination.

repository of human potential for good” (942). Following this logic, the metanarrative of domesticity and the ideology of separate spheres promoted the concept of women’s moral superiority within the home, so it is a natural assumption that this perceived moral superiority would extend to work women performed outside the home. Berend continues: “the ethos of service and usefulness that permeated the vocational concept of wifedom and motherhood similarly motivated single women: to be useful in the world and to provide help and guidance to those who need it” (943). The social reform movements of the 1890s seem to offer the best evidence in support of this claim. Berend asserts that “from the viewpoint of the vocational understanding of women’s work, home and the world, marriage and singlehood were not polar opposites but rather a continuum where the same ethos applied” (943). This claim presupposes a set of conditions, primarily educational ones, where the full meaning of charity, prudence and usefulness are understood.

Miss Kling’s interpretation of her own usefulness manifests as nasty, malicious, intentionally disruptive, and culminates in very real attempts to sabotage Nattie. Miss Kling has unreasonable expectations “of finding completeness or wholeness through love in a perfect match of temperament and values” and Nattie even views Miss Kling’s marital status as the result of Kling’s own individual misfortune (Berend 938; Thayer 11). The individual misfortune Miss Kling suffers from is her own misunderstanding of ideals like charity, prudence, and usefulness. Miss Kling’s acrimony and maliciousness are the result, more than likely, of her own disappointed expectations. Everything that Miss Kling appears to adopt into her own personal philosophy for living – sobriety, purity, love, and propriety – are also constant reminders of her own unfulfilled purpose for living, putting her in a never-ending cycle of performance and disappointment. I like to imagine that Miss Kling has her own uneducated understanding of

things like purity, charity, love, prudence, and usefulness, and as she has come up against the real meanings of those attitudes and behaviors, she has been humiliated but not humbled which has turned into bitterness and resentment in her later life.

According to Emma Liggins, unmarried women in the latter half of the nineteenth century were often viewed and represented as “redundant, superfluous, anomalous, incomplete, odd.” (1) According to Janet Fink and Katherine Holden, unmarried women were often portrayed as negative and aberrant images of womanhood, symbolizing “that only marriage combined with motherhood could give them completely fulfilled and happy lives” (233). This is certainly true of Miss Kling and the kind of unmarried woman she represents. However, modern scholarship likes to paint these women as proto-feminists, determining for themselves a life outside of the marriage and motherhood paradigm. Liggins suggests that “these odd women, positioned outside heteronormativity, albeit in different ways, not only challenged ideologies of middle-class femininity and sexuality, but also helped to reinvent them” (2). There is very little scholarship on the working-class ideology of femininity. Often, the assumption of both nineteenth century social reformers and modern scholarship is that the material pressure of capitalism on women’s lived experiences is negligible. It is also the flaw of presentism to assume that all unmarried nineteenth century women, especially working-class and rural women, were cognizant of “being feminist” and to label them as protofeminists is disingenuous.

Miss Kling has in no way opted out of heteronormativity. Her negative personality traits signify her disappointment with being outside of heteronormativity. According to Berend, “this reading of the ‘progressive’ character of nineteenth-century spinsterhood distorts its cultural context” (935). Like the texts they examine, these readings of spinsterhood assume the bourgeois ideology is appropriate, superior, and exportable to the working class. Adopting

domestic ideologies modeled on bourgeois women takes access to education for granted. In the case of Ina Ellerton, for example, her initial identification with Sir Walter Scott's heroines was predicated on her literacy and understanding of what it meant to be charitable, prudent, and useful. Miss Kling's obvious misunderstandings of charity, prudence, and usefulness indicate either a lack of education or a lack of quality education. We can assume she is literate, but how literate is up for debate. Transferability, or exportability, of domestic ideologies from the bourgeois to the working class, without access to the same education, means that working-class women go unrecognized by domestic ideology no matter how much they want to, or have been socially conditioned to want to, identify with it. For Miss Kling, her nosy, intrusive, often rude, and disruptive behaviors, towards Nattie in particular, are demonstrations of her undereducated understanding of usefulness.

The Feast of Sisterhood

While the representation of unmarried women that Miss Kling offers is negative regardless of class, the more positive representations offered by Cynthia and Nattie highlight the stark differences between bourgeois and working-class enactment of the rituals prescribed by the metanarrative of domesticity. There is considerable contemporary debate about how effectively concepts of sisterhood cross racial boundaries given the level of cultural appropriation Black women suffer at the hands of white women. Recent developments in the Black Lives Matter movement and between many Black women and white women have initiated the *#dontcallmesis*, which sends a clear message that many women of color do not wish to participate in sisterhood with white women. This reaction is not solely the result of cultural appropriation but is also the result of latent racist perceptions in some white women which often manifest in the form of "weaponized tears", body shaming, hair shaming, and sexuality shaming. However, sisterhood

is an important aspect of women's lived experiences regardless of race or class. A biological sister is not a mother, not a father, not an aunt, and sometimes, not even a friend; however, a biological sister may be called upon to perform the duties of mother, father, aunt, and friend over the course of her lifetime. A woman can experience sisterhood even when she only has brothers. Sisterhood comes with no guarantee of reciprocity, especially within a biological framework. In *The Awakening*, Edna's sister Margaret is called upon to be mother to Edna when they are girls, yet they are estranged as adults. Venus is partially responsible for Oliver's education and welfare, like a parent, in *Hagar's Daughter*. Madge Munroe and her sisters often fill the role of parents for one another, and they are adult friends in *Interweaving*; however, when Bert declares her affection for Ina, it is not as a sister but as a girl-lover.

According to Carol Lasser, "nineteenth century natal sorority idealized a closeness and collaboration ... that required demonstrative affection, emotional mutuality, and the fulfillment of obligations to support and nurture ... sisterhood offered the model of an enduring and intimate relationship, creating a sense of stability and community" (165, 169). Nancy Cott claims "a woman discovered among her own sex a world of true peers" (190). For Cott, female friendships of this period "expressed a new individuality ... a willingness and ability to extract themselves from familial definition ... and asserted that women were different from but not lesser than ... men" (190). Both Cott and Lasser contend that female friendships modeled on sisterhood were woman-centered and women-only spaces.

Cynthia Archer and Nattie Rogers develop a sisterhood, but it is not woman-centered or a women-only space. Chapter Eight, "The Feast", is an episode that demonstrates the nature of their chosen sisterhood. Nattie goes to Cynthia's rooms to lament the barriers to becoming a writer. Cynthia responds by telling her "your ambition is great enough to render you useless and

discontented, but you need something to stimulate your energy ... since you can at present accomplish nothing, why not get all the enjoyment you can out of life?" (53). Nattie responds by complaining about how difficult it is even to find something decent to eat. Cynthia tells her she can appreciate her feelings "from sad experience" (53). Together, they decide to pool their resources between food, dishes, cutlery, and money to have a feast of steak, eggs, tomatoes, potatoes, fruit, pie, and Charlotte Russe, just the two of them. The feast becomes a demonstration of Cynthia's advice to take all the enjoyment life has to offer.

The two women end up with what seems like an excess of food for two young women, which results in trouble finding enough space to have the feast and dishes to cook and eat with:

two pounds of steak ... waiting expectantly of making glad our hearts on the rocking-chair, potatoes in plebeian lowliness under the table, tomatoes and two pies on your trunk, Charlotte Russes ... on your bonnet-box, in a plate ordinarily used as a card receiver, and sugar, butter, et cetera and et cetera lying around almost anywhere, and the figs, oranges, and homely but necessary bread, where are they? I see, on top of 'Dombey & Son' ... and our dishes will not quarrel, because they are none of them any relation to each other (56).

As they sit down for the meal, Cynthia says "Eccentricity is quite the rage now, you know ... and certainly, a sugar-bowl so closely resembling a brown paper bag ... is quite *recherche*" (56).

While it is a delightfully endearing episode, the feast is also an important one to analyze further because the feast not only defines the sisterhood between Nattie and Cynthia, but it also demonstrates the lengths working-class women had to go to in order to perform the rituals of domesticity.

The way the feast episode defines sisterhood for Nattie and Cynthia requires an understanding of how family time and family meals aid in constructing family identity. According to Maria Mies and Sylvia Federici, "it was the bourgeoisie which established the social and sexual division of labour, characteristic of capitalism" meaning that family as a

“combination of co-residence and blood-relationship” is a construct of capitalism, infused with the ideology of the metanarrative of domesticity (104). Mies argues that the heterosexual, monogamous, nuclear family was made the norm “under the specific protection of the state” and “through legislation, police measures and the ideological campaign of the churches” (104-5). I would add to Mies’s assessment that the homogenized concept of family is, in fact, a state apparatus designed to organize and supervise the body politic, beginning with the bourgeois but for the express purpose of working -class interpellation.³⁸ However, the changing economic landscape of the United States in the latter half of the nineteenth century altered the structure of family.³⁹ According to Simone Cinotto, the “patriarchal, colonial family gradually began to shift toward the more self-reliant, democratic, and affectionate pattern some historians characterize as the ‘modern family’ ... industrialization was an important cause of change” (19). With industrialization came wage labor which is dependent on time, so that time with one’s family needed to be carved out of a day that was mostly devoted to work outside the home. Before industrialization, many families were together all day doing chores to sustain the family. When men began leaving to go to work, the need for family time arose. According to Kerry Daly, “family time took on a set of meanings that made it private, controlled, and personal ... Victorian Protestant culture emphasized the importance of hard work while at the same time ritualizing the family dinner” (284). The family dinner became a space to both fulfill a biological imperative and fulfill an ideological, psychological, and sometimes, emotional imperative. The ritualization is what is important when considering the establishment of non-biological family structures.

³⁸ Social reform movements appear to be the most concrete evidence for this claim as many social reform movements, like the Temperance movement, flattened ethnic, religious, and class difference for the purpose of reforming society in the bourgeois image.

³⁹ Nancy Cott, Carol Lasser and others argue that as more poor women entered the non-domestic workforce, a shortage in domestic “help” prompted some bourgeois women to perform more domestic labor themselves. It is outside the scope of this project, but this shift also prompted some bourgeois women to turn homemaking into a science of economics and efficiency.

In the process of interpellation, the repetition of sanctioned rituals is crucial. Cinotto claims the Victorian bourgeois family paradigm became the archetype of family in the United States, and that its most compelling feature was “its supposed superiority and exportability” (22). Cinotto notes that “from the view of ideological penetration”, the paradigm has proven successful (22). The politics of respectability and upward mobility are evidence of far-reaching ideological penetration as are persistent and prescriptive “traditional family values”. However, as Cinotto also points out, institutional and economic barriers made adoption of this family paradigm nearly impossible for the working class. Because everyone needs to eat, the family meal was often the most accessible means of ritual repetition in African American and poor white working-class family homes. However, the ritual is even harder to reproduce and repeat in single-occupancy rooming houses designed primarily for single men and women, where a dining room or kitchen might have also served as rented living space for boarders. What makes the feast episode so delightful is the lack of designated space for preparing and serving the food and eating the meal. Although poverty has altered the details of the meal, the fundamental principles of sharing time and food persist. It is this ritual, the family meal, that signifies a family structure between Nattie and Cynthia. They eventually invite Quimby, Clem, and Jo to join in their feast, after Quimby clumsily sits on one of the Charlotte Russe. Neither woman takes charge of the situation like a mother might, but rather, they work together with an excess of food to create a family meal for themselves and their male “siblings”, Quimby, Clem, and Jo.

Conclusion: Queer Space, Queer Family

The reference to *Dombey and Son* in the feast scene is the third specific reference to Charles Dickens. The first reference is to *Our Mutual Friend* (1865), Dickens’s critical examination of the social expectations of marriage, the role wealth plays in marriage, and

mistaken identity. The second reference is to *The Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit* (1842-1844). In *Dombey and Chuzzlewit*, children, a son and a daughter, respectively, are sacrificed on the altar of a father's hubris. Martin Chuzzlewit is disinherited by his father because he falls in love with his father's nursemaid, a woman whose class positionality makes her an unacceptable candidate for marriage. Florence is ignored and maligned by her father because she is not a male heir. The plot of *Our Mutual Friend* revolves around an estranged father and son. The son fakes his own death and delays inheriting his father's wealth to find a woman who loves him for himself and not his inheritance. Some recent scholarship explores the queer potentiality of Dickens's work and suggests that "Dickens's queer families resist cohesion" with bourgeois "conservative, heterosexual family values" (31).⁴⁰ Dickens was a prolific writer, and it is appropriate for Thayer to reference the most famous author of her day, but what is notable is the portrait of parents depicted in these three specific Dickens novels. The choice to reference these particular novels suggests Thayer's own open criticism of a homogenized and externally imposed family structure.

In *Wired Love* there is a conspicuous absence of mothers and the novel paints an unkind portrait of fathers with Clem's father and Mr. Fishblate, the references to Dickens notwithstanding. Clem becomes a telegrapher because he refuses to go to medical school, preferring to take over his father's retail business but his father has disowned him for not going to medical school. Mr. Fishblate is in a constant state of agitation at the slightest disturbance, and like Miss Kling, very attuned to a superficial sense of propriety when it comes to Celeste's pursuit of Quimby. The fact that Celeste is even in pursuit of Quimby, however, undoes his

⁴⁰ See also: Furneaux, Holly. *Queer Dickens: Erotics, Families, Masculinities*. Oxford UP, 2010.

sense of propriety because a young woman properly trained in the performance of bourgeois femininity would never openly pursue a man in 1879.

The residents, with the notable exception of Mr. Fishblate and Miss Kling, strive to aid one another in just getting from one day to the next. The lack of biological connections, the fact that they each pursue different career paths and have differing desires does not seem to matter in their regular availability to each other. Because the house was designed and built to house a patriarchal nuclear family but is being used to house disparate single men and women who are intentionally delaying starting their own families so they may realize their individual ambitions makes the Hotel Norman itself a queered space. This queer space demonstrates an alternative, no less meaningful, container for a family that is also queer. The family is queer because it lacks biological connections, but also because it lacks the formulaic structure of the nuclear family, having no mother or father. In essence, this is a family of orphans. The excess of food, the queer family, and the queer space each constitute what Jose Esteban Muñoz would refer to as a queer impulse, and combined they are an affective surplus of queer impulses (28). The feast is an act of hopefulness about the future in the face of the limited present represented by Nattie's complaints. The Hotel Norman is also, itself, a space designed for hopefulness embedded within a gritty, dirty, noisy urban environment. It exists as an encouragement for young men and women to postpone marriage, thereby defying its intended purpose as a building meant to contain one biological family. All these impulses to reject the present in favor of an unknown future revolve around the emotional connections among the residents of the Hotel Norman.

According to Chela Sandoval's theory of differential consciousness, *Wired Love* gives a glimpse of the revolutionary qualities that reside within decolonized love. This queer family, in its queer home, with its superficial imitations of bourgeois ideology, represent a kind of

resistance “that lies outside the binary configuration of domination and subordination” precisely because they are mimicking the forms of domination and subordination (162). J. Jack Halberstam suggests that “queer subcultures produce alternative temporalities by allowing their participants to believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience – namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death” (2). Without getting married or experiencing childbirth, they do have a family meal. The emotional connections and the quotidian needs and desires of the residents of the Hotel Norman seem to supersede the prescriptions of the metanarrative of domesticity as they relate to women’s behavior, marriage, men’s behavior, and the structure of family.

Insofar as the available choices are limited for these young people, they cobble together their own sense of what it means to be feminine and masculine, sister, brother, friend, and lover, out of what is available. The lack of wealth, and the absence of the social standing that comes with wealth, creates a space for choice that women like Edna Pontellier and Hagar Sargent did not have. Miss Kling is an often hyperbolic symbol of the obligations that come with wealth and social standing for women; however, her character serves as a foil for Cynthia and Nattie. Miss Kling is the gatekeeper and the enforcer of the patriarchy with her own disappointed expectations about a purposeful life. For young women like Cynthia and Nattie, Miss Kling and Mrs. Simonsen represent a known and unattractive potential future the young women clearly want to avoid. Faced with the stultifying present and limited options for the kind of future they want, Cynthia and Nattie must forge their own paths into an unknown future. Choosing to do this together, alongside three young men in similar situations, by adapting the prescriptions of the metanarrative of domesticity to not just fit into their budgets, but also to better suit their desires,

is revolutionary. This kind of imagined reality creates a broader picture of women's lived experiences outside of the bourgeoisie.

Conclusion

The American Dream and American exceptionalism are twin ideologies born out of the desire of thirteen rebellious colonies to form a cohesive and unified nation. Master narratives are used to provide meaning about historical events for large groups of people. Master narratives aid in “conceptualizing and ordering historical developments” but the people who lived in the late nineteenth century “did not experience the master narratives as such” (Kern 20). In the United States, master narratives about nation and empire provide meaning for the forced relocation of indigenous people, human trafficking and enslavement, internal colonization, and disenfranchisement. The dream and exceptionalism narratives explain that, in order for the United States to be competitive among other nations, territory must be increased, economies must be vibrant yet stable, and a centralized government must dictate how territory will be acquired and economy will function. Concomitantly, master narratives about courtship and marriage provided justification for centralized government control by linking marriage and notions about essentialized separate spheres from which men and women can perform civic national duty. These two narratives explain that, in order for the United States to be competitive among other nations, citizens should do their part by separating themselves into public and private domains. Men were to occupy the public domain while women were to occupy the private. Men’s abilities to be successful in meeting their civic and national obligations were directly proportionate to women’s abilities to be successful wives and mothers. Successful performance of individual civic responsibilities meant that the nation was more secure in establishing territory and stabilizing the economy. The reward for citizens who were successful in their individual realms was inclusion in a collective national identity that was touted as a

shining example for all other citizens of other nations around the world, and the realization of the American Dream – a patriarchal nuclear family, home ownership, and political enfranchisement.

The rituals required to reproduce the ideology of American exceptionalism were transmitted via conduct and etiquette manuals for women, romance fiction, artworks, sermons, and were passed down orally between mothers and daughters. Marriage and family become, according to Althusser's definition, an ideologic state apparatus. Together, the master narratives of nation, empire, courtship, and marriage with the vehicles of transmission become a metanarrative about domesticity, an all-encompassing phenomenon about both national identity and practices tied specifically to the home. Because national expansion and stability relies on individual civic duty, and men's successful implementation of civic duty relies on women's establishment of homes and families, the success of the nation rests on women.

The United States is currently experiencing an ideological divide that threatens the internal stability of individual citizens and the integrity of the nation as a whole. Traditional family values are central to this divide and those values are directly linked to the metanarrative of domesticity. Evidence of that lies in the recent Senate Bill 8 in Texas, the most restrictive ban on abortion in the nation. Policing women's reproductive health is a form of internal colonization which extends directly from the national and imperial master narratives. Some citizens believe women's reproductive autonomy is a threat to national stability. These same citizens believe marriage equality and gender fluidity also jeopardize national stability. Without an understanding of the metanarrative of domesticity, it is hard to comprehend how the sexual behaviors of citizens has anything at all to do with national security. These citizens also believe there is a past moment in US history when there were no challenges to traditional family values. Because art often imitates life, though, it is easy to find instances where cisgender, heterosexual whiteness

has been consistently challenged from the margins almost from the beginning of US history. Learning about women's histories cannot be done in a vacuum; we must highlight the ways in which the national and imperial master narratives infiltrate fiction, even the most benign genre of Romance fiction, as well as our own analyses of fiction; must account for the imbrication of courtship and marriage master narratives within the national and imperial ones.

The conduct and etiquette books, the sermons, the private, daily instructions from mother, and various modes of entertainment available to women in the late nineteenth century promised a specific set of circumstances. The metanarrative of domesticity promised women safety, protection, a sense of purpose, and value, both in the eyes of the nation and in the eyes of God, through marriage and motherhood. These promises were supposedly unqualified by race or class, meaning they were promised to every woman. The only prerequisite for realizing these promises was adhering to a specific mindset and set of behaviors that also required a bourgeois education in those behaviors. However, the education needed to meet those requirements was not available to every woman. The fine print, so to speak, embedded in bourgeois domestic ideologies disclaims equitable access to the tools necessary for realizing the promises of the courtship and marriage . The courtship/marriage master narratives are so intertwined with the national/imperial master narratives because the former promised enfranchisement and belonging in the latter because women could only be economic and political citizens vicariously through their husbands.

I began this project with Chopin because *The Awakening* is a well-worn staple in the study of American women's literature. My personal experience with the novel did not reflect the accolades and devotion demonstrated in the prevailing scholarship. As an undergraduate and working, single mother, higher education was my ladder out of poverty, and the idea that I was

striving to occupy space with historical and academic women who glorified suicide and child abandonment as acts of subversive, feminine agency was not the emancipatory drive I wanted. My unwillingness to support such moves made me an outsider in those early survey courses. Analyzing *The Awakening* through an intersectional lens enabled me to make peace with the novel and articulate a less toxic reading. What is important to me, though, is that intersectionality enables another way to teach the novel – one that does not encourage women to valorize suicide and child abandonment. What good are we to the movement of women’s liberation if we are dead? It always seemed to me that supporting a reading of suicide did more to acknowledge the oppressors than it was liberating for women.

Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge claim that because “education has the potential to oppress or liberate” it has “long been important for intersectionality” (159). They draw on Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* to demonstrate the neoliberal backward turn in higher education to the banking approach which reinforces “existing social inequalities” because it “asks students to uncritically accept and help reproduce their assigned place in the social hierarchy” (161-2). The tenets of the banking approach, according to Collins and Bilge, teach oppressed students “to uphold the very practices that produce their subordination” (162). In relation to my experience as an undergraduate with *The Awakening*, this means that adopting the prevailing scholarship’s rhetorical stance on the ending of the novel flattened the difference class makes. Collins and Bilge further suggest that intersectional methodologies “require *negotiating* differences that exist within discrete scholarly and political traditions of race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, nationality, ethnicity, colonialism, religion, and immigration” rather than dismissing those differences or attempting to ignore them (168). The rhetorical stance of the

prevailing scholarship of the novel ignores class, and even in the emancipatory act of studying literature written by women and about women, the creep of social inequity can persist and thrive.

As I claimed in Chapter One, teaching the novel according to prevailing scholarship sends a message to young women, many of whom are using higher education to climb out of poverty, that they are unworthy on their own merit to achieve liberation. This messaging is best encapsulated by Sheryl Sandberg in her best-selling book *Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead* (2013) which suggests that an “appropriate” amount of capitalist ambition is what liberates women. The push to uncritically adopt this rhetorical stance is a form of neoliberal assimilation. I showed in that chapter the ways in which Edna’s class positionality made her more vulnerable to feeling isolated and to specific forms of oppression. Rest cures and electroshock therapies were treatments reserved for bourgeois women; bourgeois women had fewer opportunities to explore waywardness than rural or working women even though they had greater access to living alone and supporting themselves. Edna’s one true moment of liberation was in a garden, with a dog, and no other humans. From this experience, she was able to differentiate between isolation and solitude which thus enabled her to become more creative, more autonomous, and more determined. Because she is already a wife and mother, her experience of waywardness is truncated, but the ambiguity of the ending and her unrequited love, signify her acceptance of failure as a space of potential growth and inward development. Her traditional family, one that perfectly emulated the bourgeois ideal, became the unsatisfying realm where her impetus for change arose. The patriarchal nuclear family, the thing marketed to moor her in reality and satisfy all of her ambitions, was the same thing that drove her to the margins of society in the first place. Love and failure, then, become the anchors of this project: women who created

social poesis through failure and love, becoming the heroines of their own stories, challenging class expectations and prescriptions, and redefining the metanarrative of domesticity.

The patriarchal nuclear family, as described herein, is a social construct that permeates the US imagination as traditional and had become a part of the American dream. The construct of traditional family values undergirds one-half of the body politic, directing not only political rhetoric and propaganda, but also guiding legislation about housing, working, loving, and being in the United States. Traditional family values are tied to narrow Protestant and capitalist ideologies without regard to systemic barriers stemming from wealth inequality and structural racism. While the ideology of separate spheres dictated that the home and family should be respite for men, home and family offered no guarantees of safety or respite for women. There were no prescriptions for what a woman should find in home and family, only what she should produce within home and family. There were no addendums on how a woman should make a home a respite if that home was just two rooms on a tenement floor crammed in with ten other families or if that home was also occupied by addiction and violence. In other words, there were no allowances, no quarter, given for women who were incapable of making a home a respite, and producing good little US citizens, no matter the reasons for that failure. Any woman incapable of living up to the bourgeois standard was simply written off as wayward, morally deficient, hysterical, or incompetent.

In Chapter Two, I described the cultural differences inherent in the way African Americans perceive family and how white supremacy, human trafficking, enslavement, and systemic racism forced African American families into structures created by and for white bourgeois families. I described the way the politics of respectability and uplift ideology reinforced, because of white supremacy and systemic racism, the white, bourgeois model of ideal

womanhood and ideal families, forcing Black women into various unnatural positions related to both gender and class. Hagar is forced into passing when it may not have been necessary for her to do so. Then, Washington society punished her for passing, but only slightly because she managed to perform her gender and class according to the prescriptions of the metanarrative of domesticity. Unlike Edna, Hagar did find fulfillment in her role as wife and mother and was content in her ideal-looking family. However, just as family was marketed as a mooring in reality and the fulfillment of women's desires, it was also marketed as a realm of safety and security for women. The very thing meant to keep Hagar safe was also the thing that endangered her the most. It was precisely her marriage and offspring with Ellis that made her vulnerable to her brother-in-law's greed and amorality. One family does stand out in the novel as offering mooring, fulfillment, and security, but it is not a traditional, patriarchal nuclear family as prescribed by bourgeois domestic ideologies. The family Aunt Henny creates is woman-centered, focused on the children's wellbeing, and adheres more closely to centralized family structures which originated in Africa. From love, Aunt Henny creates a family with Marthy, which grows to include Venus, Oliver, Hagar, and Jewel. This family structure fails to adhere to the courtship/marriage and national/imperial master narratives, including the politics of respectability, and yet, from within this family, Hagar and Jewel are both protected and rescued; Venus and Oliver are protected, encouraged, and loved.

Highlighting the differences in stability and security between Hagar's patriarchal nuclear family and Aunt Henny's women-centered one against the backdrop of racial uplift and contemporary social work in African American families demonstrates a holistic approach to understanding the myriad forms of oppression women experience. As a pedagogical approach, intersectionality enables the decentering of the "major means of adjudicating knowledge" and

creates a space for what Patricia Hill Collins refers to as “subjugated knowledges” (Mann 180, 182).⁴¹ For example, Aunt Henny is suspicious of Estelle Bowen’s true identity almost immediately; however, there is no space in the novel for her to give voice to her suspicions. What she knows about Estelle Bowen is a subjugated knowledge because she has no space to educate others and she has no tangible proof until the trial of Cuthbert Sumner. Even then, she is not the appropriate character to give voice to this knowledge because of her status as domestic help. The major means of adjudicating her knowledge would be for her to offer some kind of tangible proof rather than just her gut instinct, even though her instincts are accurate. Being born with a veil rarely holds up in courts of law, but “socially lived knowledge” is just an “alternative way of knowing” (Mann 180). Her knowledge has no less validity than if she had tangible proof. Bringing Aunt Henny’s family from the background to the foreground also exists as an alternative way of knowing and constitutes one way to decolonize women’s studies.

It was challenging to locate novels that demonstrated non-traditional women that were not also didactic in supporting the prescriptions of the metanarrative of domesticity. In other words, it was hard to find novels where the female characters survived their “abnormality” let alone embraced it. In Chapter Three, I examined Lida Churchill’s *Interweaving*, about a young rural woman, disappointed by her first experience of love, who goes to the big city and turns her disillusionment into a self-help book for girls. There is only the barest minimum of previous scholarship on this novel. It is not in the mainstream reading lists of literature surveys. It is often overlooked because it lacks the style of Kate Chopin or Pauline Hopkins. However, this lack of style is another demonstration of subjugated knowledge. While both Chopin and Hopkins have well-documented lives and their experiences with bourgeois education tend to be held up as

⁴¹ See also, Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and Empowerment*. Unwin Hyman. 1990.

admirable given their era, bourgeois education was not available to every woman. Limiting what is taught based on an artist's access to bourgeois education excludes subjugated knowledge and delivers an incomplete picture of women's lived experiences.

Interweaving is a queer fantasy of two young women in love who never have to defend their love to the outside world, who never have to lie to their biological kin about what they mean to each other, and who are never ostracized because of the love they feel for each other. Jose Esteban Muñoz suggests that “queer fantasy is linked to utopian longing [that] together ... can become contributing conditions of possibility for political transformation” (172). The utopian longing is to be free to love whomever one chooses without a thought as to what “the neighbors might say”. In contemporary terms, that utopian longing translates into extensions of employer-sponsored health insurance benefits for same-sex partners, job protections, legal acknowledgement of marital unions, and the freedom to adopt children. Obviously, the political transformation resulting from this kind of queer fantasy is government protection of marriage equality. Arguably, the Quaker framework of the novel insulates it from book-banning, but this framework also constitutes an Othered knowledge. As a challenge to traditional family values, the love between Ina and Bert rejects heteronormative ideas of value. Ina marries Rex Hilton in the end of the novel, but not before she has had at least five years of unconditional love with Bert and achieved her goal of publishing a self-help book for girls. The Quaker framework enables a reading that is not obsessed with the sexual identities or preferences of the two young women, but one that exposes love as a technology of opting out of the dominant social order. We can only hope that Edna chose to opt out of the dominant social order through love of self by choosing to live on her own terms. Aunt Henny does opt out through love of family, albeit a chosen family, which was also created from love.

J. Jack Halberstam suggests that liberty, as defined by dominant culture, places oppressed groups in a double bind. On the one hand, oppressed groups are defined in relation to hierarchies of power, and on the other hand, the means of escaping oppression are also defined in relation to the position of power. Halberstam refers to Saidiya Hartman's conceptualization of freedom for emancipated people during an extremely violent period in US history: "the very definition of freedom and humanity within which abolitionists operated severely limited the ability of former slaves to think social transformation in terms outside of the structure of racial terror" (130).⁴² In other words, for formerly enslaved people, conceptualizing freedom had to be done outside of the dominant social order, "in terms of a not yet realized social order, so the maps of desire that render the subject incoherent, disorganized, and passive provide a better escape route than those that lead inexorably to fulfillment, recognition, and achievement" (130). For late nineteenth-century women, the same is true in that there always seems to be the oppression they suffered and the ability to intentionally either resist, reject, or transgress that oppression. Yet at all times, oppression, or "the colonial project" is the focal point, the point of power (Halberstam 133). When liberation is conceived outside of the dominant social order, it is "unimaginable to those who offer freedom" (145). Offering freedom is an expression of privilege, and so refusing to accept the freedom offered, and instead redefining it, disavows the colonial project.

The only freedom on offer in the United States's colonial project for women in the late nineteenth century was death: death in childbirth, suicide, or murder. Rachel Blau DuPlessis argues that nineteenth-century literature suggests that the consequence for pursuing personal or professional fulfillment often meant literal or figurative death for women characters (2). For late

⁴² See also: Saidiya Hartman *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America*. Oxford UP. 1997 and *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*. New York, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux. 2008.

nineteenth-century women who opted out of the dominant social order, the redefinition of liberty was simply to live. Ina and Bert do not just live, though. They thrive. Ina achieves her goal of becoming an author who helps other women; she expands her family to include Rex and Bert Hilton, Madge Munroe, and Henry Matthewson. Bert is able to establish a home for other wayward young women to help them also opt out of the dominant social order and turn their waywardness into heroism in their own lives.

Chapter Four examined Ella Thayer's *Wired Love: A Romance of Dots and Dashes* about Nattie Rogers and her co-conspirators in opting out of the colonial project. Again, this novel demonstrates women thriving outside of the dominant social order. Here again is an author who does not enjoy mainstream exposure in literature survey courses, and a novel that lacks the kind of writing style Kate Chopin is most beloved for. Also, this novel presents its own forms of subjugated knowledge through its working-class characters against the backdrop of an urban, working-class environment. The Hotel Norman, where all of the characters live and most of the action takes place, is a single-family dwelling converted for single-room occupancy. In other words, the rooming house was built to house a single family, but it is being used to house single people. The working-class single people in occupancy are challenging the metanarrative of domesticity by intentionally delaying marriage, thus delaying family, and they are able to do this because they have a place to live, which has been intentionally converted for their use. The Hotel Norman thus simultaneously exists as a space of liberation, containing the challengers, and as a vehicle of liberation, providing them with some means to be challengers. The conversion of the family home is not the only appropriation in the novel.

The family meal is another symbol of traditional family values and bourgeois domestic ideologies which Nattie and Cynthia appropriate and convert. Negotiating with power is often

characterized by a series of tiny thefts, small appropriations and conversions of the symbols of dominant culture. Some might even argue that the very nature of marriage equality is itself a kind of appropriation and conversion. Nonetheless, these petty thefts, and more importantly the ways in which the stolen symbols are converted, constitute negotiations with power compensating for income inequality and inequitable access to education. None of the residents of the rooming house can afford to own their own single-family dwelling, so they make a single family out of one another in a converted home. There is no money for any one of the residents to enjoy a home-cooked meal, so they combine their resources to make one for everyone to enjoy. These conversions are not capricious; they are intentional. For the rooming house, walls and doors had to be added, and for the family meal, food had to be purchased and prepared. The search for adequate dinnerware and space, while delightful, was also intentional and meant to be inclusive.

Chela Sandoval posits that differential consciousness enables “technologies developed by subjugated populations to negotiate” shifting meanings and “can be recognized as the very technologies necessary to all first-world citizens, who are interested in renegotiating postmodern first world cultures” (176). Differential consciousness, according to Sandoval, is a realignment of focus away from dominant, Western worldviews. It has not been lost on me that the very existence of this project is itself a demonstration of bourgeois education, or that the attempts to highlight subjugated knowledge while also adhering to the dictates of that bourgeois education are always already somewhat contradictory. However, I view this project as a demonstration of how technologies developed by subjugated people are, in fact, just as Sandoval suggests: useful tools for all people interested in challenging Western logics for negotiating, at least, how to survive and thrive in a nation that often seems hellbent on its own destruction. I also hoped that

analyzing two mainstream novels through the lenses of Marxism, renegade feminism, and intersectionality would lend credibility to analyses through the same lenses of two novels that exist in academic obscurity. The divide the United States is currently experiencing is not a new one, and I hope that through the course of this project, I have shown that. What became clear to me during this project is that women who have historically existed in the margins have always already adapted, appropriated, negotiated, navigated, and converted the prescriptions of the metanarrative of domesticity compensating for inequitable access to the privileges of dominant culture. These women have not just lived in spite of their oppression; they have thrived, created multigenerational families where Western culture had devastated them, and forced their way into board rooms as well as the hallowed halls of legislation and jurisprudence. I have attempted to use the privilege of my bourgeois education to bring subjugated knowledge to bear on the most fundamental aspect, as I see it, of United States culture: national identity and family.

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