

A

Tom/Boys:  
The Racialization of White Tomboys in American Women's Fiction, 1840 - 1950

by

Michelle Ann Abate

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2004

UMI Number: 3127841

Copyright 2004 by  
Abate, Michelle Ann

All rights reserved.

#### INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

**UMI<sup>®</sup>**

---

UMI Microform 3127841

Copyright 2004 by ProQuest Information and Learning Company.

All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against  
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

ProQuest Information and Learning Company  
300 North Zeeb Road  
P.O. Box 1346  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

©2004

Michelle Ann Abate

All Rights Reserved

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

March 3, 2004  
Date

David S. Reynolds  
David S. Reynolds, Chair of Examining Committee

3/26/04  
Date

J. Richardson  
Joan Richardson, Executive Officer

\_\_\_\_\_  
Wayne Koestenbaum

\_\_\_\_\_  
Marc Dolan

Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK



## Abstract

Tom/Boys:  
The Racialization of White Tomboys in American Women's Fiction, 1840-1950

by

Michelle Ann Abate

Adviser: David S. Reynolds

Beginning with the observation that both syllables of the term “tomboy” evoke common racial pejoratives, the project investigates tomboy characters in general and the way in which they are often racialized in the fiction by late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century American women's in particular. After providing an overview of both racialization and tomboyism in American literature and culture, the study spotlights the convergence of these elements in the work of six women writers: E. D. E. N.

Southworth, Louisa May Alcott, Sarah Orne Jewett, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Willa Cather, and Carson McCullers. Probing the possible reasons why ostensibly Caucasian tomboys acquire a dark hue in these novels, each chapter draws on an abundance of social and cultural phenomena as possible sites of intersection. Discussing such varied elements as blackface minstrelsy and girls' doll culture, the study explores the ways in which tomboyishness and blackness mutually construct or at least reinforce each other.

After tracing a trajectory of racialized white tomboys in fiction by late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century American women, the epilogue explores the continued life of this phenomenon in lesbian pulp fiction and, later, popular film. The final segment argues that as changing social circumstances in the 1950s and 1960s made it unacceptable for mainstream literature to racialize white characters in overt ways, these

images went underground to more subversive forms. Through the work of classic lesbian pulp novelists such as Ann Bannon and popular tomboy stars such as Tatum O'Neal, white tomboys continued to "fade to black."

In the opening pages of *Speech Acts and Other Late Essays*, Mikhail Bakhtin observes, "the most interesting and productive life of culture takes place on the boundaries." Tomboy characters in general and racialized white tomboys in particular participate in this phenomenon. Existing on the boundaries of male/female, black/white, adult/child, heterosexual/homosexual, savage/civilized, different/same, and drag/passing, these figures dismantle cultural binaries while they participate in them. Accordingly, "Tom/Boys" places itself at the interstices between high and low culture, printed and visual texts as well as narratives written for children and adults to investigate this vital but previously unexplored facet of American literature and culture.

## Acknowledgements

Both conceptualizing and completing this project has been a prolonged experiment in delinquency, from the gender delinquency of my own tomboy childhood (in which these ideas have their root) to my delinquent absence at countless professional events and social gatherings because I was busy researching and writing these pages. For all those who have spent years living with, apologizing for and (most importantly) nurturing my various forms of aberrance, I offer my love and gratitude.

To my best friend, Jennifer Diebold, I owe a special thanks. Just thinking about your love, friendship and encouragement moves me to tears. Thank you for all you have done, not only during these trying years in gradual school, but from the age of eleven when we first met. All of the times you have been my personal cheering section, steady shoulder to cry on and voice of often much-needed reason will not be forgotten. Now and always, I send you my tenderness.

If George Orwell was correct in saying that writing a book is like having an illness, then my friends and fellow students at the Graduate Center have been the consistent curative: Elizabeth Toohey, Jamie Skye Bianco, Barrie Balter, Linda Camarasana, Amy Leahl, David Yaffe, Chris Daley, Jennifer Brown, Anne Rice, Jody Rosen and Vincent Bissonette. One could not ask for more supportive, encouraging and convivial peers. To Marilyn Weber and Erin Henriksen, I would like to extend a special thanks. Through your kind words, caring friendship, and countless hours of conversation, you have given me the courage to practice the various forms of delinquency that have formed the basis for much of my graduate work and (all too often) personal life.

I am indebted to many readers and advisors who have helped shape and sharpen these ideas along the way. First of all, to Rita Capezzi. From the time I was an undergraduate at Canisius, you have never been delinquent with your support, wisdom or friendship. Without your help and continued encouragement, I never would have made it to graduate school in the first place. If someday I am able to be even half the mentor that you have been to me, it will be an achievement that far exceeds anything in these pages.

Next, to my committee at the Graduate Center: David S. Reynolds, Wayne Koestenbaum and Marc Dolan. The knowledge part of this Acknowledgements comes from each of you. More than simply the careful readers of countless drafts, you have also been my honorary tomboys. Without your sustained support and generous feedback, this project would not only have been much less pleasant to complete, but also much less insightful. To each of you, I extend my sincere thanks.

Finally, to my grandmothers: Lorraine B. Hunt, for whom these pages are a preview of what is to come, and Emma Violet Schwelle (1912 – 2000), for whom this unfortunately comes too late. Through the brave examples of your lives, you have been my first and best teachers of delinquency. Thank you for your continued love, guidance and encouragement. You have shaped my life in more ways than you will ever know, and I dedicate these pages to you both.

## Table of Contents

### INTRODUCTION.

|                                                                                                                  |    |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| When Girls Will Be Boys, When White Will Be Black: Tomboyism and Racialization in the United States, 1840 – 1950 | 1  |
| <u>Part I.</u> “Grrrl Power”: Tomboyism as a Concept and a Cultural Phenomenon in the United States              | 9  |
| <u>Part II.</u> “Beyond the Pale”: White-to-Black Racialization in Europe and the United States, 1840 – 1950     | 26 |

### CHAPTER 1.

|                                                                                                                                           |     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Gender B(l)acklash: E. D. E. N. Southworth and the Emergence of Racialized White Tomboys                                                  | 41  |
| <u>Part I.</u> Domestic Melodrama and Dark Melanin: E. D. E. N. Southworth, The Edenic South and “South-Worthy” Fiction                   | 46  |
| <u>Part II.</u> “Written on the Body”: The (Dark) Glow of (White) Health in <i>The Deserted Wife</i>                                      | 53  |
| <u>Part III.</u> Biblical Blackness and Tomboyish “Monkey Business”: Hagar Churchill as the Deserted Wife who (Almost) Deserted Whiteness | 60  |
| <u>Part IV.</u> “Raising Cain”: Capitola Black(face), Minstrelized Tomboyism and Southworth’s <i>The Hidden Hand</i>                      | 81  |
| <u>Part V.</u> More Than Simply “Skin Deep”: Tomboyish Darkness in E. D. E. N. Southworth and the Emergence of a National Trend           | 102 |

**CHAPTER 2.**

|                                                                                                                              |     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Topsy and Topsy-Turvy Jo: Louisa May Alcott's <i>Little Women</i> and American Popular Culture                               | 106 |
| <u>Part I.</u> "One is the Loneliest Number": Brown Skin and "Bad" Behavior in the Life and Work of Louisa May Alcott        | 112 |
| <u>Part II.</u> Topsy and a Topsy-Turvy Tomboy: Louisa May Alcott and Harriet Beecher Stowe                                  | 119 |
| <u>Part III.</u> Behind a (Minstrel) Mask: Louisa May Alcott and Blackface                                                   | 130 |
| <u>Part IV.</u> "Coming to America": Continental Racial Constructions and the (African) American Miscegenation of Miss March | 138 |
| <u>Part V.</u> "Being Colored Me": Taking the Case for Realism in <i>Little Women</i> a Little Further                       | 149 |

**CHAPTER 3.**

|                                                                                                                                          |     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Passing and Palimpsests: Sarah Orne Jewett's <i>A Country Doctor</i> and The Case of the Two Nancy Princes                               | 151 |
| <u>Part I.</u> (Not Quite) Six Degrees of Separation: Sarah Orne Jewett and Nancy Prince                                                 | 155 |
| <u>Part II.</u> Building on the <i>Bildungsroman</i> : Nan Prince's Coming of Age and/as Becoming Nancy Prince                           | 169 |
| <u>Part III.</u> "In <i>Dark</i> New-England Days": The Place of Race in Sarah Orne Jewett & the Construction of An/Other <i>Country</i> | 188 |

**CHAPTER 4.**

|                                                                                          |     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Dark Continents: Going "Back to the Future" in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's <i>Herland</i> | 197 |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|

|                                                                                                                                                                    |     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| <u>Part I.</u> “Welcome to the (Urban) Jungle”: American Pluralism,<br>Modernist Primitivism and Gilman’s (Racialized)<br>Utopianism                               | 204 |
| <u>Part II.</u> The Art of Darkness: White Conquests and Whiteness<br>Contests in <i>Herland</i>                                                                   | 216 |
| <u>Part III.</u> “Let’s Get Physical”: The Death of the Tomboy and <i>The<br/>Birth of a (Primitive) Nation</i>                                                    | 224 |
| <u>Part IV.</u> Putting the “Prim” in “Primitive”; or, Sex and the<br>(Utopian) City: The Attraction of Atavism and The<br>Atavism of Attraction in <i>Herland</i> | 235 |
| <u>Part V.</u> “It’s a Small World After All”: Thinking Locally, Acting<br>Globally in <i>Herland</i>                                                              | 240 |

## **CHAPTER 5.**

|                                                                                                                                     |     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| (Un)Settling the Frontier: Body-Building and Border-Crossing in Willa<br>Cather’s Prairie Novels                                    | 249 |
| <u>Part I.</u> “The Virginian”: Willa Cather’s Southern Heritage                                                                    | 254 |
| <u>Part II.</u> Farmer Brown, Farmer Bergson: Soil Cultivation and Skin<br>Transformation in Willa Cather <i>O Pioneers!</i>        | 264 |
| <u>Part III.</u> Retreating to the (Southern) Past: <i>My Antonia</i> and the<br>(Jim) Burden of Willa Cather’s (Virginia) Heritage | 273 |
| <u>Part IV.</u> Blacking up and Lighting Out: Imitation and Immigration,<br>Minstrelsy and (Western) Migrancy                       | 291 |
| <u>Part V.</u> The (Un)Making of the Americans: Sex/tionalism and the<br>“American” Girl                                            | 302 |

## **CHAPTER 6.**

|                                                                                                                              |     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| The Carnal and the Carnavalesque: Carson McCullers, the Civil Rights<br>Movement and the Decline of Racialized White Tomboys | 313 |
| <u>Part I.</u> “Georgia on My Mind”: The Southern Heritage and Heresy<br>of Carson McCullers                                 | 321 |

|                                                                                                                                      |     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| <u>Part II.</u> “Monkey Business”: <i>The Origin of Species</i> and The<br>Origin of McCullers’ <i>The Ballad of the Sad Café</i>    | 328 |
| <u>Part III.</u> Freakishly “Queer” and “Queerly” Freakish: The<br>(Primitive) Sexuality of Amelia Evans                             | 340 |
| <u>Part IV.</u> The (Frankie) Addams Family: Physical Anomaly and/as<br>Racial Ambiguity in the Later Fiction of Carson<br>McCullers | 347 |
| <u>Part V.</u> When a <i>Ballad</i> is a Swan Song: The Postmodern, Post-<br>Minstrel Decline of Racialized White Tomboys            | 353 |

## **EPILOGUE.**

|                                                                                                                                   |     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Fade to Black: The Legacy of Racialized White Tomboys in Lesbian Pulp<br>Fiction and Popular Film, 1950 – 1980                    | 357 |
| <u>Part I.</u> Postwar, Pulps and Posses: The “Dark Passage” of White<br>Tomboys through Cold War Fiction                         | 360 |
| <u>Part II.</u> Tomboyhood Comes to Hollywood: Popular Film and the<br>Transformation of Racialized White Tomboys, 1940 –<br>1980 | 370 |
| <u>Part III.</u> Looking Forward, Looking Backward: Whiteness and<br>White Tomboyism at the Millennium                            | 382 |

## **SELECTED TOMBOY BIBLIOGRAPHY.**

|                              |     |
|------------------------------|-----|
| Adult and Children’s Fiction | 392 |
| Lesbian Pulp Novels          | 395 |
| Drama / Musicals             | 399 |
| Film                         | 399 |
| Hollywood Prison Pictures    | 401 |
| Music                        | 402 |

|                            |     |
|----------------------------|-----|
| <b><u>WORKS CITED.</u></b> | 403 |
|----------------------------|-----|



**Introduction:****When Girls Will Be Boys, When White Will Be Black:****Tomboyism & Racialization in the United States, 1840 – 1950**

In the second chapter of *Women and Economics*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman argues “The most normal girl is the tom-boy—whose numbers increase among us in these wiser days,—a healthy young creature, who is human through and through; not feminine till it is time to be” (29). By the time Gilman penned her famous meditation on gender and capitalism in 1898, tomboyism as both a cultural phenomenon and literary convention had become somewhat ubiquitous in the United States. As Frances Cogan illustrates in *All-American Girl*, an alternative, profoundly more active and “tomboyish” code of conduct emerged for women during the mid-nineteenth century. Dubbing the trend “Real Womanhood,” Cogan argues, “This popular ideal advocated intelligence, physical fitness and health, self-sufficiency, economic self-reliance, and careful marriage...” (4). In *Imaging American Women*, Martha Banta continues Cogan’s observations. Examining visual images from the *fin-de-siecle*, she finds that a new “type” of American girl emerged with the new century: the vigorous, athletic and even muscular “Outdoors Pal.”

Not surprisingly, the presence of tomboyish women in American culture was mirrored in its literature. During the nineteenth century, tomboys (often in the form of cross-dressers) became something of a fixture in fiction by many writers. Similar to the trope of the “fallen woman” or the male “rake,” numerous narratives featured a boisterous tomboy as either a main or, at least, minor character. Most famous among these, perhaps, are E. D. E. N. Southworth’s Capitola from her 1859 novel *The Hidden Hand* and Jo March from Louisa May Alcott’s 1868 classic *Little Women*. Capitola

Black was so popular that Southworth's serial text was reprinted several times in Robert Bonner's *New York Ledger* before being released in book form in 1888. In addition, many of the era's new mothers named their daughters after the spunky heroine. Meanwhile, the popularity of Louisa May Alcott's Jo March propelled *Little Women* to instant success and has helped it remain a favorite among young girls to this day.

As the nineteenth century turned into the twentieth, America's interest in and production of tomboys did not abate. Changes in the nation's social, political and even economic climate in fact facilitated the expansion of this figure. By the end of the First World War, women were voting, donning "bloomers," and even asserting their right to participate in the "male" world of work. Compared with young women only one generation before them, the entire sex had arguably been "tomboy-ified." As the number of tomboys increased in the early-twentieth century, so did the locales in which these figures could be found. Not only were tomboy characters prevalent in literature, but they were now also the subjects of musicals (such as Charles George's 1936 *My Tomboy Girl*) and even popular songs (including Red Norvo and his Swing Septet's 1930s hit "Tomboy").

In spite of both the long history and strong presence of tomboys in American literature and culture, comparatively little work has been done on the subject. To date, no full-length study of the issue from a literary, cultural or even psychological perspective has been published. Scholars seeking information about tomboys, in fact, will find no listing for the topic in either the Library of Congress or (perhaps more shockingly) in the *Oxford Companion to Women's Writing*.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, such seminal works of lesbian

---

<sup>1</sup> Rather than arising from what may be called "tomboy-phobia," my suspicion is that these exclusions arise from a flimsy distinction between "literature" and "entertainment" as well as between writing

history as Lillian Faderman's *Surpassing the Love of Men* and *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers* omit tomboyism from their indexes. Similarly, the works of Frances Cogan and Martha Banta discussed above never mentions the subject, even though the phenomenon they are addressing (women engaging in vigorous outdoor play or, at least, images of them doing so) is clearly on the spectrum of tomboyishness.

"Tom/Boys: The Racialization of White Tomboys in American Women's Fiction, 1840 – 1950" hopes to offer an antidote to this trend. The chapters that follow investigate tomboy characters in general and the way in which they are often racialized in fiction by late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century American women in particular. In addition to being described as "wild" and a "dark beauty," for instance, E. D. E. N. Southworth's tree-climbing Capitola is repeatedly called the racially charged term "monkey" throughout the novel. Likewise, Louisa May Alcott's Jo March is often differentiated from her three sisters by her brown skin. In the opening pages of *Little Women*, the ostensibly Caucasian character is described as "very tall, thin and brown" (4).

Numerous other white tomboys in American women's novels from the 1840s to the 1950s acquire a similarly dark hue. The tomboyish Nan Prince in Sarah Orne Jewett's 1884 *A Country Doctor* shares her name with a prominent black travel writer from the 1850s. Both Alexandra Bergson and Antonia Shimerda in Willa Cather's prairie novels—the 1913 *O Pioneers* and the 1918 *My Antonia*—cross-dress and possess distinctly brown skin. The "land of tomboys" in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's utopian

---

intended for "adults" and that meant for "children." In this way, although tomboys straddle several disciplines, they fall through the critical cracks for the same reason. Each field—children's literature, popular culture, psychology, gender studies and adult American literature—considers these figures the domain of another discipline. Thus, they shy away from discussing them. The cumulative effect of this phenomenon is the widespread critical neglect of tomboys in American literature and culture.

novel *Herland* is frequently described in both colonialist and racializing ways. Finally, the townspeople in Carson McCullers' 1943 *The Ballad of the Sad Café* insist that adult tomboy Amelia Evans "had been born dark" (14).

Beginning with the observation that both syllables of the term "tomboy" evoke common racial pejoratives, the chapters that follow probe the possible historical, literary and even biographical reasons behind these figures who are, to echo the title of Werner Sollors' latest book, "neither black nor white yet both." Why were so many white tomboys described in racially charged ways by white women writers during this period? What is the relationship between dark tomboys and the trope of the fair (and feminine) heroine who often serves as a foil? Can any links be drawn between this pairing and what Leslie Fiedler identifies in *Love and Death in the American Novel* as "the drama of an equal meeting and mating of Caucasian and colored man"—such as Huck Finn and Jim or Isaac McCaslin and Sam Fathers—in fiction by men of the same era (367 – 8)? Is there any connection between the racialization of white tomboys and the "masculinization" of such strong black women as Francis Ellen Watkins Harper and Sojourner Truth?<sup>2</sup> What about between racialized white tomboys and such tomboyish black characters as Frado in Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig* (1859)? Were tomboys' racialized traits an extension of their defiance of white women's gender roles? Or, on the other hand, did the presence of these characteristics eclipse such concerns, transforming these novels from explorations of the male/female binary to the black/white one? As Eric Lott

---

<sup>2</sup> In a now-famous anecdote, the six-foot-tall Truth once bared her breast to an audience to "prove" she was a woman. Meanwhile, Hazel V. Carby notes in her introduction to *Iola Leroy* that Frances Ellen Watkins Harper "was so articulate and engaging as a public speaker, audiences concluded that she couldn't possibly be a black woman. Some even speculated that she must be a man, while others reasoned that she was painted to look black" (ix). In *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*, Michele Wallace argues that this tendency to "immasculate" strong black women continues today. During the Civil Rights era, she discusses how African American men often chastised female family members and friends for being "too domineering, too strong, too aggressive, too outspoken, too castrating, too masculine" (*Macho* 91).

notes in *Love and Theft*, “the sentimentalist strategies for representing white women and blacks were often identical” during this period (32). Given that white tomboys were both the main characters (and thus the object of reader identification and even desire) and were frequently married at the end of the novel, what does their racialization say about such issues as miscegenation and even passing? In the same way mulatto women were often believed to be sterile, these figures would be equally unproductive (at least, heterosexually) if their childhood tomboyishness was a precursor for adult lesbianism.

In treating these and other concerns, two issues will be of central importance: the etymology of the term “tomboy” and the history of blackface performance in the United States. While the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “tomboy” as “A bold or immodest woman... A girl who behaves like a spirited or boisterous boy” (211 – 12), its listing for the prefix “tom” includes both the racial pejorative “Uncle Tom” (208) and slang for “prostitute” (207). In what ways do these understandings of “tom” and “tomboy” intersect with such concerns as the complicated history of black women’s sexuality? For decades, African American women were purported to possess bold, immodest and even boisterous sexual appetites.

Echoing these links is the tradition of blackface minstrelsy. As Mel Watkins notes, “For more than half of the nineteenth century, minstrelsy was America’s preeminent form of entertainment” (Foreword iix). During the past decade, there has been a veritable explosion of scholarship on blackface performance in the United States. Although such texts as Robert Toll’s *Blackening Up* and William H. Mahar’s *Behind the Burnt Mask* highlight different aspects of this phenomenon, all cite the 1840s as the origin of blackface on the American stage. As Annemarie Bean, James V. Hatch and

Brooks McNamara assert in their Preface to *Inside the Minstrel Mask*, “In February 1843, four white men in blackface, wearing ill-fitting, ragtag clothing, took the stage in New York City to perform, for the first time, an entire evening of the ‘oddities, peculiarities, eccentricities, and comicalities of that Sable Genius of Humanity’ ” (xi). Calling themselves the “Virginia Minstrels,” the young men—Dan Emmett, Frank Brower, Billy Whitlock, and Dick Pelham—were an instant success and spawned numerous imitation acts almost overnight.

This date of blackface origins coupled with the etymology of the prefix “tom” begs the question: was it mere coincidence that the “blacking up” of both white performers and white tomboys began during the same period? Were these two cultural phenomena related in any ways? If so, to what end(s) or for what purpose(s)? Echoing Jane Tompkins’ *Sensational Designs*, what “cultural work” did such a synchronous existence accomplish? Do they participate in the “dialectical flickering of racial insult and racial envy” that Eric Lott associates with minstrelsy in *Love and Theft* (18)? Finally, can racialized white tomboys be placed in what W. T. Lhamon identifies as the “blackface lore cycle”? In *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop*, Lhamon argues that in spite of changing racial attitudes, minstrelsy keeps resurfacing in American culture. Does the presence of racialized white tomboys participate in this trend?

In the same way blackface performance and racialized white tomboys emerged in the same historic period, they also faded during the same era. In the 1950s, after over a century of minstrelsy in vaudeville acts, Hollywood films and even television shows, the burgeoning Civil Rights movement led by the NAACP began to protest such

representations in popular entertainment. As Michael Rogin illustrates in *Blackface, White Noise: Race and the Making of the American Melting Pot*, the NAACP believed such images “only reinforced the racial stereotypes that made blacks unacceptable to whites” (256). The battle reached its apogee when the minstrel-inspired radio program *Amos ‘n’ Andy* was turned into a television show in the early 1950s. Although the NAACP led a failed boycott to get the radio version removed from the airwaves, mounting pressure caused its television adaptation to finally cease production in 1953 and be withdrawn from syndication in 1966. In many ways, these events marked the end of blackface minstrelsy in the United States. After the 1950s, whites would no longer be able to “black up” with the ease of social sanction. This overt form of blackface, however, was quickly replaced with more covert manifestations. Most famous among these, perhaps, is the hipster or “white negro” described in Norman Mailer’s 1957 treatise. As Mailer argues in the opening pages, throughout the mid-1950s “the source of [white] Hip was the Negro.”<sup>3</sup>

Mirroring this trajectory, the representation of racialized white tomboys also disappears during the 1950s. The dark and even grotesque Amelia Evans in Carson McCullers’ 1943 *The Ballad of the Sad Café* largely signals the end of this century-long tradition in American women’s fiction. While white tomboy characters continue to populate the nation’s literature, they are seldom racialized in such overt ways. Hence, the Epilogue explores lesbian pulp novels from the 1950s and 1960s as well as tomboy films

---

<sup>3</sup> As Michele Wallace notes in *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*, Mailer’s image of the white negro was predicated on both the racist association of blackness with savagery and the sexist association of blackness with misogyny: “By labeling the black man as a psychopath, Mailer meant to place him in closer to the original man, primitive man, a savage who knew how to beat his women when they gave him trouble and who dealt with shit when it occurred not by pressing a button in some emasculated way, but with fists or by whipping out his switchblade” (Wallace *Macho* 43).

of the 1970s and 1980s as a possible refuge for these images. Did the racialization of white tomboys in mainstream literature get displaced onto such subversive forms as pulp fiction and such tomboy stars as Jodie Foster, Robin Johnson and Tatum O'Neal? If so, why and for what cultural purpose(s)?

In her 1992 *Playing in the Dark*, Toni Morrison identifies a previously unseen circuit of influence in the production of both "Americanness" and American literature. While critics commonly assume the nation's black writers turned to white culture for inspiration, Morrison notes the opposite trend: white writers filtering their narratives through a distinctly black or what she deems Africanist consciousness. Creating the neologism "American Africanism" to describe this phenomenon, Morrison goes on to characterize it as "the self-evident ways that [white] Americans choose to talk about themselves through and within a sometimes allegorical, sometimes metaphorical, but always choked representation of an Africanist presence" (17). In addition to providing an antidote to the critical neglect of tomboys, "Tom/Boys: The Racialization of White Tomboys in American Women's Fiction, 1840–1950" will also participate in Morrison's project. Tracing various manifestations of Africanism in presumably white American literature, the chapters that follow heed her admonition: "All of us, readers and writers, are bereft when criticism remains too polite or too fearful to notice a disrupting darkness before its eyes" (*Playing* 91).



## Part I. “Grrrl Power”:

### Tomboyism as a Concept and a Cultural Phenomenon in the United States

“ ‘You see... That’s the surprise. I’m a girl. But now I’m a boy too and I can do anything and anything and anything’ ” (15). So remarks the blond and beautiful heroine in Ernest Hemingway’s posthumously published novel, *The Garden of Eden*. Although the gender-bending Catherine utters these remarks in response to cropping her hair, they could serve as the motto for tomboys in American literature and culture. From their inception, tomboyish characters and their accompanying behaviors have been linked with such elements as social surprise, gender duplicity and unlimited personal and professional possibility.

Although feminism and queer theory may make tomboyism seem like a relatively contemporary phenomenon, the concept actually originated in the sixteenth century. Interestingly, “tomboy” initially referred to rowdy gentlemen courtiers rather than boisterous young women. The first listing in the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “tomboy” as “A rude, boisterous or forward boy” and gives such textual examples as “Is all your delite and ioy in whiskyng and romping abroad like a Tom boy?” (211). It wasn’t until the end of the century that the term shifted from characterizing spunky young men to likeminded individuals of the opposite gender. By the 1570s, “tomboy” began to connote a “bold and immodest woman” (211) or a “girl who behaves like a spirited or boisterous boy; a wild romping girl; a hoyden” (212).

The etymology of the term “tomboy” does not cease with a consideration of its masculine or gender-bending origins. In addition to an awareness of the way in which tomboys began as literal boys, attention must also be paid to the word’s loaded prefix. In

addition to its use as a synonym for prostitutes mentioned above, “tom” is also used to connote male sexual predators (tomcats), clowns (tomfools) and women who have sex with other women (Tommy girls).<sup>4</sup> In this way, as Mary Elliott argues, there is “more complexity to the tomboy figure than is commonly supposed” (5). In addition to connoting “boisterous” or “romping” young women, the term fuses “notions of masculinity, promiscuous sexuality, prostitution, and lesbianism together in various configurations” (Elliott 5).

Such diverse meanings of the term “tomboy” have permeated American literature and culture from the word’s first appearance to its most recent incarnation. Over the decades, tomboys have been used to connote everything from street-smart hoydens and foolish pranksters to salacious heterosexual women and lesbians. In Mary E. Wilkins Freeman’s “Louisa” (1891), for instance, the title character is considered a knave when she refuses to wed wealthy suitor Jonathan Rye and instead tomboyishly insists on being economically self-sufficient.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, in Susan Warner’s *The Wide, Wide World* (1850), the tomboyishly naughty Nancy Vawse asks Ellen “in a lower tone than common” for a kiss (Warner 264). When the protagonist refuses, the young woman displaces her affection onto a gift Ellen has given her: a Bible. Although Nancy refuses to read the book, she idolizes and even fetishizes it as an object that Ellen’s hands have touched (Elliott 14).

---

<sup>4</sup> In *Tipping the Velvet* (1998), contemporary novelist Sarah Waters makes reference to this phenomenon. Set in late Victorian England, her narrative discusses girls who are “Toms.” In one especially revealing passage, Kitty exclaims to her friend Nan, “ ‘They’re not like us! They not like us, at all! They’re *toms*..... They make a *career*—out of kissing girls!’ ” (Waters *Tipping* 131).

<sup>5</sup> Similar to the fool-sage character in Shakespearean drama, Louisa’s seemingly imprudent decision ultimately proves wise. After refusing Jonathan, he proposes to the town’s schoolteacher. When she vacates her post for marriage, Louisa is given the highly respected and well-paid position.

While tomboyism as both a concept and a cultural phenomenon may date back to the Renaissance era in England, it did not become prevalent in the United States until nearly four hundred years later, during the mid-nineteenth century. Certainly tomboyish women existed in American literature and culture prior to this period. From the hearty women who traversed the Atlantic and established homes in the colonies to those who moved Westward and helped settle the prairie, strong, gender-defiant figures have been a hallmark of American culture since its inception. Nevertheless, these women neither considered themselves nor were labeled by others as “tomboys.” The term is simply absent from early writings by and about American women. Echoing and even reinforcing this trend, David S. Reynolds in *Beneath the American Renaissance* dubs strong, independent and even rebellious young women during the antebellum era “adventure feminists” rather than tomboys (345). Citing such figures as Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s Hope Leslie and Isabelle Linwood, he constructs subcategories based on their behavior. Those who are models of moral compunction he deems “feminist exemplars” while those who are more sinister he places in the category of “feminist criminals” (Reynolds *Beneath* 342, 352). In spite of the tendency for many of these spunky young women to engage in such tomboyish behaviors as fighting, lawlessness and cross-dressing, Reynolds refrains from deeming them tomboys or even proto-tomboys. Echoing the attitudes of the time, he refers instead to their “Amazonian” spirits and “spunky and active” natures (Reynolds *Beneath* 339).

In spite of the strong presence of tomboyish young women during the Federalist and antebellum periods, it was not until after the Civil War that this term made its debut in American literature or culture. Echoing Michel Foucault’s remarks about the

homosexual in *The History of Sexuality*, one could say that it was not until the late-nineteenth-century that the tomboy became a “species” in the United States. A product, at least in part, of the growing concern over the deplorable state of women’s health, tomboyism began to be seen as an effective antidote. In marked contrast to gender codes that called for women to be frail, feminine and often enfeebled, many began to believe “the rowdy tomboy would make a better wife and mother than her prissy, housebound sister... for participation in boyish sports and games would develop the health, strength, independence, and competence she would later need as a wife and mother” (O’Brien “Tomboyism” 354). Concerned that weak women would produce weak and even defective children, advice writers during the postbellum period began to recommend active and unfettered childhoods for little girls. Unlike their antebellum predecessors who shied away from the term, Sharon O’Brien notes that many childrearing manuals “openly advocated tomboyism” (“Tomboyism” 352).<sup>6</sup>

This increased presence and even popularity of tomboyism in the nation’s social realm was mirrored in its literature. Although relatively absent in writings prior to the Civil War, characters who were explicitly identified as tomboys or, at least, could be placed on the spectrum of tomboyishness increased exponentially. As Alfred Habegger argues in *Gender, Fantasy, and Realism in American Literature*, “The tomboy became a major type in the 1860s” (172). Books written by both men and women, intended for both children and adults, and issued by both popular and prestigious presses had a spunky

---

<sup>6</sup> Given that gender roles called for the ideal woman to be “gentle, passive, dependent, ‘a born follower’ ” while the ideal mother “was expected to be ‘strong, self-reliant, protective, an efficient caretaker in relation to children and home’—in short a born leader” (O’Brien “Tomboyism” 352), tomboyism was not the only means by which many women dealt with these contradictions. In addition to adopting a strong and independent nature, O’Brien also identifies hysteria as an alternative to “resolving the discontinuity between individual nature or aspirations and the limited feminine role” (“Tomboyism” 352).

female character romping through their pages. In addition to what would become such standard “tomboy” venues as the dime Western and the children’s novel, newspaper columnists and even social humorists participated in the phenomenon. Observing a group of ice skaters in Central Park, for instance, Fanny Fern noted, “Coats and trousers have the best of it *everywhere*... Away went coat and trousers, like a feather before the wind; free and untrammelled by dry-goods, and independent of any chance somerset; while the poor, skirt-hampered women glided circumspectly after their much-needed health and robustness, with that awful omnipresent sense of *the proprieties*, (and—horror of horrors—a tumble!)” [her emphasis] (Fern *Caper-Sauce* 61).

In light of this rapid increase in literary representation of tomboys, the period from the 1860s to the 1930s is often deemed the heyday of tomboy narratives in the United States. More specifically, both Christian McEwan and Elizabeth Segel identify the years 1866 to 1936 as the “golden era” of literary tomboyism. Commencing with the publication of E. D. E. N. Southworth’s *The Hidden Hand* (1859) and extending to Ruth Sawyer’s *Roller Skates* (1936), this period includes such “tomboy classics” as Kate Douglas Wiggin’s *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* (1903), Carol Keene’s *Nancy Drew Mystery Series* (1930 – 1957), Carol Ryrie Brink’s *Caddie Woodlawn* (1935), and Laura Ingalls Wilder’s *Little House on the Prairie* books (1935 – 1943).

Although the precise portraits of tomboyish women differ in each novel, many similarities or what may be deemed “hallmarks” of these characters arise. As Lynne Yamaguchi and Karen Barber assert, “*tomboy* seems to be so familiar a concept in contemporary North American culture that it needs no definition” (10). In nearly every historical era it connotes “a virtually uniform picture of a girl who—by whatever

standards society has dictated—acts like a boy” (Yamaguchi and Barber 10). In spite of this seeming monolithic nature of tomboyism, how one defines a “transgression into boys’ territory” differs for every individual. As Yamaguchi and Barber remind us, “For some girls, it is in excelling in—or even just playing—sports; for others, it’s as simple an act as biking to the creek to catch frogs. Still other girls cross the gender line by preferring math to English, science to history, shop to home ec.” (10). This phenomenon is especially applicable when considering tomboys from different historic eras and different socio-economic classes. Wearing “bloomers” was the epitome of tomboyish daring during the *fin-de-siecle*, for instance, but that is no longer the case today. Similarly, working outside the home may be the apogee of tomboyish independence for wealthy women, but it is a fact of life for many in the working class.

These details notwithstanding, in the years since the term “tomboy” made its American debut, a number of defining characteristics have emerged. These traits include a proclivity for active, outdoor play, a tendency to cross-dress, and a fierce, independent spirit. In recent years, such elements have become so codified that psychologists have articulated a twelve-point “Tomboy Index.” In a 1996 article on the correlation between childhood tomboyism and adult androgyny, psychologists Shawn Meghan Burn, A. Kathleen O’Neil, and Shirley Nederend deemed the following behaviors unmistakable indicators of tomboyism: (1) preferring shorts and jeans to dresses; (2) preferring traditional boys’ toys (e.g., guns, matchbox cars) over girls’ toys (e.g., dolls); (3) resembling a boy in appearance; (4) wishing to be a boy; (5) preferring traditionally boys’ activities (e.g., climbing trees, playing army) over traditionally girls’ activities (e.g., ballet, playing dress up); (6) having girl friends that were tomboys; (7) participating in

traditionally male sports (e.g., football, baseball, basketball) with boys; (8) engaging in loud or boisterous play with others; (9) preferring to play with boys over girls; (10) using traditionally girls' toys in stereotypically boys' activities (e.g., Barbie driving a Tonka truck); (11) engaging in rough and tumble play; and (12) playing with many different peer groups (e.g., tomboys, non-tomboys, boys) (Burn, O'Neil and Nederend 422).

Although these elements encapsulate the nature of many tomboys, they are by no means exhaustive or all-inclusive. To the twelve-point Tomboy Index devised by Burns et al., one could add several additional characteristics. Perhaps the most pervasive among these is the tendency for tomboys to form close and even loving relationships with effeminate male characters. More often than not, a tomboy's closest friend is a "sissy" boy rather than another tough girl. Countless tomboy narratives contain this dyad: Jo March and Laurie Lawrence in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868), Tommy Shirley and Jay Harper in Willa Cather's "Tommy, the Unsentimental" (1896) and Hellfire Hotchkiss and Thug Carpenter in Mark Twain's "Hellfire Hotchkiss" (1897), to name just a few.

In spite of the diversity of tomboy/sissy portraits, some overarching similarities emerge. First, while such a loving and even intimate relationship between members of the opposite sex may arouse suspicion for more feminine girls or masculine boys, the union between a tomboy and a sissy usually poses no threat.<sup>7</sup> Since both sissies and tomboys exist outside of conventional gender roles, their relationship also exists outside

---

<sup>7</sup> An exception to this rule is Mark Twain's *Hellfire Hotchkiss*. Throughout the narrative, Hellfire's close association with the young men in town arouse suspicions about her possible promiscuity. When the tomboyish young woman is fifteen, her Aunt Betsy informs her that rumors have started to circulate in town about her tendency to keep all-male company: " 'You always preferred to play with the boys. Well, that's all right, up to a certain limit; but you've gone way beyond the limit. You ought to have stopped long ago—oh, long ago' " (Twain "Hellfire" 198).

of conventional sexual ones. Contrary to the sexually charged prefix “tom,” Lee Zevy notes, “Tomboys have always been treated as an asexual entity, a time of cuteness” (186). Foreshadowing the queering of tomboys as proto-lesbian characters and sissies as proto-gay figures, therefore, their friendship does not contain an erotic charge. In addition to destabilizing gender codes, the tomboy/sissy dyad also disrupts heterosexual ones.

A second feature of the tomboy/sissy dyad is that contrary to one’s expectations, these figures often police or even “correct” each other’s gender transgressions rather than serving as a venue to safely display or cultivate them. In numerous nineteenth- and twentieth-century narratives, tomboys often help masculinize effeminate boys: they teach their weak counterparts to be adventurous, assert themselves and even fight. By the close of the novel, the once-sissy young boy has been transformed through the influence of his tomboy friend into a strong and even powerful adult man. As Mary Elliott points out, however, this pattern is rarely reciprocated. “Even when tomboys pair off with reformed male sissies, they are tempered not by these flawed boys but through the historically constant presence of gender and heterosexual pressure” (Elliott 11). As a result, sissies often drop out of tomboy narratives, becoming “spent characters” who after a certain point “have nothing further to contribute” (Elliott 110).

A close association with effeminate boys is not the only social condition with which tomboys are frequently associated. In addition to their friendship with frail young men, spirited female figures are often abandoned or orphaned by their mothers. Countless nineteenth- and twentieth-century narratives present tomboy characters whose mothers have died when they were young. The mothers of both Frankie Addams in Carson McCullers’ *The Member of the Wedding* (1946) and “Scout” Finch in Harper



Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) passed away when they were toddlers. Meanwhile, Capitola Black's mother in E. D. E. N. Southworth's *The Hidden Hand* (1859) was forced to give up her daughter soon after birth. In many narratives, the loss of the mother is seen as the psychological impetus for tomboyism. As Louise Westling argues, "Without mothers, these female protagonists define themselves most comfortably in masculine terms" (Westling 155).

Motherlessness need not be seen in such pathological ways, however. Similar to many other characters who have been disconnected from their roots—Mark Twain's Huck Finn and Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* come to mind—this phenomenon can be beneficial. In the words of Mary Elliot, "The presence of the orphaned tomboy in the narratives creates an orphaned space in the ideological fabric of the narrative as well, freeing it temporarily from its overarching didactic purpose" (Elliott 10). Providing an antidote to the submissive femininity, moralistic Christianity and compulsory heterosexuality showcased in many nineteenth-century novels, tomboys offer readers "girl figures who function variously as truth-telling fools, minor criminals, social eccentrics, and ominous butch 'bad girls' " (Elliott 49).

From the origins of both British and American literature, "bad" girls have been met with "bad" endings. The fate of many defiant tomboys—who according to traditional gender roles are "bad" women—is no different. In the same way numerous tomboy narratives chronicle the boisterous behavior of their spunky female characters, they also showcase the eventual elimination of these tendencies. As Sharon O'Brien notes, since Victorian times, tomboyism has been considered "a very common phase through which little girls would pass on their way to the safe harbor of domestic

femininity” (“Tomboyism” 354). Although tomboyism may be praised as a sign of independence in young girls, it becomes problematic as they grow older. Once a girl reaches puberty, advice manuals from the nineteenth century urged, “Strenuous outdoor play and excessive studying must be shunned, for the girl needed to channel her vital energies into her developing reproductive system” (O’Brien “Tomboyism” 355). If a young woman continued to engage in tomboyish behaviors, this drain of strength might compromise the health of her uterus and thereby negate any previously positive effects of tomboyism.

Anxiety about the presence of tomboyism in older girls is not limited to concerns over their physical health. With the advent of sexology in the late-nineteenth century, such apprehension also became tied to women’s social role and its accompanying (hetero)sexuality. While tomboyism taught young girls to be independent and assertive, American culture did not value these traits in its adult women. As numerous historians have noted, throughout the nineteenth century, “the ideal woman was gentle, passive, independent, ‘a born follower’ ” (O’Brien “Tomboyism” 352). Thus, while tomboyism may have been desirable in young girls, it became problematic when it was time for these strong, willful and independent youths to conform to their submissive gender roles and, in the words of Barbara White, “kiss the chastening rod” (28). If young women were unwilling or even unable to do so because of their tomboyish upbringing, society feared that these individuals would become “mannish.” In addition to being unable to bear children, the advent of sexology and the work of Sigmund Freud raised the spectrum of lesbianism. As Judith Halberstam argues, in both the nineteenth century and today,

“There is always the dread possibility... that the tomboy will not grow out of her butch stage and will never become a member of the wedding” (“Bondage” 175).

As a result of such concerns, a phenomenon Elizabeth Segel dubs “tomboy taming” became an essential ingredient to the presentation of spirited female characters. In many ways, in fact, this process is as important to the presentation of tomboys as a penchant for climbing trees or playing boys’ games. Although the precise details vary from novel to novel, by far the most common impetus for young women to abandon tomboyish behavior is societal pressure to get married and become a mother. In spite of an ostensible resistance to and even critique of these institutions, numerous tomboy narratives end with the all-too-familiar trope of wedding bells and baby’s cries. Countless examples of this type of conventional “happy ending” exist, but perhaps the most (in)famous is the betrothal of Louisa May Alcott’s Jo March to the stuffy, paternalistic Professor Bhaer. After professing, “I shall write books, and get rich and famous” for the bulk of the novel, the young woman uncharacteristically decides to abandon these tomboyish dreams and wed (Alcott *Little* 143). Not only have generations of young women lamented this event, but so did Alcott herself. In a letter the author penned to friend Elizabeth Powell later in life, she conceded, “Jo should have remained a literary spinster but so many enthusiastic young ladies wrote to me clamorously demanding that she should marry Laurie, *or* somebody, that I didn’t dare refuse....” [her emphasis] (Myserson and Shealy *Letters* 125).

If the tomboyish character was too young for marriage or if the author did not wish to engage in a conventional marriage plot, there were alternative means to break her of gender-bending behavior. By far the most popular among these was a life-threatening

illness or injury that inspired a conversion to Christianity. While many writers employed this strategy, Susan Coolidge's *What Katy Did* (1872) is widely considered to have established the paradigm. The eldest of six children, twelve-year-old Katy Carr "tore her dress every day, hated sewing, and didn't care a button about being 'good' " (Coolidge 9). As Elizabeth Segel notes, the punishment for her gender disobedience "is an injury to her back that keeps her bedridden and in pain for four years" ("Tomboy" 54). Falling from a barn in which her Aunt had forbidden her to play, Katy's invalidism provides instruction in " 'God's School,' the School of Pain, with its lessons of Patience, Cheerfulness, and Making the Best of Things" (Segel "Tomboy" 54). Assuming the role of mother to her younger siblings, Katy learns to be selfless. By the time her injury heals, the young woman has sloughed off her willfulness and independence. As Elizabeth Segel points out, "the significant people in Katy's life applaud what looks to us like a crippling of body and spirit" ("Tomboy" 54).

In the same way tomboyish young women can be found in nearly every period, genre and phase of American literature and culture, so can they be located in nearly all of the nation's racial, ethnic and socio-economic groups. As the entry for "tomboy" in *Completely Queer: The Gay and Lesbian Encyclopedia* asserts, "Tomboy identities cross racial, ethnic, class and regional lines with only slight variation" (543). In fact, the first full-length novel written by an African-American, Harriet Wilson's 1859 *Our Nig*, showcases a spunky female heroine who plays pranks in school, daringly walks across rooftops and even cuts her hair short. In addition, Sui Sin Far's collection of Chinese American folktales, *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* (1912), contains several narratives that showcase gender-defiant female characters. In "The Smuggling to Tie Co.," for instance,

a young girl dresses as a boy in order to make a border crossing. Similarly, in “Tian Shan’s Kindred Spirit” a brave young woman is disguised as a man so she can be smuggled into China. Finally, Zitkala-Sa’s *American Indian Stories* (1921) contains several tales, both fictional as well as factual, that operate along the lines of tomboyishness. Most famous among these perhaps is the appropriately named “A Warrior’s Daughter” in which a brave young woman infiltrates an enemy camp to rescue her beloved.

Contemporary writers of color, especially women writers, continue this tradition. Numerous novels released in recent years by African American, Latino/a American and Asian American authors contain gender-rebellious female figures. Of these, the central characters in Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* (1975), Jamaica Kincaid’s *Annie John* (1982), Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* (1984), and Sandra Cisneros in *The House on Mango Street* (1984) are perhaps the best known.

Although tomboyish young girls permeate nearly every social, racial and economic category, the codes of conduct against which they are rebelling are not as universal. Calling for women to be frail, feminine and largely passive, these expectations are predominantly drawn from the white middle and upper classes. In this way, while tomboyism is not exclusively the domain of a certain group, it is often associated with the Caucasian middle class.

In recent years, the impact of feminism and the subsequent expansion of women’s gender roles has caused many to wonder if tomboyism is an antiquated category. Given that it is now routine for girls to wear pants, play sports and be independent, nearly all contemporary young women can be placed on the spectrum of tomboyishness. As early

as 1977, in fact, a study by Hyde, Rosenberg and Behrman found that 51% of adult women identified themselves as childhood tomboys, and 63% of girls entering seventh, eighth and ninth grades did so as well (73). As a result, Judith Halberstam notes, “it has become almost commonplace nowadays for at least middle-class parents to point to their frisky girl children and remark proudly upon their tomboy natures” (“Bondage” 159).

Although seemingly beneficial and even liberating for women, the normalization of tomboyism has had several harmful effects. Unlike gender rebellion during the nineteenth century, “there are at least two marked forms of tomboyism, feminine and masculine” in the contemporary era (“Bondage” 155). “Feminine tomboyism,”

Halberstam asserts, is what many would consider the “classic” tomboy paradigm. Although the young girl engages in boy’s games and activities as a child, these interests give way to more feminine pursuits when she reaches puberty. Since it remains tied to (or, at least, eventually relinquishes itself to) a stable sense of female identity, this form of tomboyism is encouraged and even praised. Seen as a sign of independence and self-motivation, such gender rebellion is considered not only “normal” but even beneficial for girls. Many believe the strength and tenacity young women learn as tomboys will better prepare them for the challenges of life.

Rather than helping to remove the taboos associated with gender-defiant behavior, deeming a certain form of tomboyishness “natural” causes alternative forms to face increased stigmatization. In the words of Judith Halberstam, societal tolerance for feminine tomboyism changes when this behavior becomes associated with “preadult female masculinity” (“Bondage” 160). The moment gender rebellious girls insist on wearing only boy’s clothes, adopting a boy’s identity, or refusing to relinquish their

tomboyism at puberty, they are punished and—with the advent of so-called “Gender Identity Disorder”—even pathologized. By considering spirited female figures who identify as male to be suffering from a serious psychological problem, such girls are subjected to social stigma, reorientation counseling and, in some cases, even institutionalization.

In spite of this often negative reconceptualization, tomboyism continues to be both a powerful concept and pervasive cultural phenomenon in the United States. Although modified by the advent of feminism and queer theory, tomboyish young women have not disappeared from the American scene, nor does it appear that they will do so any time soon. In 1978, for instance, the Beach Boys’ included the single “Hey Little Tomboy” on their *M.I.U. Album*. Twelve years later, in 1990, Crosby, Stills and Nash followed suit, including the tune “Tomboy” on their *Live It Up* album. Coupled with such musical treatment by male songwriters, recent children’s novels by such female authors as Louise Fitzburgh in *Harriet the Spy* (1964), Robin McKinley in *The Blue Sword* (1982), and Cynthia Voight in *Jackaroo* (1985) spotlight tomboyish young girls. Similarly, the burgeoning genre of lesbian literature, including such classic works as Rita Mae Brown’s *Rubyfruit Jungle* (1973), Jane Rule’s *Desert of the Heart* (1986), and Fannie Flagg’s *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe* (1987), feature tomboyish young women. Even in cases where gender-bending characters come to identify as transgender or transsexual—such as Leslie Feinberg’s *Stone Butch Blues* (1993)—their gender-defiance frequently originates in tomboyism.<sup>8</sup> In the opening chapters of the

---

<sup>8</sup> Although I identify areas of overlap between tomboys and transgender/transsexual figures, I am not arguing that they can be collapsed into one. While some transgender women and F2Ms may begin challenging gender norms through tomboyishness—or what society may deem tomboyishness—they have a different locus of identity than these figures. Thus, while tomboyism, transsexualism and transgenderism

novel, Jess Goldberg engages in such classic tomboyish behavior as battling her parents over wearing dresses, getting into fights and showing off her muscles.

In the closing paragraph of their collection, *Tomboys!: Tales of Dyke Derring-Do* (1995), Lynne Yamaguchi and Karen Barber wonder, “What makes a tomboy? Is there room for girlhood in the concept? Are we denigrating girls by celebrating tomboyhood?” (14). Instead of viewing tomboyism as a rebellion from girlhood, the chapters that follow argue that it is interdependent with girlhood. In the same way notions of femininity are inextricably connected with masculinity, tomboyism is also inextricably connected with this concept. Rather than considering these categories antithetical, I argue that they mutually construct each other: tomboys could not exist without the institute of girlhood and girlhood would not be the same without tomboyism.

“ ‘You see... That’s the surprise. I’m a girl. But now I’m a boy too and I can do anything and anything and anything’ ” (Hemingway 15). This section began with this quotation from Ernest Hemingway’s *The Garden of Eden*, and these remark seem like an appropriate place to end it as well. Although not all tomboys in American literature or culture have Catherine’s bravado, they do share her sense of unlimited possibility. Whether climbing a tree or embarking on a career, both fictional and factual tomboys firmly believe that they can accomplish anything.

The limitless nature of tomboy achievement may extend to the function these figures play in American literature and culture. While commonly seen as characters who

---

may all exist along the spectrum of female gender defiance, they remain distinct categories. Although the terms “transgender” and “transsexual” did not exist during the period this project encompasses, I acknowledge that the presentations of at least some of the tomboys might have been affected if they did. When characters such as Jo March utter such remarks as “ ‘I can’t get over my disappointment in not being a boy’ ” (Alcott *Little* 3) it is difficult for contemporary readers to not see them as indications of transgenderism or even proto-transsexualism.



critique gender roles in the United States, a careful examination of seemingly Caucasian tomboys in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century fiction suggests another possibility. Echoing Catherine's assertion that tomboys are both full of surprises and able to participate in "anything and anything and anything," these gender-bending figures may be used as vehicles to comment on the construction of race. In many narratives by women writers, the ambiguity of the tomboy's gender mirrors the ambiguity of her skin tone.

## Part II. “Beyond the Pale”:

### White-to-Black Racialization in Europe and the United States, 1840 - 1950

As Richard Dyer notes, “Race... is never not a factor, never not in play” in the United States (*White* 1). Arising from a constellation of social, cultural and even biological factors, skin color is paramount in America.

Although the importance of race may remain a constant in the United States, the same cannot be said for the way in which it is determined or defined. Over the centuries, the criteria on which this characteristic has been based has varied tremendously. As Anne McClintock notes, “In the last decades of the nineteenth century, the term ‘race’ was used in shifting and unstable ways, sometimes as synonymous with ‘species,’ sometimes with ‘culture,’ sometimes with ‘nation,’ sometimes to denote biological ethnicity or sub-groups within national groupings: the English ‘race’ compared, say, with the ‘Irish’ race” (*Imperial* 52). Although referencing Victorian England when she penned these remarks, the same could be said of the United States during this era. Arising from a changing constellation of biologically based and socially constructed elements, the concept has never had a stable or universal understanding. In light of the shifting nature of race in the United States, Eric Sundquist has remarked that this classification “was not given to one but was to be acquired, absorbed, invented in a specific cultural circumstance that would be marked, yet not quite adequately defined, by color and other physical features” (*Wake* 462). Connoting different things to different people in different historic eras, the American conception of race embodies what many historians have deemed a “hellishly complex topic” (Polk 23).

While frustrating for lexicographers, the unstable nature of race is exciting for those interested in American cultural history. Given that the criteria by which this concept is determined constantly changes, disagreement often arises over the racial status of various men and women. A group that was not considered part of a racial category in one historical era may find themselves with this classification during a different period.

Although numerous examples of such shifts permeate American history, the most pertinent to this project are those that concern Caucasians. As Richard Dyer notes, for generations “to talk about race [was] to talk about all races except the white” (Dyer 18). Although undeniably a distinct “race,” Caucasian men and women were rarely considered a discrete racial group. Instead, such classification was reserved for minorities. Attention might be paid to white ethnicity—such as Italian-Americans or Polish-Americans—but at “the level of racial representation... whites [were] not of a certain race, they [were] just human” (Dyer 3).<sup>9</sup>

In recent years, this tendency to see whites as “colorless” has been called into question. Writers such as David Roediger, Shelley Fisher Fishkin and Ruth Frankenberg have challenged the proclivity to see race as a category that is only applicable to non-white peoples. Arguing that “as long as white people are not racially seen and named, they/we function as a human norm,” these critics strive to dislodge this group from the position of power (Dyer 10).<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> To illustrate this tendency, Dyer cites both the 1933 *Oxford English Dictionary* and the 1992 *Collins English Dictionary*. Both texts list “colorless” as a definition for the word “white.”

<sup>10</sup> While contemplating possible subtitles for this project, I struggled with the decision to use the phrase “The Racialization of White Tomboys.” Although conveying the acquisition of a dark hue that I was tracing in Caucasian characters, I worried that the word “racialization” would also suggest that “white” was not already a racial category. Phrased in a different way, I was concerned that my phrasing would participate in the belief that “white” was not a distinct skin tone but instead the melanin norm. In spite of such concerns, I decided to keep the term “racialization.” Although still fearful of perpetuating—or, at least, participating in—the myth of the “colorless” nature of whites, the subtitle remains true to its historic

Although Caucasians may be considered a distinct racial group today, during the historic era highlighted in this study, this was not the case. As Richard Dyer points out, from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries, they were considered “just people.” This seemingly limiting condition, however, opened up rich cultural possibilities. Because Caucasian men and women were not assigned a racial status of their own, they could artificially acquire or co-opt one. Deemed “racialization,” Michael Omi and Howard Winant define this process as “the extension of racial meaning to a previously unclassified relationship, social practice or group” (64).

Although this study investigates racialized white tomboys in American women’s fiction, it is certainly not the first time Caucasian figures have acquired a dark hue in the nation’s literature or culture. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, ostensibly Caucasian individuals have undergone what Susan Gubar would term a “racechange.” The pages that follow survey several instances in which previously race-neutral individuals, groups or acts acquired a racial charge. Rather than focusing exclusively on white-to-black racializations in the United States, the discussion casts a wider net to explore instances in Europe. In addition to providing a backdrop against which to consider the racialization of white American tomboys, this information also locates the phenomenon within a larger (Western) tradition.

By far, the example of white-to-black racialization that has the longest and most expansive history is the blackening of the Jews. In the words of Sander Gilman, “the association of the Jew with blackness is as old as Christian tradition itself” (*Difference* 31). Considered descendants of the Africanist Ishmael (whose mother was the daughter

---

era when Caucasians were not considered a discrete race and thus could be “racialized” in distinct and unmistakable ways.

of the Egyptian pharaoh) and/or Cain (whose infamous mark many speculate was the stigma of race), Jews have been associated with “dark” or “swarthy” features for centuries. Throughout the 1700s, for instance, scholars insisted that the Jews were a “mongrel” race, “who interbred with Africans during the period of the Alexandrian exile” (Gilman *Jew's* 174).<sup>11</sup> Drawing on the new sciences of anthropology and ethnology, many nineteenth-century men and women insisted that Jews bore all the signs of both racial difference and even atavism: from a muzzle-like face and sloping forehead to the so-called “Jewish foot” and “Jewish nose.” As a result, “being black, being Jewish, being diseased, and being ‘ugly’ came to be inexorably linked” (Gilman *Jew's* 173).

Hebraic men and women were not the only individuals to be characterized in racialized ways in the West. As Perry L. Curtis points out, the Irish began to be associated with a racial charge during the mid-nineteenth century. As early as the 1840s, cartoonists began to transform “the figure of Paddy, the stereotypical Irish Celt, from a drunken and relatively harmless peasant into a dangerous ape-man or simianized agitator” (vii). Depicted with a huge mouth, sloping forehead and protruding jaw, “Paddy began to resemble increasingly the chimpanzee, the orangutan, and, finally, the gorilla” (Curtis 2). Interestingly, as Anne McClintock asserts, “The English stereotype of the Irish as a simianized and degenerate race... complicates postcolonial theories that skin color (what Gayatri Spivak usefully calls ‘chromatism’) is the crucial sign of otherness” (52). Although Paddy was simianized in countless caricatures throughout the mid-nineteenth century, his ape-like features were not accompanied by an equally dark hue.

---

<sup>11</sup> Such attitudes about the Africanist nature of the Jews were not limited to Europe and Great Britain; they permeated American thinking as well. Writing his memoirs in 1857, for instance, immigrant Adam Gurowski asserted that was unable to see the difference between mulattoes and Jews in the United States. Jewish men and women, “have the greatest resemblance to the American mulattoes.... On my arrival in this country, I took every light-colored mulatto for a Jew” (qtd. in Gilman *Difference* 31).

In both prose descriptions and illustrated depictions, Paddy's skin tone remained unmistakably white.

In addition to the simianization of Paddy during the nineteenth century, connections between white working-class prostitutes and black tribal women, especially the African Hottentot, permeated Victorian England. As Sander Gilman discusses in "Black Bodies, White Bodies," "the antithesis of European sexual mores and beauty [was] embodied in the black during this period, and the essential black, the lowest rung on the great chain of being, [was] the Hottentot" (Gilman "Bodies" 231). In addition to arising from a "primitive" culture, Hottentot women were also believed to possess "primitive" sexual appetites and even genitalia. Public displays of the so-called "Hottentot Venus" during the early 1810s epitomized such beliefs. Presented as a "specimen" of "primitive" female sexuality, "Sarah Bartman was reduced to her sexual parts" (Gilman "Bodies" 232). Caucasian men and women flocked to Paris and London to see the young woman's protruding buttocks and—after her death—the public display of her distinctive labia, which came to be known as the "Hottentot apron" (Gilman "Bodies" 233).

Although possessing a different skin color than the Hottentot Venus, white working-class prostitutes were believed to share both her body and her behavior. Throughout the nineteenth century, Gilman observes "the female Hottentot came to represent the black female *in nuce*, and the [white] prostitute to represent the sexualized [white] woman" ("Bodies" 225). In this way, a kinship was established whereby the "perception of the [white] prostitute in the late nineteenth century merged with the perception of the black" (Gilman "Bodies" 248). Citing various sexologists and

anthropologists who regarded “the anomalies of the prostitute’s labia as atavistic throwbacks to the Hottentot, if not the chimpanzee,” these two individuals were co-joined in the minds of many Anglo-Europeans (Gilman “Bodies” 245).<sup>12</sup>

A proclivity for wearing boys’ clothes and engaging in active, outdoor play are not the only elements with which tomboys can be associated. With a racialized status similar to that of the Jews, the Irish and white working-class prostitutes, gender-rebellious Caucasian characters are also often connected with racially charged traits and/or minority groups. Engaging in behavior that is often characterized as “wild,” “uncivilized” and even “savage,” these gender-defiant white women are both presented in “primitive” ways and likened to “primitive” minorities. Juxtaposed with more fair and feminine characters, seemingly Caucasian tomboys are often described as having dark hair and skin tones. In Harriet Gersman’s short story “Tomboy!” (1928), for instance, both Georgia Isham and Phyllis Duganne possess “brown” faces and “brown” hands. Similarly, the butch Beebo Brinker in Ann Bannon’s 1962 pulp novel by the same name is described as a “dark young gentlemen.”

---

<sup>12</sup> Although I focus on the racialization of the Jews, the Irish and white prostitutes, this list is neither exhaustive nor all-inclusive. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, there are many other instances in which seemingly Caucasian individuals acquired a dark hue in Europe. In *Imperial Leather*, for instance, Anne McClintock discusses the racialization of female coal miners because of their “savage” association with dirt and their “barbaric” connection with “mannish” labor. “In newspapers, government reports, personal accounts and journals, the pit miners were everywhere represented as a ‘race’ apart, figured as racial outcasts, historically abandoned, isolated and primitive.... One witness described them as ‘weird, swarthy creatures, figures of women, half-clad in men’s and half clad in women’s attire, plunging here and there, as if engaged in some bedlamish saturnalia” (McClintock *Imperial* 115 - 116). Similarly, in *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness*, Sander Gilman highlights the association of madness with blackness in nineteenth-century Europe. Examining popular folklore and paintings of the era, Gilman asserts, “The association of blackness with wildness or madness seems commonplace, at least of the German romance” (Gilman *Difference* 144). Finally—anticipating the Epilogue to this project—lesbianism has often been associated with blackness. As Siobhan Somerville points out in *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture*, “it was not merely coincidental that the classification of bodies as either ‘homosexual’ or ‘heterosexual’ emerged at the same time [the *fin-de-siecle*] that the United States was aggressively constructing and policing the boundary between black and white” (3).

In many novels, such features are accompanied by equally racially charged personal characteristics. In addition to possessing the racially suggestive nickname “Gypsy” in Elizabeth Stuart Phelps’ classic Gypsy Breynton series (1866 – 1867), for instance, the tomboyish main character’s given name is the even more loaded “Jemima.” Throughout the nineteenth century, the mammy-like Aunt Jemima was a fixture in American stereotypes about race. As M. M. Manring argues in *Slave in a Box*, the minstrel figure turned pancake mix icon was “a weird sort of Confederate memorial” to antebellum racial and sexual conditions (7). Accentuating Gypsy’s connection to this racially charged figure, the young girl’s skin, face and features are repeatedly described as “brown” rather than the expected “pale” or even “white” throughout the novel.

Caddie Woodlawn in Carol Ryrie Brink’s 1935 novel by the same name echoes this trend. Throughout the narrative, the tomboyish young girl is likened to such racialized groups as “wild” Indians because of her tomboyishly “wild” behavior. Exasperated by her “uncivilized” antics, a Circuit Rider asks the youth’s mother “ ‘When are you going to begin making a young lady out of this wild Indian?’ ” (43). Positioning the “red” and the “white” races as antithetical to one another, Christian McEwan observes, “Either Caddie is obedient, ‘civilized’ well-dressed, *or* she is a little savage. An energetic, disobedient young woman is as unimaginable as a civilized Indian” [her emphasis] (xiii).

In Laura Ingalls Wilder’s *Little House on the Prairie* series, this association of “uncivilized” tomboys with “uncivilized” peoples is taken one step further. More than simply possessing dark curls, the tomboyish title character also repeatedly asserts a kinship with Native Americans. While Laura’s mother, father and sister subscribe to the



Anglo-American belief that persons of color are inferior, she consistently resists such attitudes. Throughout the novel, the youth forges a connection between her tomboyish desire for independence with the unfettered Native American way of life.<sup>13</sup> Angered by her mother's insistence that she wear a sunbonnet one day, Laura points out, "the Indians did not have to wear clothes. All their skin was out in the fresh air and sunshine." After countless similar observations, the young woman has the "naughty wish to be a little Indian girl." Although Laura disavows this desire a few moments later—insisting that "she didn't mean it. She only wanted to be bare naked in the wind and sun, and riding one of those gay little ponies"—the youth nevertheless possesses a kinship with indigenous peoples. Seeing a Native American mother pass with her infant one afternoon, she begs her parents to take the baby home with them. When her mother asks why she would want "such a thing," the tomboy cannot articulate how beautiful she finds the baby. Struggling to express her admiration, "she could not say what she meant."

In the chapters that follow, I explore both the possible causes of and various implications for such cross-racial identifications. Although several of the examples cited above highlight ostensibly Caucasian tomboys who acquire a racial charge because of their connection with Native American cultures, my focus is on those who are filtered through African American identities. Examining seemingly white figures who are characterized with "dark," "black" or "brown" skin, I read such traits as markers of what Toni Morrison would characterize an "American Africanist" presence. While this hard-and-fast link between brown skin and the black race is laughably simplistic for the contemporary era, it seems applicable to the historical period in which these narratives

---

<sup>13</sup> Given the historical realities of tribal peoples during this period, this parallel is both ironic and even paradoxical. While the tomboyish character is romanticizing the freedom of Native Americans, these men and women are being forced from their homes and confined to reservation lands.

were written and released. In marked contrast to postmodernity's recognition of numerous skin tones and ethnic classifications, the racial economy operating during the nineteenth century was not as complex. Although acknowledging the "red" and the "yellow" races, the nation's racial composition was in many ways bifurcated into two groups, black and white. Little distinction was made between a non-white skin tone and an non-black racial identity. In this way, many men and women we would now classify as Hispanic or from the subcontinent of India were considered African American because their skin was dark, brown, or even swarthy. As many historians have noted, if you looked black, you were black in nineteenth-century America.

In addition to spotlighting a specific minority group in the construction of racialized white tomboys, the chapters that follow also concentrate on a specific facet of these characterizations: the body. As Richard Dyer observes, the precise definition of race may change in the United States but "concepts of race are always concepts of the body..." (*White* 20). Because racial traits are literally and figuratively written on the body in the form of facial features, physical characteristics and especially skin color, the concept is rooted in corporeality. In the same way, tomboyism is also a distinct bodily identity. In addition to being associated with such physical traits as cutting one's hair short, it is also predicated on such corporeal acts as tree-climbing. As a result, my discussions frequently pivot around questions of embodiment and disembodiment. Contemplating how the body-based realms of gender and race mutually construct each other, each chapter explores the various implications for a certain slope of the forehead, texture of the hair and—most frequently—color of the skin.

Addressing the ways in which such racial formulations helped construct and even disrupt the representation of white tomboys, I focus on the work of six women writers: E. D. E. N. Southworth, Louisa May Alcott, Sarah Orne Jewett, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Willa Cather and Carson McCullers.<sup>14</sup> Possessing facial features, skin tones and even hair textures that connote racial Otherness, the ostensibly white figures in these novels simultaneously desire and disavow their Caucasian identities. In addition to existing on the border between masculinity and femininity because of their gender-bending behaviors, racialized white tomboys also occupy a liminal position between blackness and whiteness. This dual positionality raises a number of questions about the possible kinship between these figures and men and women of color. Why is it that white tomboyism is predicated on racial mimicry, ambivalence and even transgression in the work of so many late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century American women writers? Is it only accidental that many racialized white tomboys act as liminal pranksters in ways that recall the double-voiced trickster in Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s *The Signifying Monkey*? In what ways do these predominantly adolescent figures participate in what Joel Williamson characterizes in *The Crucible of Race* as the tendency "to see all blacks as, essentially, perpetual children" during this era (22)? Given their disruption of both gender and racial binaries, do racialized white tomboys live behind a similar veil of double consciousness such as the one W. E. B. DuBois describes in *The Souls of Blackfolk* (1903)?

---

<sup>14</sup> In addition to the racialized white tomboys populating the novels of American women writers, these figures can also be found in the fiction of their British counterparts. Throughout George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), for instance, the tomboyish main character, Maggie, is repeatedly described with brown skin and dark features. Moreover, her male sidekick is given the racially suggestive name "Tom."

Although each of the following chapters focuses on a different racialized tomboy from a different historic era, one element remains tantamount: blackface minstrelsy. As Dana Heller notes, “Much of the study of racial mimicry in general and blackface in particular... has tended to assume that blackface, the fantasy of becoming black, is a masculinity one” (65). While seldom discussed in the history or origins of tomboys, these gender-bending figures have their root in such burlesque theatrical modes as blackface. Engaged in such minstrelized acts as cross-dressing and even lewd behavior, postbellum fictional tomboys “were closely affiliated with certain burlesque roles played by actresses of the time. The hoyden who sported a cigar, the impersonation of male Greek Gods by women, a wild parodying of sex roles in general all became central features of the burlesque theater in the 1860s” (Habegger “Funny” 173). In some instances, in fact, literary representations of tomboys copied the antics of blackface characters. Similar to their theatrical counterparts, these spunky female figures were also interested in transgressing societal manners and mores. As W. T. Lhamon argues, “Minstrelsy in its early decades was a staging among marginal youth of these social pressures bearing down on them” (“Cycles” 280). By resisting their “proper” gender, class and even social role, white tomboys engage in a comparable form of youth rebellion.

The minstrelized origins of tomboyism raises a series questions about the possible shared cultural work of racialized white tomboys and blackface minstrels. Is it mere coincidence that the “blacking up” of both white performers and white tomboys began during the same period? Were these two cultural phenomena related in any ways? Can any connections be made, for instance, between “tomboy taming” and the harsh

punishments—often in the form of social ostracism, suicide and even murder—faced men and women who crossed racial lines? Similarly, is it only accidental that both minstrelsy and tomboyism are often associated with “transgressive dirt”: blackface with the application of gooey burnt cork and tomboyism with the association of uncombed hair, unwashed faces, and unkempt clothes? As Anne McClintock argues in *Imperial Leather*, the purification of the body in the Victorian era came to be read as a sign for the purification—and, by extension, denegrification—of the body politic (214).

The acquisition of a dark hue by seemingly Caucasian tomboys, however, need not be a permanent phenomenon. Returning to their racialized antecedents once again, we can see that both the Irish and the Jews were able to shirk their racially charged associations during the late-nineteenth century. Ironically, the primary means by which these two groups were able to “become white” was by donning blackface. As Michael Rogin argues in *Blackface, White Noise*, “Facing nativist pressure that would assign them to the dark side of the racial divide, immigrants Americanized themselves by crossing and re-crossing the racial divide” (56). By taking charge of the black role, such marginally white groups were able to assert their whiteness. “I am not really black,” their racial mimicry would tacitly convey, “underneath the burnt cork is white skin” (Rogin 103). For the first time in generations, minstrelsy afforded the Irish and the Jews an opportunity to play “a person of color instead of being confused for one” (Rogin 102). In this way, blackface not only helped create ethnic identity in the United States, but it also paradoxically helped to engender whiteness.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> This whitewashing of various racial and ethnic groups was one of the reasons many men and women immigrated to the United States. With anti-Semitism giving them a racial charge in Europe, many new arrivals on Ellis Island “were coming under the banner of a new racial invention: whiteness” (Rogin 12). In addition to seeking political autonomy, religious freedom and economic opportunity, therefore, many

In addition to exploring the connection between tomboyism and minstrelsy, the chapters that follow also examine the possibility that this pattern of racechange applied to Caucasian tomboys. Although none of the racialized white characters examined in this study lose their dark hue completely, many of them experience moments of “whitewashing.” In E. D. E. N. Southworth’s *The Deserted Wife*, for instance, Hagar’s complexion pales considerably after giving birth to her first child. Once described as a “dark” and “fiery” beauty, she becomes “wan” and even “pale.”

In the same way blackface helped create whiteness in the United States, I consider how white womanhood in general and white tomboyism in particular “might have been created out of a white cultural expropriation and travesty of blackness” (Heller 65). Why is it that white tomboyism in many of the novels by women writers is predicated on a masquerade of blackness in general and—given the burlesque origins of tomboyism—blackface minstrelsy in particular? Similar to the Irish and the Jews, did Caucasian tomboys “black up” paradoxically to become more white?

In “Interrogating ‘Whiteness,’ Complicating ‘Blackness’: Remapping American Culture,” Shelley Fisher Fishkin makes the compelling observation: “Concerns about ‘race’ may structure American texts, even when those texts are not ‘about’ race in any substantive way” (433). With little exception, nearly all of the narratives highlighted in this study are not explicit meditations on race or race relations. On the contrary, many of them go to great lengths to avoid these issues. Although Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* (1868) takes place during the Civil War, for instance, characters of color and

---

also sought what may be characterized as racial “cleansing.” As James Baldwin would remark years later, “‘No one was white before he/she came to America.... Jews came here from countries where they were not white, and they came here in part because they were not white.... Everyone who got here, and paid the price of the ticket, the price was to become ‘white’ ” (qtd. in Rogin 12 – 13).

discussions of slavery are conspicuously absent from the text. Other than Mr. March's service as an army chaplain and Jo's tomboyish desire to be a soldier, the family is exempt from both the abstract politics and the bloody realities of the battlefield.

The same could be said for nearly all the other narratives highlighted in this study. Each takes place during a crucial period in America's racial history—the eve of the Civil War (Southworth), the disastrous aftermath of Reconstruction (Jewett), the xenophobic *fin-de-siecle* (Gilman and Cather) and the heyday of the Jim Crow South (McCullers)—but few mention skin color.

Given this striking absence of race relations, critics frequently comment that such concerns are “unimportant” to these texts. The way in which Caucasian tomboys acquire a dark hue in these narratives calls such beliefs into question. The racialization of ostensibly white figures undermines common critical views that these “innocuous” women's novels are divorced from such real-life concerns as race. By crossing and re-crossing the color line, racialized white tomboys allow texts not commonly considered “about race” to be seen through this rubric. Returning to Shelley Fisher Fishkin's remark once again, tomboy narratives by Southworth, Alcott, Jewett, Gilman, Cather and McCullers could—and even should—be characterized in such ways.

In the opening pages of *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, Mikhail Bakhtin observes, “the most interesting and productive life takes place on the boundaries” (2). Tomboy characters in general and racialized white tomboys in particular participate in this phenomenon. Existing on the boundaries of male/female, black/white, adult/child, savage/civilized, different/same and drag/passing, these figures dismantle cultural binaries while participating in them. Accordingly, “Tom/Boys: The Racialization of

**White Tomboys in American Women's Fiction, 1840 – 1950”** places itself on the interstices between high and low culture, printed and visual texts as well as narratives written for children and adults to investigate this previously unexplored facet of American literature and culture.



## **Chapter 1:**

### **Gender B(l)acklash:**

#### **E. D. E. N. Southworth & the Emergence of Racialized White Tomboys**

As Joanne Dobson notes, the strength of E. D. E. N. Southworth's fiction can be found "in her ability to render cultural fantasies vividly, in all their fascinating and self-contradictory complexity" (Introduction xii). While the author explored numerous cultural myths in her more than sixty published texts, one of the most often-discussed is gender.<sup>1</sup> In both her serialized and book-length narratives, E. D. E. N. Southworth subverted codes that called for women to be passive, submissive and accepting.

Although giving her texts such titles as *The Deserted Wife* (1849), *The Discarded Daughter* (1852), *The Lost Heiress* (1853) and *The Missing Bride* (1854), her female protagonists do not conform to these tragic and even defeated characterizations.<sup>2</sup>

"Displaced and abused as they are... these women are for the most part strong, or able to learn strength" (Dobson Introduction xii).

While numerous essays detail the various forms of strength exhibited by Southworth's female characters, the origin of their power remains relatively unexplored. Although some critics cite Southworth's abandonment by her husband and subsequent economic hardship as the primary impetus, another, racially charged, reason is also

---

<sup>1</sup> As numerous critics and biographers have noted, it is difficult to determine the precise number of novels Southworth published during her lifetime given her propensity for reissuing texts under different titles. For instance, the writer's 1855 novel, *The Missing Bride*, was republished in 1874 as *Miriam, The Avenger*. According to Regis Louise Boyle—the author of the only full-length study on Southworth—"her serials amounted to fifty four as closely as I have been able to ascertain" (146).

<sup>2</sup> Given the often extensive gap between the serial release of E. D. E. N. Southworth's novels and their book publication, critics and biographers often disagree over the chronology of her work. Although making its debut in Robert Bonner's New York *Ledger* in 1859, for instance, Southworth's wildly popular *The Hidden Hand* was not released in book form until 1888. In light of such discrepancies, I have chosen to use the text's initial date of release—whether in serial or book format—as its date of publication. While this approach may diverge from some extant publication histories of Southworth's novels, I feel that it provides a more accurate chronology of both the private composition and public release of her work.

possible. Disillusioned by the confines of (white) women's gender codes, the Southern-born author may have turned to blackness as an alternative source of power. Although resulting in exploitation and even enslavement for African Americans, this color becomes a radical source of strength, independence and even agency when co-opted by her white characters. By associating themselves with a dark hue, Southworth's female figures are able to escape the limitations of (white) patriarchal society and acquire a degree of social, economic and even sexual freedom.

Nowhere, perhaps, is E. D. E. N. Southworth's use of this type of "liberating racialization" more evident than in her depiction of tomboys, figures who already exist in opposition to (white) women's gender roles. Although the author penned numerous novels populated by spunky female heroines, Capitola Black from her 1859 *The Hidden Hand* is by far her most famous example. From the opening pages of the narrative to its final utterances, the ostensibly Caucasian tomboy is repeatedly (and inextricably) linked with blackness in general and a particular form of racial performance in particular: blackface minstrelsy. Not only does Capitola possess "jet black hair," "black eye brows" and "black lashes" (Southworth *Hidden* 33), but she grew up in New York City among what David Roediger identifies as the primary performers of and audience for minstrelsy: the Bowery b'hoys. When readers first encounter Cap, she is even cross-dressed as one of these unruly working-class figures.

Although Capitola is Southworth's most famous tomboy, the racialization of spunky white women can be found throughout her literary *oeuvre*. A decade before the release of *The Hidden Hand*, in fact, the author's 1849 novel, *The Deserted Wife*, showcases a tomboyish young woman who similarly acquires a dark hue. In this novel,

however, the Bible and not the minstrel show is the primary means through which the seemingly Caucasian character attains her racially ambiguous status. Although christened “Agatha” after her mother, she is given the Biblical nickname “Hagar” because of “her wild, dark beauty” (Southworth *Deserted* 35). As the daughter of the Egyptian pharaoh in the Book of Genesis, Hagar is widely presumed to be black. Drawing on the racial construction of this Biblical figure, *The Deserted Wife* showcases both the darkness and the tomboyishness of its main character. The black-haired, dark-featured young girl is described as swinging “monkey-like” from tree branches, looking like a “little savage” when she grimaces her “dark brow,” and (perhaps most tellingly) possessing the family’s recessive trait of fiery “Egyptian” blood.

Though African Americans in actuality were enslaved because of their coloring during this period, the dark hue with which both Hagar and Capitola are associated serves a libratory function. As both tomboys and dark women, these characters can distance themselves from the limited possibilities of the blonde-haired, self-effacing “Fair Maiden.” Paradoxically, their blackness becomes an effective means to avoid enslavement to (white) women’s gender roles. As racially ambiguous figures, they are exempt from conforming to the restrictive confines of “True Womanhood.”

At the same time, because their blackness is metaphoric and not literal, Hagar and Capitola retain a firm link to whiteness and the socio-economic privilege it affords. They may flirt with the fantasy of existing outside mainstream culture, but their biology provides them with an important escape hatch. As in the case of white performers in blackface, their dark hue can be removed at any time and their “true” racial identity reclaimed. Accordingly, as these unruly young women become increasingly

domesticated and eventually wed, their dark hues fade. Capitola dilutes her rebellious blackness by marrying a young man named *Greyson*. Meanwhile, Hagar's complexion pales significantly after giving birth to twins.

This use of blackness as a transformative and even empowering force in the antebellum period forms another instance in which African Americans are viewed in mythologized rather than realistic ways. A gap exists between Southworth's romanticization of blacks and their actual condition of enslavement, exploitation and subjugation. Echoing the title of Toni Morrison's 1992 essay, this disjunct enables both the writer and her Caucasian tomboys to fetishize "playing in the dark."

In spite of its tenuous relation to reality, the racialization of white tomboys in E. D. E. N. Southworth's fiction marks the beginning of a phenomenon in American women's fiction. After the 1840s, ostensibly white tomboys would repeatedly be connected with a dark hue in the work of female authors. Similar to Capitola and Hagar, rather than stigmatizing these women with the "taint" of miscegenation, their "blackening up" often empowered and even elevated them.

In "Ebery Time I Wheel About I Jump Jim Crow," W. T. Lhamon argues that one of the origins for minstrelsy was youth rebellion and restlessness. "From beginning to end, the ... youth [in minstrel shows] projected themselves as blacks in order at least in part to rouse and engage the hypocrisies of their fundamentalist opponents" (Lhamon 278). While historians view blackface as a predominantly male phenomenon, the presence of racialized white tomboys in fiction by American women suggests a wider appeal. In the same way white men used racial mimicry to engage hypocrisies in the

nation's socio-economic structure, such female counterparts as E. D. E. N. Southworth may have drawn on it to engage the hypocrisies of the sex/gender system.

## **Part I. Domestic Melodrama and Dark Melanin:**

### **E. D. E. N. Southworth, The Edenic South and “South-Worthy” Fiction**

In spite of both her Maryland ancestry and her regionally suggestive appellation, critics rarely label E. D. E. N. Southworth a Southern author or explore the proslavery aspects of her fiction. As both past and present biographers have noted, numerous elements helped initiate and then perpetuate this phenomenon. Spending the bulk of her adult life in Washington, D. C., the writer was closely associated with both abolitionist publications and their representatives. Not only was her first novel, *Retribution* (1849), serialized in the *National Anti-Slavery Era*, but she was intimate with such illustrious abolitionists as Gamaliel Bailey, John Greenleaf Whittier and even Harriet Beecher Stowe. Moreover, rather than simply hobnobbing with prominent antislavery figures, Southworth also acted with them. During the Civil War, she opened her Mount Prospect home to wounded Union soldiers. Providing food, shelter and even medical care, the writer “liked to boast about the fact that Abraham Lincoln actually slept at her home during a Union campaign” (Gabler-Hover 38).

In spite of E. D. E. N. Southworth’s artistic and even activist connection with abolition, “[t]his feeling is decidedly not apparent in all her works; in fact, in many instances it would seem that she was favorable towards the institution” (Boyle 82). Many of her novels draw on racist literary conventions, present blacks in stereotypical ways, and even glorify—or at least romanticize—the plantation way of life. For this reason, Janet Gabler-Hover points out that the bulk of Southworth’s fiction can be placed “in the camp of antebellum proslavery apologism” (38).

Perhaps the most prominent symptom of Southworth's ambivalence towards abolition can be found in her depiction of Southern plantation life. Although the first to condemn the vile nature of human ownership, she repeatedly presents plantations as happy and even Edenic communities. This tendency surfaces even in the writer's first novel. As Francis Gaines points out, throughout *Retribution*, "plantation life is depicted in strong lights and shadows, and the light is not less than gorgeous. Houses are almost palatial; social activity is ceaseless, cultured, idyllic; men are gallant, courtly.... the heroines are beyond description in beauty...." (50).

In addition to such laudatory descriptions of the plantations themselves, the geographic location in which these estates are set contributes to their glorification. Although some of Southworth's Southern-based texts are located in Virginia, the vast majority are set in Maryland. In *Battle Cry Freedom*, James McPherson argues that this state was pivotal for both the Union and Confederacy throughout the Civil War. Because the region borders Washington on three sides, its affiliation "could determine the capital's fate at the outset of the war" (McPherson *Battle* 285). As a result, Maryland was engaged in a heated but notoriously ambivalent debate about slavery. "The tobacco counties of southern Maryland and the eastern shore of the Chesapeake Bay were secessionist. The grain-growing counties of northern and western Maryland, containing few slaves, were safe for the Union" (McPherson *Battle* 285). With Confederate flags flying on some porches and Union ones in homes across the street, the region became a microcosm of the nation's conflicted attitudes about slavery. After the now-legendary repulsion of General Lee's forces in April 1861, Maryland eventually aligned itself with Union sensibilities. Even then, however, such sentiments were far from universal. As

McPherson notes, the state's constitutional amendment abolishing slavery passed only because of the votes of returning Union soldiers. Among civilians, a "slight majority... voted against it" (McPherson *Battle* 805). In this way, while some critics attribute Southworth's reliance on Maryland settings to her childhood familiarity with this region, another, racially charged, motivation is also possible. Given Maryland's ambiguous racial history, the region forms the perfect medium for the writer's own conflicted and often contradictory messages.

Although Southworth's ambivalence toward slavery permeates many of her novels, nowhere perhaps are these beliefs better exemplified than in her 1869 narrative, *How He Won Her*. An ostensibly abolitionist text, the narrative traces the experiences of two daring young women who aid the Union army: Elfie (unsuccessfully) volunteers to be a soldier while Britomarte cross-dresses to (successfully) serve as a spy. In spite of such a seemingly clear political message, empathy for white slave holders and, by extension, the secessionist South abounds. Several chapters into the novel, for instance, Elfie is first carried off by and then forcibly married to a Rebel leader who was her childhood friend. Although the young woman is initially outraged by Albert's actions and his political views, she gradually changes her mind. Accused of being "no true daughter of the South" because she does not realize her spouse "thinks he is right, as many a gallant leader in the Confederate army thinks so," she comes to respect and love him (Southworth *How* 87, 259). When her Rebel husband is fatally wounded in battle, the once-Unionist Elfie not only lovingly nurses, but genuinely grieves for him. Wearing deep mourning after his death, she laments the loss of her "valiant" love.



E. D. E. N. Southworth's idealized depiction of Southern white aristocrats is coupled with her representation of their equally happy and submissive slaves. Although Southworth was close friends with Harriet Beecher Stowe, none of her novels contain an instance of Simon Legree-like mistreatment. On the contrary, the vast majority of her texts present slaves as uniformly content and masters as universally kind. In her 1881 text *A Leap in the Dark*, this portrait is taken to an extreme. Not only do the slaves refuse to leave their master after Emancipation, but many of them are suspicious of freedom. "Some of them seemed to suspect that 'manicpation was some sort of 'catching complaint' that had broken out among 'the darkies,' and that their master feared they might take it and give it to the white folks of the big house" (Southworth *Leap* 55). In accordance with such sentiments, black and white characters alike enumerate the advantages of slavery for both African Americans and—even more tellingly—the South. "Master and servants having been born into that state of life... knew no other; and this was to be said of them, that their master was as good to his servants in their station as he was to his children in theirs" (Southworth *Leap* 55).

Such paternalistic attitudes toward slavery recur in several of Southworth's other narratives. Most shockingly, for instance, is her novelette "Winny: A Child's Story" (1855). When a "red cheeked" young girl asks her father for a pet, he presents her with an abandoned black baby. After he tells Lizzie, " 'I give it to you for your own, to do what you please with,' " the youth exclaims, " 'Oh! this is so much better than a pussycat or a puppy! Oh! isn't it droll! Isn't it delightful' " (Southworth "Winny" 329). Although her mother initially objects to having "the thing sleeping in the room with us," the prepubescent youth is eventually granted full parental license. "Half in fondness, half

in fun, Lizzie had taught the little one to call her ‘mother’ ” (Southworth “Winny” 330, 331).

In light of Southworth’s view of blacks as amusingly “childlike” creatures and slavery as a divinely “benevolent” institution, it comes as no surprise that her novels are laden with both the racist representation of blacks and the use of racially charged literary conventions. As Regis Louis Boyle notes, the writer repeatedly draws on the racist association of blackness with evil. Although this paradigm permeates nearly every novel, it is especially prevalent in her 1871 text, *Cruel as the Grave*. Not only does the villainous Sybil Berners reside in “Blackville, a small hamlet lying at the foot of the Black Valley,” but her ancient mansion Black Hall overlooks Black Pond (Southworth *Cruel* 26). Countless other Southworth novels similarly associate sinister male and female characters with the color black. In *The Hidden Hand*, for instance, the treacherous villain is nicknamed “Black Donald.”

In addition to engaging the racist association of blackness with evil, E. D. E. N. Southworth also associates blacks with animalism, primitivism and even atavism. Repeatedly, African Americans are equated with primates. As Janet Gabler-Hover notes, the terms “ ‘monkey’ or ‘gorilla’ refer exclusively to an African or African American” in the author’s work (*Dreaming* 48). In addition, Southworth’s *A Leap in the Dark* (1881) depicts a black toddler who reverts to savagery after being abandoned in the woods. Even after she is returned to her mother, the youth retains her wild animalism. “The rolling and flashing of her great coal-black eyes... and the simultaneous gleaning and snapping of her snow-white teeth, kept up a kind of lightening from the dark face more suggestive of a fierce, wild animal than of a human child” (Southworth *Leap* 468).

Significantly, the lost youth is found by a group of blacks who are engaged in the suggestive sport of “coon hunting.”

Ironically, given the racist elements of her work, Southworth’s overall interest in story-telling had its roots in African American culture. As Regis Louise Boyle notes, one of the author’s favorite pastimes when young “was listening to the negroes in the kitchen tell ghost stories, old legends, and tales of the times when ‘Ole Mist’ess was rich and saw lots of grand company’ ” (4). Throughout her career, Southworth repeatedly attributed her interest in reading and eventually writing stories to hearing these black-authored tales. In this way, while most critics cite the author’s desertion by her husband and need for financial support as the primary impetus for her literary career, an Africanist catalyst is also possible. By her own admission, her authorship in general and sensational style in particular had its basis in black culture.<sup>3</sup>

Contributing to her connections with both blackness and the antebellum South are the names the author chose for her children and, in some ways, even for herself. Janet Gabler-Hover points out, “Her anagram—E. D. E. N.—made her either a canny or uncanny personification of the Jeffersonian South, which must have struck her as showing the hand of divine intervention. One can only add that having the surname Southworth must have made this writer feel even more ordained to produce a ‘worthy’ fictional paradigm of a revitalized South” (*Dreaming* 38). Coupled with her own racially suggestive name is the equally symbolic appellation she chose for her son. Although Southworth’s husband’s name was Frederick and her father’s was Charles, the writer

---

<sup>3</sup> In addition to being inspired by the black men and women around her, Southworth’s own family may have had connections to the slave trade. As Regis Louise Boyle notes, the writer’s father, Captain Charles Le Compte Nevitte, was the “Owner of a fleet of ships operating in Europe, the West Indies, and the United States...” (3). While the Captain’s shipping inventory has never been made available, given the era in which he lived it is possible that some of his West Indies cargo was human chattel.

named her son Richmond. Admittedly, she never stated that she chose the name because it commemorated the capitol of the Confederacy. It is hard to imagine, however, that this kinship was lost on the Southern-born writer, her family or contemporaries.<sup>4</sup>

Although commonly lauded as a staunch supporter of abolition, E. D. E. N. Southworth's views on slavery were much more complicated and even conflicted. In spite of aligning herself "stoutly on the Union side" (Boyle 33), the Southern-born writer had divided sensibilities about condemning the plantation way of life. Many of her novels present an abolitionist message, but simultaneously glorify the "Old South." While it is not surprising that such attitudes influenced her literary representation of black slaves and white slave-owners, the possibility that they informed her characterization of Caucasian tomboys is less expected. Unlike the pervasive association of blackness with evil, the connection between it and tomboyism is not as clear. However, throughout Southworth's 1849 novel *The Deserted Wife* and her 1859 narrative *The Hidden Hand*, a potent combination of pro-slavery apologism, the symbolic nature of blackness, and the dream of an Edenic plantation does not simply accompany, but consistently helps engender spunky white women who have racially suggestive dark hues.

---

<sup>4</sup> Another argument in favor of Southworth's awareness of the symbolic nature of these appellations was her proclivity for naming characters in ways that were suggestive "of their station in life" (Boyle 78). In *The Bride of Llewellyn* (1866), the washerwoman is dubbed Mrs. Sloss while the clerk is named Mr. Penn. In light of this Dickensian proclivity, it seems unlikely that she was unaware of the symbolic nature of both her own name and that of her offspring.

## Part II. "Written on the Body":

### The (Dark) Glow of (White) Health in *The Deserted Wife*

In the introductory section to *The Deserted Wife*, E. D. E. N. Southworth outlines the moral or theme of her novel. Giving these prefatory comments the didactic heading "Marriage and Divorce," she contemplates the epidemic of failed unions in the United States. "In no other civilized country in the world," she argues, "is marriage contracted, or dissolved, with such culpable levity as in our own. In no other civilized country can divorce be obtained with such facility, and upon such slight grounds" (Southworth *Deserted* 23). Although Southworth asserts that as she could name "a *dozen* aggravated instances of desertion," she does not wish to "trouble" her readers "with the whole of them" (24). Instead of dwelling on specific cases of divorce and separation, she wants to "look at the *causes* and the means of *prevention*, of unhappy marriages" [her emphasis] (24).

In addition to the younger generation's lack of such qualities as "truth, reverence and fidelity," she considers "a *defective... physical education*" to be "one of the primary causes" for failed unions [her emphasis] (24 - 5). Southworth argues that "[a] girl cannot be a useful or a happy wife... unless she be a healthy woman" (Southworth *Deserted* 25). In countries such as Great Britain, "a girl in delicate health never expects to marry, and her friends never desire it for her" (25 - 6). In the United States, however, this is not the case. In many ways, in fact, Southworth argues that the opposite is true. Many young women go to great lengths to ensure that they are frail, weak and thin. They wear tight-fitting corsets and constricting shoes, and avoid fresh air and wholesome foods. As a result, "American girls are proverbially delicate in organization, and frail in health, and

their mothers were delicate before them” (Southworth *Deserted* 26). Although young women pride themselves on their possession of these so-called “feminine” traits, Southworth argues that they precipitate a number of decidedly unfeminine outcomes, including infant mortality and marital desertion.

In order to avoid the peril of divorce among the current generation and ensure the health and vigor of future young women, Southworth advocates a form of female child-rearing that strongly resembles the “Ideal of Real Womanhood” outlined by Frances Cogan in *All-American Girl*. Rather than allowing young girls to grow up “drinking hot tea and coffee, eating hot meats and rich gravies and pastries, never bathing, taking little exercise, confined in crowded school-rooms or close house-rooms,” Southworth advocates “exercise, cleanliness and temperance” (Southworth *Deserted* 27). Insisting that “our happiness depends upon a free circulation, unobstructed perspiration, and a good digestion” (Southworth *Deserted* 27), she asks mothers to allow their children “[d]aily exercise by walking, skipping rope, calisthenics, horseback riding... fresh air, simple, plain food, comfortable clothing, the disuse of corsets, tight-waisted dresses, [and] tight shoes” (Southworth *Deserted* 26). As she attests, “I believe that a young person with good constitution to commence with, faithfully following these means for the preservation of health, with the blessing of God, will not fade or break until she is fifty, nor die until she is an hundred [sic] years old” (Southworth *Deserted* 26).<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> In the short story “Eveline Murray; or, The Fine Figure, Dauguereotyped from Life,” Southworth graphically—and didactically—reiterates these sentiments. The 1854 narrative details the life of a young woman who nearly dies for the sake of a “fine figure.” Less than a year after being laced into tight-fitting corsets, the once vibrant and energetic Eveline “had a pallor and a languor spread over her features that detracted very much from the beauty and her countenance” (Southworth “Fine” 201). Luckily, her fiancé determines the cause for her failing health before it is too late. After reading “Dr. Fitch’s Lectures on the Heart and Lungs,” he outlines a regimen for recovery. Upon eliminating tight-fitting clothing, the consumption of rich foods, and the avoidance of regular bathing and exercise, Eveline returns to her once-energetic self. Unfortunately, however, this lesson comes too late to help the young woman’s now-

Although Southworth never explicitly articulates it, her “excellent system of physical education” (Southworth *Deserted* 26) is in dialogue with tomboyism. In many ways, in fact, this “great reform” (Southworth *Deserted* 26) is a re-articulation of its fundamental elements. Advocating vigorous outdoor play, loose-fitting clothing and an adventurous spirit, the writer is calling for mothers to raise their girls to be tomboys or, at least, to behave in accordance with tomboyish codes of conduct.

In marked contrast to Southworth’s insistence in the Introduction to *The Deserted Wife* that a tomboyish girlhood will ensure marital felicity, the narrative itself sends a different message. Even though Hagar Churchill spends her childhood riding horses, climbing trees and even leading hunting expeditions, she becomes, as the title of the novel suggests, a deserted wife soon after getting married. Rather than replicating the moral of the prefatory section, her experiences suggest the opposite. The young woman’s tomboyish girlhood did not thwart either marital unhappiness or abandonment.

This rift between the message conveyed by the introductory preface and the narrative itself seems paradoxical until one investigates the racial implication of Southworth’s codes of physical education. Coupled with the implicit connection to tomboyism, her precepts also contain a potent racial charge. In addition to determining marital felicity, a young girl’s physical health can also impact the color of her complexion. When describing women who have been deprived of fresh air, exercise and wholesome foods, the writer repeatedly uses the term “pale” to characterize their skin tone. She argues that these girls are “pale, sickly, nervous, and fretful; they marry early, companions as pale, sickly nervous, and fretful as themselves, and have children *twice* as

---

deceased three sisters. Although it is never explicitly stated, the narrator suggests that the cause of their death was fashion. The “fair” siblings all possessed “fine figures” and, even more tellingly, “had all died between the ages of eighteen and twenty” (Southworth “Fine” 194, 196).

pale, sickly, nervous and fretful as their parents” [author’s emphasis] (Southworth *Deserted* 26). In addition to being a sign of deteriorating physical health, such pallor can also be read as an index of increasing racial purity. Although their fair skin tone foreshadows impending illness and even death, it simultaneously showcases their untainted Caucasian pedigree.

If physically ill women are “pale,” then by contrast healthy white women who have adhered to Southworth’s tomboyish codes of conduct would have complexions that could be characterized as “dark.” In addition to differentiating these women from their pale and sickly counterparts, this feature also racializes them. Health and vigor transforms ostensibly Caucasian women into figures with paradoxically dark skin. In this way, it also establishes a kinship between tomboyish white women and African Americans. The writer suggests that choosing to be strong and vibrant rather than frail and sickly is in some ways also choosing to not be white. This yoking together of gender defiance and racial difference inverts the racial economy operating in antebellum American society. In marked contrast to the actual condition of African Americans during the 1850s, the writer equates whiteness with weakness and darkness—at least when co-opted by Caucasian women—with strength.

In a novel that is set in not only antebellum America but the antebellum South, such racially charged associations go neither unnoticed nor unpunished. Although Southworth’s tomboyish codes of physical cultivation empower her tomboyish main character, they do not receive social sanction. Throughout *The Deserted Wife*, a potent combination of racism and sexism works to eradicate these achievements. Hagar’s (dark) glow of (white) health announces a strong constitution that her friends, family and



especially husband find threatening. To combat these racially charged sources of strength, they punish her in ways that are equally racialized. At various points in the novel, the dark young woman is placed in the position of an enslaved African American in general and the infamously wronged Hagar from the Book of Genesis in particular. Similar to her Biblical namesake, Hagar is objectified, exploited and finally abandoned by her husband because of both her tomboyish willfulness and her dark skin. To her blond-haired and fair-skinned spouse, in fact, these elements are inextricable.

This push and pull between (dark) empowerment and (dark) punishment permeates *The Deserted Wife*. From the opening pages of the narrative to its final utterances, Southworth repeatedly connects whiteness with feminine weakness and blackness with tomboyish power. At the same time, however, she is unable to reconcile these associations with the actual conditions of both women and blacks. The writer realizes that both dark strength and female strength are incompatible with the current state of American culture. In this way, elements that seek to empower tomboyish white women may ironically precipitate their rejection and even ostracism. These American Africanist traits may cause them to be deserted by friends and family. As a result, Southworth's *The Deserted Wife* operates along an ebb and flow between the power that comes from tomboyish darkness and the penalty that quickly (and even inevitably) accompanies it.

Since its publication in 1849, critics have tended to read Southworth's *The Deserted Wife* as an autobiographical novel. Not only was the writer abandoned by her husband several years after their marriage, but she was also a "dark" and tomboyish little

girl.<sup>6</sup> In an essay Southworth wrote later in her career, she recalled, “ ‘I was a child of sorrow from the very first year of my life. Thin and dark, I had no beauty except a pair of large, wild eyes’ ” (Coultrap-McQuinn 52). Constantly compared to her more fair and feminine sister, the author was described in such demeaning ways as a “dark, wild-eyed elf” (Harris 129). Although Southworth strove “to be a True Woman—pious, pure, domestic, and pleasing to others” (Coultrap-McQuinn 50), such efforts proved ineffectual. While pregnant with her second child in distant Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, she was deserted by her husband, Frederick Hamilton Southworth, who “abandoned the family to go exploring in South America” (Coultrap-McQuinn 54). Although the author never sought a divorce, the couple also never reconciled.

In light of the numerous areas of overlap between Southworth’s own experiences and those of her fictional character, past and present critics have read *The Deserted Wife* as a thinly veiled account of the writer’s life. In an oft-quoted essay, “Extending and Subverting: The Iconography of Houses in *The Deserted Wife*,” Susan Harris argues that the novel is Southworth’s “presentation, in her thirty-first year, of her own life to her readers... it is a fictionalized record of the author’s tribulations after losing the protection of the man she expected to support her” (128). In addition to describing the text as “the standard cover story of loss and retrieval,” Harris also characterizes it as a “spiritual autobiography” and Hagar Churchill as the author’s “spiritual double” (128, 129).

While *The Deserted Wife* contains important links to autobiography, viewing it exclusively as a confessional novel seems limiting. In light of Hagar’s (dark) glow of (white) health, the text can also be seen as a meditation on the racial charges associated

---

<sup>6</sup> Southworth’s lifelong struggle between being tomboyishly independent and femininely demure is best represented in Susan Coultrap-McQuinn’s *Doing Literary Business*, about the author’s dealings with “Gentleman Publisher” Robert Bonner.

with various forms of gender deviancy. Anticipating Michele Wallace's observations about the mythic power of the so-called "black superwoman," Southworth explores the behaviors associated with, and stereotypically expected of, white and black women.

In an 1878 letter defending her writing against accusations that it was riddled with "unimportant details," E. D. E. N. Southworth argued that those who are frustrated by this quality " 'are in too great of a hurry to get to the secret mystery of the plot' " (Kelley *Private* 220). In marked contrast to readerly complaints, therefore, her rebuttal makes the indirect assertion that the "secret mystery" of her plot is in some ways contained in the "unimportant details." While she was not directly referencing *The Deserted Wife* when penning these comments, the same observation could apply. The yoking together of Hagar's dark skin and tomboyish antics may seem like an "unimportant detail" in the novel. Given the way in which this connection resonates with the racial economy operating in Southworth's fiction as well as antebellum American society, it—and not autobiography—may be seen as the "secret mystery" of the text.

### **Part III. Biblical Blackness and Tomboyish “Monkey Business”:**

#### **Hagar Churchill as the Deserted Wife who (Almost) Deserted Whiteness**

In addition to constituting the main plot of *The Deserted Wife*, Hagar’s marriage, separation and ultimate reconciliation with Raymond is also an extended study in the racialization of her tomboyism and white society’s rejection of it. The alternating darkening and whitewashing of the young woman’s skin based on her relative conformity to white women’s gender codes epitomizes Southworth’s equation of blackness with power as well as the incompatibility of this racial economy with the realities of antebellum American society.

From the opening pages of *The Deserted Wife*, racial origins are attributed to Hagar’s proclivity for active, outdoor play. The first time the young woman romps through the woods, the narrator asks, “Do you ask where she got her fiery blood from? I do not know exactly, perhaps the spark was transmitted from some Egyptian long since” (Southworth *Deserted* 148). During colonial times, this “same spirit of adventure had incited several of Hagar’s ancestors from time to time to rebellion against church and state, and [had] sent the founder of the American branch into the new country” (Southworth *Deserted* 148-9). Now, this same “fiery” Egyptian spirit “occasionally broke out in a solitary member of the household, as in Hagar” (Southworth *Deserted* 149).

More than simply providing a biological explanation for the young woman’s tomboyishness, these remarks also offer an Africanist one. If Hagar’s gender deviancy is seen as an index of her fiery Egyptian blood, then the more tomboyishly rebellious she

behaves, the more racially Other she becomes.<sup>7</sup> In accordance with this economy, whenever Hagar engages in behavior that exists outside of white women's "proper" gender role, she is described in ways that also place her outside of conventional notions of whiteness. Throughout Southworth's novel, Hagar's tomboyish rambunctiousness is likened to such non-white elements as primitivism and even atavism. While living with Sophie and Reverend Withers, for instance, the narrator notes, "The *wild* child took to the *wild* scenes of nature, as naturally as the squirrel takes to the trees... soon she was able to climb a tree with the swiftness and agility of a *monkey*" [my emphasis] (Southworth *Deserted* 148). This tomboyish connection to racially charged elements intensifies when the youth is compared with her fair-skinned cousin, Rosalia. While Hagar's "playgrounds are the forests, rocks, and waters—and... toys are bows, arrows, and guns," her blonde relative plays with gender-appropriate "dolls in dressing rooms" (Southworth 151). Significantly, Hagar attributes their differing interests to not only Rosalia's life as a "city baby," but—even more telling—the fact that her cousin has been raised by "*white* nurses" [author's emphasis] (Southworth *Deserted* 151).

---

<sup>7</sup> This argument is frustrated somewhat by public opinion during this era about Africa in general and Egyptians in particular. As Janet Gabler-Hover notes, "Southworth was playing with fire in linking Hagar to Egypt" (41). During the nineteenth century, "Egypt had a tremendous power over the minds of Anglo Americans because it had been discovered by scientists to be the originative seat of civilization" (Gabler-Hover 41). The 1823 display of an Egyptian sarcophagus in Boston, for instance, helped to both inspire interest in the ancient culture and disseminate its political and technological advancements. Although located on the continent of Africa, Egyptians were not considered African by antebellum Americans. Throughout the United States, being African was equated with being black and being black was equated with being anything but "advanced." Especially in the South, black was the antithesis of both civilization and progress. To circumvent this stumbling block, "A whole phalanx of genetic scientists rallied to the cause of denying an Africanized Egypt" (Gabler-Hover 41). Drawing on such devices as the pseudoscience of phrenology, scholars insisted that not only did Africans differ from Egyptians, but the "presence of Africans in Egypt... was the reason Egyptian civilization eventually fell" (Gabler-Hover 42). In this way, theorists were able to maintain prevailing stereotypes about the moral, social and intellectual inferiority of blacks and, by extension, justify the institution of slavery in the United States. Undoubtedly aware of the Africa-Egypt debate, Southworth made a daring decision to yoke Egyptian and black Africanist elements in Hagar.

Several pages later when the pair goes for a walk in the woods, Hagar's connection to "wildly" unfeminine behavior becomes linked to simian traits.

Anticipating King Kong's famous abduction of Fay Wray, "the devil leaped in to the eyes of the wild child, and seizing her cousin, she swung her upon her shoulder, and springing from the spot with the bound of a kid, scarcely touching the points of the rocks with her light feet, she flew up the steep knobs of the cliff—with Rose clung to her neck in deadly terror" (Southworth *Deserted* 151). In light of such behavior, it seems appropriate that when neighbor Gusty May returns from an overseas voyage, he brings the rambunctious girl the appropriate gift of a pet monkey (Southworth *Deserted* 167).

In marked contrast to the traditional trajectory or expected paradigm for tomboys, Hagar's unconventional behavior does not wane with age. In many ways, in fact, it intensifies. By the time the young woman is fourteen years old, she excels at one of the most masculine activities: hunting. Riding across the appropriately named "Moor" in the opening pages of Part II, "she held a light fowling piece, and at her saddle's pommel hung a game bag, filled with birds" (Southworth *Deserted* 177). Seeing both the feminine Rosalia and the equally effeminate Gusty, she decides to impress them with her marksmanship. Foreshadowing Annie Oakley in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Shows during the 1880s, she points to a speck in the sky, "raised her fowling-piece, took aim, fired, and in another instant a rush and whirr of wings swooped down through the air, and a white pigeon,... dropped bleeding at their feet" (Southworth *Deserted* 178). As a result of Hagar's skill and bravado, Gusty repeatedly calls her a "sportsman." Once again, such tomboyish behavior is connected with a racially suggestive wildness and darkness. Decorating her room in a way that reflects her interest in gaming, Hagar has not only

papered her chamber “with a German landscape,... representing parts of the Black Forest, and the exploits of the Wild Huntsman,” but even painted the floor “dark green... so that, in the dusky light, the room looked not unlike a wild and darksome forest glade” (Southworth *Deserted* 185 – 6).

Several chapters later, Hagar leads an all-male hunting expedition “with a wild heart, fierce eye, and crimsoned cheek” (Southworth *Deserted* 200). During the course of pursuit, she displays another one of her tomboyish talents. While bounding after the game on horseback, she and her steed successfully jump the fearsome Devil’s Gorge. As the narrator notes, “It was an awful leap. The hoofs of the horse just grazed the edges of the rocks as he planted them firmly and struggled up the bank” (Southworth *Deserted* 200). Although the act in itself does not possess a racial charge, the young woman’s horse does. Recalling the method by which many runaway slaves made their way to freedom, the steed on which she performs such feats is named “Starlight, the Black Prince” (Southworth *Deserted* 40). A few pages later, Gusty furthers Hagar’s connection to racially significant constellations. After describing her “magnetic” personality and “electric” energy, the enamored young man likens her to “the North star” (Southworth *Deserted* 208).

In marked contrast to the actual condition of blacks in antebellum America, Hagar’s association with such racially charged elements frequently constitute a form of power. Because the young woman’s tomboyish behavior exists outside of white women’s expected gender roles, she is able to resist being subjugated to the (white) patriarchy. A dispute between Reverend Withers and his son Raymond forms a poignant example of this phenomenon. When the angered minister grabs his son and begins

“shaking him violently” (Southworth *Deserted* 141), Hagar intervenes. Coming to the defense of her beloved playmate and step-sibling, she screams, “ ‘Let Raymond! let my brother alone! Let him go, I say! you old Satan, you. I—I’ll kill you—I’ll scratch your eyes out’ ” (Southworth *Deserted* 141). When such verbal threats prove ineffectual, the youth becomes physical. In marked contrast to “proper” behavior for young (white) girls, Hagar climbs “upon a chair, and then upon a table” and springs cat-like upon the back of the Reverend’s neck (Southworth *Deserted* 141).

Although the young woman is able to save her playmate with such daring actions, she is unable to save herself. Similar to many other instances in *The Deserted Wife*, Hagar’s act of (dark) empowerment is quickly followed by a (dark) punishment. In the same way Hagar’s tomboyism allows her freedom from the confines of (white) women’s gender roles, it also causes her to face punishments that are equally racially charged. Because the young woman is likened to non-white elements, she is not afforded the genteel treatment of white women. Hence, Reverend Withers responds to the youth as if she were a savage (black) beast and not a prepubescent (Caucasian) child. As the narrator notes, the minister “seized her, and pulling her off, hurled her flying through the open window” (Southworth *Deserted* 142). Although Hagar is not hurt, this event forms one is of many instances in which the young woman’s racialized tomboyism militates against libratory ends.

This tug-of-war between darkness as strength and darkness as stain also epitomizes Hagar’s relationship with her step-sibling and future husband, Raymond Withers. When the young man first meets his future bride, he relishes her dark beauty. With an attitude similar to that of many white men about black women, Raymond views



his dark-skinned wife as an exotic and even erotic fetish object. From the time they are children, he is enchanted by her “wild” otherness and longs to possess this “spirited little creature” (Southworth *Deserted* 307). Although the pair gets married in their home state of Maryland, Raymond insists that they settle in the North. Soon after their nuptials, he mentions a house on the Hudson River and announces his intention of relocating his wife there. From the moment they arrive at the abode, it is clear Raymond wants to add Hagar to his collection of exotic objects: “ ‘Look at your reflection, Hagar... You are a little dark, sparkling creature, your effect is exhilarating. A languishing beauty in these languishing rooms would have been flatness added to softness’ ” (Southworth *Deserted* 325). Echoing these sentiments, he instructs his new bride to do nothing but “play the harp and look beautiful” (Southworth *Deserted* 324). Indulging her spouse in this fantasy, Hagar dresses in a manner that recalls an ancient Egyptian goddess. She adorns her arms with “serpent bracelets twined around them” and wears her long black hair tied back “by a serpent whose scales were formed by overlapping emeralds” (Southworth *Deserted* 322). Wearing only rich yellow topazes and dark red rubies, she insists that such jewels are “the only ones... her Egyptian complexion would bear” (Southworth *Deserted* 322).

Although Hagar’s dark complexion may receive the erotic approval of her husband, the tomboyish behavior that accompanies and even engenders it does not. The blond-haired young man finds his wife’s non-white skin tone exotic, but her tomboyishly non-white demeanor repulsive. When Hagar romps with her beloved dogs and horse, Raymond deems such behavior disgusting. “ ‘I do not like dogs and horses, and I very much dislike your attachment to them, and I utterly disapprove of your use of them’ ”

(Southworth *Deserted* 299). Although aware that adventure, activity and even animals form the basis of his bride's personality, he vows to "cure" her of such behavior. " 'You have no refinement, no delicacy. Your dress pawed over and soiled by your canine pets—your ringlets snuffed at, and your neck rubbed by the nose of your pony. I am glad that in a few days I shall be able to remove you from all these things' " (Southworth *Deserted* 298).

Before long, Hagar learns that ending her relationship with animals is not the only change Raymond intends to implement. Her new husband also longs to make his tomboyish wife more docile, feminine and thus, one may infer, more "white." As he tells her, " 'I love low tones, soft footsteps, gentle manners, sweet smiles, and complying tempers around me, and I must have them' " (Southworth *Deserted* 283). Drawing on animal metaphors to characterize his wife, Raymond vows, "*the claws and wings of the eagle shall be clipped*" [author's italics] (Southworth *Deserted* 306, 283). If Hagar refuses to subdue her independent nature, Raymond threatens to destroy her. Clutching her in a tight embrace, he whispers, " 'if our eagle flaps its wings and beats its cage so violently, I am afraid clipping its pinions and claws will not be enough—I am afraid I shall have to crush it altogether' " (Southworth *Deserted* 307).

Aware of her spouse's intentions, the spirited Hagar is outraged. After telling her husband that she is not an "automaton" but a lively human being, she bemoans her decision to get married.<sup>8</sup> Echoing Karen Sanchez-Eppler's observation that "the

---

<sup>8</sup> Even more shocking and contradictory to Southworth's ethos that tomboyish independence ensures marital felicity is the decision of several female characters to defend Raymond's behavior. Although Aunt Sophie empathizes with the young bride's predicament, she also defends Raymond's words and actions. She tells Hagar that a wife's primary duty is to silently obey the wishes of her husband. As a consequence, Raymond is justified in his contempt for her tomboyish displays of willfulness, stubbornness and independence. Even though his words might be strong, he can righteously demand that she cease such behavior. As a result, Sophie begs Hagar to not simply make peace with her spouse but apologize for her

metaphoric linking of women and slaves proves ubiquitous” in feminist writings during the nineteenth century (19), Hagar draws on the rhetoric of slavery to describe wifedom. In addition to telling Sophie that being married is like “being owned,” she also equates it with being “enslaved” (Southworth *Deserted* 248, 287). This characterization adds a further dimension to Hagar’s position as a racialized figure. Although Christened “Agatha” after her mother, the “wild” and “dark” young woman is given the racially charged nickname “Hagar” soon after birth (Southworth *Deserted* 137, 148, 35). As the daughter of the Egyptian Pharaoh in the Book of Genesis, Hagar is not only widely presumed to be black but also famously ejected from the (white) household of Abraham and Sarah. While serving as a surrogate mother for the elderly couple, Hagar is first viciously abused by the jealous wife and then turned out into the desert after Sarah miraculously gives birth to a child of her own. After seeing her white son Isaac playing with his half-brother Ishmael, Sarah “demanded of Abraham: ‘Drive out that slave and her son! No son of that slave is going to share the inheritance with my son Isaac!’ ” (Gen. 21.10).<sup>9</sup>

---

previous displays of defiance. “ ‘Tell your husband when you meet him that.... *you* have sinned Hagar, and *you* must atone for your sin; lay your hand gently on his arm, and look into his face, catch his eyes, and ask him to forgive you’ ” (Southworth 301).

Hagar’s neighbor and close friend Emily May takes these sentiments one step further. When Hagar objects to assuming a subordinate position in marriage, the meek Mrs. May informs her that it is a God-given duty. As Ann M. Ingram argues, Emily is “the most traditionally domestic of all the women characters in the novel” (281). Accordingly, when Hagar is cruelly abandoned by her husband, Emily assumes the young woman—and not her spouse—is to blame. Considering any female who lives alone both “suspicious” and “bad,” she implores her son to stop making visitations. “ ‘Do you know, oh! dolt of a child, that you will be scandalized to death, if you remain a day where you are?.... am *I* who never risked chance of a breath of calumny, am *I* now to suffer through the imprudence of my son?’ ” [author’s emphasis] (Southworth *Deserted* 440). As Ingram notes, “Emily’s primary concern here is not with Hagar’s welfare but with her own reputation” (281). As a result, “her acts have evil effects because her loyalty to local standards prevents her from questioning the her community’s norms” (Harris 140).

<sup>9</sup> As Phyllis Trible argues in *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*, Sarah’s word choice not only “increases the distance” between herself and the surrogate mother, it also signals Hagar’s denigrated blackness. Instead of addressing the Egyptian woman by the affectionate (albeit possessive) term, “my maid,” she refers to the surrogate mother by the objectifying phrase “this slave.”

Throughout *The Deserted Wife*, the way in which Hagar Churchill is both repeatedly described in racially charged ways because of her tomboyishness and, at the same time, repeatedly rejected or deserted because of it recalls both the physical appearance and life experiences of her Biblical namesake.<sup>10</sup> The young girl's experience with desertion takes many forms and occurs at various points in Southworth's text. Hagar's first encounter with this phenomenon takes place when she is young. In the opening pages of *The Deserted Wife*, Hagar is physically deserted by her parents when they both die soon after her birth. As the narrator notes, "from the hour of her [mother's] sudden death" the day after she is born, her father "pined away, and in less than a year thereafter was laid in her grave" (Southworth *Deserted* 35). Adopted by her paternal aunt, she is emotionally deserted a few years later when her cousin Rosalia Aguilar joins the household. As in the case of her Biblical namesake, the dark color of Hagar's skin is the primary cause for this event. Compared to her blonde-haired and fair-skinned cousin, the dark youth seems ghastly. The two children "were never passed by strangers or servants without some such remark as this—'Rosalia is beautiful, lovely—but that other child is *very* homely' " [author's italics] (Southworth *Deserted* 155). As a result of such attitudes, Hagar is often locked in the cold, damp attic while the fair Rose joins the family by the warm parlor fire.

---

<sup>10</sup> Rather than an isolated use of the Hagar myth, Janet Gabler-Hover argues that this Biblical figure became a trope in antebellum women's fiction, especially by Southern writers. In *Dreaming Black/Writing White*, she identifies thirteen novels written between 1850 and 1913 that draw in some way on this motif. Although discussing only a handful of them in detail, she identifies Nathaniel Parker Willis' 1827 poem, "Hagar in the Wilderness" as the text that "most likely catalyzed highly wrought white women's Hagar fiction" (Gabler-Hover 28). In marked contrast to Southworth's *The Deserted Wife*, many of the representations of Hagar in novels, paintings and poetry, depicted her as white. In *Dreaming Black/Writing White*, Gabler-Hover explores the socio-literary reasons behind this widespread disavowal of Hagar's blackness.

Although the narrator insists “It is very wrong to make remarks on the personal beauty or ugliness of children in their hearing” (Southworth *Deserted* 155), characters from all ages, stations and even races continue to physically denounce and even emotionally desert Hagar because of her dark skin. Ironically, at one point, the household’s black servant Cumbo even engages in this behavior. After informing the young girl that God “ ‘made my beautiful, lovely, good little Rosee’ ” but “ ‘De debil made you,’ ” she insists “ ‘nobody’s ever gwine to marry *you*—you’re too ugly and hateful’ ” (Southworth 165). Echoing Hagar’s relationship with Sarah in the Book of Genesis, Cumbo tells the dark youth that she shall be Rosalia’s “ ‘waitin’ maid’ ” (Southworth *Deserted* 165).

Years later, Cumbo’s mean-spirited remarks prove prophetic and the appropriateness of Hagar’s Biblical nickname becomes apparent. Although the young woman marries childhood friend Raymond Withers, he deserts her for the fair-skinned Rosalia. The moment the young man sets his eyes on the pale beauty, “his soul was absorbed” (Southworth *Deserted* 268). When his wife asks him what he thinks of her cousin, he gushes almost uncontrollably, “ ‘She is beautiful! beautiful! the most perfectly beautiful living thing I ever saw. In all my dreams of beauty, I never saw a vision of loveliness like that!’ ” (Southworth *Deserted* 268). Before long, Raymond insists the young girl come live with them and Hagar senses the all-too familiar pattern of desertion emerging. A few days before he leaves her, the young wife exclaims, “ ‘Yes, *Hagar!* that is my name, my fit name—what strange prophetic inspiration was it that made them drop my proper name of Agatha and call me ‘Hagar?’ ” [author’s italics] (Southworth *Deserted* 281).

In marked contrast to the case of her Biblical namesake, however, Hagar's skin tone and her condition of marital enslavement do not mutually construct or even reinforce each other. As the young woman abandons her (dark) tomboyish ways and embraces her role as a (white) wife and mother, her complexion gradually lightens. This whitewashing begins within days after her nuptials. Confronted by her husband's insistence, "you must grow tame my wild love," Hagar begins to both "pale and tremble" (Southworth *Deserted* 283, 287). Eager to please her spouse and make a success of her marriage, she tries to live according to his precepts. Abandoning hunting, horseback riding and many of her other wild ways, her emotional and epidural health suffers. Within several weeks, "The spirited, springy little figure was almost languid... the healthy crimson glow of her dark complexion had concentrated in a circumscribed purple spot on her cheek, leaving her contracted brow and quivering lip pallid" (Southworth *Deserted* 308).

When Hagar fully embraces the conventional gender role for (white) women and gives birth to twins, she relinquishes both the last traces of her wild, tomboyish ways and, by extension, the last traces of her dark complexion. As the narrator notes, pregnancy "had bleached her into a blonde.... she is many shades fairer... her carnation cheek has faded into a pale rose tint" (Southworth *Deserted* 336). As if ironically accounting for the loss of Hagar's dark hue, her twin girls are "duplicate miniatures of herself" (Southworth 336). Both possess her "fine blue-black hair," "long black lashes" and "crimson cheeks" (Southworth *Deserted* 336). While caring for her infants, Hagar continues to become more wan and pallid. Her long, dark ringlets once complimented her dark complexion, but they now accentuate her pale skin. At several points, she is

compelled to tie them back because “their falling, long and black, [on] each side of her pale thin face, increased its pallor by contrast” (Southworth *Deserted* 357).

Although both Hagar and Rosalia possess fair skin at this point in Southworth’s narrative, important racial differences remain. Rosalia is uniformly pale and by extension untaintedly white while Hagar has an appearance that is racially ambiguous. Even though her skin tone may have faded, remnants of her dark features frustrate efforts to see her as a “pure” white woman. Though blanched from giving birth, Hagar remains too dark to fit the ideal of an asexual white mother. In addition to lacking “naturally” fair skin, the young woman also does not conform to white “feminine” expectations of being docile and subservient. As a result, Raymond treats her as a black mistress with whom he can sow his sexual oats rather than a white wife with whom he can settle down. As was the fate of countless black women who became involved with white men in antebellum America, when Hagar loses her dark beauty, she also loses the interest of her husband. Within months after her appearance begins to fade, Raymond leaves her for what may be deemed a “real” white woman, Rosalia.

Raymond’s response to the birth of Hagar’s twins gives further credence to this conjecture. Rather than seeing the infants as a physical manifestation of his love for Hagar, he considers them an unwanted drain on her dark beauty. In a move perhaps connected to stereotypes that women of color are disinterested in their children, Raymond announces his intention to separate his wife from her babies. “ ‘They are to be sent away for *their own* sakes as well as yours’ ” [author’s emphasis] (Southworth *Deserted* 351). Raymond is disappointed that Hagar has been losing both “flesh” and “beauty” since giving birth (Southworth *Deserted* 351). He hopes that by removing the infants from his

(pale) wife, her former (dark) appearance will return. Ironically, when Hagar tries to assume the role of a (white) mother by asserting her devotion to the babies, her husband leaves her for the fair Rosalia. Within weeks, her spouse arranges an out-of-town rendezvous with the blonde-haired cousin and the two use the opportunity to run away together.

In marked contrast to the case of her Biblical namesake, however, Hagar's desertion does not restore her dark complexion. In many ways, it lightens her skin even further. After realizing her husband is enamored with her fair cousin, her face becomes "so ghastly in its pallor" that it frightens both Raymond and Rosalia (Southworth *Deserted* 379). Arriving several weeks after her desertion, Gusty is shocked to see how pale she has become. In a letter to his mother, he admits, "I never realized death" until seeing Hagar's "pallid forehead" and "white lips" (Southworth *Deserted* 438).

When Gusty returns Hagar to Heath Hall and she, in turn, returns to some of her former tomboyish behaviors, her complexion darkens again. Just entering the property gives her a "sense of independence" and "returning power" (Southworth *Deserted* 463). As a result, her "fair, wan, spiritual face" becomes "faintly flushed with returning life" (Southworth 463). Within weeks, she once again possesses "a crimson cheek blushing with pride" (Southworth *Deserted* 463).

Soon after arriving at Heath Hall, Hagar gives birth to her third and final child. The birth echoes her previous experience with pregnancy, but this time the infant's complexion has the opposite impact on her own appearance. In the same way her dark twins whitewashed the color from her skin, her "fair-skinned, blue-eyed, golden-haired boy" drains away her pallid appearance. Within months after delivering the light-skinned



child, Hagar resumes some of the “old and favorite pastimes” of her tomboyish girlhood (Southworth *Deserted* 480). Dressing “like a man” and cutting her hair in “short, boyish-looking curls” she participates in “forest hunts with horse and hounds” and “fishing excursions in a light skiff propelled by one oar” (Southworth *Deserted* 480). While such “half-savage habits” scandalize the neighbors, they reconnect the young woman with her original “health, strength, and life” (Southworth *Deserted* 480, 481). By autumn, such tomboyish physical activity has transformed her once pallid and wan body into a “form erect and robust, her limbs full and rounded, her cheeks crimson” (Southworth *Deserted* 481). Recalling Southworth’s introductory preface to the novel, the young woman once again displays the (dark) glow of (white) health.

Hagar’s return to outdoor activity is not the only type of tomboyish behavior with which she can be connected after returning to Heath Hall. Later in the narrative, she is placed in the unconventional position of supporting her children and chooses an equally unconventional method by which to do so. While contemplating possible tasks “she could herself do for a living” (Southworth *Deserted* 500), such gender-appropriate professions as sewing and teaching come to mind. A combination of Hagar’s tomboyish past behavior and her equally tomboyish present outlook, however, causes her to reject these ideas. In light of her childhood disinterest in feminine accomplishments, “[h]ow should *she* live by her needle, who had not sufficient knowledge of that branch of industry to serve her in making and repairing her own wardrobe?” (Southworth *Deserted*

500). In the same way, her newly restored sense of independence would make life as a servile teacher “impossible” (Southworth *Deserted* 501).<sup>11</sup>

After eliminating such conventional occupations, Hagar chooses a comparatively bold and even immodest one as a public singer. In many ways, her decision is fueled by her tomboyish rebellion against the confines of (white) women’s gender roles.

Dissatisfied with the “female sphere” of home and family, Hagar longs for a sense of male freedom and adventure. As the narrator notes, life as a professional singer “would give her an opportunity of seeing that ‘world’ so attractive to her eager and inquiring mind, and hitherto so completely hidden from her” (Southworth *Deserted* 501 - 2).

Similar to Hagar’s other tomboyish actions, her unconventional career choice becomes connected with—and even helps contribute to—her dark complexion. When sailor Patrick O’Murphy describes the new St. Cecilia, he uses such racialized phrases as “Hagar, the Egyptian... Hagar, the Gipsy—Hagar, the Indian” (Southworth *Deserted* 551). In a manner similar to Raymond’s fetishization of her complexion, men and women alike eroticize her “exotic” hue. In marked contrast to stereotypes about the libidinous nature of both dark women and “working” women, Hagar repels all advances. As O’Murphy informs Gusty, “the malice of [these] disappointed lovers” has earned her such nicknames as “ ‘the miser’ ” and “ ‘the prude’ ” (Southworth *Deserted* 552). The racialized and sexualized nature of Hagar’s career is exacerbated by the city in which she makes her debut. Before going aboard, the young woman gives a series of highly successful concerts in a locale that is (in)famous for its connections to both slavery and prostitution: New Orleans.

---

<sup>11</sup> The same could not be said, however, for Southworth herself. At several times during both her married and single life she turned to teaching for economic support. Her first novel, *Retribution* (1849), in fact, was written in the evenings after teaching.

Southworth's *The Deserted Wife*, however, does not end with this image of Hagar as a racially ambiguous and tomboyishly independent singer. In the final pages of the novel, the young woman abandons her lucrative career and permanently sloughs off her dark hue to reunite with her husband. In a turn of events that recalls Abraham's assertion to the Egyptian Pharaoh that Sarah was his sister and not his wife, Rosalia proves to be Raymond's long-lost sibling. Fortunately, the young woman flees before the pair becomes sexually involved and thereby spares them from committing incest. Learning about this turn of events while performing in Europe, Hagar sees Raymond in the audience one evening and decides to return to the United States. Telling both her friends and her estranged spouse to meet her at Heath Hall in one year, she renovates the ancestral home. When the penitent Raymond arrives, she runs into his arms and reconciles with him.

In *Touching Liberty*, Karen Sanchez-Eppler makes the compelling observation that many nineteenth-century American writers saw "the body as an obstacle to freedom" (123). Although the critic had Emily Dickinson in mind when she penned these remarks, they could apply to E. D. E. N. Southworth's *The Deserted Wife* in general and Hagar Churchill in particular. In the same way the reclusive poet felt hampered by corporeality, so does Southworth's tomboyish main character. In marked contrast to the author's introductory remarks that outdoor play ensures felicity, this behavior often has the opposite effect on Hagar. When the young woman makes use of her body—whether for tomboyish play, sexual attraction, or childbirth—she frequently finds herself being used. Echoing the racial charge that Southworth attributes to such rambunctious behavior, Hagar becomes denigrated, enslaved and even abandoned. As a result, no mention is

made of the young woman's bodily movements or corporeal appearance in the final pages of novel. In many ways, she ceases to have a body and becomes a type of mythical or allegorical presence.

In addition to causing *The Deserted Wife* to end on a note of conventionally (white) femininity rather than subversively (dark) feminism, these events allow Hagar to shrug off her blackness. The young woman is not heroic because she has tomboyishly achieved success in her own right. Rather, she is presented as a heroine because she has chosen to permanently abandon her unconventional ways and embrace the conventional role of wife and mother. Upon reuniting with her spouse in the final pages of the novel, much attention is given to her love for the children in general and her wayward spouse in particular. Leading her husband to "the boy he had never seen," she proudly lifted "this child up from his morning sleep, stood him on the floor in the sun-light to waken up in his beauty!" (Southworth *Deserted* 584). When Raymond asks " 'what is his name, mine own Hagar?,' " she responds " 'Raymond! but for distinction sake, as well as that because he is a sunbeam, we call him Ray!' " [author's emphasis] (Southworth 584). This nickname bestowed upon the young boy brings Hagar's connection to her Biblical namesake full circle. In the same way God promised Hagar that He would " 'make of [Ishmael] a great nation' " (Gen. 21.18), the son of Southworth's character also seems destined for greatness. With his mother likening him to a sunbeam, the infant recalls Christ's assertion, "I am the light of the world."

Similar to nearly every other episode in *The Deserted Wife*, the parallels are not without their accompanying set of racial implications. Whereas Ishmael was both half-black and "took for him a wife from the land of Egypt" (Gen. 21.21), Ray is

unmistakably Caucasian. Similar to his father, he has fair skin, “pink feet” and “golden curls” (Southworth *Deserted* 584). In marked contrast to his Biblical antecedent, therefore, the citizens of Ray’s “great nation” will be of seemingly untainted white pedigree.

The white supremacist overtones in these details are exacerbated by both Hagar’s decision to return to her native Maryland and to renovate Heath Hall. After the young woman married and moved North, her family’s estate deteriorated and the land—recalling the fate of Biblical Hagar once again—degenerated into a useless desert. Upon her return from Europe, Hagar uses the money from her singing career to restore the Hall and its surrounding environment. In addition to symbolically rebuilding the mansion’s foundation, she also replenishes the estate’s once-fertile soil. By the time her husband returns, Heath Hall is “the most fertile and productive *plantation* in Maryland” [my emphasis] (Southworth *Deserted* 585).

In this way, Hagar acquiesces to not only the codes of white women but those of Southern white women. These details offer a possible explanation why the young woman’s blackness is eradicated in the final chapters of the novel. As Janet Gabler-Hover notes, “The victory of Hagar... is contingent on the defeat of the accusation that she is black” (3). Through an ironic recombination of E. D. E. N. Southworth’s name, the conclusion of *The Deserted Wife* showcases the *worth* of the *Edenic South*. Hagar’s reconstruction of Heath Hall can be seen as a metaphor for the redemption of the proslavery South and genteel Southern womanhood. Even though Southworth’s introductory preface claims that the novel pivots around the tomboyish means to prevent divorce, a racially charged agenda is also at play. Through Hagar’s restoration of her

family's estate to its former Jeffersonian glory, the novel is also a commentary on the current decline but possible future rejuvenation of the region. Not surprisingly, this process is predicated on a plantation economy and thus, one may assume, black labor. Although Hagar employs German carpenters to renovate Heath Hall, no mention is made of the men and women who work the fields. Given the estate's location in the racially charged state of Maryland during the antebellum period, the use of African Americans seems implicit. As a result, Southworth's *The Deserted Wife* is "the story of a woman who, moving out from the circle of male protection, ultimately and happily returns to it" (Harris 130) because doing so means a permanent return to whiteness.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> As in many of the other narratives highlighted in this study, Hagar is not the only female figure to possess either a dark hue or a tomboyish nature in *The Deserted Wife*. Although not as pronounced as the main character, these qualities also appear in Sophie Churchill. In the opening pages of the novel, Hagar's guardian aunt is described as "a pretty girl of round petite form, of clear pale olive complexion, large soft brown eyes, and dark chestnut hair" (Southworth *Deserted* 36–7). Although not explicitly connected to a black African heritage like the Egyptian Hagar, her skin tone nevertheless possesses a racial charge. As numerous historians have noted, "olive" was a common designation for figures of mixed racial background during the nineteenth century.

Coupled with Sophie's racially suggestive skin tone is her tomboyish gift for handling horses. While out riding with Reverend Withers, her steed is spooked and begins galloping wildly. Although the animal violently jerks and dashes, she is able to maintain control. After successfully fording a river with the crazed animal, she calms him and rejoins the minister. Impressed by her bravery and skill during the frightening adventure, Withers calls her a "celebrated horsewoman" and even a "heroine" (Southworth *Deserted* 59). Contributing to this characterization, Emily May quips after hearing about the incident, "Sophie is the best rider of all the ladies of this county....Her horsemanship is merely habit—she has been accustomed to ride from infancy" (Southworth *Deserted* 59).

Similar to her ward Hagar, however, Sophie's adherence to tomboyish codes of "Real Womanhood" cannot save her from entanglement in an ill-fated marriage. Soon after the incident with the horse, Reverend Withers forces her to become his bride. Although aware that the young woman does not love him but Lt. Gusti Wilde, he sinisterly insists, "My little Sophie, my little fawn, you shall be Mrs. Withers in three weeks, just as sure as you live!" (Southworth *Deserted* 91). Afraid to disobey his wishes and trapped by his public announcement of their engagement, the young woman agrees and the pair is soon wed. Moments after the ceremony, however, the minister's son Raymond reveals that Sophie has been cruelly deceived. Unbeknownst to anyone, Reverend Withers suffers from a severe and often violent mental illness.

Although her life may be in danger, Sophie refuses to either annul her marriage or abandon her spouse. Recalling the minister's earlier instance that a wife ought to have "no wish beyond the well ordering of her dwelling, the propriety of her dress, her tables, her manner and conversation" (Southworth *Deserted* 76), she vows to remain with him. "Thus softened by pity, and inspired by her own high ideal of duty, she determined to devote herself to the tranquility of his shrunken and tortured life..." (Southworth *Deserted* 130). Raymond insists this course of action is a "useless, objectless sacrifice" [author's emphasis] (Southworth *Deserted* 130). At one point, he even likens her decision to martyrdom. "I do believe, Sophie, that it was your being brought up in that room pictured with the martyrs, that has given this

Similar to the vast majority of Southworth's fiction, *The Deserted Wife* was both penned and released serially. The nearly six hundred page text made its debut in the August 1849 issue of *The Saturday Evening Post*, and ran consecutively for four months. Since each chapter of the novel was written and published weekly, the writer couldn't go back and alter elements that later seemed contradictory or that did not adhere to her overall vision. Any inconsistencies that arose during composition remained.

Even when the narrative's message is unclear, E. D. E. N. Southworth's *The Deserted Wife* provides a compelling meditation on the cross-pollination of gender and race in antebellum America. While the author was aware that existing outside of (white) women's gender roles can empower, she was also cognizant that it can penalize. As the trajectory of Hagar's experiences indicate, such behavior can lead to ridicule, exploitation, and even abandonment.

Ten years later, in the wildly popular *The Hidden Hand*, Southworth revisited this interest in the intersection of tomboyishness and blackness. In this narrative, however, her vision of the way in which gender and race mutually construct each other is more clearly—and uniformly—articulated. Whereas the writer's use of racialized white tomboyism was confusing and even contradictory in her 1849 text, her use of it in the wildly popular *The Hidden Hand* nearly a decade later was both synoptic and sophisticated. Rather than fluctuating between a source of power and a source of persecution, as it did for Hagar, blackness for Capitola becomes a consistent means of strength. Building on her racially charged theories of "physical cultivation" from *The*

---

singular bias to your character' " (Southworth *Deserted* 141). In spite of such warnings, Sophie remains with her husband—to the detriment of her physical and emotional health—until his death several years later.

*Deserted Wife*, Southworth takes the paradigm one step further. Rather than simply predicating (white) health on a (dark) glow, she locates (white) gender deviancy within a (black) racial economy. In order to truly escape from the confines of white women's gender roles, Southworth's tomboy must not only shrug off her disempowering feminine attributes, but also her paradoxically disempowering skin color. Instead of viewing the young woman's blackness as a site of possible punishment or subjugation, it paradoxically allows her to resist and even defy such positions. Because Capitola's racial ambiguity exempts her from (white) women's gender codes, it also permits her to circumvent (white) patriarchal culture. This reconfiguration allows both Capitola's tomboyishness and the dark hue that accompanies it to constitute a consistent form of power.



#### **Part IV. "Raising Cain":**

##### **Capitola Black(face), Minstrelized Tomboyism and Southworth's *The Hidden Hand***

During the period in which E. D. E. N. Southworth's *The Hidden Hand* was written and released, (white) women's gender roles experienced a period of profound change. Throughout the mid-nineteenth century, the advent of industrialization, urbanization and westward expansion radically transformed the place of Caucasian women in American culture. As Ann Douglas argues in *The Feminization of American Culture*, these figures went from actively producing goods to passively consuming them. Instead of manufacturing such items as soap, thread, candles and cloth themselves at home, middle-class white women purchased them at stores.

No longer required to make material or economic contributions to the family, they were expected to offer spiritual gifts. Throughout the nineteenth century, women were believed to be more Christian than their male counterparts. As Susan Coultrap-McQuinn notes, many Americans "insisted that 'true women' were naturally domestic, submissive, and morally pure" (*Doing* 9). As a result, they could serve as an antidote to the sinful nature of men and, by extension, the sinful nature of the (male) workplace. In this way, the home became a heavenly safehaven from the outside world rather than an extension of it. Known as the "Cult of True Womanhood," these precepts about the so-called separate sphere of domesticity permeated antebellum America.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> In recent years, a heated debate has emerged over whether these new roles for women made them more subordinate or more significant. In *Doing Literary Business*, for instance, Susan Coultrap-McQuinn argues, "The separation between home and business meant that the control of economic resources shifted from the home to employed males in the marketplace, leaving women and children in the middle-class or affluent home, who did not have income-producing jobs, in a more subordinate position" (9). Meanwhile, in *Sensational Designs*, Jane Tompkins asserts that the Cult of True Womanhood created a powerful platform from which women could successfully influence men's behavior and, by extension, American society.

Although gender-appropriate behavior has always been predicated on race, class and even geographic region, antebellum attitudes that women's place was in the home brought such elements to the forefront. For countless minority and working-class women whose labor both inside and outside the home was necessary for survival, these ideals were laughably unrealistic. Without the benefit of their paid and unpaid work, the families of many immigrant and blue-collar women could not have sustained themselves. In light of these race and class biases, numerous nineteenth-century "True Women" were also literal and figurative "Fair Maidens." In addition to possessing a spiritual nature that was "lily white," these predominantly middle-class, Anglo-American women also had light skin tones and blonde hair.

First serialized in 1859, Southworth's *The Hidden Hand* both arose from and collapsed into these issues. Throughout the narrative, its tomboyish main character rebels against codes of conduct for "True Women." The young girl defiantly goes out riding alone, shockingly uses slang, and even scandalously cross-dresses as a boy. In spite of Capitola's efforts to defy gender "appropriate" behavior, she cannot completely liberate herself from these strictures. While the spunky figure may be able to escape the expectations of her sex, she cannot escape those connected to her race. As a Caucasian woman, Capitola remains under the control of white patriarchal society. In order to distance herself from this system of subjugation, she must renounce more than her sex. To truly exist outside of societal expectations and obtain a degree of social, sexual and even economic freedom she must also escape her skin color. In short, the white woman must find some way to cease being white.

Coupled with changes in (white) women's gender roles during the 1840s when *The Hidden Hand* was released, a new mode of performance also emerged that allowed white (male) actors to flirt with the possibility of no longer being white. By covering their faces with burnt cork, Caucasian men could occupy the position, however temporarily, of the racial Other. Embodying such blackface characters as Zip Coon, they could express political sentiments, tell sexual jokes, and behave in comedic ways that would have been unacceptable for whites. In this way, while minstrel stereotypes denigrated blacks, they simultaneously—and paradoxically—liberated whites.

In an attempt to free herself from the confines of both her gender and her race, the central character in E. D. E. N. Southworth's *The Hidden Hand* practices what may be characterized as "minstrelized tomboyism." Although ostensibly Caucasian, Capitola possesses numerous links to blackness in general and blackface minstrelsy in particular. Raised in an environment that is commonly cited as the birthplace of blackface in the United States, the Bowery, the young woman possesses a racially suggestive dark hue and engages in such minstrelized antics as cross-dressing and prankery. Unlike the experiences of predecessor Hagar Churchill, whose Biblical-inflected blackness often led to punishment, Cap's adoption of a tomboyism that is refracted through minstrelsy allows her to successfully circumvent (white) patriarchal society. Moreover, because her donning of a black mask is metaphoric and not literal (like those of the performers, it could be washed off at any time), her adoption of a minstrelized tomboyism gives her the libratory benefits without the pitfalls of this racialized position. Recalling the contradictory messages about slavery in many of Southworth's other novels, Cap can

reap the rewards of “playing in the dark” without jeopardizing her superiority over “real” black characters.

In *Blackface, White Noise*, Michael Rogin argues “Blackface, the performance of the white man’s African American, opens the door to the meanings of whiteness in the United States” (27). While the work of Eric Lott and David Roediger illustrate the ways in which minstrelsy helped engender the white working-class, the minstrelized tomboyism in E. D. E. N. Southworth’s *The Hidden Hand* suggests that it may have also shaped the construction of another cultural group. In the same way “burnt cork contaminated every white American political perspective on race” (Rogin 43), it also seems to have influenced the literary representation of Caucasian tomboys. Although E. D. E. N. Southworth titled her novel “The Hidden Hand,” the importance of minstrelsy in the rebellion against white women’s gender roles may have constituted its hidden message in many ways.

From the moment Southworth’s tomboyish main character is born, she enters a racially charged, minstrelized world. Cap’s mother delivers her not only while occluded behind a veil of black crepe, but also while being held hostage by men who are similarly masked. In an attempt to eliminate competing heirs and gain control of the family fortune, Capitola’s uncle has murdered her father and placed her pregnant mother in a secluded cottage. Although Gabriel Le Noir and his villainous associate assume the mother-to-be can deliver her baby alone, complications arise and they are forced to seek assistance. In order to hide their identity and the identity of their captive, they drape their faces with black fabric. When they approach mulatto Nancy Grewell and forcibly enlist her services as a midwife, she is understandably shocked by their appearance. In a

passage Southworth places in italics, Nancy tells Major Warfield, “ ‘*their faces were covered with black crepe*’ ” (Southworth *Hidden* 18). Upon arriving at the cottage, her horror increases when she meets the expectant mother and sees “ ‘*her whole face and head completely covered with black crepe, drawn down and fastened securely around her throat, leaving only a small slit at the lips and nose to breathe through*’ ” [author’s emphasis] (Southworth *Hidden* 20).

While the veils worn by Capitola’s mother and her captors are made of fabric and not burnt cork, they recall the defining facet of minstrelsy. Similar to countless white performers, the trio has donned a type of black mask. Giving further credence to this conjecture is the title Southworth chose for the chapter in which her main character’s birth takes place. Rather than dubbing the section “Black Veils” after Grewell’s description of the disguises, she chose a title that is more suggestive of minstrelsy: “The Masks.”

The racialized circumstances of Capitola’s birth carry over into her childhood experiences. Although the youth’s mother survives childbirth and is capable of caring for an infant, she does not raise her. Aware that her evil brother-in-law will murder the babe, she gives the newborn away. As the mulatto Nancy Grewell prepares to leave the birthing room, Cap’s mother begs her to take the squalling child: “ ‘conceal the child under your shawl, and take her with you when you go!’ ” (Southworth *Hidden* 22). Eager to help the imprisoned woman and even more eager to save the life of an innocent baby, the black midwife agrees. As she tells Major Warfield, moments after hearing the desperate mother’s request, “ ‘I put on my bonnet, made a sort of sling around my neck of the silk handkercher, opened the large part of it like a hammock, and laid the little

sleeping babe there. I foiled my big shawl around my breast, and nobody [was] any the wiser' ” (Southworth *Hidden* 22).

Successfully smuggled from the birthing room, Capitola becomes a type of prohibited good or illegal contraband. While the term “contraband” has existed since the sixteenth century, it acquired a new, racially charged meaning in the early 1860s. During the American Civil War, the word was used to refer to runaway slaves. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, General Butler declared in 1861 that “slaves were contraband of war” (833). Although E. D. E. N. Southworth’s *The Hidden Hand* was first released in 1859, it was reprinted several times after the outbreak of hostilities. As a consequence, Capitola’s status as a “contraband” in the early pages of the novel can be seen as another instance of the young woman’s racialization. The racially suggestive implication of this term would not have been lost on later readers of Southworth’s text.

When the concealed Capitola begins to cry and is discovered by Black Donald a few pages later, her figurative status as a runaway slave is quickly transformed into a literal one. Instead of murdering the deceptive midwife and her wailing cargo, the opportunistic villain sees a chance to turn a profit. Rather than allowing Nancy to return home, he decides to sell both the free mulatto and her contraband white infant into slavery. Presenting the light woman to an interested buyer, Black Donald offers the infant as if she were Nancy’s actual daughter. Although the dealer is hesitant to purchase such an old woman and such a young child, Black Donald insists, “ ‘I want to get rid of the pair of them... so name the price you are willing to give’ ” (Southworth *Hidden* 24). After a brief period of bargaining, the pair agrees on an amount and the transaction is

made. As a result, the ostensibly Caucasian character is positioned as black or at least of mixed racial ancestry.

Although a well-timed shipwreck spares Nancy and Capitola from enslavement, it does not break their familial association. In fact, Black Donald's treatment of Cap as if she were Nancy's actual daughter foreshadows the mulatto woman becoming her surrogate parent. Separated from her father by death and from her mother by circumstance, Capitola is raised by Nancy. For more than the first decade of her life, the mulatto midwife is the only family she knows. The rearing of white children by black mammies was a common practice in the antebellum South, but Nancy and Capitola settle in New York City.

In the same way Capitola's childhood experiences can be read in racially charged ways, so can her physical appearance. Not only does the infant possess "jet black hair," "black eyebrows," and "long, thick, black lashes" (Southworth *Hidden* 33), but when Nancy Grewell is asked if Capitola has any identifying traits, she points to a birthmark on the infant's hand. "'In the middle of her left palm was the perfect image of a crimson hand, about half an inch in length'" (Southworth *Hidden* 28). In both past and present criticism, this image is commonly read as a symbol of Cap's kinship with Black Donald, the locail villain whose hands are rumored to have turned red from the blood of all his victims. Although Capitola's crimson mark does align her with this character, an extra-textual association is also possible. The young girl's birthmark recalls the fate of Cain in the Book of Genesis.<sup>14</sup> After learning that the jealous sibling had committed fratricide,

---

<sup>14</sup> The life of Cain may also form a possible explanation for Capitola's unusual name. After settling in the land of Nod, east of Eden, Cain "became the founder of a city, which he named after his son Enoch" (Gen. 4.17). Not only is Enoch often referred to as the Capital or "first city" (Mellinkoff xii), but Southworth resided in the American capital, Washington, D.C. while penning *The Hidden Hand*.

the Lord condemned him to wander the earth. As a restless vagabond who lacked land, a home or connections to a particular place, Cain was fearful that “ ‘anyone may kill me at sight’ ” (Gen. 4.14). Determined that this not happen, God put a protective mark on him and declared “If anyone kills Cain, Cain shall be avenged sevenfold” (Gen. 4.15).

While seldom mentioned in criticism about *The Hidden Hand*, Capitola also has a brother. Unlike Cain from the Book of Genesis, the young woman does not murder her twin sibling; he is stillborn.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, similar to the Biblical figure, she also seems to live a protected life. From the day of her birth, Cap gets herself into and out of numerous scrapes. Without suffering so much as a bruise, she navigates the rough streets of the Bowery, rescues Clara from the base Craven Le Noir, and single-handedly captures the legendary villain Black Donald.

Although theologians have quarreled over the exact nature of the mark of Cain, it is most commonly envisioned as a type of tattoo. According to the *New American Bible*, “[t]he use of tattooing for tribal marks has always been common among the nomads of the Near Eastern deserts” where the story takes place (*New American Bible* 7n). Speculation about the various symbols God could have tattooed on Cain ranges from the tetragrammaton (YHWH)—the “most holy sign conveying divine protection”—to a single letter from the Torah (Mellinkoff 28).<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Forming a further link between Capitola and the Biblical story of fratricide, Elizabeth Cady Stanton argues in *The Woman's Bible* that numerous scholars insist “Cain and Abel were twins” (28).

<sup>16</sup> Regardless of the exact nature of the tattoo, a heated debate rages over whether the marking was a positive sign of forgiveness or a negative one of punishment. Those who advocate a redemptive view of the mark argue that it commemorated Cain's repentance and, by extension, served as an “emblem of honor and protection” (Mellinkoff 28). On the other hand, those who view the mark negatively insist that “[t]he token printed on Cain is to identify him and his evil deed so that everyone will know who he is and what he has done. Stigmatized with his disgraceful mark Cain... must flee because of the shame attached to it” (Mellinkoff 34).



In addition to possessing a crimson birthmark on her hand, Capitola also has the date of her birth tattooed on her arm. Soon after arriving in New York, Nancy Grewell asked Herbert Greyson to take the infant and mark “upon her forearm in India ink her name and birthday” (Southworth *Hidden* 28).<sup>17</sup> In this way, not only does Capitola share similar markings with Cain—both a tattoo and a birthmark—but they are also located on similar parts of the body. As Ruth Mellinkoff argues in *The Mark of Cain*, “for one reason or another a continual significance has been attached to placing signs or marks on heads (forehead) and hands (or arm)” (27). Although Capitola’s forehead is unmarred, her arm bears the tattoo while the palm of her hand possesses the crimson birthmark.

A ritual tattoo, however, is not the only manner in which the mark of Cain has been interpreted. Recalling the crimson hand on Capitola’s palm once again, scholars have also viewed it as a dark discoloration of the skin, like a birthmark. This interpretation has caused the mark of Cain to be read in racially charged ways. Especially in recent years, theologians have argued that God’s mark protected Cain because it identified him as a racial Other. According to Ruth Mellinkoff, the “cursing of Ham and the cursing of Cain were two favorite explanations offered for the origin of the black races. Through black skin is more commonly ascribed to Ham and his son (Canaan), Negroes were... thought to have been descendants of Cain, who was blackened by God, thus identifying the mark of Cain with blackness” (76). Differentiated by this

---

<sup>17</sup> Rather than forming another similarity between Capitola and the Book of Genesis, the tattoo distances her from it. In marked contrast to the Christian image God placed on Cain, Cap’s tattoo symbolizes a pagan holiday. According to Nancy Grewell, the young woman was born on Halloween, “Oct. 31<sup>st</sup>, 1832” (Southworth *Hidden* 28).

skin coloration, Cain was identified as “tainted” or “taboo” and was thus able to wander the desert unadulterated.<sup>18</sup>

In light of this racially charged way of viewing Cain, the Biblical story became a common skit in blackface shows. As W. H. Lhamon argues, the fratricide narrative can be found at “every phase of blackface performance” (*Raising* 118). From the theatrical origins of minstrelsy to its appearance in vaudeville and Hollywood film, countless troupes performed some version of Cain and Abel. As a result, in addition to being associated with boisterous or rowdy behavior, the phrase “raising Cain” also suggests minstrelized conduct.<sup>19</sup>

When thirteen-year-old Capitola makes her appearance in Chapter IV of the novel, her minstrelized past is yoked with her current tomboyish personality. In addition to possessing a birthmark that recalls the mark of Cain, the “madcap” young woman specializes in “raising Cain.” Recalling both minstrel performances and stereotypes about the imitative nature of blacks, one of Cap’s favorite antics is being “ ‘a droll.... a mimic’ ” (Southworth *Hidden* 175).<sup>20</sup> Contributing to and even helping to construct Cap’s connection to blackface is her Americanized surname. Although born Le Noir,

---

<sup>18</sup> Two years before the serial publication of *The Hidden Hand*, Southworth drew on the Cain and Abel story in another one of her novels. Not only does the main character in *Vivia, or The Secret Power* (1857) quote the famous phrase “Cain, where is thy brother Abel?” when asking Austin about his brother, but he responds “I might ask, ‘Am I my brother’s keeper?’ ” (Southworth *Vivia* 518). Unlike *The Hidden Hand*, however, this exchange is the only time the Biblical story of fratricide is referenced the text. Not only do none of the characters discuss it again, but none of the events in *Vivia* echo it.

<sup>19</sup> In *The Mark of Cain*, Ruth Mellinkoff argues that such comic presentations of this Biblical narrative constitute one of the most “intentionally distorted interpretations of the mark of Cain” (81). Although her discussion focuses on an English mystery play known as the Wakefield *Mactacio Abel* (*The Killing of Abel*), minstrel performances operate in similar ways.

<sup>20</sup> Blackface minstrelsy, like the Cain and Abel story, recurs in several of Southworth’s other novels. In her 1852 narrative *The Discarded Daughter*, for instance, a young woman threatens to paint her face “ ‘black for the rest of [her] life, and sell [herself] to base servitude’ ” if an unwanted suitor succeeds in his desire to forcibly marry her (Southworth *Discarded* 129). This yoking together of blackface and stereotypes about libidinous black sexuality mirrors minstrelsy’s engagement with skin color as well as salacious sexual behavior.

Major Warfield refers to his ward as “Miss Black.” More than simply being associated with racially charged names and colors, Capitola is also simianized at various points in Southworth’s narrative. Upon first meeting the boisterous young woman, for instance, Major Warfield describes her as both an “ ‘impertinent monkey’ ” and a “ ‘ridiculous little ape’ ” (Southworth *Hidden* 36).

What may be called Capitola’s “minstrelized tomboyism” is not limited to her physical appearance or comedic behavior while residing at Hurricane Hall. It can be traced to her childhood in New York City, the geographic origin of blackface. Of the numerous Gotham neighborhoods where Nancy could have raised Capitola, she chose a region that has strong connections with minstrelsy: the Bowery. As Eric Lott argues in *Love and Theft*, not only did the area’s rough b’hoys constitute the main audience for minstrelsy, but the theaters of the Bowery were among the first to showcase this performance mode. Echoing the trajectory of Cap’s birth in Virginia and her relocation to New York, one of the most popular blackface troupes at the Bowery Theater during the early 1840s was the *Virginia Minstrels* (Lhamon *Raising* 47).

Raised in an environment that is infused with both minstrelsy and youth rebellion, Southworth’s Capitola adopts many of the Bowery’s manners and mores. In addition to adopting the slang of the b’hoys, she cross-dresses as one of these rowdy, working-class figures. After being evicted from her home and abandoned by Nancy, Capitola is both unable to find honest work and is in constant sexual peril on the street. Seeing the ease with which young men can find employment and protect themselves, she decides to replace her petticoats with pants. Recounting this transformation to the police, she matter-of-factly declares, “ ‘I went into that little back parlor *a girl*, and I came out *a boy*,

with a suit of pants and jacket, with my hair cut short and a cap on my head!’ ” [author’s emphasis] (Southworth 46). Moments after making the alteration, the young woman is able to find ample means of employment. As she attests, “ ‘...from that day forth I was happy and prosperous! I found plenty to do! I carried carpet-bags, held horses, put in coal, cleaned sidewalks, blacked gentlemen’s boots, and did everything an honest lad could turn his hand to!’ ” (Southworth 47)

When Major Warfield arrives in New York looking for his female ward, he encounters this cross-dressed incarnation. Scanning the crowd for the young man who offered to carry his luggage, “Old Hurricane saw sitting astride a pile of boxes at the corner store, a very ragged lad, some thirteen years of age... He was a handsome boy, too, notwithstanding the deplorable state of his wardrobe” (Southworth *Hidden* 33). After Capitola is arrested for wearing men’s clothes and brought into the precinct, Warfield realizes that the young *man* who helped him with his luggage is actually the young *lady* who has been placed in his guardianship. Days after obtaining custody of the youth, he returns with her to his home in Virginia. Although Cap is surrounded by finery at Hurricane Hall, the tomboyish girl longs for the adventure, freedom and excitement of the Bowery. During one especially dull day at the mansion, she complains “ ‘Yes, I *am*! just decomposing above ground for want of having my blood stirred, and I wish I was back in the Bowery! Something was always happening *there*! One day a fire, the next day a fight, another day a fire and a fight together’ ” [author’s italics] (Southworth *Hidden* 173). Infuriated by such inappropriate desires, Warfield fears that Capitola will never “ ‘leave off this Bowery boy talk’ ” (Southworth *Hidden* 173). For the rest of her

life, she will remain one of those rogues who is perpetually “ ‘spoiling for a fight’ ” (Southworth *Hidden* 173).

Even when not behaving as a “minstrelized tomboy,” Capitola remains associated with racially charged characters and events. As did many black women at the hands of white men, she suffers rape attempts by both Black Donald and Craven Le Noir.<sup>21</sup> In each instance, however, the young girl uses her tomboyish craftiness and Bowery b’hoy wiles to escape. By cunningly playing the role of an innocent young girl, she is able to get Craven Le Noir to naïvely remove his saddle and Black Donald to unknowingly sit over a trap door. Such clever ruses not only enable Capitola to avoid a racialized fate, but also liken her to tricksters from African American folklore.<sup>22</sup> Henry Louis Gates, Jr. argues that these figures are inextricably connected with “individuality, satire, parody, irony, magic... ambiguity,... chance,... disruption,... and betrayal” (*Signifying* 6); so is Southworth’s Capitola. Throughout *The Hidden Hand*, the willful young woman functions as a comedic foil to people, places and even ideological positions. She disrupts gender boundaries, betrays male authority, satirizes sexual stereotypes, and magically escapes peril, all while incessantly asserting her unique and powerful individuality. In this way, Major Warfield’s designation of Capitola as a “monkey” for her tomboyish

---

<sup>21</sup> It should be noted that Capitola is not the only female character to be threatened with rape. Several other white women face a similar peril. Decades prior to the opening of the novel, for instance, Gabriel Le Noir creates a ruse to give the appearance that has slept with Major Warfield’s wife, Marah Rocke. While the young wife is sleeping, he crawls into bed with her. When the Major returns home, he finds the “couple” in bed together and assumes that they have been intimate. Several chapters later, his son, the villainous Craven Le Noir, attempts a similar act by trying to force the innocent Clara Day into marriage. Although he never mentions violating the young women, such behavior is implicit given the degree of his moral depravity.

<sup>22</sup> In addition to permeating African American literature and culture, trickster figures also recur in Biblical narratives. “Israelites tend to portray their ancestors and thereby to imagine themselves as underdogs, as people outside the establishment who achieve success in roundabout, irregular ways. One of the ways marginals confront those in power and achieve their goals is through deception and trickery” (Niditch 18). Although she does not identify the Biblical character with whom Capitola shares the greatest affinity, Cain, she does assert that women are among the most common tricksters in the Book of Genesis.

antics may not have gone far enough. Echoing the title of Henry Louisa Gates, Jr.'s study of tricksters, Old Hurricane could have referred to the young woman as a "signifying monkey."

In addition to sharing a connection with figures from African American folklore, Capitola also possesses a kinship with several black characters in Southworth's novel. As Katherine Nicholson Ings argues, the young woman's nickname, "Cap," "links her with 'Old Hat,' a black woman who nurses Cap's dying guardian, Granny Grewell" (133). Similar to the cross-dressing tomboy, "Hat appears to be genderless" (Ings 133). When Major Warfield and Parson Goodwin arrive at her "Witch's Hut," she is dressed in a "strange anomalous costume" that makes it difficult to determine her sex. Her "tall form was rigged out first in a long, red, cloth, petticoat, above which was buttoned a blue cloth surtot. A man's old black beaver hat sat upon the strange head and completed the odd attire" (Southworth *Hidden* 16). Echoing Capitola's seemingly charmed or magical life, Old Hat is both a fortune-teller and rumored to possess supernatural powers.

When Cap arrives at Hurricane Hall later in the narrative, she establishes a kinship with another character of color: her handmaid, Pitapat. Similar to her connection with Old Hat, their affiliation is based on names. Moments after being introduced to her new servant, Capitola observes, " '...I've got a 'pit' in my name and you've got a pit in yours' " (Southworth *Hidden* 76). Adding to this coincidence, the young woman lives in a room that also has a pit. Because most of the quarters " 'are not furnished, and in some, the chimneys are foul,' " the youth occupies "the room with the trap-door" (Southworth *Hidden* 71). Ruminating on her gothicized lodgings, Capitola asserts that the trap door

covers “ ‘a great black, deep vacuity, without bottom or sides’ ” or, in other words, a pit (Southworth *Hidden* 73).

Pitapat, like Capitola’s minstrelized childhood, can be linked with blackface. As Patricia Okker and Jeffrey R. Williams argue, the black housemaid is patterned after images on the minstrel stage. Not only does her name recall the onomatopoeic appellations of blackface characters, but she is “confined to being happy, foolish, and musical” (134). Presented as “poor little darkey” who is afraid of “ghoses” (Southworth *Hidden* 76), she displays the exaggerated facial expressions of many minstrel performers. After hearing a story about the haunted Hidden House, for instance, the handmaid’s eyes “threatened to burst from their sockets” (Southworth *Hidden* 76).

Echoing these characteristics, the pit in Capitola’s bedroom is also in dialogue with blackface. Although the trap door was originally intended to capture “Indians,” it becomes a trap for the only character in Southworth’s novel to directly engage in minstrelsy: the appropriately named Black Donald. During one of his many attempts to abduct Capitola, the evil villain “disguised himself as a negro” (Southworth *Hidden* 209). When this plan failed, he returned to Hurricane Hall and hid in Capitola’s bedroom. Although Donald is not blacked up when the young woman tricks him into falling into the bedroom’s pit, the sexual violence implicit in this attempt to capture Capitola makes his racialization all the more profound. By darkening the face of the lecherous Black Donald, Southworth places him in dialogue with stereotypes about the salacious nature of black men. As Deborah Gray White argues in *Ar’n’t I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South*, “[b]lack men and women were thought to have such insatiable sexual appetites that they had to go beyond the boundaries of their race to get satisfaction” (38).

Echoing these attitudes, Black Donald repeatedly describes his “uncontrollable desire” for Capitola, sinisterly demands “*I must have that girl*” and even refers to the virginal young woman as his “prize” [author’s italics] (Southworth *Hidden* 161, 163, 209).

This association between dark skin and dark sexual appetites is not limited to the villainous Donald. As a racialized character herself, the tomboyish Capitola is also placed in dialogue with the supposed libidinous nature of women of color. Recalling listings for the prefix “tom” in the *Oxford English Dictionary* that include slang for “prostitute,” Cap playfully engages stereotypes about sexual impropriety. During a discussion with Reverend Goodwin, the young woman confesses to having been “very indiscreet” (Southworth *Hidden* 183). Pressing her for details, Cap leads him to believe that her impropriety has been of a sexual nature. “ ‘Oh, sir, I’m afraid to tell you! you’d hate and despise me! you’d never speak to me again.... *but he was so handsome I couldn’t help liking him*’ ” [author’s italics] (Southworth 183, 184). Capitola then tearfully admits that the name of the “base deceiver” is Alfred Blenheim and “ ‘he’s *hid in the closet of my room*’ ” [author’s italics] (Southworth *Hidden* 185). When the minister prepares to confront the young man, Capitola abruptly ends the charade. Indignant that the pastor would think she has given “private interviews to a man,” she reveals that Alfred is the name of “ ‘Blenheim poodle that strayed away from some of the neighbor’s houses, and that I found in the woods and brought home and hid in my closet, for fear that he would be inquired after’ ” (Southworth *Hidden* 185).

In this instance, as in nearly all others, Capitola’s association with a dark hue does not enslave or even subjugate her. In marked contrast to the actual condition of black women in antebellum America, it liberates the young women from the restrictive



confines of white women's gender roles. By linking herself with various forms of blackness, Cap is able to escape the control of a (white) patriarchy symbolized by Major Warfield. When Old Hurricane threatens to punish her, she responds in a way that recalls stereotypes about the African American propensity for knife-fighting. If the Major " 'ever dishonored [her] person with a blow,' " she vows, " 'the—first—time—I—should—find—you—asleep—I—would—take—a—razor—and—' " (Southworth *Hidden* 188). Although Capitola later jokes that all she intended to do was " 'Shave your beard off smick, smack, smooove!' " (Southworth *Hidden* 188), her remarks go beyond mere tomboyish rebellion; they recall a complicated history of antagonism between (male) superiors and (female) subordinates as well as between (white) masters and (black) slaves.

In a compelling paradox, Capitola's empowering blackness does not eclipse her superiority over "legitimate" black characters. Similar to Hagar Churchill in *The Deserted Wife*, the young woman retains this important aspect of her whiteness. Throughout Southworth's *The Hidden Hand*, Cap has no trouble giving orders to black servants. Like Major Warfield, she speaks to them gruffly, as if they were subhuman, and often even threatens them with violence if they do not obey. When the young woman finds her horse unexpectedly lame one afternoon, she informs the stable-hands, " 'It must have been your carelessness, you good-for-nothing set of loungers! And if he is not well enough to take me to the fair to-morrow, at least, I'll have the whole set of you lamed for life!' " (Southworth *Deserted* 189 – 90). Given both the ease and frequency with which Capitola addresses black characters in this manner, she seems more like a

cruel white slave owner than a character who has her own elaborate kinship with blackness.

Interestingly, Capitola is not the only ostensibly white character to be associated with a dark hue in Southworth's *The Hidden Hand*. Echoing the empowered position occupied by the racialized tomboy, nearly all the Caucasian figures who have agency and independence in *The Hidden Hand* possess dark features. Both Gabriel Le Noir and his depraved son Craven are repeatedly described with long black locks of hair. Capitola's guardian, the tempestuous Major Warfield, has "heavy black brows" and a "bronzed" complexion (Southworth *Hidden* 8). Similarly, the villainous Black Donald has not only a "dark complexion," but a "black soul, black deeds, and... jet black hair and beard" (Southworth *Hidden* 156). Finally, both Marah Rocke and Capitola's mother, Mrs. Eugene Le Noir, have dark hair and features. Although these women are not as powerful as Capitola, their ability to survive abandonment, poverty and gross mistreatment is a testament to their strength.

Conversely, the characters who are the weakest and most exploited are those who possess light skin, fair features and blonde hair. By far, the most oft-cited example of this phenomenon is Clara Day. As numerous critics have pointed out, Clara is the ideal "True Woman." She is quiet, self-effacing, and even self-sacrificing. In marked contrast to countless contemporary novels that glorified the literal and figurative Fair Maiden, these qualities are not rewarded in *The Hidden Hand*. Although Clara may conform to true womanhood, she is not presented as an admirable character. After the death of her father, the young woman is first forced into the guardianship of the deceitful Gabriel Le Noir and later nearly forced into wedlock with his equally villainous son, Craven.

Significantly, she is spared from this fate by Capitola's daring heroics. Switching both clothes and places with the dark tomboy, Clara is able to escape from the Hidden House. As a result of such experiences, Capitola repeatedly warns her about the dangers of playing "the sentimental" (Southworth *Hidden* 308, 356).

Lest one think Southworth's representation of white weakness has a sexual bias, light-skinned men suffer the same fate in *The Hidden Hand*. Major Warfield's close friend and frequent houseguest, John Stone, possesses not only "fair skin, blue eyes, and light hair," but also a "quiet and lazy" personality (Southworth *Hidden* 360). When Capitola's reputation is slandered by Craven Le Noir, John adamantly refuses to challenge him to a duel. Although he cites his wife and family as the primary deterrents, Cap is convinced he is simply a coward. After bitterly declaring, " 'The men are all dead! if any really lived' " (Southworth *Hidden* 366), the young woman takes matters into her own hands. Writing Craven a letter, she demands " 'satisfaction' " and calls him out herself.

Although Capitola serves as a foil to weak white characters for the bulk of *The Hidden Hand*, she develops a kinship with them at the end of the narrative. The young woman dilutes her racialized rebellion against (white) women's gender roles by getting married. Acquiescing to a life as a wife and even mother, she no longer stands in opposition to the conventional behavior for Caucasian women. On the contrary, she has now conformed to the expectations of both her sex and her race. The once-defiant Capitola *Black* does what is expected of all *white* women. Symbolizing this decision, she marries a man who is appropriately named Herbert *Greyson*.

Similar to *The Deserted Wife*, this delicate combination of blackness with whiteness allows Capitola to be the text's heroine or, as Amy E. Hudock suggests, even its hero.<sup>23</sup> Even though the young woman does not conform to the traditional gender roles for white women, she does conform to their moral codes. Surrounded by both male and female characters who commit such "dark" acts as murder and betrayal, Capitola repeatedly proves that her moral nature is "lily white." In addition to capturing the villainous Black Donald, she also saves Clara Day from Craven Le Noir and helps reform the cantankerous Major Warfield.

Rather than constituting an incidental or even accidental facet of her characterization, therefore, Capitola's racialized tomboyism forms a crucial component of Southworth's *The Hidden Hand*. The young woman's association with various forms of blackness makes up an important part of her tomboyishly rebellious personality. Her acquisition of a dark hue and connection with minstrelsy allow her to distance herself from the confines of white women's gender codes. In a recently published essay, Lynette Carpenter argues that the primary issue E. D. E. N. Southworth seeks to undermine in her fiction "is that of gender" (18). Focusing on *The Hidden Hand*, Carpenter traces the way in which the author critiques "the division of the world into two sexes with mutually exclusive traits and roles" (Carpenter 18).

Although gender is a primary concern in *The Hidden Hand* and many of Southworth's other novels, the presence of racialized white tomboyism offers an alternative possibility. In addition to exploring the male/female binary, the Southern-born writer could also have sought to examine the dyad of black and white. More than

---

<sup>23</sup> For more on the ways in which Southworth's text allows its female character to be a hero rather than a heroine, see Amy E. Hudock's essays, "Challenging the Definition of Heroism in E. D. E. N. Southworth's *The Hidden Hand*" (*ATQ*, 9.1 March 1995).

simply addressing how “proper” behavior is predicated on gender, *The Hidden Hand* also considers how it is contingent on race. Incorporating elements from blackface minstrelsy and even black culture into her characterization of Capitola, E. D. E. N. Southworth formulated what could be characterized as a b(l)acklash against (white) women’s gender roles in her fiction.

## Part V. More Than Simply “Skin Deep”:

### Tomboyish Darkness in E. D. E. N. Southworth and the Emergence of a National Trend

Although this chapter focused on *The Deserted Wife* and *The Hidden Hand*, several other of Southworth’s novels contain racialized white tomboys. More than a half-dozen narratives the writer published during the 1850s, 1860s and 1870s showcase an ostensibly Caucasian female character whose spunk and vigor causes her to be repeatedly associated with a dark hue. The “wild, elf-like girl” Garnet Seabright in Southworth’s *The Discarded Daughter* (1852), for instance, not only possesses the “celerity of a monkey,” but also “crimson cheeks” and “rich dark hair” (Southworth 136, 137, vol. II 43). Similarly, in *Vivia; or, The Secret of Power* (1857), the appropriately named Helen Wildman has hair and eyebrows that are “jet black” (Southworth *Vivia* 61). Recalling the tomboyish pastimes of Capitola and the Africanist ancestry of Hagar, the rambunctious ten-year-old both hunts with a crossbow and possesses a black servant who is suggestively named “Uncle Pharaoh” (Southworth *Vivia* 60).

Echoing this trend is Harriette “Harry” Joy in Southworth’s 1858 novel *The Three Beauties*. Not only is the tomboyish young girl characterized as a “handsome swaggering hoiden,” but she also has Africanist features. The young woman is described with “wicked black eyes, and... clustering curls, kinkling like grape tendrils, in short, spiral, glistening black ringlets” (Southworth *Three* 48, 64).<sup>24</sup> In addition to containing characters with these racially suggestive traits, the novel recounts the failed union between a Native American woman and an Anglo man. After being jilted by her

---

<sup>24</sup> Although Harry has Africanist hair texture and facial features, it should be noted that these racializing traits do not extend to her skin tone. In addition to being characterized as “broad” and “boyish,” Harry’s brow is also presented as “white” (Southworth *Three* 64).

Caucasian lover for a white bride, the “wild forest girl” who was also the “dark, rich, [and] luxurious” leader of her tribe committed suicide (Southworth *Three* 55).

Romanticized by the community over the years, this tragic story of interracial love has been elevated to the near-mythic “Legend of Lover’s Leap.”

Containing not one but two racialized figures, Southworth’s 1863 narrative *The Fatal Marriage* takes this motif one step further. The “young Amazon” Lionne Delaforet has a complexion of “warm, rich, olive” and “shining hair, flashing eyes, quaintly curved eye-brows and long eye-lashes... [that are] intensely black” (Southworth 29, 30).<sup>25</sup> Repeatedly characterized as a “wild, untaught creature,” she is mistaken for a man while out hunting in the opening pages of the narrative (Southworth *Fatal* 65). Several chapters later, a second ostensibly Caucasian tomboy, Kate Kyte, is introduced. Similar to her tomboyish predecessor, this young woman is dressed as a “huntress” and described as a “wild, dark, gipsyish young girl” (Southworth *Fatal* 100). Recalling both the backdrop and the trajectory of *The Deserted Wife* once again, *The Fatal Marriage* is set in Maryland and the dark Lionne is jilted by her blonde lover for the fair-skinned Lady Adelaide. In an ironic twist, fellow tomboy Kate plays an instrumental role in these events. Not only does she reveal that Deville has wed both Lionne and Adelaide, but she also helps disseminate the gothicized information that the two women are long-lost relatives.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> It should be noted that Southworth either rescripts or misremembers her characterization of Lionne several pages later. In Chapter IV, she describes the young woman’s throat as “ivory” (Southworth *Fatal* 57). This instance, however, forms the only moment in the text when Lionne’s complexion seems contradictorily presented. Although the young woman is characterized as pale several other times in *The Fatal Marriage*, it is because she has been ill or frightened.

<sup>26</sup> Lest this discussion imply that all of Southworth’s white tomboys are racialized in some way, I did discover one narrative that defied this trend: Southworth’s 1869 novel, *How He Won Her*. Although nicknamed “Elifie” because of her “elfin charms” (Southworth *How* 50), the gender-bending young woman does not possess dark hair, skin or even features.

Although each of these texts contains a racialized tomboy, Southworth's use of tomboyish blackness varies from novel to novel and often even from chapter to chapter. As in both *The Hidden Hand* and *The Deserted Wife*, the specific ends or means of these elements differ. In some texts, racialized tomboyism serves a liberatory function by allowing ostensibly Caucasian characters to exist outside the confines of (white) women's gender roles. Meanwhile, in other narratives, tomboyish blackness occupies a more limiting and even stereotypical purpose; it simply announces a character's connection with evil. Although the precise use of gender and race in Southworth's work may vary, these texts can be placed on a continuum: all are concerned with exploring the ways in which tomboyishness and blackness mutually construct and even destruct each other.

At the same time, the racialization of Southworth's white tomboys marks the beginning of a phenomenon in American women's fiction. After the 1840s, seemingly Caucasian tomboys would be characterized in racially ambiguous ways for more than a century. During this period, the manner in which ostensibly Caucasian young women acquire a dark hue will both broaden and deepen. In addition to the "dark" characters with "black" features that Southworth depicts, it will expand to include young women with "brown," "sallow," "olive" and even simianized features.

In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha articulates her theory of racial "in-betweenness," a phenomenon whereby white women attain the status of surrogate otherness by occupying the imaginative place of people of color. Although Bhabha was referencing postcolonial literature when she penned these remarks, the same could be said about racialized white tomboys in general and Southworth's female figures in



particular. Although repeatedly characterized as dark, these ostensibly Caucasian figures do not “become” black. Echoing the *modus operandi* of minstrel performers, they merely slip the black mask over their white complexions. As Lynette Carpenter once pointed out, the work of antebellum American novelist E. D. E. N. Southworth “illustrates and upholds the principle of paradox” (18). While the critic was thinking of the way in which the author reconciled pious Christianity with irreverent comedy in her fiction, the same could be said about her use of gender and race. Although disempowering to African Americans, the possession of dark skin and features paradoxically empowered her white characters. In addition to forming another instance in which people of color shaped American cultural identity even as whites disavowed their contribution, this paradigm would come to be indicative of the way in which white tomboys were depicted in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century fiction. In the years to come, such prominent women writers as Louisa May Alcott, Sarah Orne Jewett and Willa Cather would consciously or unconsciously follow Southworth’s example. For the next ten decades, white tomboyism and its racialization would increasingly become inextricable. In numerous narratives by the nation’s women, references to gender-bending Caucasian characters would exist in tandem with references to dark features, black culture and blackface minstrelsy.

## **Chapter 2.**

### **Topsy and Topsy-Turvy Jo:**

#### **Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* and American Popular Culture**

As Elizabeth Janeway aptly notes, Jo March from Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* is "the tomboy dream come true" (97). More than any other character highlighted in this study, her name is synonymous with tomboyism. Although nearly 150 years have passed since Jo's first appearance, she continues to be seen by critics and readers alike as not simply one example of a rebellious tomboy, but the paradigm for such figures. Exemplifying this belief, Christian McEwan dubbed her 1997 collection of tomboy tales of "high adventure, true grit and real life," *Jo's Girls*.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, Ruth Berman titled her 1998 exploration of sex roles in children's literature, "No Jo Marchs!"<sup>2</sup>

In the same way Jo March has become linked with a certain type of behavior in *Little Women*, one could also argue that she can be connected with a certain color: brown. Although she is an ostensibly Caucasian figure, her skin is not characterized as the expected "fair," "pale" or even "white," as her sisters' is. Instead, from the moment the young woman is first introduced to readers, her face, arms and especially hands are repeatedly noted as "brown." In the opening pages of *Little Women*, for instance, the seemingly white young woman is described as "very tall, thin and brown" (4). Coupled with the dark nature of her skin is her equally dark hair. Throughout the novel, she is distinguished by her dark "mane" of chestnut locks (3).

Contributing to—and perhaps even helping to construct—the unexpectedly dark nature of the seemingly Caucasian Jo March, the young woman also signs her name

---

<sup>1</sup> Christian McEwan, ed., *Jo's Girls: Tomboy Tales of High Adventure, True Grit, and Real Life* (Boston: Beacon, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> Ruth Berman, "No Jo Marchs!," *Children's Literature in Education*. 29.4 (December 1998): 237 – 47.

“Topsy-Turvy Jo” throughout the novel. Whenever she pens a note to one of her sisters, her beloved neighbor Laurie, or her father in the Civil War, she closes with this autograph. After addressing the complicated history and numerous spellings of the term “topsy-turvy,” the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it as “With the top where the bottom should be; in or into an inverted position; upside down, bottom upwards.... With the higher where the lower should be; in or into a reversed condition; with inversion of the natural order” (262). Throughout the opening sections of the novel, Jo makes such repeated declarations as, “It’s bad enough to be a girl, any-way, when I like boy’s games, and work, and manners. I can’t get over my disappointment in not being a boy...” (Alcott *Little* 3). Whether these remarks more accurately signal a transgender identity or a tomboy one, they nevertheless provide a window onto Jo’s subjectivity. One may surmise that the young girl has adopted the phrase “topsy-turvy” to characterize her convoluted experience of internally identifying with the male gender, but outwardly needing to behave according to female codes.

This explanation of Jo’s use of the phrase “topsy-turvy” seems satisfactory until one explores American popular culture during the period in which *Little Women* was written and released. As Shirley Samuels notes in *The Culture of Sentiment*, a toy called the “topsy-turvy doll” was popular in the American South during the nineteenth century and is, in fact, still produced today. Rather than presenting a girl who, like Jo March, is topsy-turvy in her gender role, the toy depicts a “topsy-turvy” racial boundary. Samuels illustrates, “Held one way, the doll appears as a white woman with long skirts. Flipping over her skirts does not reveal her legs, but rather exposes another racial identity: the

head of a black woman, whose long skirts now cover the head of a the white woman” (113).<sup>3</sup>

Although doll histories such as Gwen White’s *European and American Dolls: Their Marks and Patents* indicate that the “topsy-turvy” or “upside-down” doll did not emerge until nearly three decades after Alcott penned *Little Women*, the character Topsy from Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was widely known.<sup>4</sup> As Thomas Gossett illustrates in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin and American Culture*, from the moment Stowe published her narrative in 1852, it was a run-away bestseller. Ten thousand copies of the book were sold in the first few days of release and “[w]ithin a year, the number had risen to 300,000” (Gossett *Uncle* 164). The unprecedented success of Stowe’s novel not only made such characters as Little Eva, Uncle Tom and even Topsy household names, but it also caused them to morph into other cultural forms. Perhaps the most famous among these were stage acts based on the text. Often called Tom or Tommer shows, these productions did not simply retell Stowe’s narrative on stage; they acted it out in blackface. White actors and actresses “blackened up” for their portrayals of the benevolent Uncle Tom or the comic antics of Topsy. Ironically, this phenomenon brought Stowe’s character full circle: upon first seeing Topsy, Augustine St. Clare described her as a “rather funny specimen in the Jim Crow line.” As William Leonard notes in *Masquerade in Black*, by the late 1860s, when Alcott released *Little Women*, Tommer shows were

---

<sup>3</sup> Rather than placing a white and black figure at opposing ends, it should be noted that most contemporary topsy-turvy dolls depict fairy tales characters. Little Red Riding Hood and her foil the “Big Bad” Wolf is perhaps the most frequent combination. For additional information on the topsy-turvy doll and its significance in nineteenth-century American culture, see Karen Sanchez-Eppler’s *Touching Liberty: Abolition, Feminism, and the Politics of the Body* (Berkeley: University of California, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> Anne Marie Douglas patented the idea in England in 1894 (White *European* 194). Five years later, Dewitt C. Bouton of Ithaca, New York did so in the United States (Coleman et al. 174).

both popular and pervasive, appearing in towns all over the United States.<sup>5</sup> Thomas Gossett speculates, in fact, “Perhaps as many as fifty people would eventually see *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, the play, for every one person who would read the novel” (*Uncle* 260).

In addition to minstrel shows based on *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, board games and even children’s toys were produced. While doll versions of such main characters as Eliza and Little Eva were the first to appear, a Topsy figure was widely available by the publication of *Little Women*. Reviewing advertisements for American doll companies throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, *The Collector’s Encyclopedia of Dolls* contains numerous listings for Topsy dolls from as early as 1860. Of course, not only is Stowe’s Topsy “one of the blackest of her race” (Stowe *Uncle* 258), but she is also defiant of (white) women’s gender roles: with “her hair cropped short to her head,” Topsy engages in such tomboyish activities as lying and stealing (Stowe *Uncle* 261 – 5).

While neither Stowe’s character Topsy nor the doll based on it question the black/white division as overtly as the “upside-down” or “topsy-turvy” doll a generation later, it nevertheless complicates Jo March’s invocation of the phrase “topsy-turvy.” The dark young woman’s autograph evokes the name of a popular black character, the doll version of which little girls may have even been snuggling while they read Alcott’s novel.

Since the discovery and reprinting of Louisa May Alcott’s sensational tales, “critics have tended to divide her work into two opposing groups, separating her well-known domestic or children’s fiction from the rest of her work” (Klimasmith 115). Her

---

<sup>5</sup> As Leonard and other historians have shown, Tommer shows did not simply participate in the blackface tradition; they played a major role in developing and disseminating it. Due to the popularity of minstrel shows based on Stowe’s antislavery novel, features such as the use of elaborate sets and even live animals that were originally specific to Tom shows came to be associated with blackface performances in general.

blood-and-thunder thrillers frequently hinge on a gothicized treatment of such provocative issues as slavery and even miscegenation while her children's and sentimental stories are consistently devoid of such concerns. Given this literary trend, repeated mention is made of Alcott's "literary double life" (Stern *Unmasked* xi) or "apparent split" in fictive style (Bernstein 25).

A careful examination of both the possible reasons for and the potential implications of brown, "topsy-turvy" Jo March destabilizes this binary. The apparent racialization of this beloved tomboy character closes the gap between *Little Women*'s much-discussed setting in the midst of the Civil War and its divorce from such social issues as race. In addition, it adds another facet to the question of interracial desire in Alcott's life and the remainder of her work.

With a propensity for presenting Spanish characters who are "dark" and even "swarthy" in her sensational narratives, Louisa May Alcott has a long history of drawing on European-inflected racial constructions. The links between the brown Jo March and Harriet Beecher Stowe's minstrelized Topsy broadens and deepens the repertoire of race operating in Louisa May Alcott's fiction. Raising the possibility of an African American racial economy operating in her work, the topsy-turvy tomboy suggests that Louisa May Alcott drew on more than Continental configurations of skin color. Given the numerous areas of overlap between *Little Women* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, it is possible that Alcott turned to American popular culture in general and one of the best-known abolitionist novels in particular to represent race in her girls' novel.

At the same time, the dark hue with which Jo March is associated provides a bridge between Louisa May Alcott's seemingly disparate domestic fiction and sensational

tales. By raising such issues as passing, interracial desire and—with Jo's marriage to the Aryan Professor Bhaer at the end of the novel—even miscegenation within *Little Women*, the brown, topsy-turvy figure suggests that these concerns may not have been limited to the author's lurid stories. They could be a crucial, albeit coded, facet of her most celebrated children's novel.

## Part I. "One is the Loneliest Number":

### Brown Skin and "Bad" Behavior in the Life and Work of Louisa May Alcott

In spite of all the work Louisa May Alcott and her parents performed for abolition, it would be erroneous to assume that they were devoid of prejudice.<sup>6</sup> Although Bronson Alcott admitted black pupils to his school,<sup>7</sup> was ostracized for his involvement with Boston abolition groups,<sup>8</sup> and even aided fugitive slaves,<sup>9</sup> he nevertheless held the racist association of dark skin with an equally dark and "primitive" soul. As Sarah Elbert notes, the philosopher "was very blond and had blue eyes and, delightedly tracing his ancestry, persisted in believing that Anglo-Saxon 'races' possessed more spiritually perfect natures, were generally 'harmonious,' and had more lofty intellects than darker-skinned people" (Introduction xv).

In addition to applying these attitudes to various racial and ethnic minorities, Bronson also attributed them to members of his own family. Both Louisa May Alcott and her mother, Abba, were dark or "sallow" complexioned: they possessed brown hair, eyes and even skin tones. In addition, both young women had spirited, even rebellious

---

<sup>6</sup> Although numerous biographies and critical essays address the extensive antislavery efforts of Louisa May Alcott and her parents, both Madelon Bedell's *The Alcotts: Biography of a Family* (New York: Clarkson Potter, 1980) and Martha Saxton's *Louisa May: A Modern Biography of Louisa May Alcott* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1977) provide a particularly thorough and detailed discussion.

<sup>7</sup> In June 1839, Bronson daringly admitted black student Susan Robinson to his experimental Temple School in Boston. Scandalized by this "outrageous" act, white parents asked the instructor to remove the young girl. Madelon Bedell notes in her biography, when Bronson refused, "Retribution was swift... all of the parents except the Robinsons and Bronson's long-time mentor, William Russell, withdrew their children from... classes" (149). As a result of this loss in patronage, Bronson was forced to close his school, relinquishing both his lifelong dream of being a schoolmaster and also the means to support his family.

<sup>8</sup> Among other endeavors, Bronson served as the "first general agent and corresponding secretary of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society" (Bedell *Alcotts* 105).

<sup>9</sup> From 1835, the Alcott home was a designated stop on the Underground Railroad. Although the philosopher and his family were "threatened by mobs several times, [and] warned never the return to Boston," they continued to aid fugitive slaves (Bedell *Alcotts* 105). Of these, among the most memorable was a thirty-year old man named John who stayed at their home in 1847. Reflecting on the young man's stay, Bronson wrote in his journal "he has given an image and a name to the dire enemy of slavery. And was an impressive lesson to my children, bringing before them the wrongs of the black man, and his tales of woe" (Saxton *Louisa May* 168).



natures. In the words of Madelon Bedell, “Louisa was a villain. At two years of age, she had not changed one whit from her tempestuous infant self.... When remonstrated with, she would throw herself into a vortex of crying and violent activity... beating on herself and anyone else who happened to be around” (73). As a result of this potent combination of “dark” behavior and dark skin tone, Bronson frequently referred to Louisa and her mother as “two devils” and even joked that his daughter was “a true-blue May, or rather, a brown” (Shephard 173).

More than simply being exposed to Bronson’s racialized beliefs about coloration, Louisa May Alcott adopted them as her own. In an 1855 letter, the future author displayed her absorption of these attitudes while comparing her father’s childhood to that of her own. As she observed, “I know *you* were a serene & placid baby when you began your wise meditations in the quiet little Spindle hill farm house.... Fifty six years have passed since then, & that peaceful babys [sic] golden head is silver now..... *I* was a crass crying brown baby, bawling at the disagreeable old world where on a dismal November day I found myself” [her emphasis] (Myerson and Shealy *Letters* 13 – 14).<sup>10</sup> Similar to her father, Louisa May Alcott makes the racist correlation of a fair complexion with angelic behavior and dark or brown skin with unruly habits. Recalling the racialized association of mischief with melanin, the future writer yokes Bronson’s “serene” and “placid” demeanor with his “golden” features. Meanwhile, she mentions her “crass” and “bawling” behavior in tandem with her status as a “brown baby.”

Louisa May Alcott’s correlation between brown skin and “bad” behavior not only affected her youthful self-image, it also made its way into her adult writing. Following

---

<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, Louisa May Alcott and her father shared the same birthday. Bronson Alcott was born on November 9<sup>th</sup>, 1799 and his daughter on November 9<sup>th</sup>, 1832. The future author of *Little Women* composed these reflections on the occasion of her twenty-third birthday and her father’s fifty-fourth.

her ingrained association of skin hue with conduct, characters who can be placed anywhere on the spectrum of villainy—from the dastardly evil to the mildly mischievous—are given a dark hue. Like the author herself, many of these characters engage in wild or “uncivilized” behavior. For instance, the tomboyish little girl Chow-Chow in Alcott’s 1873 short story “Cupid and Chow-Chow,” has sparkling black eyes and a “little brown face” (4). The mischievous Tommy in her 1885 children’s story “How They Ran Away” has a “brown face” that beams with joy when he is defiant (140). Similarly, in the autobiographical “My Boys” (1871), Alcott recalls a childhood friend who was “full of mischief” and who has grown into “a big, brown man” (10). Nonconformist Rose in her “Water-Lilies” (1887) is presented as a “tall robust girl of seventeen with dark eyes and hair, a fine color of brown cheek and vigor in every movement” (96). Finally, the untamed “firebrand” Dan in Alcott’s 1871 sequel to *Little Women*—the appropriately titled *Little Men*—is repeatedly described with a brown face and features (138, 243).<sup>11</sup>

In light of such links between coloration and conduct, it comes as no surprise that Alcott’s work engages other racially charged literary conventions. Recalling the common

---

<sup>11</sup> It should be noted, however, that “wild” and “brown” Dan is linked with Native Americans rather than African Americans throughout *Little Men* and especially its sequel, *Jo’s Boys* (1886). In the opening pages of *Jo’s Boys*, in fact, Jo is convinced that Dan has Indian blood in his veins (Alcott *Jo’s* 54). When she wonders whether the youth will marry someday, he asks her how she’d feel if he brought home an Indian squaw for a wife (Alcott *Jo’s* 56). Moreover, when Dan “lights out” for the territories of the West and (even more tellingly) after he is released from prison in Kansas, he lives among the Montana Indians, who Jo describes as his “chosen people” (Alcott *Jo’s* 62). Given the name “Dan Fire Cloud” by the tribe, he dies while defending Indian territory, “and at last lay quietly asleep in the green wilderness he loved so well” (Alcott *Jo’s* 322). As Madeleine B. Stern notes in *Louisa May Alcott: From Blood and Thunder to Hearth and Home*, “Alcott was deeply interested in the American Indians. Just two years before the publication of *Jo’s Boys*, Alcott penned an Indian story, ‘Onawandah,’ for the *St. Nicholas* children’s magazine. On September 18, 1885, she described the narrative to Thomas Niles in a letter as ‘a noble record of the great wrongs of her chosen people... It recalls the old slavery days, only these victims are red instead of black’ ” (qtd in Stern *Blood* 203). As Stern notes, at the time this letter was drafted, “she was working on *Jo’s Boys*, which included Dan’s death defending ‘his chosen people,’ the Indians” (*Blood* 203n).

but bias-based association of blackness with evil, many of her novels and short stories connect dark-skinned characters with morally dark actions. The sinister, shape-shifting Bernard Noel in her 1864 short story “Enigmas,” for instance, possesses “dark curling hair” and a “black brow” (456). Similarly, in “The Fate of the Forrests” (1865), the main character learns that he is destined to die by the hand of a “black brotherhood” whose “dark history” has been the “savage curse” of his family (171). The vengeful lover Basil Yorke in “A Marble Woman; or, The Mysterious Model” (1865) has such a “dark and strange” face, “dark, neglected hair,” and “black brows” that his wife urges him to portray Othello at their costume party (136, 200). Russian Prince Alexis from Alcott’s 1867 sensational tale “Taming a Tartar” is not only characterized as a “savage beast” but is also described as “swarthy, black-eyed” and possessing a distinctly “brown hand” (585).<sup>12</sup> Finally, the hag-like Grandma Miller in Alcott’s children’s story “May Flowers” (1887) is described as a “tiny, dried-up thing, brown as a berry” (16).

Louisa May Alcott’s life and work were so mired in such racially charged connections that even the author’s animal tales contained them. In many such narratives, Alcott associates the brown animals with bad behavior. Her autobiographical “Seven Black Cats” (1879), for instance, evokes disparaging stereotypes about African Americans. In the opening lines of the narrative, the writer asserts that unlike their “maltese” animals, her family’s dark felines “all came uninvited... all led eventful lives, and all died tragical deaths” (52). Similarly, Alcott’s allegorical children’s narrative about the rivalry between two roosters, “Cockyloo” (1885), presents the white-feathered

---

<sup>12</sup> At one point in the narrative, Prince Alexis’ “black brow” darkens by the perceived disobedience of his dog and he begins violently whipping the animal. Drawn to the incident by the dog’s terrible howls of pain, the narrator sees the Prince’s “eyes full of savage fire, teeth set, and hair bristling like that of an enraged animal” (589).

animal as the beloved leader of the roost and the black-feathered rooster—who dies while fighting—as both quarrelsome and lazy (95, 99).

In light of Louisa May Alcott's pervasive tendency to connect dark coloring with bad behavior in her narratives, it might be tempting to consider Jo March simply another mischievous character assigned an appropriately "mischievous" skin tone. Throughout the bulk of the novel, Jo famously refuses to conform to her gender role and be, as the title of the book suggests, a "little woman." In marked contrast to feminine codes of "proper" conduct, the brown-skinned girl clomps about in army boots, shamelessly uses slang, and shakes hands "in a gentlemanly manner."

The numerous areas of overlap between Jo March and her creator further this connection. Since the publication of *Little Women* in 1868, Louisa May Alcott's kinship with her topsy-truvy tomboy has been well-documented. Countless critics and biographers have identified Jo as the author's semi-autobiographical alter ego. Similar to her fictional character, the sallow-toned Alcott refused to conform to "proper" gender codes and instead reveled in her role as a rambunctious tomboy. Reflecting on this tendency in one of her journal entries, Alcott observed, "No boy could be my friend until I had beaten him in a race, and no girl if she refused to climb trees, leap fences and be a tomboy" (Cheney 20). Hence, in the early 1860s, Alcott chose the term that she would later adopt as Jo's autograph, "topsy-turvy," to describe herself, her family and even the world in which she lived.<sup>13</sup>

Jo's tomboyish rebellion against a gender that requires her to "stay at home and knit like a poky old woman" is not the only form of mischief in which she engages

---

<sup>13</sup> For these specific references, see Alcott's March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1860 and May 19<sup>th</sup>, 1861 missives to Alfred Whitman in Myerson and Shealy's *The Selected Letters of Louisa May Alcott* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1987).

(Alcott *Little* 3). Recalling the author and her own mother once again, the gender-bending character possesses an equally strong temper.<sup>14</sup> Whenever she feels angered or mistreated, the topsy-turvy tomboy feels compelled to seek vengeance. One of the most famous instances of this behavior occurs after Jo's sister Amy has destroyed one of her beloved manuscripts and then insisted on being included in a skating trip with Laurie. Annoyed by her "tag-along" sibling and still smarting from the destruction of her story, Jo allows Amy to go skating on ice she knows is too thin. Although Laurie is able to rescue Amy before she either freezes or drowns, the event highlights the potentially lethal consequences of Jo's temper. Rather than simply hurting another's feelings with her sharp tongue and stubborn nature, the topsy-turvy tomboy realizes that her willfulness can result in bodily harm. As she confesses to Marmee, " 'Mother, if she *should* die, it would be my fault' " [author's emphasis] (Alcott *Little* 78).

Following the advice of her mother and playing a real-life game of "Pilgrim's Progress," Jo is able to curb her tomboyish temper. By the close of the novel, the topsy-turvy young woman has, as she vows to Marmee, " 'let the sun go down on [her] anger' " (Alcott *Little* 82). In spite of such accomplishments, Jo is unable to escape her association with mischief. When Laurie forges a love note from John Brooke to Meg, everyone assumes she is responsible. Confronting her tomboyish daughter about the hurtful joke, Marmee says, " 'You have played so many pranks, that I am afraid you have

---

<sup>14</sup> Of course, Jo's mother Marmee also possesses this quality. As she tells her tomboyish daughter, " 'You think your temper is the worst in the world; but mine used to be just like that' " (Alcott *Little* 79). When Jo expresses disbelief at this confession, Marmee goes on, " 'I've been trying to cure it for forty years, and have only succeeded in controlling it. I am angry nearly every day of my life, Jo; but I have learned not to show it; and I hope still to learn not to feel it, though it may take me another forty years to do so' " (Alcott *Little* 79).

had a hand in this' ” (Alcott *Little* 208). Once again, the dark-skinned girl has been linked with equally “dark” or deceitful behavior.

The racialization of Jo March throughout *Little Women*, however, does not arise exclusively from her gender-bending “bad” behavior. In marked contrast to the bulk of seemingly Caucasian characters who acquire a dark hue Alcott’s life work, the young woman acquires her dark hue, at least in part, from her association with a “legitimate” black character. Throughout Alcott’s novel, the tomboyish girl possess strong parallels to Topsy from Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. In addition to her suggestive autograph, Jo’s physical appearance, life experiences and even daily behavior mirror this well-known African American figure.

More than simply drawing on her own life and experiences for the construction of the brown, mischievous Jo March, it is possible that Louisa May Alcott had another source in mind. Referencing American popular culture in general and the work of literary predecessor Harriet Beecher Stowe in particular, the main character of Alcott’s children’s narrative may be in dialogue with one of the most well-known antislavery novels. In addition to inculcating her father’s yoking of brown skin with bad behavior, the author may have taken this association one step further. In light of the mischievous antics of Stowe’s Topsy, the brown skin of Alcott’s tomboy also connects her to the black race.

## Part II. Topsy and a Topsy-Turvy Tomboy:

### Louisa May Alcott and Harriet Beecher Stowe

Similar to many men and women in nineteenth-century America, Louisa May Alcott was a devotee of Harriet Beecher Stowe's work. As numerous critics and biographers have noted, the future author of *Little Women* read *Uncle Tom's Cabin* upon its release in 1852. A lifelong proponent of abolition, the narrative embodied the union of Alcott's most fervent interests: literature and politics.

Although Louisa May Alcott's conversance with the way in which *Uncle Tom's Cabin* surfaced in American material culture is less clear, it seems likely that she was at least familiar with its various incarnations. As Thomas Gossett asserts, "The novel inspired a whole new industry of souvenirs" (*Uncle* 164). Enterprising businesses manufactured dolls, poems, posters, calendars, candles, collector's figurines, and board games within months after the novel's release. By the time a year had passed, such items literally clogged store shelves. In the words of one reviewer, " 'There has been nothing like it in the history of book-making' " (Gossett *Uncle* 164).

More than simply being an enthusiast for Harriet Beecher Stowe's antislavery novel, Louisa May Alcott also sought the elder writer's opinion of her own work. The two shared mutual friends and even publishing connections, and the aspiring author valued the suggestions of her literary predecessor. While Stowe lauded Alcott's girls' novel, she was less pleased with her first book, *Moods* (1864). As Janet S. Zehr notes, "Harriet Beecher Stowe attacked the morality of *Moods* in vague terms in a conversation with Thomas Niles" (331). Although Louisa May Alcott was understandably disappointed by these remarks, they did not dispel her respect for either Stowe's work or

her literary opinion. When Alcott revised *Moods* in the early 1880s, it seems likely that she had Stowe's comments in mind. Following the advice of her literary predecessor that certain elements of the text were objectionable to middle-class readers, Alcott strove to make the revised edition more universally appealing.

In light of both Louisa May Alcott's esteem for Harriet Beecher Stowe and the ubiquitous nature of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* at the time, it is possible that the author of *Little Women* had the tomboyishly mischievous Topsy in mind when crafting her topsy-turvy tomboy Jo March. As the *Oxford English Dictionary* notes, the name Topsy is based on the phrase "topsy-turvy." Recalling the denotative meaning of this phrase, Stowe's character arises from a condition of convolution and even inversion. In addition to being a slave in the supposed "land of the free," the young girl also figuratively turns the St. Clare household on its head. Instead of performing her household chores, "she would climb the [bed] posts, and hang head downward from the tops; flourish the sheets and spreads all over the apartment; dress the bolster up in Miss Ophelia's night-clothes" (Stowe *Uncle* 270).

While the saying "topsy-turvy" has existed in various incarnations since the sixteenth century, Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was the first to use "Topsy" as a proper noun. As a result, the name is almost exclusively associated with the famed antislavery novel. According to the *OED*, the term denotes the "name of a character in Mrs. H. B. Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; used allusively as the type of something that seems to have grown of itself without anyone's intention or direction" (261).

The similarities between Harriet Beecher Stowe's Topsy and Alcott's Jo March extend beyond mere etymology. The two figures share numerous personal, emotional



and even physiological traits. The first and most obvious of these, perhaps, is their tomboyish behavior. From the moment Topsy enters the St. Clare house, she engages in antics that are shocking and unruly. While Miss Ophelia instructs her in bed-making, for instance, “the young disciple had contrived to snatch a pair of gloves and a ribbon, which she had adroitly slipped into her sleeves” (Stowe *Uncle* 264). When the ribbon falls out a few minutes later, Topsy adamantly denies the theft. In a clever lie, the young girl swears that she did not steal the item: “ ‘Miss Feely must have left it on the bed, and it got caught in the clothes and so got in my sleeve’ ” (Stowe *Uncle* 265). While arguing the point, the stolen gloves slip from her sleeve. Once again, this incriminating event does not spurn the deceitful young girl to tell the truth. “Topsy now confessed to the gloves, but still persisted in denying the ribbon” (Stowe *Uncle* 265).

Rather than being an isolated or atypical incident, this event foreshadows the young woman’s future behavior. In the coming weeks, Topsy continues to engage in such tomboyish antics as pranks, trickery and even sabotage. “It was very soon discovered that whoever cast an indignity on Topsy was sure to meet with some inconvenient accident shortly after;—either a pair of ear-rings or some cherished trinket would be missing, or an article of dress would be suddenly found utterly ruined....” (Stowe *Uncle* 269 – 71). Topsy’s unladylike displays of will are not only commonplace, but compulsive; her vengeful mischief is as swift as it is certain.

Similar to Stowe’s Topsy, Louisa May Alcott’s Jo March is often overcome by a desire for vengeance and, as a result, exists outside of conventional (white) women’s gender roles. Whenever the young woman feels slighted or unfairly treated, she feels compelled to seek retribution. In addition to the ice-skating incident with Amy discussed

earlier, there are many other instances in which Jo exerts her willful defiance. In spite of Frederick Bhaer's warnings about the harmful effects of sensational fiction on young readers, for instance, the tomboyish young woman continues to submit stories to the *Weekly Volcano*. Significantly, Jo uses primitivist language to describe such outbursts: "It seems as if I could do anything when I'm in a passion; I get so *savage*, I could hurt any one, and enjoy it." [my emphasis] (Alcott *Little* 79).

Such unladylike behavior is compounded by Jo's equally unconventional demeanor. From the opening pages of the novel, the topsy-turvy tomboy clomps about in army boots, unashamedly uses slang and repeatedly expresses her desire to be the "man of the family." Recalling the unkempt appearance of Topsy once again, Jo often has tousled hair and dishelved attire. In the opening pages of *Little Women*, the eldest sibling remarks that she is repulsed by "rude, unlady-like girls," and wishes her sister would cease being one of them. When the pair is invited to a gathering at Mrs. Gardiner's house, she even implores Jo: "'do behave nicely; don't put your hands behind you, or stare, or say 'Christopher Columbus'....'" (Alcott *Little* 24).

In addition to resembling Topsy physically, Jo also recalls her behavior. Echoing Topsy's bed-making incident with Miss Ophelia, the tomboyish young girl has a mishap with a pair of gloves. Having stained her pair with lemonade, she shares the ones belonging to her sister. Soon after arriving at Mrs. Gardiner's party, however, she ruins them while fetching a cup of coffee. As the narrator notes, Jo made "a dive at the table [and] secured the coffee, which she immediately spilt" (Alcott *Little* 31). Rather than asking for a rag to clean the mess, the youth tomboyishly uses her glove. "'O dear! what a blunderbuss I am!,' exclaimed Jo, and finished Meg's glove by scrubbing her

gown with it” (Alcott *Little* 31). After such treatment, the once-beautiful article is ruined; damp and coffee-stained, the glove is now a rag itself.

In the same way Jo March and Topsy engage in similar types of tomboyish behavior, a series of analogous events persuades them to abandon such antics. When Topsy makes her appearance in Stowe’s novel, she is described as both “goblin like” and “heathenish” (Stowe *Uncle* 258). While the young girl’s “glittering glass eyes” and “quick and restless glances” contribute to this characterization, so does her unkempt hair. As the narrator notes, Topsy’s woolly mane “was braided in sundry little tails, which stuck out in every direction” (Stowe *Uncle* 258). In an attempt to make the little girl “presentable,” Miss Ophelia bathes Topsy and also trims her locks. With “her hair cropped short to her head Miss Ophelia, with some satisfaction, said she looked more Christian-like than she did, and in her own mind began to mature some plans for her instruction” (Stowe *Uncle* 261). Ironically, Topsy’s short, “unfeminine” hair makes her appear more “feminine” and even Christian.

Jo March undergoes a similar transformation. In an attempt to raise money for her mother’s efforts to nurse her father in Washington, Jo sells her hair. Arriving home late one afternoon, she places a roll of bills before Marmee and declares: “ ‘That is my contribution towards making father comfortable, and bringing him home!’ ” (Alcott *Little* 161). When asked where she obtained the twenty-five dollars, Jo explains, “ ‘I earned it; and I don’t think you’ll blame me, for I only sold what was my own. As she spoke, Jo took off her bonnet, and a general outcry arose, for all her abundant hair was cut short’ ” (Alcott *Little* 161). Recounting the steps that led to this radical act, she tells Marmee, “ ‘I hadn’t the least idea of selling my hair at first, but as I went along I kept thinking about

*what* I could do.... It came over me all of a sudden that I had one thing to make money out of, and, without stopping to think, I walked in, asked if they bought hair, and what they would give for mine' ” (Alcott *Little* 163). Although the barber is initially disinterested in Jo's locks, the determined tomboy refuses to give up. In an effort to persuade him, she explains her motivations in what she characterizes as “my topsy-turvy way” (Alcott *Little* 163).

Similar to Harriet Beecher Stowe's Topsy, Jo's lack of long feminine locks paradoxically brings her closer to womanly codes of conduct. While readers would expect that the tomboyish figure would revel in the masculine haircut, the opposite is true. After going to bed later that evening, the young girl weeps over the loss of her long hair.

Jo lay motionless, and her sister fancied that she was asleep, till a stifled sob made her exclaim, and she touched a wet cheek,—

‘Jo, dear, what is it? Are you crying about father?’

‘No, not now.’

‘What then?’

‘My—my hair,’ burst our poor Jo, trying vainly to smother her emotion in the pillow. (Alcott *Little* 164)

When Mr. March returns home several chapters later, he notices the ironic feminization of his short-haired daughter. “ ‘In spite of the curly crop, I don't see the ‘son Jo’ whom I left a year ago... I see a young lady who pins her collar straight, laces her boots neatly, and neither whistles, talks slang, nor lies on the rug, as she used to do’ ” (Alcott *Little*

223). Of course, the short haircut itself did not elicit such changes in Jo. The feminine sentiments of selflessness and even self-sacrifice that led her to this action can be credited with the transformation.

While an altered physical appearance may have inspired more “ladylike” conduct in Jo and Topsy, the moral and spiritual influence of a particular person solidifies these changes. Miss Ophelia may be Topsy’s official “master,” but the naughty black servant does not heed anything the New England woman says. In spite of repeated efforts to teach Topsy proper manners and even mores, “Miss Feely” is exacerbated by Topsy’s continued disobedience. As the narrator notes, “If Miss Ophelia, after three or four days of careful and patient supervision, was so sanguine to suppose that Topsy had at last fallen into her way, could do without overlooking, and so go off and busy herself about something else, Topsy would hold a perfect carnival of confusion, for some one or two hours” (Stowe *Uncle* 270). Instead of doing her chores, the mischievous character “would amuse herself with pulling off the pillow-cases, butting her wooly head among the pillows.... flourish the sheets and spreads all over the apartment; dress the bolster up in Miss Ophelia’s night-clothes” (Stowe *Uncle* 270).

Although Miss Ophelia is unable to control Topsy’s behavior, one individual in the St. Clare household does have an influence over her: Little Eva. From the moment the wild young servant encounters the angelic child, she is overwhelmed by her goodness, kindness and love. While Miss Ophelia “expatiated on Topsy’s naughty, wicked conduct,” Little Eva sweetly tells the black youth: “ ‘Poor Topsy, why need you steal? You’re going to be taken good care of, now. I’m sure I’d rather give you anything of mine, than have you steal it’ ” (Stowe *Uncle* 267). Such loving sentiments have an

immediate effect on Topsy. “It was the first word of kindness the child had ever heard in her life; and the sweet tone and manner struck her strangely on the wild, rude heart, and a sparkle of something like a tear shone in the keen, round, glittering eye” (Stowe *Uncle* 267). Unlike any other member of the St. Clare household, Little Eva displays a genuine interest in and compassion for the black servant. This concern for her emotional and spiritual well-being allows Little Eva to penetrate Topsy’s indifference and influence her conduct. For the first time, the unruly black youth cares about her actions and longs to behave in a way that will make others proud.

As Little Eva nears her death, this influence increases. The angelic young girl implores Topsy to not only repent her wild ways, but always behave in a Christian and moral manner. “ ‘Oh, Topsy, poor child, I love you!’ said Eva, with a sudden burst of feeling..... ‘I love you, and I want you to be good.... I wish you would try to be good, for my sake;—it’s only a little while I shall be with you’ ” (Stowe *Uncle* 304). With this declaration, Little Eva is able to accomplish a task that perpetually eluded Miss Ophelia: getting Topsy to behave. Upon hearing Eva’s wishes, the black servant vows: “ ‘I will try, I will try; I never did care nothin’ about it before’ ” (Stowe *Uncle* 305). Although occasionally reverting to her naughty ways, Topsy is able to keep her promise. After this declaration, scant mention is made of her mischievous behavior. In time, Topsy “is baptized into the Christian faith and comes to ‘show intelligence, activity, and zeal’ ” (Gossett *Uncle* 159). By the end of the novel, she has moved to Africa to work as a missionary.

Echoing events in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Louisa May Alcott’s Jo abandons her willful, unladylike behavior through the influence of a similarly angelic figure: her

younger sister Beth.<sup>15</sup> Although her blonde-haired sibling Amy resembles Little Eva physically, it is Beth who possesses the character's saintly personality. Similar to Stowe's beatific Little Eva, Beth seems devoid of all sin. In preparation for their real-life game of "Pilgrim's Progress," the March girls articulate various personal faults on which they hope to improve. While Amy, Meg and Jo can quickly and easily name their shortcomings, Beth is noticeably silent. When it is her turn, she "said nothing, but wiped away her tears with the blue army-sock" (Alcott *Little* 9). Rather than an act of vanity, her behavior is a moment of honesty. As Marmee concedes, "'Each of you told what your burden was just now, except Beth; I rather think she hasn't got any' " (Alcott *Little* 10).

As a result of such undisputed goodness, Beth inspires Jo to conduct herself in more ladylike and Christian ways. While the tomboyish young woman does not want her topsy-turvy behavior to upset the beloved Marmee, she especially does not want it to disappoint Beth. As she tells Laurie, "'Beth is my conscience' " (Alcott *Little* 186). Jo's selfless sister serves as a model for proper conduct and, by extension, a means to keep her mischievous impulses in check.

---

<sup>15</sup> In addition to Beth's positive influence, the impact Professor Bhaer has on Jo was also significant. Similar to the saintly sibling, Frederick inspires the topsy-turvy tomboy to conduct herself in ways that are more Christian, moral and even "feminine." The most famous and oft-cited example, of course, is convincing Jo that the blood-and-thunder tales she has been writing for the "Weekly Volcano" corrupt readers in general and young boys and girls in particular. Soon after the Professor declares that "If the respectable people [who compose these trashy tales] knew what harm they did, they would not feel that the living was honest, " [her emphasis] (Alcott *Little* 355), Jo destroys her remaining manuscripts. Ashamed of her participation in the moral decay of society for the sake of money, she "stuffed the whole bundle into her stove, nearly setting the chimney afire with the blaze" (Alcott *Little* 356). While a tragic event from a creative standpoint, the act leads to the discovery of her "true style." After experimenting with essays, sermons, moral fiction and even children's narratives, she realizes her talent for crafting domestic fiction based on her own family. "Jo never knew how it happened, but something got into that story that went straight to the hearts of those who read it; for, when her family had laughed and cried over it, her father sent it, much against her will, to one of the popular magazines, and, to her utter surprise, it was not only paid for, but others requested" (Alcott *Little* 436).

As in the case of Little Eva, however, Beth's goodness makes her too good for this world. Averting her suspicion that " 'it never was intended that I should live long,' " the youth falls gravely ill with scarlet fever in the first half of *Little Women* and succumbs to an unnamed illness in the novel's second segment (Alcott *Little* 374). Beth's sickness and eventual death does not signal the end of her influence over Jo, but actually increases it, as Little Eva's death did for Topsy in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Leaning over her sister's sickbed, Jo confesses, " 'I used to think I couldn't let you go; but I'm learning to feel that I don't lose you; that you'll be more to me than ever, and death can't part us, though it seems to' " (Alcott *Little* 418). After Beth's death, the once topsy-turvy tomboy self-consciously tries to emulate her saintly sister. "Jo found herself humming the songs Beth used to hum, imitating Beth's orderly ways, and giving the little touches here and there that kept everything fresh and cozy...." (Alcott *Little* 434).

In addition to containing textual parallels between Jo March and Topsy, Louisa May Alcott's novel makes explicit references to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In chapter four of *Little Women*, for instance, Jo mentions the title character from Stowe's antislavery text and even does an impression of his wife, Aunt Chloe. Frustrated by the burdens of wartime hardship, Marmee advises her daughters to concentrate on the happiness brought by friends and family rather than lament the material pleasures that are beyond their reach. Identifying an apt literary parallel, Jo humorously notes that Marmee has said "to us as Old Chloe did in Uncle Tom—'Tink ob yer marcies, chillen, tink ob yer marcies' " (Alcott *Little* 45). As this remark suggests, not only do elements of Jo's personality, behavior and even autograph recall Stowe's Topsy, but the tomboyish girl is conversant with the novel in which this black character appears.



In light of the numerous areas of overlap between *Little Women* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, one can see that the racialization of ostensibly Caucasian tomboy Jo March stems from a panoply of site and sources. In addition to being characterized by the unexpected adjective “brown” for her “bad” behavior, the topsy-turvy figure also possesses numerous similarities to Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Topsy. While most critics view *Little Women* as a novel grounded in autobiography, an alternative and intertextual basis for the narrative is also possible. At least in part, Louisa May Alcott’s awareness of and enthusiasm for *Uncle Tom's Cabin* may have inspired key facets of her beloved main character. Commonly considered hallmarks of Jo’s unique personality, these “topsy-turvy” elements have their root in a figure who is, as Stowe’s novel attests, “one of the blackest of her race” (*Uncle* 258).

### Part III. Behind a (Minstrel) Mask:

#### Louisa May Alcott and Blackface

In the same way Harriett Beecher Stowe's Topsy constructs Jo March in *Little Women*, she, in turn, is constructed by a racially charged facet of American popular culture: blackface minstrelsy. As Mel Watkins notes, "For more than a century, minstrelsy was America's preeminent form of entertainment" (Foreword iix). Not only were countless dramatic versions of Stowe's novel performed in blackface, but Topsy's appearance and personality was self-consciously modeled after minstrel figures.

When Augustine St. Clare first sees Topsy and when he presents her to Miss Ophelia, he characterizes the young girl as a " 'rather funny specimen in the Jim Crow line' " (Stowe *Uncle* 258). In accordance with this classification, the black servant possesses a minstrel-like "talent for every species of drollery, grimace, and mimicry—for dancing, tumbling, climbing, singing, whistling, [and] imitating every sound that hit her fancy" (Stowe *Uncle* 269). Before any inquiries are made about Topsy's name, age or past circumstances, she is asked to perform. "[G]iving a whistle, as a man would to call the attention of a dog," St. Clare tells the young girl, " 'give us a song, now, and show us some of your dancing' " (Stowe *Uncle* 258). Accordingly, Topsy commences a routine that mirrors countless minstrel shows. "The black, glassy eyes glittered with a kind of wicked drollery, and the thing struck up, in a clear shrill voice, an odd Negro melody, to which she kept time with her hands and feet, spinning round, clapping her hands, knocking her knees together, in a wild, fantastic sort of time, and producing in her throat all those odd guttural sounds which distinguish the native music of her race" (Stowe *Uncle* 259).

Similar to Harriet Beecher Stowe, Louisa May Alcott was both conversant with and a literary participant in blackface minstrelsy. Although seldom discussed in biographies or critical essays, several of the author's narratives make direct reference to this racially charged mode of American performance. Even more telling, many of these stories were penned during Alcott's conceptualization, construction and completion of *Little Women*. The simultaneity of these events suggests that minstrelsy may have helped shape her famous girls' novel. Although Jo March never darkens her face with burnt cork, the presence of blackface in both Stowe's character Topsy and Alcott's own imaginative repertoire may have contributed to the tomboy's acquisition of a similarly dark hue.

As Madeleine B. Stern and other critics have argued, Louisa May Alcott had a "lifetime interest in the theater" (*Blood* 13). Before the young woman longed to be a writer, in fact, she dreamed of a career on the stage. The first works Alcott penned were plays that she and her sister Anna performed when they were children. Similar to "The Witch's Curse, an Operatic Tragedy" in *Little Women*, the siblings would build sets, design costumes and construct a makeshift stage. Often taking the roles of five or six characters during the production, they would perform the farce for neighbors and family members.

By August 1850, when Alcott was eighteen years old, her passion for acting had so intensified that she began thinking of it as her vocation. As the future author noted in her diary, "Anna wants to be an actress, and so do I.... I like tragic plays, and shall be a Siddons if I can" (Cheney *Life* 63). In the years that followed, Alcott joined the Walpole New Hampshire's Amateur Dramatic Company and played roles as diverse as "tan

checked Indian maids” to characters from the novels of Charles Dickens (Stern *Blood* 14).

Although Alcott received both popular and critical acclaim for such performances, her dream of becoming a professional actress was never to be realized. In spite of repeated attempts to find a position with a large theater, she was unsuccessful. Ironically, by the time the Howard Athenium staged her much-delayed “Nat Bachelor’s Pleasure Trip” in May 1860, her career in drama was all but over.

Even though Louisa May Alcott would never again return to the stage, she continued to have a lifelong passion for the theater. When the young woman began writing fiction years later, this interest surfaced. Many of the aspiring author’s short stories centered around the stage. In fact, Alcott’s first published narrative, “The Rival Prima Donnas” (1854), focused on the rivalry between two actresses.

A staggering number of Alcott’s later sensational stories and even full-length novels contain some connection to the theater. While a detailed discussion of these references would necessitate a full-length study, Alcott’s short stories, “Marion Earle; or, Only an Actress!” (1858), “A Double Tragedy. An Actor’s Story” (1865), “V.V.; or, Plots and Counterplots” (1865), “Behind a Mask: or, A Woman’s Tragedy” (1866), “Hope’s Debut” (1867), “The Abbott’s Ghost; or, Maurice Treherne’s Temptation” (1867), “La Jeune; or, Actress and Woman” (1868), and “La Belle Bayadere” (1870) all concern the stage; either the main characters in these narratives are actors or a central facet of the plot revolves around the theater.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> For such an examination, see Debra Bailey Young’s unpublished dissertation, “‘A Woman’s Pen Presents You with a Play’: The Influence of Drama and the Theater on the Life and Writings of Louisa May Alcott” (Indiana University, 1998). As far as I know, this is the only full-length treatment about the impact of the theater on Alcott’s life and work.

In addition to referencing drama in her short fiction, Louisa May Alcott also incorporated it into her book-length narratives. The first volume of Alcott's *Little Women* (1868) not only contains Jo and Meg's performance of "The Witch's Curse," but closes with the comment: "So grouped the curtain falls upon Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy. Whether it ever rises again, depends upon the reception given to the first act of the domestic drama, called 'Little Women' " (235). Accordingly, the writer refers to the second volume of *Little Women* as "Act Second" in a 1869 letter to Thomas Niles (Myerson and Shealy *Letters* 118).

Several of Alcott's other narratives also engage the stage. In *Little Men* (1871), Jo March's niece (and namesake) Josie Brooke wants to be an actress. Several chapters of the text trace her efforts to realize this dream. Echoing this pattern, a portion of Alcott's 1873 novel *Work* follows Christie Devon's successes and failures while employed as an actress on the Boston stage.<sup>17</sup> Finally, the concluding installment to the March family saga, *Jo's Boys* (1886), closes with the sentence, "And now, having endeavored to suit everyone by many weddings, few deaths, and as much prosperity as the eternal fitness of things will permit, let the music stop, the lights die out, *and the curtain fall forever* on the March family" [my emphasis] (Alcott *Jo's* 323).

In light of the recurring presence of theater in Alcott's narratives, it is not surprising that critics and biographers often comment on her interest in the stage, as well as the subsequent influence it had on her. As Madeleine B. Stern notes in her introduction to *Behind a Mask: The Unknown Thrillers of Louisa May Alcott*, "[t]hroughout her life [the author] carried the theater with her wherever she went" (xi).

---

<sup>17</sup> As Martha Saxton notes in her biography of Louisa May Alcott, the name "Christie Devon" appears "in the stock company of the Boston Theater Company in the 1855 – 1856 season and may have been Louisa's stage name when she tried briefly to be an actress" (320).

In spite of all this attention to Louisa May Alcott's interest in the theater, her relationship to another form of American performance remains unexplored: blackface minstrelsy. As Martha Saxton notes in her biography, Alcott attended the 1854 – 1855 season of the Boston Theater where the “manager, Thomas Barry, booked clergymen, ballet dancers, [and] minstrel shows” (200). Although no concrete evidence to date places the author at any blackface shows, many of the narratives she penned after this period allude to this performance mode. In the author's 1863 short story “M.L.,” for instance, a dark-skinned young man is repeatedly called a “minstrel” for his singing ability (Alcott “M.L.” 5, 8).<sup>18</sup> Similarly, in Alcott's young adult novel *An Old-Fashioned Girl* (1870), Polly Milton is shocked when friends take her to what appears to be a blackface performance. Described as “one of the new spectacles which have lately become the rage,” the show consists of “sparkling creatures who danced and sung... negro melodies” (Alcott *Old-Fashioned* 13). Significantly, *An Old-Fashioned Girl* was serialized in the children's magazine *Merry's Museum* in 1869, the same year that the second volume of *Little Women* was released. Finally, in the 1871 sequel to Alcott's girls' novel, *Little Men*, white street musician Nat Blake plays “a simple Negro melody” when Jo asks for a recital on his violin (Alcott *Little* 16).

In several other narratives, characters do not simply make passing reference to minstrelsy, they participate in it themselves. Most famous among these, perhaps, is the villainous Jean Muir in Alcott's appropriately titled “Behind a Mask; or, A Woman's

---

<sup>18</sup> Admittedly, long before the term “minstrel” was associated with blackface, it was used as a synonym for singer. By the period in which Louisa May Alcott incorporated this word into her novels and short stories, however, its exemption from racially charged associations had eroded. In light of both the popularity and pervasiveness of minstrel shows during the 1860s, it seems unlikely that the author could evoke this term without being aware of and even deliberately drawing on its connection to blackface. For these reasons, I read Alcott's use of the term “minstrel” as a racially charged component of her narratives.

Tragedy.” For a costume party in the middle of the narrative, the actress “darkened her skin, painted her eyebrows, [and] disposed some wild black locks over her fair hair” (Alcott “Behind” 147). Similar to *An Old-Fashioned Girl*, “Behind a Mask” was released in close chronological proximity to *Little Women*. The narrative was first serialized in 1866, just two years before the appearance of Alcott’s children’s novel. Near the end of Louisa May Alcott’s publishing career, the trope of a white woman blacking up surfaces again. In the 1884 short story “The Banner of Beaumanoir” the heroine Yvonne “stained her fair skin” to disguise herself as an old woman and rescue her lover from enemy captivity (Alcott “Banner” 139).

While these four texts are the only ones that directly engage the minstrel mask, several of Alcott’s other narratives contain Caucasian characters who use language that is both racially charged and often even directly drawn from minstrelsy. In her 1880 children’s novel *Jack and Jill* and 1884 short stories “Eli’s Education” and “Corny’s Catamount,” for instance, white characters refer to their mothers by the unexpected name “Mammy.” In *Little Men* (1871) and *Eight Cousins* (1875), both boys and girls are characterized as the racially charged animal “monkey” because of their proclivity for boisterous antics. Moreover, many of Alcott’s sensational stories invoke the rhetoric of masking and enslavement to describe friendships, family bonds, and especially relations between the sexes. In *A Modern Mephistopheles* (1877), Canaris repeatedly laments his various forms of “enslavement” to Jasper. Similarly, in “The Skeleton in the Closet” (1867), Mme. Mathilde Arnheim likens her bracelet to a “fetter” (245).<sup>19</sup> Finally, in “Anna’s Whim” (1876), the main character uses the term “masks” to describe the facades

---

<sup>19</sup> Alcott’s 1868 short story “Countess Vazaroff” combines several of these motifs. At various points in the narrative, the main character frequently describes herself as both “fettered” and a “slave.”

young men and women employ in society. As a result of this characterization, masquerade balls recur throughout that story and others like it. As Madeleine B. Stern joked in her Introduction to *Plots and Counterplots*, countless tales contain the “inevitable Alcott masquerade party” (16).

To this list of masks and masqueraders, of course, Alcott herself could be added. Numerous critics have argued that by publishing her sensational tales anonymously or under a pseudonym, the writer engaged in her own form of self-masking. Exemplifying this belief, Madeline B. Stern titled one of the first collections of Alcott’s blood-and-thunder stories *Behind a Mask*. So effective was this disguised authorship that it was not until decades after her death that readers realized the writer who was repeatedly touted as the “children’s friend” also penned an abundance of lurid sensational fiction.

Although blackface minstrelsy is never overtly mentioned in Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women*, the text contains elements that are informed by this racially charged performance mode. Not only does Jo share various physical, emotional and linguistic similarities to the minstrelized Topsy, but she pens the operatic tragedy “A Witch’s Curse,” in which both Jo and her elder sibling Meg play a series of darkly villainous characters. In Jo’s first appearance on stage, for instance, she is dressed as the sinister Hugo, who is noted for not only for the “clanging sword at his side” but also his suggestive “black beard” (Alcott *Little* 17). Similarly, when Meg makes her entrance as the wizardly Hagar, she dons an equally suggestive “black robe” (Alcott *Little* 17). Throughout the remainder of the play, the duo continues to enact ostensibly Caucasian characters who possess dark costumes, customs and even characteristics. Echoing the



*modus operandi* of white minstrel performers, therefore, they must disguise their comparatively fair complexions.

A short story Meg pens for the “Pickwick Portfolio” takes this phenomenon one step further. Rather than merely incorporating dark figures into her narrative, she has them donning black masks. From the opening sentences of the story—which is appropriately titled “The Masked Marriage”—to its final scene, both male and female characters wear these dark disguises. Although made of fabric and not burnt cork, the masks nevertheless resonate as one of the hallmarks of minstrelsy.

In this way, though *Little Women* may not explicitly engage blackface, it can be placed on a continuum with Alcott’s narratives that do. In addition to brown Jo March’s possible patterning after the minstrelized Topsy from the equally minstrelized *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, the text also makes repeated reference to black masks. While the complex feedback cycle such writers as Mark Twain and Walt Whitman shared with blackface minstrelsy is well-documented, the connection contemporary author Louisa May Alcott had with it remains largely unexplored.<sup>20</sup> In the same way Jo’s topsy-turvyness necessitates a reconsideration of *Little Women*’s relationship to Stowe’s antislavery novel, the minstrelsy that informs many of Alcott’s narratives requires a reevaluation of her conversance with what Lawrence Levine would call “lowbrow” forms of American popular culture. Evidence from both Alcott’s children’s fiction and her sensational tales suggests that she was writing from behind not only a pseudonymous mask, but often a minstrelized one.

---

<sup>20</sup> In addition to the references Whitman and Twain make to minstrelsy in their work, there was a more general overall relationship with this performance mode, as discussed in David Roediger’s *The Wages of Whiteness* (London: Verso, 1991), Eric Lott’s *Love and Theft* (New York: Oxford, 1995), Susan Gubar’s *Racechanges* (New York: Oxford, 1997) and W. T. Lhamon, Jr.’s *Raising Cain* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1998).

#### **Part IV. “Coming to America”:**

#### **Continental Racial Constructions and the (African) American Miscegenation of Miss March**

Although Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and the blackface shows based on it were immensely popular, Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* witnessed the emergence of another cultural phenomenon. A mere five years before the girls’ novel was released, the idea of “miscegenation” made its debut. In December 1863, a pamphlet written by David Goodman Croyle and George Wakeman entitled *Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races, Applied to the American White Man and Negro* asserted that the term then commonly used to describe the integration of slaves into American society, “amalgamation,” was inaccurate and even inappropriate. While “amalgamation” referred to the union of metals with quicksilver, Croyle and Wakeman argued that the word “miscegenation,” from the Latin “miscere” (to mix) and “genus” (race), was more precise. The new term suggested the social, political and economic assimilation of blacks into white society. More importantly—and, of course, shockingly—it also implied the sexual intermingling of the races. In contemporary usage, in fact, “miscegenation” refers almost exclusively to interracial desire, marriage and even reproduction. Presented less than one year after the Emancipation Proclamation, Croyle and Wakeman’s new way of thinking about America’s post-slavery society made even some of the staunchest supporters of abolition uneasy.

In spite of the simultaneity of Louisa May Alcott’s life and work with this important shift in American racial thinking, her work does not explore black-white mixing in the United States. Even though the author was a fervent proponent of

abolition, resided in the U.S. throughout her life, and set the bulk of her narratives in the nation, she does not discuss African Americans in her writing. Recalling the tendency of both her British counterparts and especially literary adherents of the Gothic, Alcott's sensational and antislavery narratives draw on European racial constructions. Characters of color in her novels and short stories consistently hail from the Continent.

Louisa May Alcott's racialized association of brown skin with bad behavior was not limited to an individual's social or moral actions. In the same way the author linked dark skin with dark conduct, she also subscribed to the popular but bias-based belief that exotic features signaled an equally erotic sexuality. In both past and present criticism, much attention has been given to Louisa May Alcott's nightmares about being pursued by a handsome and sexually aggressive Spaniard. Numerous biographies, critical essays, and even prefatory blurbs mention the delirious hallucinations with which she was plagued while suffering from typhoid fever and calomel poisoning in 1863. In what has now become an oft-cited journal passage, the author asserts, "As I shall forget the strange fancies that haunted me I shall amuse myself with recording some of them. The most vivid & enduring was a conviction I had married a stout, handsome Spaniard, dressed in black velvet with very soft hands & a voice that was constantly saying, 'Lie still, my dear' " (Myerson and Shealy *Journals* 116). Although this image was often accompanied by the appearance of both her mother and the Pope, Alcott recalls being haunted by "an awful fear of the Spanish spouse who was always coming after me, appearing out of closets, in at windows, or t[h]reatening me dreadfully all night long" (Myerson and Shealy *Journals* 116).

In light of the frequency of such images, it comes as no surprise that the trope of the “handsome Spaniard” came to inhabit both Louisa May Alcott’s sleeping and waking hours. As Betsy Klimasmith notes, representations of a swarthy Spanish man “became a familiar inhabitant of the dynamic zones of desire and race” in the author’s work (118). Both Alcott’s antislavery and sensational fiction is riddled with characters who are both highly eroticized and of a dark European background. Most famous among these, perhaps, is Paul Frere from her short story “M.L.” First published by the Boston *Commonwealth* in 1863, the narrative recounts the romance between a young man rumored to hail from Spanish nobility and a white woman. Only days before the couple is to be married, a villainous friend reveals that the “swarthy” suitor is actually a fugitive slave: the scar on his right hand form the letters “M.L.,” the initials of his former owner.

Perhaps even more shocking than this information about her husband’s past is the young woman’s reaction to it. When Claudia learns that her spouse is a former slave, she decides to remain with him. To the consternation of her family and friends, she announces, “ ‘My husband has achieved a nobler success than men you honor, has surmounted greater obstacles, has conquered sterner foes, and risen to be an honest man’ ” (Alcott “M.L.” 22). Once the couple is wed, Claudia reinterprets the meaning of his scar. No longer the mark of her husband’s former owner, she reads the initials as an abbreviation for “My Love.” Due to the provocative stance “M.L.” takes on miscegenation, James Russell Lowell declined the narrative when Alcott submitted it to the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1860. Grumbling over this politically fueled rejection, Alcott complained in her journal, “the dear South must not be offended” (Myerson and Shealy *Journals* 98).

In addition to “M.L.,” several of Alcott’s other abolition tales showcase such taboo issues as interracial desire. Although all these narratives are set in the United States, they once again draw on European racial constrictions to give their characters a dark hue. In Alcott’s 1863 narrative, “My Contraband,” for instance, a runaway slave (or contraband) is the object of affection for a white Civil War nurse. From the moment the young mulatto enters her ward, Nurse Dane eroticizes his body. Similar to Paul Frere, she describes him in Europeanized ways. After observing that Robert possess “all the attributes and comeliness belonging to his mixed race,” she asserts that he is “more quadroon than mulatto, with Saxon features, [and a] Spanish complexion darkened by exposure” (70 – 1).<sup>21</sup>

Narratives concerning slavery and abolition are not the only venues in which Louisa May Alcott engaged such issues as miscegenation. Many of the sensational stories the author wrote in the years prior to *Little Women* highlight the sexually charged relationship between an exotic foreign man and a white woman. Although some incarnation of the swarthy European lover can be found in “Pauline’s Passion and Punishment” (1863), “A Double Tragedy” (1865), “Taming a Tartar” (1867), “Which Wins?” (1869), “Perilous Play” (1869), “Honor’s Fortune” (1869), “Betrayed by a Buckle” (1870), “The Baron’s Gloves” (1882) and *Comic Tragedies* (1893), Phillip Tempest from *A Long Fatal Love Chase* is perhaps the most representative example.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> Observing his “strong-limbed” and “manly” physique, Nurse Dane concludes “I had seen many contrabands, but never one so attractive as this” (Alcott 70). Although Nurse Dane and Robert do not become romantically involved, they form a close bond. At one point, she dissuades him from murdering his white half-brother whom he has ironically been assigned to help nurse. As a sign of gratitude, Robert adopts Dane’s last name when he is discharged from the ward and moves North. Upon doing so, he becomes, as the title of the story suggests, *her* contraband.

<sup>22</sup> It should be noted that not all of these figures are necessarily characterized as “Spanish.” Baron Sigismund Palsdorf from “The Baron’s Gloves,” for instance, is Polish. Meanwhile, several figures from Alcott’s *Comedic Tragedies* are Italian, Greek and even Moor.

Maintaining residences in Italy, France and even Germany, the “fiery-eyed and menacing” young man possesses a “bronzed face” (Alcott *Long* 5, 21). In addition to being a swarthy figure himself, Tempest is frequently accompanied by another dark figure: his loyal servant Baptiste. Born in Algeria, the sinister sidekick is described as “a slender, swarthy, fiery-eyed young man” (Alcott *Long* 55). Significantly, in an attempt to recapture Rosamond near the end of the novel, Baptiste cross-dresses as a Spanish lady (Alcott *Long* 205).

In the same way Louisa May Alcott’s male characters are eroticized for their dark, exotic features, so are some of her female figures. In Alcott’s first novel, *Moods* (1864), Sylvia Yule is unable to wed Adam Warwick because of “his previous engagement to a hot-blooded, unprincipled Cuban beauty who has seduced him into a promise of marriage” (MacDonald 77). As a result, in both the 1864 original and its 1882 revision, the young woman settles for a man with a nominal link to foreign exoticism: Geoffrey *Moor*. Similarly, in Alcott’s 1870 short story “La Belle Bayadere” a sensual Indian dancer is described as both “swarthy” and perhaps even a “Spaniard” (743, 744). Every night, the young woman delights a predominantly Caucasian audience with her erotic routine “The Spirit of the Ganges.”

The racialization of Jo March throughout *Little Women* adds a new dimension to the representations of race in Louisa May Alcott’s work. In marked contrast to the bulk of the author’s other writing, the brown Topsy/turvy tomboy acquires her dark hue through her association with African American rather than European sources. Also, just as there are numerous areas of overlap between Jo and Topsy from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*,

the tomboy and her creator can be connected with another uniquely American racial form: blackface minstrelsy.

These details, coupled with the era's changing attitudes about skin color, suggest a new way to approach and read Alcott's famed children's novel. As the object of affection for both a series of male admirers within the novel and also for generations of young women who have read it, Jo March is eroticized and even fetishized throughout *Little Women*. In this way, although Alcott's sensational and antislavery fiction are commonly considered the genres in which she explored race, her girls' novel evokes such issues as passing and—with Jo's marriage to the Aryan Professor Bhaer at the end of the novel—even interracial desire. In addition to broadening the repertoire of race operating in the author's life and work, these elements also place it in dialogue with changing postbellum attitudes about skin color. In many ways, Miss March can be connected with the nation's new concept of miscegenation.

Jo's first suitor, of course, is her best friend and close neighbor Laurie Lawrence. From the moment the duo meets at Mrs. Gardiner's party, they form a deep connection. "Both peeped, and criticized, and chatted, till they felt like old acquaintances. Laurie's bashfulness soon wore off, for Jo's gentlemanly demeanor amused and set him at his ease...." (Alcott *Little* 28 – 29). As the boyish girl and girlish boy respectively, Jo and Laurie are mirror images of each other. Recalling the frequent yoking of tomboyish girls with sissy or effeminate boys, the pair becomes fast friends. Before long, Jo and Laurie are inseparable; they go on skating expeditions together, construct their own private postal system, and even officiate over "The Busy Bee Society."

In addition to sharing similar personalities, Jo and Laurie also possess a common skin tone. Like his topsy-turvy playmate, the ostensibly Caucasian boy is repeatedly described as “brown” in Alcott’s narrative. The first time Jo sees Laurie, in fact, this feature is foregrounded. Observing the “Lawrence boy” from across the room, she notices his “[c]urly black hair, brown skin, big black eyes, long nose, nice teeth, little hands and feet” (Alcott *Little* 29). In marked contrast to Topsy/turvy Jo, however, Laurie gets his coloration from European sources. As in many of Alcott’s sensational tales, the boy’s mother was a “foreigner,” and he was also born abroad. According to Marmee, Laurie’s father “married an Italian lady” and the youth was born while the family was living in Italy (Alcott *Little* 56).

In spite of the mutual affection between Jo March and Laurie Lawrence, Alcott famously refused to wed the pair. After the tremendous success of *Little Women*’s first volume, the author felt tremendous pressure to script a fairy-tale ending to the story. Throngs of enthusiastic readers wanted to see Jo and her beloved Laurie paired off in the second installment. For various personal, creative, and undoubtedly psychological reasons, the author refused to consent. Although she would pen a conventional happy ending for her girls’ novel, it would not be completely formulaic.<sup>23</sup> While working on the second volume of *Little Women* in November 1869, the author vowed in her journal: “I *won’t* marry Jo to Laurie to please anyone” [her emphasis] (Myerson and Shealy *Journals* 167).

---

<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, Laurie does propose to Jo in chapter 35 of *Little Women*. In spite of Jo’s repeated efforts to stop him from making the declaration, he “plunged into the subject with characteristic impetuosity” (Alcott *Little* 361). Faced with this proclamation, Jo is forced to tell her childhood friend that she does not share his feelings: “‘I don’t see why I can’t love you as you want me to. I’ve tried, but I can’t change the feeling, and it would be a lie to say I do when I don’t’ ” (Alcott *Little* 362). As a result, the chapter is given the appropriate title “Heartache.”



Louisa May Alcott's refusal to wed Jo and Laurie did not destine the topsy-turvy tomboy for a life of spinsterhood. Near the end of *Little Women*, Jo meets and falls in love with the paternalistic Frederick Bhaer. In addition to being the emotional opposite of Laurie, the reserved and rational Professor is also his antithesis when it comes to coloration. Although Fritz hails from Germany, his European ancestry does not darken his skin or cause him to be characterized as swarthy. In marked contrast to both Laurie Lawrence and characters in the bulk of Alcott's sensational tales, Bhaer is made more Caucasian as a result of his Continental origins. At various points throughout *Little Women*, the Professor's fair skin is mentioned in tandem with his status as a "true German" (Alcott *Little* 453).

In this way, Alcott's decision to wed brown, Topsy/turvy Jo to this Aryan figure may extend beyond her desire to resist a conventional happy ending. In marked contrast to a union with the similarly dark-skinned Laurie, Jo's matrimony to the Caucasian Professor Bhaer can be read as a coded commentary on black/white reproduction. Recalling the etymology of the newly coined term "miscegenation" once again, their coupling represents a mixing of dusky and Aryan races. One of the first pupils Jo and Professor Bhaer enroll in their school exemplifies this conjecture. The young boy is "a merry little quadroon, who could not be taken in elsewhere, but was welcome to the 'Bhaer-garten' " (Alcott *Little* 486).

This racially charged way of reading *Little Women* adds an element of subversion to the iconic status of both Alcott's text and its topsy-turvy heroine. As Sarah Elbert notes, Jo has "become the best loved and most memorable character in all of Alcott's fiction" (*Hunger* 144). For nearly 150 years, she has been an object of affection,

identification and even fetishization for its (predominantly white) audience.<sup>24</sup> As a result of such popularity, “[i]n the eyes of many readers and critics, Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* is ‘the American female myth and Jo March has become the most influential figure of the independent and creative woman’ ” [her emphasis] (Stimpson 958). An awareness of Jo’s brown skin, connection to Topsy/turvyness and marriage to Aryan Professor Bhaer adds a new dimension to her appeal as an iconoclastic character. Rather than simply embodying a tomboyish young woman who defies conventional gender roles, Jo March can also be seen as a figure who disrupts contemporary constructions of race. Existing on the boundaries between male and female as well as black and white, the ostensibly Caucasian character highlights the interrelated natures of gender, race and sexuality in the United States.

In “ ‘Never Was Born’: The Mulatto, An American Tragedy?,” Werner Sollors argues that the suicide of a mixed-race character “is the cultural given in American settings; Quadroon and Octoroon lovers survive only if they remove themselves to Europe with their white suitors or spouses” (300). Countless nineteenth-century novels and short stories present mulatto men and women as self-hating and even self-destructive. Alienated from both white and black culture, these figures are unable to fit into American society. As a consequence, many die by their own hands or at the hands of another soon after becoming romantically involved with a member of either racial group.

---

<sup>24</sup> Since the 1868 publication of *Little Women*, feminist writers and thinkers from Gertrude Stein to Joyce Carol Oates have commented on the influence Alcott’s novel in general and Jo March in particular had on their development. Perhaps most famous among these testimonials is Simone de Beauvoir’s moving remarks in her 1958 autobiography *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*. De Beauvoir noted: “There was one book in which I believed I had caught a glimpse of my future self: *Little Women*, by Louisa May Alcott.... I identified myself passionately with Jo, the intellectual. Brusque and bony, Jo clambered up into the trees when she wanted to read; she was more tomboyish and daring than I was, but I shared her horror of sewing and housekeeping and her love of books. She wrote; in order to imitate her more completely, I composed two or three short stories.”

Although Jo March is never explicitly identified as mulatto and does not commit suicide at the end of *Little Women*, Angela M. Estes and Kathleen Margaret Lant argue in “Dismembering the Text: The Horror of Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women*” that her marriage to Professor Bhaer is akin to murder. By the end of the novel, Jo’s feisty, independent spirit has been replaced by the one-dimensional personality of her now-deceased sister, Beth. “[B]y a fascinating sleight of hand, Alcott hides the failed experimental corpse of Jo and switches the identity of her victim” (Estes and Kant 105). As a result, Estes and Kant insist that *Little Women* can—and perhaps even should—be read as a murder mystery rather than a domestic novel.

While a radical argument in many ways, countless past and present readers share the position. According to Barbara Sicherman, audiences cherish *Little Women* for its ambitious, literary, and boyish heroine rather than for its lessons in domestication and self-control (217). As a consequence, many readers selectively omit Jo’s matrimonial fate when talking about the text. They concentrate on her tomboyish girlhood and not her adult conformity to the gender codes of “little women.” If readers do acknowledge the young woman’s nuptials, they do so as apologists, insisting that if the topsy-turvy tomboy was to wed it should have been to neighbor Laurie. Unlike the paternal Professor Bhaer, this fun-loving figure would not have required Jo to relinquish her spunky nature, spirited personality or proclivity for writing sensational tales. Although these traits are unconventional and even unladylike, they form the basis of her personality. Echoing Estes and Kant’s argument as well as the fate of many mixed-race characters, their loss seems like an act of suicide or even homicide.

In light of such parallels, while not an explicitly mulatto character, the topsy-turvy tomboy contains numerous parallels to such men and women. Ostensibly Caucasian, Jo March's brown complexion makes her ambiguously raced while her matrimonial circumstances recall the fate of many tragic mulatto characters. In an 1861 letter to friend Alfred Whitman, Louisa May Alcott contemplated a photograph that was taken of her when she returned to Massachusetts. Imagining how the portrait would look, she wrote: "as I always take very dark & hunched up you will be gratified with an image of a stout mulatto lady with a crooked nose, sleepy eyes & a tempestuous gown" (Myerson and Shealy *Letters* 67). While critics presume that a tomboyish personality and a proclivity for writing are the primary traits Louisa May Alcott bequeathed to her fictional alter ego, her 1861 letter suggests otherwise. As the author's description of her physical appearance indicates, a connection to an African American identity may also have been one of Jo March's inheritances.

## Part V. "Being Colored Me":

### Taking the Case for Realism in *Little Women* a Little Further

Since its publication in 1868, readers have puzzled over *Little Women*'s setting in the midst of the Civil War but its seeming divorce from race. Aside from Mr. March's service as an army chaplain and Jo's tomboyish desire to be a soldier, the novel does not engage slavery, abolition, or any other facet of black/white relations.<sup>25</sup> On the contrary, the text is sanitized from such concerns. Other than their repeated reference to knitting blue army-socks, Marmee and her four daughters are immune from both the abstract politics and bloody realities of the battlefield. Throughout the more than four-hundred page novel, in fact, the issues of slavery, abolition and even the Civil War are mentioned in less than a dozen instances and rarely discussed for more than a few lines. Frustrated by this phenomenon, critics have often dismissed *Little Women* as simply an escapist children's book: the novel may entertain and even instruct young girls, but it is hopelessly disconnected from the "real world."

During the past few decades, examinations of *Little Women* from a feminist perspective have helped to undermine such dismissive assumptions. Critics such as Elaine Showalter and Madeline B. Stern have argued that the novel is not disconnected from societal concerns, but an imprint of them. In addition to providing a valuable portrait of women's culture during this era, the text also represents a window onto Alcott's struggles with authorship: negotiating her professional need to remain within the

---

<sup>25</sup> Admittedly, Laurie's tutor (and Meg's future husband), John Brooke, is also involved in the conflict. So little attention is paid to his participation, however, that it seems inconsequential. Only one sentence, in fact, is devoted to the young man's experiences. As the narrator notes, John "did his duty manfully for a year, got wounded, was sent home and never allowed to return" (Alcott *Little* 237). After this remark in the opening paragraphs of Part II, his Civil War service is never mentioned again.

confines of acceptable literary and gender codes with her personal desire to tomboyishly rebel against them.

The presence of brown, topsy-turvy Jo March adds another facet to this discussion. Rather than being divorced from such issues as race and even popular culture, Jo's dark hue and connection to the minstrelized *Uncle Tom's Cabin* suggests that the text was in dialogue with them. In a seemingly innocuous girls' novel, the young woman's eroticized presence and fertile marriage raise such "adult" issues as passing, interracial desire and even miscegenation.

In "*Little Women: Alcott's Civil War*," Judith Fetterly remarked that even a cursory examination of Alcott's domestic fiction and her sensational tales "make[s] clear the amount of rage and intelligence Alcott had to suppress in order to attain her 'true style' and write *Little Women*" (370). Similar to many critics, Fetterly is shocked by both the frequency and liberty with which Alcott explored racial and sexual issues in her thrillers, as well as her staunch refusal to engage these concerns in her children's fiction. The repeated characterization of Jo March as both brown and topsy-turvy undermines this phenomenon. It introduces such "forbidden" elements as passing and miscegenation to her seemingly "harmless" and "innocent" domestic novel. In this way, the brown, topsy-turvy character closes the gap between Alcott's children's fiction and her lurid abolition and sensational narratives. It erodes the popular critical consensus that the author utilized different genres and even styles to engage different social, sexual and racial concerns. Rather than the commonly identified rift between Alcott's literary lives, there may be more continuity than readers and critics commonly presume.

### **Chapter 3.**

#### **Passing and Palimpsests:**

#### **Sarah Orne Jewett's *A Country Doctor* and the Case of the Two Nancy Princes**

Since its publication in 1884, Sarah Orne Jewett's *A Country Doctor* has largely been viewed as a literary response to both William Dean Howells' *Dr. Breen's Practice* (1881) and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps' *Doctor Zay* (1882).<sup>1</sup> Numerous studies compare and contrast the way in which the main character in each of these texts reconciles (if at all) the demands of her profession with the expectations of her gender, namely marriage and motherhood. Dissatisfied with the literary solutions offered in these novels, Jewett formulated her own response to the debate about women, professions and marriage.<sup>2</sup> Unlike the main characters in Phelps and Howells, Jewett's Nan Prince "retains her independence: she refuses to marry" (Masteller 136).<sup>3</sup> The varying portraits of professional women provided in these novels reflect the diverse opinions about women and work in late-nineteenth century America.

When analyzing narratives by Howells, Phelps and Jewett, however, most investigations neglect the color components operating in their texts. These discussions forget that the three novels are not simply focusing on "women," but white women, and are also not simply looking at "professions," but those commonly characterized as "white collar."

---

<sup>1</sup> To this circuit of influence, Louisa May Alcott's 1886 *Jo's Boys* could also be added. In this novel, a tomboyish girl by the name of Nan also longs to be a doctor. Similar to Jewett's Nan Prince, the young woman forgoes marriage for her career. Published only two years after *A Country Doctor*, it is possible Alcott had Jewett's text in mind when she composed her narrative.

<sup>2</sup> In "Rewriting the Necessary Woman: Marriage and Professionalism in James, Jewett and Phelps," Valerie Fulton argues that Henry James' 1886 novel *The Bostonians* ought to be included among this triptych of texts. Even though Dr. Mary Prance is a minor figure in the narrative, she raises the same social and cultural issues as the women physicians in Howells, Jewett and Phelps.

<sup>3</sup> As Margaret Farrand Thorp notes, these texts were written "at a time when very few people thought it possible to combine the two" (30).

This chapter explores the possibility that Sarah Orne Jewett's *A Country Doctor* may be not simply a continuation of the debate on (white) women in (white-collar) professions, but a coded commentary on black women in such fields. Though the novel's tomboyish main character, Nan Prince, is ostensibly named after her paternal aunt, she shares her name with a prominent black travel writer of the 1850s. Formally named Anna, Nan's Aunt Prince of Dunport is called "Nancy" more than twenty times in the narrative. Discussions of the life and career of Nancy Prince appear in such well-known studies as Hazel Carby's *Reconstructing Womanhood*, Carla Peterson's "*Doers of the Word*," and Francis Smith Foster's *Written by Herself*. As these texts reveal, the New England-born Prince published her reflections on visiting and even living in such distant locales as Russia and Jamaica in *A Narrative of the Life and Travels of Mrs. Nancy Prince*. First released in 1850, the text was reprinted in 1853 and again in 1856. Not only did the appearance of *Life and Travels* challenge stereotypes that travel and ethnographic writing were predominantly white genres, but it also—in the words of Carla Peterson—"conceptualized the stance of the 'colored tourist' as a means of achieving the 'common cause' of racial uplift" (88).

The linkages between Sarah Orne Jewett's Nan Prince and travel writer Nancy Prince go beyond the simple sharing of a name. The past history, present conditions and even future prospects of Jewett's character echo her namesake in many ways. As with the other tomboys highlighted in this study, for instance, Nan's features are racialized throughout the novel. The youth's future guardian, Dr. John Leslie, describes her face as "brown" when he first sees her (Jewett *Country* 175). Similarly, when Nan reflects on all the things her mother lost but made sure her daughter would receive, a "whiteness of



soul” is among them (Jewett *Country* 369). In addition, like E. D. E. N. Southworth’s Capitola Black, Nan is often characterized with the racially charged terms “wild” and “monkey” because of her tomboyish antics.

Such linguistic connections are not the only links that can be made between Sarah Orne Jewett’s Nan Prince and travel writer Nancy Prince. The lives of the two figures share thematic concerns as well. In the same way “colored tourists” such as Nancy Prince struggled with the troubled past and uncertain future of African Americans in American culture, Nan Prince confronts a similar issue in *A Country Doctor*. Orphaned in the opening pages of the narrative, Nan struggles first to discover her ancestral roots and then to come to terms with them. Uprooted by her troubled mother and disowned by her father’s well-to-do family, the young girl must search for both the meaning and the location of “home.”

In this way, Sarah Orne Jewett’s ostensible meditation on (white) women’s role in (white-collar) male professions draws on both racial passing and textual palimpsest. Racialized tomboy Nan Prince can be seen as embodying or “passing” as Nancy Prince while, at the same time, episodes from *A Country Doctor* can be viewed as palimpsestic with *A Narrative of the Life and Travels of Mrs. Nancy Prince*. Reading Jewett’s 1884 novel in tandem with this possible source of inspiration adds a new facet to her construction of womanhood, her exploration of the historical past, and her reliance on the journey motif. Similar to Prince’s travel narrative, *A Country Doctor* interrogates the way in which one’s racial identification (whether actual or perceived) can dictate the adoption of unconventional gender roles as well as necessitate forms of travel that are both forced and chosen.

Such shared concerns open up the possibility that the novel which is both Jewett's most autobiographical and the one she repeatedly quipped was her favorite<sup>4</sup> is a continuation of, rather than divergence from, her literary treatment of race and race relations during this era. The case of the two Nancy Princes undermines the common critical consensus that gender and class are the primary and even exclusive thematic concerns of *A Country Doctor*. Similar to such narratives as Jewett's "The Foreigner" (1900), "A War Debt" (1895) and especially *The Story of the Normans* (1887), this text is also concerned with the issue of race.

In his important critical biography, Richard Cary argued that Sarah Orne Jewett's fiction focused "exclusively upon the region and people she truly knew" (*Sarah* 52). While this observation holds true for the bulk of her narratives, the author's 1884 meditation on women and medicine may be an exception. In light of the linguistic, structural and even thematic similarities to Nancy Prince's *Life and Travels*, it is possible that *A Country Doctor* may have had a more geographically diverse and even socially ambitious vision at its root.

---

<sup>4</sup> For more on the special esteem with which Jewett held *A Country Doctor*, see Louis A. Renza's "*A White Heron*" and the Question of Minor Literature (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1984).

## **Part I. (Not Quite) Six Degrees of Separation:**

### **Sarah Orne Jewett and Nancy Prince**

Admittedly, neither the various editions of Sarah Orne Jewett's letters nor past or present biographies indicate that she read *A Narrative of the Life and Travels of Mrs. Nancy Prince*. Of the many books and articles she mentions perusing as well as those critics and biographers have ascertained she encountered, Prince's travel narrative is not among them.

In spite of this lack of concrete evidence, it seems likely that she would have encountered this narrative. Sarah Orne Jewett was both a member of Boston's elite literary circles and a voracious reader who had a passion for books of any genre. Her correspondence is filled with references to the numerous fiction and nonfiction narratives she recently read. From the time the author was a small girl, her father encouraged her to explore such classic writers as Milton, Cervantes, Fielding, Tennyson, Arnold and Lowell. Although initially skeptical of such literary "heavyweights," Jewett soon grew to love these authors. As John Eldridge Frost notes, "The doctor's keen appreciation of books led to a strong tie between father and daughter" (22). Jewett would recall in her essay "Looking Back on Girlhood," "He gave me my first and best knowledge of books by his own delight and dependence on them..." (5).

At the same time Jewett's father was introducing her to literary classics, her mother and grandmother were fostering an interest in popular texts. From their hands, the future writer received copies of "*Pride and Prejudice*, *Scenes of Clerical Life*, and the stories of Mrs. Oliphant" (Frost 22 – 23). According to biographer Paula Blanchard, "[t]he Jewett household literally overflowed with books. All the bookshelves were full,

and hundreds more were stored in closets and the attic. Tidy stacks of books were removed from chairs so that visitors could sit on them” (30). This sizable family collection was supplemented by subscriptions to a wide array of journals as well as the holdings of her father’s many scholarly friends.

The love of reading instilled in Jewett by her parents during her childhood carried over into her adult life. Not only did the author’s South Berwick home have an ample library, but so did Annie Fields’ Boston residence, which she shared with Jewett from the 1880s. Although the exact volumes contained in their respective collections is unknown, an article in an 1894 issue of *The Women’s Era* attests that *A Narrative of the Life and Travels of Mrs. Prince* could be “found in the houses of many of the old residents of Boston, as well as other places all over Massachusetts” (Hilton 4). It is difficult to think of a home more established or respected during this era than the Fields’ famous abode on 148 Charles Street. If the assertion in *The Woman’s Era* is correct, one may surmise that the Fields’ library included a copy of *Life and Travels*. If so, then it seems likely Jewett perused it.

In addition to having their writing share shelf space, Sarah Orne Jewett and Nancy Prince also hailed from the same geographic region, New England. Although Jewett was born in Maine and Prince in Massachusetts, each shared a special bond with their place of birth. In *Life and Travels*, Nancy Prince proudly identifies herself as hailing from New England stock. The opening sentences of her narrative inform readers, “I was born in Newburyport, September the 15<sup>th</sup>, 1799. My mother was born in Gloucester, Massachusetts.....” (Prince 1). In the pages that follow, she goes on to boast that her brother was a sailor in the region and her Grandmother “an Indian of this country”

(Prince 1).<sup>5</sup> As Cheryl Fish argues, even Prince's religious identity can be connected to her New England roots. The young woman believed in evangelical Christianity, a faith "that developed distinctly but nevertheless in reaction to the Calvinism of the Puritans" (Fish "Going" 13).

As numerous biographers have noted, the ties Sarah Orne Jewett had with the small towns of coastal Maine are central to understanding both her life and her work. This region forms the setting for not only the bulk of her narratives, but those commonly seen as her "masterpieces." For local color authors such as Jewett, Ann Douglas Wood has argued "the act of writing offered an exercise in nostalgia" ("Impoverishment" 13). It was a forum for both memorializing and, by extension, making immortal the sleepy, tight-knit communities that were rapidly disappearing in the wake of urbanization and industrialization. A lifelong concern of Sarah Orne Jewett, this narrative thread can be found in countless of her novels and short stories. Perhaps Perry D. Westbrook put it best when he said that Jewett's work is "Essentially... a lament for the past" (*Acres* 43).<sup>6</sup> The author's most celebrated text, *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896) is by far the most oft-cited example of this phenomenon. The novel's "backward" focus forms the basis of its reputation in many ways. Its spotlight on a vanishing Maine people and way of life accounts for much of the critical praise and popular attention the novel has received.

---

<sup>5</sup> To date, surprisingly little attention has been given to Prince's Native American ancestry. Eager to align her with other black travel writers such as Mary Seacole, most critics neglect or at least minimize her mixed race background.

<sup>6</sup> In her important study *Folk Roots and Mythic Wings in Sarah Orne Jewett and Toni Morrison*, Marilyn Sanders Mobley argues that these seemingly dissimilar writers performed similar "cultural work" due to their shared concern for the past. "Writing from an apparent moral imperative, Jewett and Morrison see themselves consciously reclaiming folklore that their respective cultures either had lost or were about to lose in the wake of dramatic historical change" (Mobley 8). She goes on to assert that this "marriage of their folk knowledge and sensibility of their artistic vision and narrative attention" forms the basis for "both the substance and structure of Jewett's and Morrison's texts" (8, 9). Rather than simply serving as a literary repository for what their culture "has attempted to discard, negate or marginalize," these writers interrogated "the relationship between 'the folk' and American culture" (9).

Jewett's commitment to the people and places of New England, however, did not foreclose curiosity about other lands. Throughout her life, the author read travel narratives, as well as purchased them for her library. Moreover, in 1887 and again in 1889, she fostered a correspondence with travel author Francis Hopkins Smith. Her first missive lauds a new edition of his *Well-Worn Roads of Spain, Holland and Italy* (Boston, 1887). In her characteristic style, she tells him it is "a truly charming little book" and wishes it "all the good fortune it deserves" (Cary *Letters* 56). Two years later, when Smith released a volume of exotic travel sketches titled *A White Umbrella in Mexico* (Boston, 1889), Jewett was equally enthusiastic. With almost histrionic zeal, she insists "Nothing could be more charming than the dress of these Mexican sketches—you make the little book as pretty as a picture" (Cary *Letters* 60).

Sarah Orne Jewett was not interested in simply reading travel writing; she was also an avid traveler herself. From the early 1880s until her death in 1909, the author embarked on numerous international excursions, most often in the company of Annie Fields. Significantly, one of the first trips the author made abroad was to Jamaica in 1882—only two years before releasing *A Country Doctor*. Near the end of her life, in the late 1890s, Jewett returned to the West Indies region, touring Nassau, Jamaica, Port au Prince, Palm Beach and Prince de Leon on a two-month cruise. While no evidence suggests that Jewett read Prince's *Life and Travels* prior to either of her trips, her interest in travel literature makes it possible that she perused the book before departing.

If Sarah Orne Jewett did not discover Nancy Prince's *Life and Travels* for its travel information, she may have come to it for its historical detail. Even as a child, the writer gravitated toward accounts of English history in particular and European affairs in

general. Nancy Prince resided in both Russia and Jamaica during one of the most extraordinary periods in those nations' histories. While she was in St. Petersburg with her husband in 1824, for instance, a great flood struck the city.<sup>7</sup> As Prince details in *Life and Travels*, "The water rose sixteen feet in most parts of the city; many of the inhabitants were drowned. An island between the city and Cronstadt, containing five hundred inhabitants, was inundated, and all were drowned..." (Prince 20). The following year this natural catastrophe was coupled with a political calamity: the Decembrist Revolt. In a monumental paragraph that spans several pages, Nancy Prince presents a graphic eye-witness account of the bloody events: "The scene cannot be described; the bodies of the killed and mangled were cast into the river, and the snow and ice were stained with the blood of human victims" (Prince *Life* 25). Viewing serfdom as another form of slavery, the author understood the reasons for the revolt and even sympathized with the rebels.<sup>8</sup> As a result, she was appalled by the violent manner in which the government dealt with the protesters.

Although Nancy Prince did not stay in Jamaica as long as she resided in Russia, her time on the island was just as eventful. In 1833, the British Parliament passed the Emancipation Act, calling for the slow but steady manumission of slaves in the colony of Jamaica. During the next six years, black men, women and children would be gradually

---

<sup>7</sup> As numerous critics have noted, Prince's description of both her marriage and departure for Russia distorts or misrepresents the actual sequence of events. As she writes in *Life and Travels*, "...after seven years of anxiety and turmoil, I made up my mind to leave my country. September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1823, Mr. Prince arrived from Russia. February 14, 1824, we were married. April 14, we embarked on board the *Romulus*... bound for Russia" (Prince 15). In many ways, the young woman's description makes it seem as though her decision to leave New England preceded her decision to marry Nero Prince rather than *vice versa*. At the very least, it suggests her marriage to Prince arose out of the pragmatism of longing to leave America rather than romance of having fallen in love.

<sup>8</sup> This was a common comparison during this era. As Cheryl Fish notes, "[b]efore and during the time Nancy Prince published her narrative, it was not unusual to see comparisons of American slavery with slavery in Russia, published in both the popular press and abolition press" ("Going" 61). For more information on these attitudes and specific examples of such arguments, see footnote 35 on page 64 of Fish's "Going Mobile."

released from servitude.<sup>9</sup> Although designed to provide a smooth transition from a slave-based to a free labor economy, the Emancipation Act proved ineffectual. “By August 1, 1838, two years before Mrs. Prince’s arrival, the apprenticeship system had broken down in Jamaica, and the local Assembly begrudgingly granted full freedom to all blacks on the island” (Walters xviii). Soon after this event, missionaries flocked to Jamaica and the devout Christian and staunch abolitionist Prince was among them. Disillusioned by the fractious nature of antislavery efforts in the United States, the young woman asserted in *Life and Travels*, “My mind, after the emancipation in the West Indies, was bent upon going to Jamaica” (Prince 48).<sup>10</sup> In spite of such lofty aims, Prince’s missionary efforts in Jamaica did not go as planned. Thwarted by everything from bad weather and civil unrest to lack of funds and infighting among missionaries groups, she left Jamaica permanently in 1842.

Although disappointed by her overall experiences, Nancy Prince never relinquished her beliefs in the inherent worth of the black race nor in the evils of slavery.

---

<sup>9</sup> In 1834, for instance, when the legislation went into effect, all slave children under six years of age became free (Walters xvii). Over the next four years, blacks working in domestic roles would be granted increasing levels of liberty. “During this transitional period of apprenticeship, ex-slaves worked forty-five hours a week for their masters, with the remainder of time belonging to them” (Walters xvii). Finally, in 1840, the final stage of the Emancipation Act would take effect, freeing all field hands and providing compensation to white masters for the loss of their property.

<sup>10</sup> By the 1830s, the American antislavery movement was bitterly divided. Disagreements over the “woman question,” the use of insurrection, and the recolonization of blacks after emancipation began to fracture anti-abolition groups around the country. Although Nancy Prince glosses over these details in *Life and Travels*, she was at the center of such debates. Belonging to the “dissenting” faction of the Boston Female Antislavery Society (BFASS), Prince publically aligned herself with Garrisonian politics and ardently believed in women’s active participation in anti-slavery work. In addition to disputes over the use of violence and the comparative good of sending blacks back to Africa, “[a]nother tension among the Boston women was centered around the question of where one could do the most significant reform work, at home or abroad” (Fish “Going” 75). After all, unlike in Jamaica, blacks in the United States were not only still enslaved but denied even the most basic human rights. Nancy Prince’s disillusionment with the fractious nature of American abolition efforts propelled her to take up work abroad. As she writes in *Life and Travels*, “I hoped that I might aid, in some small degree, to raise up and encourage the emancipated inhabitants, and teach the young children to read and work, to fear God, and put their trust in the Savior” (Prince 50).



As Ronald Walters notes, nearly every sentence in *Life and Travels* reflects her desire “to disprove racist claims that blacks were only fit for slavery” (Walters xix). Asked by an Afro-Jamaican one day why she was so inquisitive about the island’s inhabitants, she told them “we had heard in America that you are lazy, and that emancipation has been of no benefit to you; I wish to inform myself of the truth respecting you, and give a true account on my return” (Prince 54). Dispelling white fears that Afro-Jamaicans would refuse to work after emancipation and that their conversion to “civilized” Christianity was hopeless, she presents the island’s black men and women as hardworking, honest and God-fearing. When her experiences with Jamaicans fall short of this image, she refuses to use race as an explanation. “It is not surprising that these people are full of deceit and life... this is the fruits of slavery, it makes masters and slaves knaves” (Prince 57).

While Sarah Orne Jewett never expressed explicit interest in missionary or reform work, she was captivated by tumultuous historical events in general and colonialism in particular. Not only did she read countless history books during her lifetime, but her final narrative, *The Tory Lover* (1901), is a historical novel about the Revolutionary War. Moreover, in 1884, the same year Jewett published *A Country Doctor*, she wrote Annie Fields a long, impassioned letter after reading Matthew Arnold’s commentary on relations between England and Ireland. While the author agreed that Ireland was too “backward” for its independence at the present time, she conceded that “looked at from the human side, what business has one nation to keep another under her authority” (Fields *Letters* 22). Jewett’s interest in the plight of colonized peoples may have led her to *Life and Travels*. As many critics have pointed out, Prince’s narrative discusses the plight of

subjugated Russian serfs and the newly independent Afro-Jamaicans with greater passion and detail than the social, cultural and geographic data that is the book's purported focus.

More than having simply an academic or intellectual interest in the colonized people of Jamaica, Sarah Orne Jewett may also have had a personal investment in them. Echoing one of Nancy Prince's travel destinations, the author's ancestors were heavily involved in the West Indian shipping circuit. In the years following the War of 1812, Jewett's paternal grandfather, Theodore Furber Jewett, "grew rich from the West Indies trade" (Silverthorne 20).<sup>11</sup> With the money he earned and goods he brought back, the Captain started a business. Run by his son William, the Jewetts' "West Indian store—the W.I. Store, it was called" was a fixture in South Berwick for decades (Frost 25). Christened Theodora Sarah Orne Jewett after her grandfather, the future author inherited more than simply his name.<sup>12</sup> Upon his death, she received a sizable portion of his fortune. At several points during her lifetime, Jewett commented on this source of her family's wealth. In "Looking Back on Girlhood," the author noted that their sizable fortune came from the "flourishing West Indies of that time" (4). Similarly, in "River Driftwood" (1881), Jewett compares her grandfather to another resident of South Berwick who "made a great fortune in the lucky West India trade of his time" (175). Although seldom discussed by critics and biographers, this money enabled Jewett's literary career in many ways: the funds gave her both the leisure time to write and the freedom to write what she wished. Reflecting on the impact of this inheritance later in

---

<sup>11</sup> While an inventory of Captain Jewett's shipments has not been made public, most critics and biographers suspect that his runs consisted of sending lumber to the region and bringing sugar back to Maine. As Sarah Sherman Way notes, "South Berwick has once been a center for exporting lumber to the West Indies" (*American* 47). In addition to being a hub for trade to the West Indies, F. O. Matthiessen observes "Berwick was... a busy artery between Santo Domingo and London" during Grandfather Jewett's lifetime (*Sarah* 19).

<sup>12</sup> As Paula Blanchard notes, the author "used her baptismal name Theodora in signatures, but only through adolescence" (17). At that time, she shifted permanently to "Sarah."

her life, Jewett once quipped that unlike many women authors she “need not write for her ‘bread and butter’ ” (Cary *Letters* 30).

While no evidence suggests that either Jewett or her relatives bought, sold or shipped slaves, they did amass their fortune by trading with slave economies.<sup>13</sup> As Joseph Church discusses in his article, “Fathers, Daughters, Slaves,” Jewett was aware of and even troubled by this disturbing detail about her source of wealth. In her 1890 short story “In Dark New England Days,” she “explicitly indicts those responsible for the West Indies slave economy and then subtly indicts herself as well” (Church 218). After naming all the countries that have perpetuated slavery, “Jewett then seems to declare her own part in this economy by associating the slaver’s money with a literary work: ‘the [daughter’s] prize-money had been like Robinson Crusoe’s in the cave’ ” (Church 218). Jewett’s likening of her work to that of Defoe’s suggests that the slave origins of her wealth cast a troubling pall over both her class status and creative endeavors. As Joseph Church notes, Crusoe was an “enthusiastic, entrepreneurial trader in slaves, some of whom were bound for the West Indies” (218).

In a short story Jewett published at the turn of the century, she continued to explore her connection to West Indian culture, colonialism and racial otherness. Appropriately titled “The Foreigner,” the tale is narrated by *The Country of the Pointed Firs* character Mrs. Almira Todd and recounts both the life and death of a sea captain’s wife.<sup>14</sup> Unlike the vast majority of residents in Dunnet Landing, Mrs. John Tolland was

---

<sup>13</sup> Although Jewett’s grandfather never engaged in the slave trade, he often told stories about those who did. In “Looking Back on Girlhood” the author recalls listening to his “exciting tales of great storms on the Atlantic, and winds that blew them north-about, and good bargains in Havana, or Barbados....” (5). Among the “good bargains” of which the Captain spoke was human chattel. As Joseph Church notes, Barbados often functioned as a codeword for West Indian slavery throughout the nineteenth century (221).

<sup>14</sup> Both the presence of Almira Todd in this story and the narrative’s date of composition has spurred heated debate over whether the “The Foreigner” was meant as an epilogue to *The Country of the Pointed*

not a native of New England or even the United States. As the title of the story suggests, she was a “foreigner.” Captain Tolland first encountered the French-born young woman while on a sugar-shipping run to Kingston, Jamaica. While singing at a local saloon, the beautiful young woman becomes involved in a scuffle. Although Jewett never overtly describes the scene as such, the events suggest an attempted rape in many ways. Soon after leaving the tavern, the Captain and his friends “heard the guitar a-goin’ an’ a-stoppin’ short by turns, and pretty soon somebody began to screech, an’ they saw a white dress come runnin’ out through the bushes” (Jewett “Foreigner” 535). Eager to help the distressed young woman, the sailors take her to their ship and—after hearing that she has lost both her husband and her children—offer her passage to the United States. While an ostensibly philanthropic act, the gesture can also be seen in racially charged ways. “Like the African slave women that her history seems calculated to evoke, the ‘strange-looking’ woman of the ‘foreign cast’ is removed from her homeland, isolated from her family, stripped of her resources, subjected to sexual assault and humiliation, pursued, capture, ‘auctioned off,’ and shipped overseas” (Schrage 192).

During the voyage back to Dunnet Landing, Captain Tolland and the young woman become romantically involved and wed. Upon their arrival in Maine, however, the Captain’s friends and neighbors do not approve of his new bride. The Protestant community is disturbed by not only her Franco-Catholic roots, but also her racial and ethnic heritage. At several points in the narrative, Mrs. Tolland’s face is characterized as

---

*Firs*. As Mitzi Schrage points out, the narrative was neither written nor published with the *Pointed Firs* sketches that were first serialized in the *Atlantic Monthly*. Nor was “The Foreigner” included when these sketches, together with two previously unpublished Dunnet Landing stories, came out later that year as *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (190). Hence, controversy rages over whether the narrative ought to be included in future editions of the novel. Even if the story remains separate, its representation of whiteness and “otherness” indicates the “need to reassess the foundations of *Pointed Firs*’ community (Schrage 190).

possessing “a sort of foreign cast” and being “strange-looking” (Jewett “Foreigner” 541, 542). In addition, she engages in practices that resemble both Caribbean obeah and African voodoo. Mrs. Todd states, “ ‘She taught me a sight o’ things about herbs I never knew before nor since; she was well acquainted with the virtues o’ plants. She’d act awful secret about some things too, an’ used to work charms for herself sometimes, an’ some o’ the neighbors told to an’ fro after she died that they knew enough not to provoke her’ ” (Jewett “Foreigner” 541). This admission indicates not only Almira’s respect for Mrs. Tolland, but also the “source of much of the vital knowledge of plants and herbal medicine that augment Mrs. Todd’s subsequent income and for which she is so valued in *The Country of the Pointed Firs*.” (Schrage 191). While critics commonly cite homeopathy or even witchcraft as the origin of Almira’s herbal wisdom, “The Foreigner” reveals that it may arise from a non-Western source.

In addition to being associated with such exotic practices as obeah, Mrs. Tolland’s place of origin also likens her to non-white cultures. During the period Jewett’s “The Foreigner” was written and released, a West Indian heritage was often used to indicate that a character was black or at least mulatto. Although numerous narratives throughout the nineteenth century employed this technique, one of the most famous and perhaps and oft-cited example is Charlotte Brontë’s 1847 novel *Jane Eyre*. Hailing from “Spanish Town” in the West Indies, Rochester’s wife Bertha Mason possesses both a “pigmy intellect” and a “dark” complexion (Brontë 308). In *Imperial Leather*, Anne McClintock provides an extended discussion of the racial implications these details have on the novel. Not only did Sarah Orne Jewett read *Jane Eyre*, but several of her biographers note that it

was among her favorite books.<sup>15</sup> Although Jewett's narrative may assert that Captain Tolland's wife was born in France, her residence in Jamaica could point to a more complicated racial ancestry.

Such questions about the young woman's heritage are answered by an episode shortly before her death. While keeping vigil over the dying widow, Mrs. Todd notices a dark figure outside the window.<sup>16</sup> As she recalls, "I couldn't tell the shape, but 't was a woman's *dark* face lookin' right at us...." [my emphasis] (Jewett "Foreigner" 553). Although the individual disappears before she can be approached, Mrs. Tolland informs her friend that the dark stranger was her mother: "'You saw her, didn't you?.... 'T is my mother' " (Jewett "Foreigner" 554).<sup>17</sup> Perhaps even more daring than Mrs. Tolland's admission that the dark figure is her mother is Mrs. Todd's response. Rather than being shocked by this possible acknowledgement of a mixed racial background, Almira is supportive of it. In a response that Jewett places in italics, she assures her friend, "'*You ain't never goin' to feel strange an' lonesome no more*' " [author's emphasis] (Jewett "Foreigner" 554).

Jewett's short story "The Foreigner" is not the only narrative to engage the issues of foreigners, race or racial otherness. At various points throughout her career, these concerns received primary or at least passing attention. The narrative upon which her

---

<sup>15</sup> When she and Annie Fields visited England in 1898, in fact, the pair made a pilgrimage to the Bronte home in Haworth. In a letter to Mrs. Henry Whitman, Jewett described in detail her impressions of the near-mythical abode (Fields *Letters* 156 - 8).

<sup>16</sup> Sarah Way Sherman suggests in *Sarah Orne Jewett: An American Persephone* that in addition to the dark nature of foreigner Mrs. Tolland, Almira can also be read as possessing a "'dark' quality" (107). Although Mrs. Todd's dusky nature stems from her surname being the German word for death, it nevertheless provides a further identificatory link between these two characters.

<sup>17</sup> It is important to emphasize that this is one of the few instances in which Mrs. Tolland gets to speak for herself. Throughout Jewett's short story, Mrs. Todd authors her narrative. In addition, the character from *The Country of the Pointed Firs* refrains from quoting Mrs. Tolland directly. Unlike her treatment of male characters, Mrs. Todd paraphrases or summarizes the widow's words. In this way, as Marilyn Sanders Mobley points out, "The Foreigner" constitutes another Jewett text in which "the reader is allowed once again to bear witness to, 'to overhear' " (Folk 170).

reputation is largely based, her 1896 novel *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, for instance, also contains elements of colonialism in general and West Indian trade in particular. Although the text does not spotlight race and racial otherness as explicitly as “The Foreigner,” Elizabeth Ammons notes, “Traces of empire—tiny trophies from ‘exotic’ foreign ports and colonies—pop up throughout” (“Material” 92). Such trinkets include the various “West Indian curiosities” which decorate the home of Mrs. Beggs, an “old flowered-glass tea caddy” Mrs. Todd’s mother has from the island of Tobago, and a “quaint West Indian basket” the narrator receives from Almira as a going-away present.

In spite of these numerous sites of both fictional and factual contact, Sarah Orne Jewett’s familiarity with *A Narrative of the Life and Travels of Mrs. Nancy Prince* is only speculative. While it seems likely that the famed fiction writer, frequent world traveler and omnivorous reader would have encountered Prince’s writing, no concrete evidence solidifies such a claim. The same cannot be said, however, for the palimpsestic nature of *A Country Doctor* and *Life and Travels*: even if Jewett did not read Prince’s text, striking similarities exist between it and her 1884 novel.

In chapter three of *A Country Doctor*, Sarah Orne Jewett introduces the Dyer twins. Attempting to encapsulate both the past history and present natures of Jake and Martin, the narrator remarks, “the two men had a curiously dependent feeling toward each other. It was the close sympathy which twins sometimes have to each other.... They were seldom individualized in any way, and neither was able to distinguish himself” (Jewett *Doctor* 158). Although travel writer Nancy Prince and Jewett’s Nan Prince do not have the familial kinship of Jake and Martin, they can be seen as twinned characters

in many ways. Sharing similar names, life experiences and even societal obstacles, they too possess a “close sympathy.”



## Part II. Building on the *Bildungsroman*:

### Nan Prince's Coming of Age and/as Becoming Nancy Prince

In the opening pages of *A Country Doctor*, Sarah Orne Jewett remarks, "The repetitions of the best stories are signal events, for ordinary circumstances do not inspire them" (157). Nancy Prince's 1850 travel narrative is a tale many nineteenth and twentieth century readers would regard as a "best story." The text was well-known in its time and continues to be widely read today.

Although Jewett's 1884 remarks about the repetition of "best stories" does not make specific reference to *A Narrative of the Life and Travels of Mrs. Nancy Prince*, it could have. From the opening pages of *A Country Doctor* to its final utterances, Jewett's novel draws upon and even repeats crucial elements of Prince's text through various manifestations of the journey motif. As a travel narrative, this theme in Nancy Prince's *Life and Travels* is implicit. The genre in which she participates literally arises from and collapses into various forms of movement. By moving from common interpretations of this theme involving personal development and physical movement to more sophisticated readings encompassing literary influence and tradition, Sarah Orne Jewett shows how metaphoric journeys within a text can parallel the literary journeys texts make back to and between each other. The language the author selects, textual format she uses, arguments she raises and even character names she employs echo and in many ways extend the issues raised by Nancy Prince. Questions such as the meaning and location of home, the problem of spiritual and physical dislocation, and the forms of journeying that are both forced and chosen constitute primary concerns in *A Country Doctor*. In this way, Jewett's 1884 novel draws upon or "journeys through" the work of a literary

predecessor to engage the next “great debate” in postbellum America. Published after the end of the Civil War, *A Country Doctor* does not spotlight the issue of slavery. Instead, it addresses the question of (white) women and (white-collar) professions.

Ultimately, the way in which *A Country Doctor* repeats one of the “best stories” in American travel writing, *A Narrative of the Life and Travels of Mrs. Nancy Prince*, allows us to build on its use of the *Bildungsroman*. More than simply a narrative about the psycho-social maturation of its main character, *A Country Doctor* can be seen as a reiteration of an important literary predecessor. Through the process of coming-of-age, Jewett’s Nan Prince in many ways *becomes* travel writer Nancy Prince.

Sarah Orne Jewett’s use of the journey motif to both iterate her novel and reiterate Prince’s travel narrative commences in the opening pages of *A Country Doctor*. The first segment of Jewett’s tale is constructed around a literal interpretation of the journey theme: geographic dislocation. Metaphors of roving and wandering abound as Jewett traces the return of a wayward young mother and her infant daughter. Accordingly, the text’s first chapter bears a teleological title: “The Last Mile.” As this appellation suggests, the wandering young mother’s physical journey quickly comes to a tragic conclusion: reaching her destination, the wayward character collapses on her mother’s doorstep and passes away.

Although Nancy Prince never fled the home of a cruel mother-in-law, she did make an equally desperate pilgrimage on foot.<sup>18</sup> In 1816, after learning that her sister had

---

<sup>18</sup> Numerous critics have expressed frustration at the lack of information Prince provides about her husband and his family. According to Cheryl Fish, “[w]e know that [her spouse] Nero Prince had been elected the second grand master of the African Grand Lodge of the Masons in 1808, after its first grand master, Prince Hall, had died. Prince had been one of the organizers of the African Lodge when it was founded in 1791” (“Going” 56). Beyond this information, however, factual details are scarce. One highly improbable legend, for instance, identifies Nero as a Russian Jew. For more on the confusing and often contradictory stories surrounding Nancy Prince’s husband, see footnote 30 of Cheryl Fish’s “Going Mobile.”

been forced into prostitution, the author walked from Boston to Salem to rescue her. Significantly, the young woman who accompanied the writer on this journey was also carrying “a little child whom she held in her arms” (Prince *Life* 8). Arriving at the brothel on Sunday evening, Prince recalls, “My sister did not see me until I clasped my hand round the neck.... The old woman seized her to drag her down into the kitchen; I held on to her, while Mr. Brown on my side, used his great cane ... he threatened her so that she was obliged to let my sister go, who, after collecting her things, accompanied Mr. Brown and myself” (Prince *Life* 8 – 9). The melodramatic tone of this passage echoes Jewett’s account of Adeline Prince in *A Country Doctor*. As numerous critics have commented, this sentimental opening segment “seems utterly foreign” to Jewett’s work and is atypical of her overall writing style (Blanchard 170-1).<sup>19</sup> In this way, Prince’s narrative could have served as a template for the chapter.

While Nan Prince and Nancy Prince shared a dramatic experience with a family member, the similarities do not end there; both Nan Prince and Nancy Prince revisit the site where these events took place long after their loved ones have passed away. In *Life and Travels*, Prince confesses, “Now while I write, I am near the spot that that was then the hold of all foul and unclean things.... Even now, I cannot refrain my feelings, although death has long separated us; but her soul is precious; she was very dear to me....” (Prince 10). During times of loneliness and confusion in *A Country Doctor*, Nan also returns to the place where her mother stumbled by the river. The narrator notes, “There was a strange fascination about these river uplands; no place was so dear to Nan,

---

<sup>19</sup> A common observation today, this detail was also noted when *A Country Doctor* was published. Marie Therese Blanc, writing under the pseudonym Th. Bentzon, remarks in her 1884 review, “The first chapter... announces itself dramatically, as if the author were proposing once and for all to get away from the narrative method which is so dear to her and to enter into action resolutely” (9).

and yet she often thought with a shudder of the story of those footprints which had sought the river's brink...." (Jewett *Doctor* 369).

Although Jewett's Adeline Prince is a widowed mother and not a fallen woman, she nevertheless bears a stigma of contamination. While keeping a vigil at the dying woman's bedside, Dr. Leslie notes that she looks "worse than defeated" (Jewett *Doctor* 168). Sarah Way Sherman points out that the use of this phrase "suggests other sins, possibly sexual ones. The image of the begging woman hints at prostitution.... [H]er sexuality and alcoholism are a kind of pollution" (*American* 171).

After the death of their respective parents and guardians, the fate of these two figures also contains important areas of overlap. Once Nan's mother and grandmother have passed away, the young girl is left in the care of Oldfield's country doctor, John Leslie. This guardianship is not accidental or coincidental, however. On her deathbed, Adeline Prince makes Dr. Leslie promise to look after her daughter once her own mother had passed: " '...I want you to should look after my little girl.... That was what made me willing to come back.... I wonder if you could n't show me how to make out a paper giving you the right over her till she is of age?' " (Jewett *Country* 169). Once again, this event is echoed in the life and experiences of Nancy Prince. After the death of her own parents, the writer's brother was adopted by a country doctor. At the request of her mother and father, "Dr. Phelps took him to bring up" (Prince *Life* 14).

This resonance of personal events is not the only link that can be established between Jewett's Nan Prince and travel writer Nancy Prince. In addition to sharing similar life experiences, Nan and Nancy Prince also encounter similar obstacles. As Hazel Carby argues in *Reconstructing Womanhood*, the "dignity and power of Prince's

narrative was gained from her position at once inside and outside the society she wished to condemn.... Prince made clear her double position inside U. S. society as a citizen and outside it as an outcast because of her color” (42). Given her racial heritage, the very notion of traveling was fraught with historical complications. For blacks whose ancestors were forcibly brought to this country, “travel is not a word that can be easily evoked to talk about” (hooks 173). These men and women did not have the liberty to choose their geographic destination; these decisions were made for them. For these reasons, bell hooks among others often uses the term “journey” when referring to movement that is chosen rather than coerced.

In light of the racialized nature of travel literature, Cheryl Fish asserts that Prince’s decision to participate in this genre was both calculated and deliberate. With its episodic discourse.... and wandering gaze [that] uses the other as a mirror,” travelogue was a medium by which Prince could articulate what may be called her “double-voiced” journeying (Fish “Voices” 479). In addition to detailing her experiences as a “foreigner” in Russia and Jamaica, she could also relay her feelings about being a “foreigner” in the United States. Rather than focusing exclusively on her trip abroad, the first segment of *A Narrative of the Life and Travels of Mrs. Nancy Prince* is devoted to the forced travels of her ancestors: how her grandfather Tobias Wornton was “stolen from Africa” and how her Native American grandmother “became a captive to the English” (Prince *Life* 1).

In the words of Carla Peterson, the existence of “colored tourists” such as Prince during the antebellum era “raises a host of theoretical questions surrounding the African-American traveler and his or her strategies of displacement.... If African Americans were indeed on tour, where then was home? Can home ever be specified for the African

transplanted to American soil? Can he or she ever tour at leisure, or is the tour always in some sense an enforced one?" (88 - 9). Throughout *Life and Travels*, Prince details her experience not only as a tourist but also as an object of tourism. Although she insists that "there was no prejudice against color" in Russia, at the same time she concedes that for "all casts... each [was] in their place" (Prince 18). As a result of this stratified social system, Prince's skin color often placed her in the position of exoticism if not subjugation. On several occasions, she became a local oddity or resident curiosity.

In addition to describing the people and places of the countries she visits, therefore, *A Narrative of the Life and Travels of Mrs. Nancy Prince* also describes the author's negotiation of dual alienation. An outsider while in Russia and Jamaica, Nancy Prince is equally estranged from the country of her birth. As a result, the only entity with whom Prince feels she can find community is God. The final pages of *Life and Travels*, in fact, celebrate her connection and commitment to the Lord. With her skin color frustrating efforts to connect with whites and her economic and social status impeding kinship with many blacks, she turns to the Savior for a sense of belonging. Prince's poem "The Hiding Place," with which she concludes her narrative, encapsulates both her reasons for desiring this union and also the comfort which it gives her.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> In some ways, Prince's desire for a "hiding place" can be read as a desire for invisibility or even obliteration. After all, in asking God's admittance to this sanctuary, she repeatedly uses such words as "wilderness," "loss," and "erase." At the same time the author may be seeking to obscure her presence on earth, however, she is longing for a return to a gestative state in which to nurture her abilities. Unable to connect with the men and women around her, she dreams of a womb-like place free from the "tumultuous noise" and "vain charms" of the world. In this space, Prince can not only protect herself from racial prejudice, social ostracism and economic hardship, but she can also develop her talents and gifts. Freed from these obstacles, she writes in the final stanza of the poem, "...with enlarged powers, / I'll triumph in redeeming love." After a lifetime of struggling with being a tourist both at home and abroad, Prince has found a place in which she truly belongs. In the realm of God, she can not simply fare, but flourish. For these reasons, critics such as Hazel Carby have identified Prince's narrative as a form of "spiritual autobiography" (*Reconstructing* 43).

Although Sarah Orne Jewett's Nan Prince lives in a different historic era and faces a different set of obstacles, her experiences in many ways echo *A Narrative of the Life and Travels of Nancy Prince*. Similar to the travel author, Nan is also doubly alienated throughout the novel: death and resentment have orphaned her from her biological family while her tomboyish ambition to be a country doctor impedes her kinship with conventional gender roles. Echoing the trajectory of travel writer Nancy Prince, therefore, Nan embarks on a series of journeys that are both forced and chosen, physical and spiritual in her effort to find a sense of purpose and belonging. Similar to Nancy Prince's tale, the story of Nan's displacement and alienation begins before her birth. The young girl's mother, Adeline, married a man who was outside of both her community and her economic class: Navy surgeon John Prince of Dunport. As Martin Dyer asserts, " 'T'ain't no use for folks to marry one that's of another kind or belongs different' " (Jewett *Doctor* 151).<sup>21</sup> Although Adeline's marriage to John Prince should have been a joyous occasion for the young woman, it was a disastrous event in many ways. Not only did the young bride have to move far away from her relatives, but she was not accepted by her in-laws. The bulk of her husband's well-to-do relations were disappointed and even disgusted by his decision to marry "beneath him." While Adeline's family came from respectable Maine stock, they did not have the wealth or pedigree which the Prince family could boast. Hence, many considered Adeline nothing more than an "insolent, ill-bred young woman" (Jewett *Country* 288).

When John Prince died only months after their daughter Nan was born, Adeline's situation worsened. Although a sister-in-law took in the young widow and her

---

<sup>21</sup> While Martin's disapproval stems from class and not racial differences between the couple, it is worth noting that his observation about marrying "one that's of another kind" is also commonly used to disparage interracial unions.

infant girl, she had nothing but contempt for them. In addition to thinking ill of Adeline's "breeding," Anna Prince also held her accountable for her brother's tragic early death. In her eyes, she had "beguiled and ruined poor Jack" (Jewett *Country* 288). Unwilling to live amidst such harsh attitudes, Adeline fled with her infant daughter. Although suffering from the final stages of consumption, she was able to make it back to her mother's house in Oldfields. Echoing the opening pages of Nancy Prince's travel narrative, *A Country Doctor* commences with this account of ancestral journeying. Similar to *Life and Travels*, it narrates the forced journey of one of Nan's relatives.<sup>22</sup>

Adeline's abrupt departure from the home of her sister-in-law solidified the Prince family's ill will. Rather than exempting Nan from this legacy of ostracism and alienation, it ensures that she will inherit it. After Adeline's death, Anna Prince makes a "plea for the custody of the child, her mother's and her own namesake" (Jewett *Country* 174). This request, however, is "indignantly refused" by Adeline's mother (Jewett *Country* 174). Informed by Grandmother Thatcher that she intends to raise the child herself, Anna severs all contact. Although she sends a monthly check, the wealthy widow has nothing to do with the youngster. As the narrator notes, "[t]here was no love lost between the town and country household, and for many years all intercourse was at an end" (Jewett *Country* 174).

As a result of these events, Nan Prince is disconnected from her nuclear family, her ancestral roots and her place of birth. Orphaned by her parents, disowned by her paternal relatives and then orphaned once again by the death of her maternal Grandmother a few years after arriving in Oldfields, she is cut off from every possible

---

<sup>22</sup> To this list of journeying, Nan's father can also be added. Although a surgeon, John Prince works on a navy ship and is thus perpetually away on some voyage at sea.



source of her history and personal identity. Similar to the black travel writer with whom she shares her name, Nan must search to uncover both the meaning and location of home.

Echoing the actions of Nancy Prince, Nan embarks on a personal and physical journey to rectify this situation. Disturbed by the silence between her parents' families and intrigued by the hushed whispers she has heard about her Aunt Anna of Dunport, she tries to reconnect with this portion of her heritage. Soon after finishing school, Nan pens a note to her Aunt Anna in which she matter-of-factly declares: "I cannot think it is right that we do not know each other. I should like to go to Dunport for a day some time next month...." (Jewett *Country* 283). To her surprise, her Aunt accepts the offer and arranges a visit. From the moment Nan arrives in Dunport, Anna sees "she was a little lady, who did honor to the good name of the Princes and Lesters—a niece whom anybody might be proud to claim" (Jewett *Country* 288). In the weeks that ensue, the two grow close and become warmly affectionate for each other. Before long, their past estrangement seems foolish and even frivolous. As the narrator notes, "with the new relationship's growth, there faded away the thought of the past times (Jewett *Country* 292).<sup>23</sup>

In addition to signaling the end of the family feud, the reconnection with her ancestry gives Nan great comfort. Looking through her Aunt's Bible one day, she comes across "her grandfather's name in the prayer-book" (Jewett *Country* 294). This discovery "gave her a feeling of security as being a link with her past experiences" (Jewett *Country* 294).

---

<sup>23</sup> In spite of Aunt Anna's eagerness to make amends, she is not willing to take responsibility for the part she played in both starting and continuing the feud. From the first day Nan arrived, Anna "separated herself as much as possible from any thought of guilt or complicity in the long estrangement.... If anyone dared to hint that it was a pity this visit had been so long delayed, Miss Prince grandly ignored all personality" (Jewett *Country* 292).

A disconnection from home and family are not the only forms of alienation that either Nan or Nancy Prince encounter. Coupled with being alienated from their ancestral roots, both figures are also ostracized from their conventional notions of womanhood. As a black woman in antebellum America, Nancy Prince was by definition unable to conform to her gender role. As Hazel V. Carby illustrates in *Reconstructing Womanhood*, conceptions of women's proper behavior were predicated on white women. "The parameters of the ideological discourse of true womanhood were bound by a shared social understanding" of class and especially race (Carby 25). Not only were these conventions constructed by white women, but they were intended for them. The history of both personal and sexual exploitation experienced by black women caused such standards to be seen as attainable by them in many ways. Although a free black and not a slave, Nancy Prince existed outside notions of "true womanhood" by virtue of her race. In spite of being wealthy, wed and well-educated, the color of her skin dictated that she could never conform to these conventions.<sup>24</sup>

At several points in *Life and Travels*, Prince's exclusion from contemporary conceptions of womanhood is made explicit. On her return voyage from Jamaica, for instance, she is repeatedly reminded of her tenuous status as a free black in America's slave society.

While docking in New Orleans in 1842, for instance, "the whites went on shore and made themselves comfortable while we poor blacks were obliged to remain on that broken, wet vessel. The people were very busy about me; one man asked me who I belonged to, and many other rude questions..." (Prince 78). On the way to New York during the next leg of the voyage, the ship's sadistic white captain forces Prince to observe "the vessel of

---

<sup>24</sup> In addition to her racial status, one could add that further distancing Prince from this standard was her publishing career. Although prefacing *Life and Travels* with the comment that she wrote it to support herself after the death of her husband, the tenets of "true womanhood" did not include wage labor.

slaves laying at the side of our ship” (Prince 81). She recalls, “The deck was full of young men, girls, and children, bound to Texas for sale!” (Prince 81-2). After making Prince witness this horrifying sight, he demanded additional money for her passage. If she refused to pay, he threatened to place her on a steamer heading back to New Orleans. Although never directly stated in the narrative, her status as not only a free black but an autonomous sexual being would be ignored upon her return to Louisiana. Similar to the fate of many attractive slave women, Prince would be sold as either a mistress to a white man or as a “breeder” for his existing pool of black workers.

Vividly aware of her dubious status, Prince goes to great lengths to demonstrate her adherence to proper feminine behavior. Throughout *Life and Travels*, for instance, she repeatedly mentions her association with only “respectable colored families” and “religious people” (6). Rather than stay in a home that was “not good” while on her way to Salem, she remained outdoors and suffered frostbite on her “feet, hands and ears” (8). Moreover, as Francis Smith Foster notes, Prince “did not gamble or dance or participate in activities which would have been unacceptable in New England polite society. Most of her stay in Russia... ‘was taken up in domestic affairs’ and in attending Protestant services ‘twice every Sabbath, and evening prayer meeting, also a female society, so that I was occupied at all times’ ” (85).

Throughout *A Country Doctor*, Jewett’s Nan Prince faces a similar struggle. In addition to being disconnected from her familial ancestry, she is ostracized from her traditional gender role as a result of her tomboyish ambition to be a country doctor. As a child, Nan was not the quiet and obedient “good girl” that her Grandmother Thatcher wished. Instead, she was tomboyishly adventurous and even mischievous. The opening

chapters of *A Country Doctor*, in fact, are filled with accounts of Nan falling out of trees (176), affixing prankish tick-tacks to the neighbor's windows (186), skipping school to romp through the fields (187), and playing in the river (189).

Similar to the white tomboys discussed in previous chapters, both Nan and her tomboyish actions are associated with a racial charge. Recalling a crucial characteristic of Nancy Prince once again, the ostensibly Caucasian character is described as "brown" at various points in *A Country Doctor*. When Nan's future guardian, Dr. John Leslie, sees her in church several months after her entrance into Oldfields, he uses this color to characterize her skin tone (Jewett *Doctor* 175). Accentuating the significance of this description, the physician couples his comment with the observation that the child is paler than usual. Moments after classifying Nan as brown, he tells Grandmother Thatcher that due to a recent fall " 'I thought she looked a little pale' " (Jewett *Doctor* 176). Such a remark implies that when healthy, the young girl's skin possesses an even darker hue. Although Nan's coloration is seldom mentioned again in *A Country Doctor*, she is associated with other racially charged terms and events. Significantly, references to the young woman's racialization often exist in tandem with references to her tomboyish behavior. Similar to E. D. E. N. Southworth's Capitola Black, for instance, Nan is often characterized by the loaded term "monkey" because of her tomboyish antics. Unlike many girls her age and especially those in Oldfields, Nan is active, defiant and adventurous. To her Grandmother's shock and dismay, the young girl chases squirrels, climbs trees and even wades in the river.<sup>25</sup> For these reasons, her Aunt's housemaid

---

<sup>25</sup> When Nan goes to live with Dr. Leslie, he encourages this behavior. The country doctor believes that even girls ought to be raised in an active and permissive environment that encourages them to run and play outdoors. These attitudes echo the argument Frances Cogan makes about the cult of what she deems "Real Womanhood" in *All-American Girl*.

characterizes her messy room as a “monkey’s wedding” and the kitchen after she finishes eating a “monkey’s wedding breakfast” (Jewett 324). When Nan isn’t being likened to this particular racially charged animal, she is characterized by the equally loaded adjective “wild.” The young girl’s exasperated Grandmother describes the rambunctious youth as “wild as a hawk” (186), “a wild creatur’ ” (186), and “wild as ever” (192).<sup>26</sup> Unlike many tomboyish young girls, Nan does not outgrow her proclivity for such unconventional behavior. Although she no longer frolics outdoors or refuses to go to bed, she longs to be, as the title of Jewett’s novel suggests, a country doctor. In marked contrast to most young women, Nan does not seem suited for marriage and motherhood. Viewing children as mere “bundles of inheritances,” Dr. Leslie fears his young ward’s tomboyism may be a symptom of her mother’s “restlessness and discord” (Jewett *Doctor* 304, 251). The country doctor, who sees Adeline’s tomboyism as the cause of her proclivity to drink, her suicidal impulses and even her determination to leave Oldfields, believes the rambunctious Nan possesses this trait as well. The young girl’s need for constant motion, adventure and excitement makes it unlikely that she would be happy “settling down” in marriage. Hence, Dr. Leslie remarks to Mrs. Graham one afternoon, “When a man or a woman has that sort of self-dependence and unnatural self-reliance, it shows itself very early. I believe it is a mistake for such a woman to marry” (Jewett *Doctor* 234).

While the physician does not think it wise for his ward to wed, he also does not envision her becoming a useless spinster. In addition to concerns that Nan has inherited

---

<sup>26</sup> In her well-known and oft-cited article, “‘Mateless and Appealing’: Growing into Spinsterhood in Sarah Orne Jewett,” Barbara Johns offers an alternative reading of these characterizations. Rather than seeing them as colonialist and even primitivist, she argues that they denote Nan’s “sympathetic identification with nature” which will provide her with “an intense, mystical experience... beyond the structures of woman’s place” (153).

some of mother's willful restlessness, she also seems to have received some of her father's surgical skill. From the time Nan is a young girl, she possesses both an innate interest in and even talent for medicine: the youth accompanies Dr. Leslie on his rounds, reads medical books for pleasure, and even sets the broken bones of both an injured turkey and a fallen farmer.

This gender-bending combination of Nan's inclination for doctoring and her disinclination toward wedlock stands in marked contrast to her "proper" or expected gender role. Throughout the nineteenth century, medicine was considered an inappropriate or "unnatural" pursuit for females. Women were perceived as too delicate and even unintelligent to cope with the physical and cerebral demands of doctoring. Their constitutions "naturally" suited them for the roles of housewifery and motherhood. As Josephine Donovan notes, the "prevailing medical opinion in the nineteenth century had been that 'motherhood was woman's natural destiny and those female who thwarted... their body's design must be expected to suffer' " ("Apples" 23). Numerous sexologists were convinced that if women neglected their "natural" duties of marriage and motherhood, they would destroy their wombs and become " 'semi-women, hermaphrodites' " (Donovan "Nan" 23). Such "scientific" conclusions caused many nineteenth-century Americans to believe that women who forfeited their "proper" roles for male occupations would become unsexed and unnatural.

Although Dr. Leslie insists Nan "showed no sign of being the sort of girl who tried to be mannish and forsake her natural vocation for a profession" (Jewett *Doctor* 249), the young girl's interest in pursuing medicine is denounced by men and women from nearly every generation, social stratum and economic class. The first person other

than Dr. Leslie with whom Nan shares her ambition, the housemaid Marilla, inaugurates this trend. As the narrator notes, “Marilla had laughed when she had been told of Nan’s intentions, and had spoken disrespectfully of women doctors” (Jewett *Doctor* 203). Echoing such sentiments, Dr. Leslie’s close friend and former classmate, Dr. Ferris, scoffs at the idea. Upon learning of the young ward’s aspiration for joining the medical field and the country doctor’s encouragement of it, he exclaims, “ ‘You surely are n’t going to sacrifice that innocent creature to a theory!.... I don’t doubt that you supplied her with Bell’s ‘Anatomy’ for a picture-book and made her say over the names of the eight little bones of her wrist, instead of, ‘This little pig went to market’ ” (Jewett *Doctor* 212). Embodying the opinions of Nan’s own generation, her peers at boarding school “grumbled angrily” at her decision to pursue “a career they would have rejected for themselves” (Jewett *Doctor* 249). Finding medicine too demanding and even grotesque a career for women, the youth’s classmates object to any member of their sex engaging in it. Taking such ideas one step further, the elderly Mrs. Fraley judgmentally informs Nan, “ ‘a woman’s place is in the home, and a strong minded woman [is] out of place, and unwelcome anywhere” (Jewett *Doctor* 326). As a result, she belittles the young woman’s ambitions as merely “whims and extravagances” and looks “forward in spite of it all to seeing her happily married” (Jewett *Doctor* 40).

Concluding such attacks on Nan’s determination to be a country doctor is her potential suitor, George Gerry. Although the young lawyer finds Nan’s “impetuous defense of her choice... very charming,” he nevertheless has “a great prejudice against the usurpation of men’s duties and prerogatives by women” (Jewett *Doctor* 335). Similar to many men during this era, George is threatened by Nan’s aspirations and wishes to see

them eradicated. In an attempt to “bully” the young woman into abandoning her desire to pursue medicine, he even invokes these opinions. To give his argument for matrimony added weight, George tells her, “Everyone will say I am in the right” (Jewett *Doctor* 354).

Faced with such repeated opposition, Nan’s response is once again patterned after the life and experiences of Nancy Prince: the young woman embarks on a physical and intellectual journey to discover her true calling. Traveling first to Oldfields and then to medical school, she affirms her commitment to medicine and defends it from every objection imaginable. Confronted by the opposition of her Aunt Anna in Dunport, for instance, Nan points out, “ ‘everything helps a young man to follow his bent.... I don’t see why it should be a shame and dishonor to a girl who is trying to do the same thing and to be of equal use in the world’ ” (Jewett *Doctor* 327).

Although the young woman’s determination periodically wavers, her tenacity for pursuing her dream ultimately triumphs. In the final chapter, “At Home Again,” Nan returns to Dr. Leslie’s after completing her studies and becoming, as the title suggests, a country doctor. Recalling the final pages of Nancy Prince’s travel narrative once again, the young woman finds communion in God. After contemplating the struggles faced by both her mother and herself, she offers a prayer of thanksgiving: “ ‘I thank thee for my future’ ” (Jewett *Doctor* 370).

This God-given basis for Nan’s interest in being a doctor forms a final link between *A Country Doctor* and *A Narrative of the Life and Travels of Mrs. Nancy Prince*. Nan’s aptitude for medicine is congenital and thus can be equated with such hereditary conditions as skin color. In the same way Prince argues that it is unjust to enslave men



and women simply because they are black, Jewett suggests that it is wrong to bar Nan from becoming a physician simply because she is a woman. Rather than present Nan as unnatural if she pursues a medical career, Jewett argues that it would be unnatural if she does not. Since God has bestowed on her a gift for healing, thwarting her efforts to develop this talent would go against His wishes. As Nan remarks at one points, “ ‘God would not give us the same talents if what were right for men were wrong for women’ ” (Jewett *Doctor* 327). Jewett’s bold re-visioning of a woman’s “natural” place in society has caused *A Country Doctor* to be seen as “one of the earliest feminist repudiations of Krafft-Ebbing and other theorists who saw women’s choice of masculine vocations as unnatural, indeed pathological” (Donovan “Nan” 23). The novel illustrates Jewett’s firm belief that “women need not be trapped by the popular fictions of either wifhood or spinsterhood” (Johns “Mateless” 148).

Given the parallels between race and gender in *A Country Doctor*, it comes as no surprise when Nan is tempted by a job offer in the symbolic country of Canada. Although the young woman receives several other professional proposals after becoming a physician, this the only one that earns the endorsement of John Leslie. The aging country doctor thinks the position in Canada “an uncommonly good chance to have the best hospital experience and responsibility” (Jewett *Doctor* 366). Moreover, in the closing pages of the narrative, Nan reflects on all the things her mother lost but made sure her daughter would receive. Significantly, a “whiteness of soul” is among them (Jewett *Doctor* 369).

The textual and thematic links between *A Country Doctor* and *A Narrative of the Life and Travels of Mrs. Nancy Prince* establish a connection between these two writers

while they simultaneously provide a new perspective from which to approach, read and understand Jewett's novel. From the time of its publication in 1884, Sarah Orne Jewett's *A Country Doctor* has been viewed through the lens of autobiography. For more than a century, readers and critics alike have cited Jewett's own life and experiences as the primary impetus for her text. While past and present critics alike have made this observation, perhaps Sarah Way Sherman said it best when she wrote: "*A Country Doctor* has a strong autobiographical component. Its heroine, Nan Prince, becomes the doctor that Jewett herself might have been, had she patterned herself even more closely on her father. In telling Nan's story, Jewett seems to have offered a barely disguised *apologia pro vita sua*" (*American* 169).

The numerous areas of overlap between Jewett's Nan Prince and travel writer Nancy Prince call this critical consensus into question. Although the author may have drawn on her own life and experiences to construct Nan Prince, the way in which her character's past history, present circumstances and even future prospects resonate with the black travel writer suggests that another autobiography may also have been involved. In examining the fictive perils of a white woman struggling to participate in a white-collar profession, Jewett's *A Country Doctor* recounts the factual trials of a black woman in a similar circumstance.

In this way, the case of the two Nancy Princes adds a new facet to Jewett's use of the journey motif while it simultaneously expands the conception of womanhood operating in her novel. In marked contrast to many of Jewett's other narratives, female gender roles are not simply tied to class or geographic region in *A Country Doctor*.

Given the way in which the text “journeys through” or repeats key elements of Nancy Prince’s *Life and Travels*, they are also predicated on race.

### **Part III. "In *Dark New-England Days*":**

#### **The Place of Race in Sarah Orne Jewett & the Construction of An/Other Country**

As Mitzi Schrag aptly observed, Sarah Orne Jewett's work has long been "celebrated for its universal, mythic and transcendent properties... in part because it so successfully constructs 'whiteness' as 'human nature,' everywhere and nowhere at the same time" (188). Not only are the author's novels and short stories seemingly devoid of people of color, but this absence often attracts readers and critics to her writing.

Spotlighting the seemingly homogenous inhabitants of a small coastal village in Maine, Jewett's narratives appear divorced from such weighty social issues as multicultural diversity or racial prejudice. At least for white readers, the writer presents Caucasian characters in a manner that makes them seem simultaneously provincial and "universal." In the same way these figures are inextricably connected to their geographic region, they also give the illusion of representing the hopes and fears of all men and women: black and white, rich and poor, urban and rural.

In recent years, such beliefs that the fiction of Sarah Orne Jewett is either "devoid" of race or presents it in a "universal" way have been called into question. As Sandra Zagarell has pointed out, "it seems impossible to understand what 'community' " is in Jewett's fiction "without exploring the racial attitudes, nativism, and exclusionary impulses that inflected the narrative's graceful, appealing depiction of community" (40). Born in 1849, the writer lived during a turbulent period in the nation's history. Not only was she raised in an era punctuated by heated debates over abolition and immigration, but she also attended the Berwick Academy during a period that exactly

spanned the Civil War, 1861 - 1865.<sup>27</sup> Although this facet of her writing is often overlooked by critics, many of Jewett's fictional and factual work addresses racial issues.<sup>28</sup> From narratives early in her career to her last published novel, skin color formed a central, though often subtle, facet of her writing.

The similarities between Nan and Nancy Prince places *A Country Doctor* within this important, though often overlooked, context. These elements build a bridge between the novel's release during a turbulent period in the nation's racial history and its seeming divorce from the issue of race. At the same time, the case of the two Nancy Princes adds a new dimension to Sarah Orne Jewett's exploration of the historical past. While critics and biographers commonly cite the Anglo-Saxon inhabitants of Maine as her primary focus, her 1884 narrative suggests that her conception of community may have been more diverse. More than simply referring to the gradual disappearance of New England's small coastal villages, the "dark" days in her fiction suggest that an entirely different conception of darkness may permeate Jewett's novels and short stories. Given the numerous areas of overlap between Nan and Nancy Prince in *A Country Doctor*, the "local color" style for which she is famous could include skin color.

---

<sup>27</sup> The composition of the student body at Berwick Academy is also worth noting. In addition to being a highly esteemed institution, the school was filled with "the 'foreign flavor' that some of the students" brought to it (Frost 18). A sizable number of the pupils had accompanied their fathers on sea voyages to such exotic lands as Spain, France and even India. Moreover, during Jewett's enrollment, the Academy's dormitory boarded some young Cubans who had come to Berwick on a shipping route and remained for the educational and economic opportunities. Recalling these classmates years later in her 1887 essay "My School Days," Jewett described them in both exotic and erotic ways: "...the handsome dark faces of these lads from Trinidad in Cuba.... They were the most conspicuous in the school life, admired by the girls and fellowshipped with the boys.... [They were] laughing, quick-tempered, brown-skinned little fellows who seemed to me already like men" (1).

<sup>28</sup> Susan Gillman has pointed out, "Within the Sarah Orne Jewett mini-industry" these issues are "rarely mentioned" (102). Even Paula Blanchard's much-discussed recent biography, *Sarah Orne Jewett: Her World and Her Work*, gives such scant attention to the issues of slavery, race, and the Civil War that they do not merit listing in the book's index.

Understanding Sarah Orne Jewett's attitudes about racial and ethnic minorities necessitates a consideration of the time in which she lived and worked. Sandra A. Zagarell notes, "Many of the New England Brahmins who formed Jewett's circle of friends in and around Boston felt America was under siege during the 1880s and 1890s, when Jewett did most of her major work" ("Community" 40). The dramatic rise in immigration during this era, especially from Ireland, Eastern Europe and China, sparked a backlash against anyone and anything perceived as "foreign." Many men and women "believed that 'America' had been, and should remain, a homogenous nation—a nation whose origins were usually identified as Anglo-Saxon" (Zagarell "Community" 41). Within years, such sentiments inspired a wide range of xenophobic efforts to preserve the nation's racial "purity" and its economic prospects from competition by those born overseas. From the Homestead and Pullman strikes to the Chinese Exclusion Acts of 1882, 1888 and 1891, concerns over "foreigners" permeated nearly aspect of life in late-nineteenth century America.

Although seldom mentioned in biographies or critical essays, not only did many of Sarah Orne Jewett's friends support such nativist attitudes, but so did the author herself.<sup>29</sup> In 1883, only one year before releasing *A Country Doctor*, she began to articulate her beliefs about racial hierarchy. Proud of her father's French ancestry and a firm believer in the innate nature of personality traits, Jewett began researching the Norman people.<sup>30</sup> In time, this reading would inspire her to write a nonfiction book on

---

<sup>29</sup> The general reticence about Sarah Orne Jewett's racial attitudes ought not to imply that critics have never addressed this issue. Writing during the Depression era, Vernon Louis Perrington, for instance, denounced Jewett as a "bleached-out Brahmin and an economic dolt" (Cary Foreword xvi). In spite of such blunt declarations, many critics continue to mask Jewett's racial beliefs in euphemism. Encapsulating this trend, Sarah Way Sherman identifies the author by the vague and polite classification of "Tory" (*American* 48).

<sup>30</sup> As Richard Cary notes in "The Literary Rubrics of Sarah Orne Jewett," it was the author's paternal grandmother who hailed from French stock. In "Looking Back on Girlhood," Jewett attributed much of her

the subject. Ferman Bishop notes in his important 1957 essay, "Sarah Orne Jewett's Ideas of Race," "The arduous reading that Miss Jewett undertook in preparation for her history *The Story of the Normans* (1887), provided her with materials for developing her own theory of race" (244). In the writings of Augustin Thierry, Jacques Barzun and Edward A. Freeman, the author found "scientific" confirmation for her conviction that "the best of America was Anglo-Norman" (Zagarell "Community" 42). These men argued, among other things, "that the aristocratic nature of English institutions stemmed from the Norman Conquest" (Bishop 244). Jewett was so committed to this idea that she once quipped in a letter to Annie Fields, "When I read the 'Saturday Review' and 'Spectator' I find myself calling one politician a Saxon and the next a Norman! Indeed I can pick them out here in Berwick" (Fields *Letters* 18).

Such attitudes about race and race relations not only made their way into Sarah Orne Jewett's work, they often formed the foundation upon which it was based. In *The Story of the Normans*, for instance, numerous passages attribute England's imperial prowess to its infusion of Norman blood. "[T]he Norman spirit leads [England] to be self-confident or headstrong and willful...." (Jewett *Normans* 365). Hence, she privileges the "Norman's brighter, more enthusiastic, and visionary nature [to] the stolid, dogged, prudent, and resolute Anglo-Saxons" (Jewett *Normans* 364).

Echoing these beliefs, in Jewett's 1895 short story, "A War Debt," a young Southern woman is considered beautiful primarily because of her Norman heritage: "She was the newer and finer Norman among the Saxons. She alone seems to have that inheritance of swiftness of mind, of sureness of training. It was the highest type of

---

father's kindness and compassion to this pedigree: "My father had I inherited...from his mother's French ancestry, that peculiarly French trait, called *gaite de coeur*" (6).

English civilization refined still further by long growth in favoring soil” (Jewett “War” 73). Similarly, in the author’s final novel, *The Tory Lover* (1901), the exceptional nature of both the New England and Virginian people is attributed to their shared racial pedigree. “In these Pascataqua neighborhoods, we do not differ so much from those of Virginia.... We are children of Norman blood in New England and Virginia” (Jewett *Tory* 249).

Even the book commonly viewed as Jewett’s masterpiece, her 1896 *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, is informed by these racial theories. As Elizabeth Ammons notes in “Material Culture, Empire, and Jewett’s *Country of the Pointed Firs*,” the narrator “calls attention to ‘the curiously French type of face which prevailed in this rustic community,’ points out that ‘Mrs. Blackett was plainly of French descent,’ and observes that ‘a large proportion of the early settlers on this northern coast of New England were of Huguenot blood’ because ‘it is the Norman Englishman, not the Saxon, who goes adventuring to a new world’ ” (95). In light of such attitudes, Ammons goes on to suggest that the much-discussed Bowden family reunion near the end of the novel can be seen as not simply a celebration of their “racial particularity” but as a protofascist event: “all those white people marching around in military formation ritualistically affirming their racial purity, global dominance, and white ethnic superiority” (97).<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> This observation is even more shocking given Graham Frater’s assertion that the reunion had an autobiographical origin in Sarah Orne Jewett’s life. In “‘A Brave Happiness’: Rites and Celebrations in Jewett’s Ordered Past,” Frater argues that the event was based on an 1855 family gathering at Rowley in Essex County, Massachusetts. Although Jewett was only six years old when she attended the event, numerous parallels exist between this factual reunion and the fictional one she composed years later for *The Country of the Pointed Firs*. For a detailed account of these chilling similarities, see the chart on page 254 of Frater’s article.



Given Jewett's placement of whites at the top of the racial hierarchy, it comes as no surprise that she viewed people of color in damaging and even disparaging ways.<sup>32</sup> In both her personal life and professional writings, she expressed stereotypical views about the nation's racial and ethnic minorities. Her 1896 novel, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, for instance, contains anti-Chinese sentiments. While at a community gathering, a character remarks "you could pick out the likeness of most every sort of foreigner when you looked about you in our parish... I always did think Mari' Harris resembled a Chinee" (101).<sup>33</sup> Although this comment could be read as an index of racial mixing in the area, it is used to justify the young woman's exclusion from the community.

Such instances of prejudice are not limited to Jewett's portrayal of Chinese immigrants; her treatment of African Americans is just as negative. In a shocking sentiment from her short story "A War Debt" (1895), Jewett's narrator asserts that blacks are unfit for independence: "the negroes, who crowded on board the train, lawless and unequal to holding their liberty with steady hands, looked poor and less respectable than in the old plantation days—it was as if the long discipline of their former state had counted for nothing" (71). In "The Mistress of Sydenham Plantation" (1888), the author takes this idea one step further. In this text, Jewett suggests that blacks were not only better off during slavery but that they even enjoyed it.<sup>34</sup> While visiting the ruins of his former master's plantation, a freed slave laments "the old times had not been without

---

<sup>32</sup> In spite of this overall failed representation, the London *Saturday Review* was repeatedly impressed by Jewett's command of black dialect. In several articles, they relayed they praised her ability to capture the speech habits of African Americans (Cary Foreword xii). Contemporary linguists and ethnographers, however, would most likely dispute these claims.

<sup>33</sup> Interestingly, this is the same character who voices her contempt for Mrs. Tolland in "The Foreigner."

<sup>34</sup> As Elizabeth Silverthorne notes, Jewett may have imbibed at least some of these attitudes from her relatives and neighbors. The author "knew that most of the prominent families in her part of New England, near tidewater, had possessed African slaves in the previous century. Listening to stories of her adult relatives and their friends, she was convinced that the slaves were content, loyal, and affectionate toward the white families 'they adopted as they own' " (Silverthorne 43).

their pleasures, and the poor old man's heart leaped with the vague delight of his memories...." (Jewett "Mistress" 29).<sup>35</sup> As Josephine Donovan observes, the "point of the story seems to be that nobody benefited from the destruction of the South" (*Sarah* 95).

The case of the two Nancy Princes in Jewett's *A Country Doctor* not only aligns her 1884 novel with these racially charged texts, but it also broadens and deepens the treatment of skin color in her writing. Rather than simply including elements from Nancy's Prince's life and work to disparage people of color, Jewett draws on them to establish compelling parallels between the historical conditions of women and people of color.

In *The Apparitional Lesbian*, Terry Castle argues, "to write the literary history of lesbianism is to confront, from the start, something ghostly: an impalpability, a misting over, an evaporation, or 'whiting out' of possibility" (28). Spotlighting narratives from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries, she traces how elements of female homosexuality "haunt" or subtly permeate narratives that are not explicitly lesbian-themed.

Although not necessarily invoking metaphors of "ghosting," critics and commentators have said the same about the pre-industrial history of New England in

---

<sup>35</sup> Similar to many of her contemporaries, Jewett also used the term "slavery" to describe the conditions of other oppressed groups. As Joseph Church notes in "Fathers, Daughters, Slaves," narratives such as "In Dark New England Days" use "slavery as a metaphor for women's lives" (217). In the short story, two sisters are described as their father's "dutiful, patient slaves" while a neighbor is characterized as having "been slaving herself" with work (Jewett "Dark" 226, 222). In her autobiographical essay "From a Mournful Village" (1881), Jewett extends this comparison to the circumstances of all women. She argues that "the altered position of woman... on her way from much talked-of slavery and subjection to coveted equality" (120-1).

Sarah Orne's Jewett's life and work.<sup>36</sup> In many of the author's novels and short stories, the predominantly Caucasian settlers of Maine's vanishing coastal villages haunt her narratives. Myths and even legends about their hopes, habits and even ways of life permeate nearly every facet of her plot and characterizations. In *A Country Doctor*, for instance, Dr. Leslie inhabits the appropriately named town of "Oldfields." At various points in the novel, reference is made to the gradual eradication of the old customs in the wake of industrialization. In addition to lamenting the way in which "modern manufacturing communities" have begun to "rear their thinly built houses and workshops, and their quickly disintegrating communities of people" in the area, the physician also comments on how he belongs to a "dying profession." Talking with Marilla one day, Dr. Leslie remarks, " 'Whenever I hear that an old doctor is dead I sigh to think what treasures of wisdom are lost instead of being added to the general fund' " (Jewett *Doctor* 223, 237).

The vanishing history of these predominantly Caucasian people and their way of life may not be the only element "haunting" Jewett's narrative. In light of both the palimpsest nature of *A Country Doctor* and *A Narrative of the Life and Travels of Mrs. Nancy Prince* and the way in which Nan Prince in some ways can be seen as passing for travel writer Nancy Prince, Sarah Orne Jewett's use of "local color" may also have included people of color. As Paula Blanchard once noted, "In recent years Jewett has become recognized by feminist scholars as an unsurpassed chronicler and interpreter of women's lives" (xvi). The author's possible awareness of Nancy Prince's travel narrative, coupled with the stunning incidents of overlap between it and her own work

---

<sup>36</sup> Echoing Castle's argument, of course, are suspicions about Jewett's own homosexuality. In addition to the way in which history "haunts" the writer's texts, so does speculation that Jewett herself was a lesbian and that this sexuality is somehow encoded in her work.

adds a new dimension to this assertion. The case of the two Nancy Princes in *A Country Doctor* opens up the possibility that the author was interested in chronicling the lives of not simply white women, but—perhaps for the first time in her writing—black ones as well.

## **Chapter 4.**

### **The Dark Continent:**

#### **Going “Back to the Future” in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland***

Although gender-defiant female characters permeate nearly every period, genre and phase of American women’s fiction, the nature of these tomboyish figures and their rebellion has not remained static over time. As manners and mores for women have changed, so has the nature of individuals who stand in opposition to these codes.

While one can argue gender roles have undergone modification in nearly every historical era, the early-twentieth century was a period of exceptionally profound change. During the *fin-de-siecle*, women began donning bloomers, cropping their hair, and agitating for their right both to vote and to participate in the “male” world of work. Compared with young women only one generation before them, one might argue that by the end of the First World War the entire sex had been “tomboy-ified.”

As tomboyism became more prevalent and even normative in American society, the way in which it was defined, depicted and disseminated in the nation’s literature and culture changed. On the whole, the spunky female figures in E. D. E. N. Southworth, Louisa May Alcott and even Sarah Orne Jewett are forward-looking characters. They represent the “next generation” of women: a group of strong, independent young figures who are unfettered by the confines of their “mother’s femininity.”

As the nineteenth century turned into the twentieth, this quality or characteristic of tomboys shifted. Instead of representing a glimpse into possible gender roles of the future, spunky female characters became a product of nostalgia for the past. Untainted by the fakery, artifice and superficiality that many associated with the modern period,

tomboys harkened back to an earlier and more idyllic era when human behavior was “authentic.” As many men and women began to regard modernity as stiflingly over-controlled and horrifically overcivilized, rebellious tomboys began to symbolize human behavior that was uncorrupted by a false social façade. With their “wild” and “primitive” natures, these rebellious figures existed in stark opposition to the refinement and reserve that had come to characterize modernity. As a result, many began to advocate tomboyism as the most natural manner of female compunction.

Perhaps more than any other author highlighted in this study, Charlotte Perkins Gilman was inextricably connected with these concerns.<sup>1</sup> In addition to being a tomboyish figure in her own life, the writer and intellectual also frequently depicted tomboyish characters in her writings. Of the various fictional and factual works in which Gilman addressed female physicality, one of the most detailed articulations appears in her 1915 utopian novel, *Herland*. Rather than featuring one spunky female figure, the narrative presents an entire nation of them. Soon after arriving in the all-female society, Terry Nicholson exclaims in both awe and anxiety, “ ‘It’s a land of tomboys!’ ” When a combination of war and natural disaster eradicated the society’s male population, the women formed their own self-sustaining society. By the time Gilman’s three male adventurers explore their all-female utopia, the Herlanders excel at tasks gendered both

---

<sup>1</sup> Given the faddish popularity of tomboyism during the early-twentieth century, numerous writers and artists began depicting spunky women in their work. As a result, the presence of tomboys in novels and short stories increased exponentially. Whereas spunky female characters were largely a feature of writing by women during the nineteenth century, the modern era saw the elimination of this gender divide. Throughout the early-twentieth century, narratives by such popular and esteemed male writers as Nathaniel West, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and even Ernest Hemingway depicted tomboyish women. During the late 1890s, even Mark Twain, the famed writer of boy’s narratives, jumped on the “tomboy bandwagon.” In his unpublished short story “Hellfire Hotchkiss,” he depicts a gender-bending female character who the town members assert is more “manly” than the area’s legitimate male inhabitants. In addition to the increased representation of literary tomboyism, there was also an emergence of these figures in other cultural forms. For the first time, tomboys were the subject of musicals (Charles George’s 1936 *My Tomboy Girl*) and even popular songs (Red Norvo and his Swing Septet’s 1930s hit “Tomboy”).

“masculine” and “feminine.” They can successfully design and build their own structures, as well as birth (through parthenogenesis) their own children.

The tomboyism showcased in Gilman’s *Herland*, however, was not the only growing national interest during the modern era. In addition to a period punctuated by a nostalgic longing for female physicality, the early-twentieth century was also fascinated with another manifestation of the past: primitivism. Although many Victorians disparaged tribal peoples for their “uncivilized” ways and “backwards” customs, others romanticized and even idealized this way of life. In the wake of World War I and its legacy of mass destruction, “primitive” cultures came to be viewed as sites of origin, rejuvenation and even reinvigoration for an over-mechanized Western culture. As Maria Torgovnick argues, primitivism represented a “utopian desire to go back and recover irreducible features of the psyche, body, land, and community—to reinhabit core experiences.... [It] became a medium for soul-searching and self-transformation” (*Passions* 5, 8). From the paintings of Pablo Picasso to the display of the Hottentot Venus, the untainted nature of the primitive entranced Western men and women.

While the gender-bending elements of Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland* are frequently discussed, the way in which her conception of tomboyism arises from and collapses into racially charged primitivism is relatively unexplored. Although not commonly seen in dialogue with modernist impulses, her utopian novel can be seen as a product of the era’s fascination with primitivism in many ways. Frightened by the increasing racial diversity of American culture and appalled by the increasing fakery of (white) women’s gender roles, Gilman sought refuge in a past that was both decidedly tomboyish and unmistakably “primitive.” Because the indigenous peoples surrounding

Gilman's Herland do not participate in modern Western culture, they are frequently called "savages" in the novel. Surprisingly, this classification is not accompanied by a common anatomical marker of primitivism, skin color. When a group of natives guide Vandyck, Terry and Jeff to the secluded land of women, in fact, there is no indication that these individuals possess dark pigmentation. The same cannot be said, however, for Gilman's Herlanders. The three Herland women who marry the novel's male adventurers are repeatedly described in racializing ways. Terry's bride Alima, for instance, possesses "brown hands" that are nearly as strong as those of her husband. In addition, the narrator notes that Vandyck's wife Ellador not only has hair so dark that it resembles "a seal coat," but also "clear brown skin" (Gilman *Herland* 92). While a physical description of Jeff's tutor Zava is never presented, Terry frequently calls her by such racially charged nicknames as "Java," "Mocha," "Coffee," or—when he is feeling "especially mischievous"—"Chicory" and even "Postum" (Gilman *Herland* 75 - 76). Finally, when Alima refuses to consummate her marriage with Terry, he responds in a way that recalls the complicated history of black women's sexuality. After singing the refrain, "The things that I learned from the yellow and the black, / They've helped me a 'eap with the white" from Kipling's "The Ladies," Terry tries to force himself on his new wife (Gilman *Herland* 129).

Although feminism is commonly seen as the underlying principle of Gilman's narrative, these racializing traits constitute its driving force in many ways. Primitivism may be seen as a sign of stagnation when applied to tribal people, but it becomes a vital source of rejuvenation for the author's tomboyish characters. Rather than being a mere repetition of E. D. E. N. Southworth's association of blackness with power sixty years



earlier, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's novel takes this phenomenon one step further. More than simply helping (white) women escape the confines of (white) femininity and the stagnation of (white) American culture, *Herland* suggests that "going (tomboyishly) primitive" can enhance the entire human race. In addition to making this racialized practice more global or universal, Gilman's yoking together of the tomboyishly "wild" with the primitively "valid" establishes a complex feedback cycle between these seemingly unrelated aspects of modernity. Instead of representing disparate manifestations of the era's nostalgia for the past, the tomboy and the primitive exist on a racially charged continuum.

Since the publication of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland*, numerous critics have read the novel as a response to H. Rider Haggard's imperialist romance *She* (1887), a bestseller during its time and still considered a classic adventure novel today. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue that Gilman penned her utopian narrative as an antidote to the misogynistic portrait of women in Haggard's text. In an effort to revise the emasculating image made popular by *She*, the feminist writer "created an all-female society whose culture suggests that the figure Haggard portrayed as a femme fatale needs to be understood... as a sex parasite" (Gilbert and Gubar *Sexchanges* 71). In her 1915 novel, she demonstrates that such "[m]asculinist dystopias... fuel feminist utopias, for if woman is dispossessed, a nobody, in the somewhere of patriarchy, it may be that she can only become somebody in the nowhere of utopia" (Gilbert and Gubar *Sexchanges* 72).

While Charlotte Perkins Gilman's novel is certainly in dialogue with Haggard's narrative, revising the image of women in literature is not its only concern. In the same way *Herland* imagines a new societal structure to accompany the new century, it also

posits a new connection between gender and imperialism. If tomboyish women can play at being men, then maybe they can also play at being imperialists.<sup>2</sup> Throughout *Herland*, Gilman transforms Haggard's portrayal of the colonial motherland into a utopian land of mothers. In doing so, she inverts conventional notions of dominant/submissive, savage/civilized and even colonizer/colonized. Although the three male adventurers come to Herland with the aim of civilizing what they perceive as a primitive female society, they are the ones who end up feeling like inferiors. Restricted to designated areas, dressed in non-Western clothes, and educated in a "foreign" language and culture, the men are placed in the position of subalterns.

More than simply a clever reversal of gender roles, these events can be seen as an inversion of the colonial order. Rather than seeking external conquests for the glory of the colonial motherland, the actions of Gilman's Herlanders are undertaken for the internal project of bettering their land of mothers. If the novel's utopian inhabitants can invert the colonial order, then they can also invert its accompanying value system. Instead of seeing the primitive as a disparaged quality to be conquered and subdued abroad, Gilman's Herlanders see it as a valued element to be harnessed and utilized at home. By becoming more tomboyishly primitive, Gilman's Herlanders can paradoxically make their society and, by extension, their race more sophisticated.

As a consequence, Charlotte Perkins Gilman may posit an ostensibly white utopia in her 1915 narrative, but the health and vigor of this tomboyish land is predicated on a

---

<sup>2</sup> In *White*, Richard Dyer makes a similar observations, arguing that "the built body and the imperial enterprise are analogous" (165). Although he was referencing male body-builders when he penned these remarks, they could apply to the similarly muscular tomboy. In the same way the tomboy's physicality has been deliberately molded and shaped, so has the colonial enterprise. "The built body sees the body as submitted to and glorified by the planning and ambition of the mind; colonial worlds are likewise represented as inchoate terrain needing the skill, sense and vision of the colonizer to be brought to order" (Dyer *White* 165).

dark continent. Similar to many devotees of primitivism during the modern era, she prescribes an infusion of non-white sources to paradoxically preserve a “white” race. In spite of the author’s fantasy of removing Aryan peoples from contamination by “foreign” immigrants and “low” races, her reliance on racially charged primitivism belies the impossibility of this desire. However repulsed Charlotte Perkins Gilman may have been by the “mongrelization” of the nation, her tomboyish Herlanders arise from a mongrelized mix of competing and often even contradictory notions of race and empire.

In *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*, Roland Robertson observes, “the idea of nationalism... develops only in tandem with internationalism” (103).

Although the bulk of Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s writings are driven by fears of an increasingly multicultural American society and “the possibility of... submergence in an unprecidently globalized cultural broth” (Peyser 69), her 1915 utopian novel defies this trend in many ways. In spite of Gilman’s flirtation with isolationism in *Herland*, the narrative ultimately affirms the necessity for contact between diverse peoples and cultures in the maintenance of a vibrant human race. Echoing Robertson’s comments on the interconnected relationship between nationalism and internationalism, the text’s construction of an ostensibly homogenous culture is paradoxically underwritten by racial, cultural and even geographic heterogeneity.

## **Part I. “Welcome to the (Urban) Jungle”:**

### **American Pluralism, Modernist Primitivism and Gilman’s (Racialized) Utopianism**

As critics and biographers have often noted, simply because a writer holds progressive views on one subject, it does not necessarily follow that they are similarly enlightened on other issues. Although commonly remembered as a woman whose feminist thinking was generations ahead of her time, Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s views on race were decidedly a product of her historical era. In the words of Ann J. Lane, the writer and intellectual “seriously neglected issues of class, race and ethnicity and their complex interaction with gender” (“Rights” 7). More than simply overlooking parallel forms of oppression while addressing the subjugation of women, Gilman often participated in them. Echoing the prevailing prejudices of modernity, her personal and professional writings are riddled with disparaging comments about the nation’s racial and ethnic minorities.

In addition to being a period punctuated by an interest in tomboyism and a fascination with primitivism, the modern era was also a time of rampant nativism and xenophobia. During the early-twentieth century, both the numbers and types of immigrants entering the United States changed dramatically. Not only were men and women coming in increasing quantities, but they were also coming from such “foreign” locales as Asia. In marked contrast to their Welsh-Irish and Western European predecessors, they spoke “alien” languages, practiced “unfamiliar” religions and observed “strange” customs. Rather than assimilating into American society, this new breed of immigrant established their own religious and ethnic enclaves in large American cities where they preserved their language, culture and traditions. Moreover, during a

time when many Nordic and Anglo-Saxon Americans were having smaller families, many new immigrants engaged in what Lothrop Stoddard characterized in *The Rising Tide of Color* as “reckless procreation” (12). Out of personal preference and/or religious observance, they sired large families.

This potent combination of new ethnographic types and their increasing visibility in American society threatened many whites. As the nineteenth century turned into the twentieth, Anglo-Saxons grew concerned about the unchecked influx of new and decidedly “foreign” arrivals. Questioning their ability to melt into (white) American society, men and women began to speculate that the unrestricted influx of these “mongrel” peoples would contaminate the racial and cultural composition of the nation. Over time, intermarriage would bring about the extinction of both the Caucasian race and the “American” way of life.

Faced with this threat to hegemony, middle-class whites fought back. Using tactics from informal discrimination against minorities to official legislation restricting immigration, they were determined to maintain the status quo. Buttressed by such respected public figures as Theodore Roosevelt, a sharp division was drawn between “native” Americans and “foreigners.” The popularization of evolutionary theories and the new field of sociology provided an important pseudo-intellectual scaffolding for these beliefs. Although many men and women romanticized primitivism as a site of origin and even rejuvenation during the modern era, others used this term as a pejorative. As Paula Wynn Allen notes, a “pervasive ideology of Anglo-Saxon hegemony maintained that there were inferior and superior races, that superior races produced higher cultures, and

that the amalgamation of superior and inferior races would bring about the deterioration of the superior race and its loftier culture” (*Building* 18).

An avid reader of anthropology, ethnology and sociology, Charlotte Perkins Gilman subscribed to this hierarchy of racial and ethnic groups.<sup>3</sup> Confident that the Nordic races had reached the pinnacle of development, Gilman was disgusted by what she considered the depravity of “lower” and more “primitive” races. In both her personal life and professional writings, she expressed sentiments that were racist, nativist, and xenophobic. Alarmed by the massive influx of Eastern European immigrants to the United States, for instance, Gilman argued “It is... a mistake to suppose that social evolution requires the even march of all races to the same goal” (“Suggestion” 291). After outlining the numerous and varied ways in which certain minorities would never “melt” or “mix” into “good Americans,” she called for the end of unrestricted immigration. Fearful that the integrity of American stock was being diluted and even polluted by these new peoples, she asked that the world’s “degenerate” races of be kept out of the United States (“Suggestion” 291).

Gilman’s distaste for racial Otherness was not limited to foreign immigrants; it included such “primitive” peoples as African Americans in the United States. Similar to many men and women of her era, she considered blacks a minority so far below Anglo-Saxons on the evolutionary chain that they were nearly subhuman. As Carol Farley Kessler points out, the writer and intellectual “nowhere draws the analogy between gender and race as twin sources of subordinate status” (48). Throughout her life, Gilman

---

<sup>3</sup> As Thomas Peyser remarks in *Utopia and Cosmopolis*, it is not possible to understand Gilman’s feminism, her racial views or her utopianism without first understanding the sociology of her time. The writer’s connections to Lester Ward, Edward Ross, and other theorists were instrumental to the formation of both her personal and professional opinions. As many biographers and critics have suggested, Gilman’s work is in many ways a reiteration of the ideas proposed by these academic men.

did not hesitate to tell racist jokes or make disparaging comments directly to her black servants (Allen *Building* 52). Furthermore, the author's feminist theories never included the hardships faced by black women. As several critics have pointed out, "there is no evidence that she established reciprocal relationships with women of color or that she listened seriously to the stories or concerns of black women.... The racist message of her fiction is that black women did not exist except insofar as they served and amused white women" (Allen *Building* 52). When Gilman did comment on blacks in either her fictional or factual writings, her remarks were often prejudicial. While riding a train to New York City, she insisted on being reseated after discovering that she had been placed near people of color. Discussing the incident the next day, she remarked, "To have sat in the sun opposite those coons... would have used me up pretty badly" (Lane *Beyond* 337). Years later, a battle erupted between Gilman and her sister-in-law in which race played a central role. As the author informed her daughter, she was infuriated that the relative "accepted the word of a colored cook against mine" (Lane *Beyond* 341). Finally, in her oft-quoted 1908 essay, "A Suggestion on the Negro Problem," Gilman argued that unlike "other races... whose special standing in racial evolution does not embarrass us" in the case of African Americans "it does" (78). To bridge this gap in evolutionary development, she turned to an influential novel of her day. Inspired by the "Industrial Army" discussed in Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, her "scheme for 'civilizing' former slaves was to conscript them into regiments for the learning of vocational skills" (Allen *Building* 53).

In light of such disparaging views about non-whites, Charlotte Perkins Gilman sought to literally and figuratively distance herself from "inferior" peoples. When the

writer and intellectual began drafting her autobiography, she went to great lengths to emphasize her untainted racial pedigree. In addition to showcasing her kinship with the esteemed Beecher family, she also asserted that she could trace her ancestry back to what many considered the apogee of Anglo-Saxon purity: Queen Victoria and the royal family. Throughout the autobiography, Gilman makes repeated reference to these and other debts of her “racial heredity” (Gilman *Living* 6). Moreover, several biographers have noted that Gilman’s relocation to Norwich Town, Connecticut in 1922 had nativist connotations. In both her letters and diary, she expressed “measureless relief” upon leaving the “conglomerate races” that were flooding into her longtime home of New York City (Allen *Building* 50).<sup>4</sup>

More than simply shaping her personal actions, Gilman’s attitudes about racial and ethnic minorities also made their way into her professional writings. In her domestic fantasy, *What Diantha Did* (1910), for instance, she deems Danish and Swedish immigrants capable of being only agricultural workers or domestic laborers. Similarly, in her 1929 mystery novel, *Unpunished*, the narrator makes frequent use of such racial and ethnic slurs as “Chink,” “Wop” and “dago” (29, 123). Even Gilman’s most famous fictional work, her 1892 short story “The Yellow Wallpaper,” may have arisen from prejudicial impulses. In a recent essay, Elaine Showalter suggests that threats of the “Yellow Peril” informed key facets of Gilman’s narrative: strong parallels exist between anti-Chinese sentiments and the author’s haunting wallpaper. In both Gilman’s text and in prevailing attitudes towards Asian-Americans, the color yellow connoted “inferiority,

---

<sup>4</sup> Gilman’s exodus from New York City was not the only instance when she expressed relief upon leaving a racially diverse region for a comparatively homogenous Anglo-Saxon area. In a diary entry from 1881, the future author is elated when her family moves from their Boston home to their Aunt’s house in the country. In a sentiment that sounds like a line from a minstrel show, she writes, “So goodbye to ungraded ‘Coonville’ and ho! for fresh fields and pastures new!” (Knight *Abridged* 27).



strangeness, cowardice, ugliness and backwardness” (Showalter “Feminist” 427). Given that “The Yellow Wallpaper” was written while Gilman was living in California and published a mere ten years after the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act, Showalter suggests that the racial implications of the color choice could not have been merely coincidental.

Although she is commonly lauded for her feminist ideology, Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s racism, nativism and xenophobia casts a pall over her reputation. As Carol Farley Kessler has pointed out, the writer and intellectual “could see that men, but not whites, needed reeducation to understand that a subordinated group deserved a fuller life” (*Progress* 48). As a result, many critics and biographers struggle to reconcile her progressive feminism with her decidedly reactionary views on race and ethnicity. Exemplifying this trend, a recent retrospective look at the writer and intellectual was dubbed, “The *Mixed Legacy* of Charlotte Perkins Gilman.”<sup>5</sup>

In spite of her disparaging attitudes about racial and ethnic minorities, Charlotte Perkins Gilman was not an unequivocal racist. Although the writer and intellectual participated in the nativism and xenophobia of her day, she was adamantly opposed to a practice that often resulted from these attitudes: colonialism. As numerous historians have noted, widespread beliefs about the inferiority of “primitive” peoples during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century made possible conquests by Western explorers. Throughout the modern era, white merchants and missionaries invaded countless tribal peoples in the name of “civilizing” what they considered heathenish races. Charlotte Perkins Gilman lived and worked during this great wave of European

---

<sup>5</sup> *The Mixed Legacy of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*. Ed. Catherine J. Golden and Joanna Schneider Zangrando. (Newark: University of Delaware, 2000).

imperialism. During her lifetime, in fact, “a fifth of the world’s landmass (excluding Antarctica) and a tenth of its population had been seized by colonial powers” (Kasson *Houdini* 179).

Although Charlotte Perkins Gilman believed in the evolutionary hierarchy of various races and ethnicities, she did not believe in the colonialist sublimation of inferior cultures. Throughout both her personal and professional writings, she expressed disgust over imperialist practices at home and abroad. Ironically, given her own sense of racial superiority, Gilman chided Americans for their shameful, ethnocentric treatment of Native Americans, African Americans and Chicanos. In her 1913 essay titled “Race Pride,” Gilman insisted, “For any separate nationality to look down on another shows ‘provincialism,’ and for us of the United States of America to look down on the nations from which we are constructed is palpably worse; not only wrong but ridiculous.... That we have cheated the Indian, oppressed the African, robbed the Mexican and childishly wasted our resources is grounds for shame” (Gilman “Race” 89 – 90).

Although more commonly remembered for her writings on women and economics, Charlotte Perkins Gilman also penned numerous utopian narratives. In addition to *Herland* in 1915, there were nearly a dozen short stories and two full-length novels—*Moving the Mountain* (1911) and *With Her in Ourland* (1916)—on this theme.<sup>6</sup> Because Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s utopian fiction focuses on fictional worlds during fictional time periods, it is tempting to exclude them from both the author’s views on race

---

<sup>6</sup> For both the complete texts of Gilman’s utopian stories and an extended analysis of them, see Carol Farley Kessler’s *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Her Progress Toward Utopia* (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1995). In addition to discussions of *Moving the Mountain*, *Herland* and *With Her in Ourland*, Kessler’s collection also includes ten short narratives: “Aunt Mary’s Pie Plant” (1908), “A Garden of Babies” (1909), “Heresy and Schism” (from *What Diantha Did*, 1910), “Her Housekeeper” (1910), “A Strange Land” (1912), “Maidstone Comfort” (1912), “Forsythe & Forsythe” (1913), “Mrs. Hines’ Money” (1913), “Bee Wise” (1913) and “A Council of War” (1913).

and the historic period in which they were written and released. One may argue that as imaginative narratives about fantasy civilizations, they are divorced from the concerns of contemporary society and instead, recalling Richard Poirier's remarks about the nature of American literature, chronicle a "world elsewhere."

In marked contrast to this common critical tendency, not only are Charlotte Perkins Gilman's utopian narratives in dialogue with their historical era, but they often arose in direct response to contemporary conditions. Minna Doskow points out, "Set in future time or imaginary geographic space, the novels delineate the ills of contemporary society and prescribe their cure in imaginary working models that are based on her social vision and reform agenda" (Introduction 16). Given that Gilman's utopian narratives were written in reaction to modern society rather than as an escape from it, it comes as no surprise that they contain the biases of both their author and their historical era. In the words of Thomas Peyser, it would be a mistake to assume that the writer's "idealism and her racism were not cut from the same cloth" (90). When critics address Gilman's various forms of prejudice, in fact, they frequently cite examples from her utopian fiction. Throughout *Moving the Mountain* (1911), for instance, her utopian vision is also a xenophobic one. Set thirty years in the future, the story presents Ellis Island as transformed into an "experiment station in applied sociology" (Gilman *Moving* 54). Newly arrived immigrants are given instruction in "Compulsory Socialization" (Gilman *Moving* 55). Those who achieve "a certain standard" of social, cultural and linguistic skills are permitted to enter American society. Meanwhile, those who are unable to achieve acceptable levels of assimilation are refused admittance. In a matter-of-fact tone that surprises even the novel's central character, Gilman's narrator argues that this new

“standard of citizenship... an idea of what people ought to be and how to make them so” has been to “great advantage” for natives and foreigners alike (Gilman *Moving* 55, 56). Prior to the implementation of this system, many newly arrived immigrants “used to prefer to live like hogs” (Gilman *Moving* 56).

In both past and present criticism, Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland* has been seen as a continuation of her interest in creating a racially purified state. Set on an isolated piece of land in South America, *Herland* has been characterized by many as a type of ghetto in which white Anglo-Europeans can be removed from the horrific “ascendancy of darker races” and the resulting “incursion of the global upon the local” (Peyser 25). In light of Gilman’s belief that “everything valuable about humanity derives somehow or other from the rugged purity of her racial forbearers,” critics have argued that her 1915 novel “looked backward to what she saw as a primordial racial past, finding there the uncontaminated essence of the groups with which she identified: the Aryan and, more specifically, Anglo-Saxons” (Peyser 64).

In spite of this tendency to see Gilman’s “garden civilization as inextricably intertwined with her vision of racial purity” (Peyser 90), the racial dynamics operating in *Herland* are neither this simple nor this synoptic. Although the text does imagine a type of “primordial racial past,” it is not one free from cross-cultural “contamination.” Soon after arriving in the female utopia, Vandyck asserts, “there was no doubt in my mind that these people were of Aryan stock, and were once in contact with the best civilization in the old world” (Gilman *Herland* 55). In spite of such assertions, when he describes the skin color of the *Herland* women a few moments later, he contradicts this affirmation. “They were ‘white,’ but somewhat darker than our northern races because of their

constant exposure to sun and air” (Gilman *Herland* 55). By putting the adjective “white” in quotations, Vandyck disavows or, at least, undermines the women’s racial heritage. Although the Herlanders may hail from Aryan stock, the quotations suggest that their whiteness is something that exists in name only. Since it is a racial categorization that cannot be confirmed by skin tone, their Aryan status is merely nominal or honorary.

These details regarding the racial dynamics operating in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland* undermine prevailing views of the novel as a separatist fantasy about homogeneity and the dangers of interracial marriage. In marked contrast to common critical consensus that the novel’s overall message is “to keep the rest of the globe at arm’s length” to preserve the purity of the superior white race (Peyser 91), events in the narrative suggest otherwise. In addition to being eager to marry and mate with the dark-skinned Herlanders, the novel’s three male adventurers also see this purportedly “primitive” society as more civilized than white America. Initially resistant to Herland culture, Vandyck concedes that their clothing style, sanitation methods and even childrearing practices are superior to those in the United States.

Although written as an antidote to colonialist novels such as Haggard’s *She*, Gilman’s utopian novel is predicated on imperial conquest in many ways. Not only do the actions of her three male adventurers recall those of countless imperialist explorers, but the Herland women also engage in various form of conquest and colonization. As Thomas Peyser points out, the “settlement of white, European women in the middle of South American jungle” represents “a remnant of the first great waves of European exploration” (Peyser 82). As the Herland women confess to Vandyck, Jeff and Terry, their society used to rely on slave labor. Although the women have eliminated this aspect

of their culture, both the past origins and current success of their society are predicated on exploitation.

In addition, the Herlander's abolition of slavery ought not to imply that they have renounced all forms of conquest. As both past and present criticism has pointed out, the utopian women also frustrate the efforts of the three male adventurers. Rather than allowing themselves to be politically and sexually "conquered" by the Western men, they invert the paradigm and colonize them. In the words of Susan Gubar, "[e]specially in the introductory chapters of Gilman's utopia, the men experience culture shock when they are treated like the minority they, in fact, are. Secondary creatures, they are herded like cattle, bedded down like babies, and put on display as anatomical curiosities marketable only for matrimony" (*She* 193). Such reversals are not isolated incidents, but rather are indicative of the overall aim of Gilman's narrative. The inversions of race, gender and empire allow *Herland* to transform the primitive (as it was then perceived) into the progressive, an ostensible meditation about racial purity into one about race-mixing, and a narrative that is purportedly about isolationism into one about globalism. In doing so, the utopian novel posits a new relationship between gender and imperialism. For centuries, outposts of the American and especially British empires had a long, complicated history with female sexuality and especially gender rebellion. As Susan Gubar has pointed out, the "colonies, which had been a dumping ground for redundant women in search of husbands, also served as punishment for fictional female rebels like Moll Flanders and Hetty Sorrel" (Gubar *She* 199 – 200). Although female rebels by conventional standards of femininity, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Herlanders do not

represent colonial punishment. In possession of a superior society and more advanced culture, these women can be seen as exemplars of global progress.

In a letter Charlotte Perkins Gilman wrote to her future husband, Houghton Gilman, she playfully compared their courtship to Br'er Rabbit's encounter with Tar Baby. After identifying herself as the trickster male hare she promised her beloved that unlike the Tar Baby "you will not 'turn me loose' " (Hill *Journey* 240). Although it is a utopian narrative about an imaginary civilization, the same remarks could apply to Gilman's *Herland*. In spite of the narrative's resistance to and even hostility for the commingling of the races, its presentation of race and empire also occupies the position of a trickster. The repeated characterizations of ostensibly white Herlanders as both brown and primitive suggests that the author's vision of racial homogeneity could not be "turned loose" from the effects of multiculturalism and globalization.

## Part II. The Art of Darkness:

### White Conquests and Whiteness Contests in *Herland*

In both past and present criticism, if any mention is made of the social and cultural circumstances that surrounded Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland*, it is as a reminder to view the text as a war novel or at least as a novel written during a war. As numerous critics and biographers have noted, the author was deeply disturbed by the carnage and mass destruction of World War I. Seeing the outbreak of hostilities as the product of an overly masculine society, the writer conceived *Herland* as a literary antidote. In an ironic twist on the primary battlefield of the war, Sandra Gilman and Susan Gubar point out that Gilman's all-female utopia presented a literal and figurative "No Man's Land."

While the Great War forms a poignant backdrop to *Herland*, it was not the only event that may have influenced the author's imaginative repertoire. Although not commonly viewed in terms of the colorline, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's utopian novel was written and released during a turbulent year in the nation's racial history: 1915. During this twelve-month period, the "dark" Jew Leo Frank was lynched for the alleged rape of a white girl in Atlanta. Similarly, the cinematically progressive but racially reactionary film *The Birth of a Nation* was released to both critical and popular acclaim. Echoing this trend, throughout the 1910s, Edgar Rice Burroughs' Tarzan novels were consistent bestsellers. Similar to Gilman's *Herland*, the series not only chronicled a "lost" white civilization in the heart of a "dark continent" but also showcased an ostensibly Caucasian character who is reared in a racially charged, primitivist



environment. Interestingly, Burroughs' first novel, *Tarzan of the Apes*, was released only two years before the publication of *Herland*.<sup>7</sup>

This racially charged *milieu* that surrounded Charlotte Perkins Gilman's utopian novel raises the possibility that the narrative was more than simply a literary response to military events of the era. Instead, *Herland* may have been a reaction to racial ones as well. Although ostensibly Caucasian, Gilman's Herlanders are repeatedly associated with a dark hue in the novel. Recalling the racially ambiguous status of such contemporary figures as Tarzan and Leo Frank, Gilman's tomboyish characters may be identified as Aryan, but they are consistently described and even treated as racial Others throughout the novel. These details suggest a new cultural approach to reading and interpreting Gilman's narrative. Rather than providing an escape from contemporary concerns such as race and the colorline, *Herland* may have been in dialogue with them.

Although the literary impetus for Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* is commonly considered Rider Haggard's *She*, in recent years critics have identified another equally racialized source of inspiration. In addition to modeling her utopian narrative after Haggard's imperialist romance, Gilman also drew inspiration from the suggestively named "White City" of the 1893 Columbian Exposition (Sharnhorst *Charlotte* 107). Gilman admired the order and cleanliness of the structure, a "baroque assemblage of parks, monumental buildings, and boulevards in imitation Renaissance style constructed a few miles from the Chicago Loop." She recalled soon after visiting the Exposition, "The White City by the lake was an inspiration to myriad lives, and wrought a lovely change in

---

<sup>7</sup> Although no critics or biographers indicate that Charlotte Perkins Gilman ever read the *Tarzan* series, given the narrative's mass popularity and her penchant for imitating the style of popular authors, it seems likely that she would have at least been familiar with the novels.

architecture” (Gilman *Home* 152). Many argue that when Gilman penned her 1915 novel about an equally clean and orderly utopia, she drew on memories of this structure.

Although Charlotte Perkins Gilman many have fashioned her fictional utopia after the impressive “White City,” both the architecture and the inhabitants fail to conform to this racially suggestive condition. Not only are the buildings in Herland constructed from rose and not white colored stone, but the region’s tomboyish inhabitants are repeatedly described with brown and not pale skin. Rather than forming a contradiction or flaw in Gilman’s characterization, this paradox becomes an apt metaphor for the narrative’s treatment of race and empire. From the opening pages of her 1915 utopian novel to its final utterances, the text presents a similarly mongrelized mix of competing and often contradictory ideas. In the same way women who possess dark skin tones are ironically classified as white in *Herland*, primitive behavior is paradoxically deemed progressive. Given these dynamics, Gilman’s utopian narrative may be patterned after a “white city,” but the text pivots around colonial conceptions of a dark colony. Recalling Joseph Conrad’s famous imperialist novel, *Herland* traffics in the “art” of darkness.

The racialization of Herland’s tomboyish inhabitants begins from the moment Terry, Jeff and Vandyck encounter the young women. After seeing Alima, Celis and Ellador “balanced on a long branch that dipped and swayed beneath their weight” (Gilman *Herland* 16), the trio begins to describe them in simian ways.<sup>8</sup> Amazed by the ease and agility with which they navigate the branches, Vandyck Jennings observes that

---

<sup>8</sup> The simianization of Gilman’s Herlanders adds a further element to her inversion of popular paradigms established by Rider Haggard’s colonialist romance. Throughout his 1887 novel *She*, the male adventurers and not the female exotics are frequently described in simian ways. In the opening pages of the novel, in fact, Horace Holly is presented with “unusually long arms,” “dark hair” and “whiskers [that] grew right up to his hair, so that there was uncommonly little of his countenance to be seen” (Haggard *She* 2). Given these details, the narrator admits, “Altogether he reminded me forcibly of a gorilla” (Haggard *She* 2). Although femme fatale Ayesha is frequently presented in animalistic ways, she is more commonly linked with serpentine rather than simian qualities.

the culture at first appear to be “arboreal” (Gilman *Herland* 19). Although this characterization proves to be incorrect, the women’s affinity for climbing is repeatedly mentioned. When the young men are brought to the gymnasium, for instance, they are astounded by acrobatic abilities of both the young and old Herlanders. “ ‘Forty—over forty—some of ‘em fifty, I bet—and look at em,’ grumbled Terry in reluctant admiration” (Gilman *Herland* 34). When Terry, Jeff and Vandyck attempt to escape later in the narrative, the Herlanders’ “monkey-like” agility is emphasized. In addition to Vandyck’s concession “ ‘We know they can out-run, and out-climb us,’ ” the young men also realize that they were being carefully observed “by careful ladies sitting snugly in big trees by the riverbed...” (Gilman *Herland* 42, 45).

Similar to the simianization of the Irish and the Jews, the connection between Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s Herlanders and monkey-like traits is not without an accompanying association with a dark hue. Although ostensibly Caucasian, the utopian women possess brown skin. As Vandyck notes, “[t]hey were ‘white,’ but somewhat darker than our northern races because of their constant exposure to sun and air” (Gilman *Herland* 55). While acquiring a suntan does not change an individual’s racial composition, Ann Douglas argues that it can connote racial envy. In *Terrible Honesty*, the critic points out that sun-tanning acquired a racial charge during the early-twentieth century. Throughout the modern era, the nation was increasingly intrigued by black culture. From the popularization of Jazz music to the romanticization of Harlem, the country was becoming “negrified.” As Ann Douglas argues, if “actual blacking up, Eddie Cantor-style, decreased in the 1920s, blacking up, speaking metaphorically, increased dramatically” (Douglas *Terrible* 78). In addition to such popular stars as

Rudolph Valentino playing “swarthy” Arabs, the new fad of sun-tanning could also be connected with this phenomenon. Though it was shunned during the Victorian era, Douglas notes that “[t]anning the skin.... was newly fashionable....” (Douglas *Terrible* 78). After centuries of valuing porcelain white skin, sun-tanning was a way for Caucasian men and women to “flirt with varying degrees of Negritude” (Douglas *Terrible* 78).

At several points in Gilman’s *Herland*, Vandyck’s description of Alima and especially Ellador calls attention to their racialized nature in general and tanned skin in particular. Drawing on adjectives commonly used to connote the three major racial groups in the United States—African Americans, Caucasians, and Native Americans—Alima is presented as “black-and-white-and-red, a blazing beauty” (Gilman *Herland* 92). A few chapters later, her hand is described as both “strong” and “brown” (Gilman *Herland* 118). Taking this characterization one step further, Ellador’s skin tone along with her hair texture are presented in racialized ways. Vandyck’s future wife possesses “brown skin” and dark hair that is reminiscent of a “seal coat” (Gilman *Herland* 92). As the novel progresses, such racialized characterizations escalate into racial slurs. Although a physical description of Jeff’s tutor Zava is never presented, Terry frequently calls her such racially charged nicknames as “Java,” “Mocha,” “Coffee,” or—when he is feeling “especially mischievous”—“Chicory” and even “Postum” (Gilman *Herland* 75 - 76).

The possession of dark skin and features is not the only way in which the women of *Herland* are racialized in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s novel. Throughout the text, connections are made between *Herland* society and Oriental cultures. Vandyck, for

instance, repeatedly likens the women's clothing to garments worn in the East. At one point, he characterizes the large straw hats the Herlanders wear as "something like those used in China and Japan" (Gilman *Herland* 51). Later, while praising the comfort and beauty of their attire, he asserts "they had evolved a costume more perfect than the Chinese dress" (Gilman *Herland* 82).

This comparison of Herland customs with "exotic" non-Western cultures is not limited to the male adventurers. At several points, the Herlanders themselves use Orientalist language to characterize various elements of their society. While describing their asexual means of reproduction, for instance, the women assert that since the first parthenogenic birth in Herland, all the female babies have been "harem-bred" (Gilman *Herland* 58).

In light of these racially charged characterizations, it comes as no surprise when the men identify the Herland women as racial Others. "Long since we had been given our own two rooms apiece, and as being of a different sex and *race*, these were in a separate house" [my emphasis] (Gilman *Herland* 124). Similar to the quotations marks placed around the adjective "white" earlier in the narrative, this comment detracts from the women's identity as Caucasians. If the Herland women did hail from Aryan stock as Vandyck first attests, then they would be of the same and not a different race as the white men. Accordingly, the trio considers their wedlock with the Herland women an extreme form of interracial marriage. Although accustomed to unions between whites and black, yellow, brown and red races, Vandyck muses, "no combination of alien races, of color, caste, or creed was ever so basically different to establish as that between us, three modern American men, and these three women of Herland" (Gilman *Herland* 120).

The racial dynamics operating in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* place the novel in dialogue with the historical period in which it was written and released. Similar to Maria Torgovnick's analysis of Tarzan, Gilman's utopian inhabitants embody "white apes" in many ways. Although commonly seen as existing outside modernity's conceptions of the colorline, the ostensibly Caucasian Herlanders are repeatedly presented with racially charged brown skin, dark features and simian traits. In addition to creating links between Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* and the work of Edgar Rice Burroughs or Thomas Dixon, the racially ambiguous status of her tomboyish inhabitants also likens them to another contemporary phenomenon: primitivism. While this term was commonly used to connote a restorative state, it was also frequently associated with people of color. During the modern era, racial and ethnic groups that were considered "low" or subordinate were often deemed primitive. Not surprisingly, given the nativism and xenophobia of the period, these same groups were also the ones who possessed a dark hue. In this way, in addition to constituting an evolutionary classification, primitivism also came to be seen as a racial one. Since primitive races were also often the ones with dark hues, primitivism came to be associated with racialism.

Although possessing a culture that is far superior to the world of the three white adventurers, Gilman's Herlanders also possess compelling links to the primitive. In addition to their repeated characterizations as "brown" and "dark" in Gilman's novel, they share numerous links with modernity's conception of the primitive. Recalling the title of a popular 1915 film, the utopian fantasy may commonly be viewed from feminist perspectives, but the racial dynamics operating in *Herland* also chronicle the "birth of a (primitive) nation." In the same way Thomas Dixon considered "racism.... crucial to the

reinvention of the American state” (Michaels *Our* 34), Charlotte Perkins Gilman considered primitivism crucial to the construction of tomboyism and, by extension, the reconstruction of female gender roles.

### Part III. "Let's Get Physical":

#### **The Death of the Tomboy and *The Birth of a (Primitive) Nation***

In marked contrast to all the other writers examined in this study, Charlotte Perkins Gilman considered tomboyism an unnatural or, at least, artificial category. The writer and intellectual did not believe that active, outdoor play was the exclusive domain of boys and men. In the opening segment of *Women and Economics* (1898), she asserted, "The most normal girl is the tomboy—whose numbers increase among us in these wiser days—a healthy young creature, who is human through and through; not feminine until it is time to be" (29). Elaborating on these convictions in *The Man-Made World* (1911), Gilman devoted an entire chapter to highlighting the harmful artificiality of femininity and, by extension, the healthy genuineness of what many would consider "tomboyism."<sup>9</sup> After asserting that the "play instinct is common to girls and boys alike," she laments the way in which "we have reduced the play impulse in women by restricting them to one set of occupations... and forcibly differentiate their toys and methods of play long before any natural distinction would appear" (Gilman *Man-Made* 107, 109). Unlike many of her contemporaries, Gilman regarded physical culture as the realm of all children, male and female alike. In marked contrast to the exceptional category of tomboyism, she believed it was normal and even natural for girls to engage in physical activity and outdoor play. As a result, one might say that she called for the death of tomboyism as an exceptional category. Returning to *The Man-Made World* once again, she insisted that women "are

---

<sup>9</sup> *The Man-Made World*, of course, is not the only text in which Charlotte Perkins Gilman addresses this issue. Throughout both her personal and professional life, she discussed physical culture. For a complete index of all the poems, essays and books that engage this issue, see Gary Scharnohst's *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: A Bibliography* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1985).



perfectly competent to take part in all normal athletic development, the human range of agility and skill is open to them....” (153).<sup>10</sup>

Although not an exclusive meditation on the relationship between women and sports, Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland* showcases the naturalness of tomboyish behavior. Throughout the narrative, the speed, strength and agility of the Herland women is emphasized both repeatedly and matter-of-factly. Unlike the manufactured strength of “fishwives” and “market women” in the United States, Vandyck observes “These were merely athletic, light and powerful” (Gilman *Herland* 24). Even for the older women, strength and agility were commonplace rather than exceptional or “freakish” qualities. When Terry, Jeff and Vandyck accompany the women to the gymnasium, for instance, they are astounded by the ease with which they run, jump and climb. Recalling Gilman’s assertion from *Women and Economics* that the most “normal” and “natural” girl is the tomboy once again, Vandyck asserts, “They ran like deer, by which I mean that they ran not as if it was a performance, but as if it was their *natural* gait” [my emphasis] (Gilman *Herland* 34).

Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s belief in the naturalness of female physicality not only calls for the elimination of tomboyism as an exceptional category, but also establishes a kinship between the tomboy and the primitive. During the modern era, T. Jackson Lears notes “authentic experience of any sort seemed ever more elusive” (No 5). Especially for

---

<sup>10</sup> In marked contrast to Gilman’s libratory views on female gender roles, she was adamantly opposed to an early-twentieth century phenomenon that is often placed on the spectrum of tomboyishness: the flapper. Rather than seeing the short hair and boyish appearance of these figures as signs of gender liberation, the writer and intellectual saw them as merely a faddish means to attract male attention. Commenting on both the disingenuous nature of Jazz Age flapper and the repulsive “mannishness” of the New Woman in *His Religion and Hers* (1923), Gilman asserted, “These poor little slouchy creatures, painting their cheeks and powdering their noses... adopting male vices, and so utterly traitorous to the essential glory of their own sex.... But these are not women. These are really worthy of that absurd title with which men have tried to discredit the progressive women of our times—‘the third sex’ ” (236).

the wealthy elite, “life seems increasingly confined to the air parlor of material comfort and moral complacency” (*No 5*). The life of primitives existed in marked contrast to this condition. Unencumbered by the manners and mores of modern society, these men and women came to be seen as emblems of natural, unadulterated human behavior. For many Westerners, primitives were lauded as the only true element of authenticity in the *fin-de-siecle*.

If Charlotte Perkins Gilman sees tomboyish behavior as authentic behavior, and authenticity is considered the realm of the “savage” during the modern era, then tomboys must be also primitives or, at least, on the spectrum of primitivism.<sup>11</sup> Although developing a highly advanced society, Gilman’s tomboyish Herlanders have many characteristics in common with modernity’s conception of “the primitive.” Throughout the 1915 utopian novel, these figures share an active physicality, untamed spirit, childlike innocence, latent warrior tendency, and close connection with nature. In addition to linking Gilman’s *Herland* with one of the most potent concepts in modernity, her yoking of the tomboyish and the primitive broadens and deepens the racialization of white tomboys spotlighted in previous chapters. More than simply associating one Caucasian tomboy with a dark hue, Gilman connects the entire practice or concept with a racially charged phenomenon. In her oft-discussed *Terrible Honesty*, Ann Douglas observed, “It is one thing to be in search of the ‘primitive,’ as white artists of the 1920s were; another

---

<sup>11</sup> Although Gilman’s conception of primitivism is redemptive in her 1915 utopian novel, she did not always use this term in such a positive way. Throughout her personal and professional life, the writer also frequently invoked the word as a pejorative to denote “crude” or “unsophisticated” ways. Although instances of this derogatory usage permeate Gilman’s life and work, the most poignant and certainly most famous example occurs in her 1898 *Women and Economics*. Throughout this much-celebrated text, Gilman repeatedly refers to the current domestic division of labor as “primitive.” Viewing this “barbaric” practice as both the root of women’s oppression and the primary element retarding social progress, she expressed her disgust in primitivist language. As Paula Wynn Allen notes, “From her days in the Nationalist and Fabian movements to her retirement days in Norwich Town, Gilman tried to foster a sense of ‘we-ness’ and ‘our-ness’ in place of such ‘primitive’ notions as ‘I and ‘mine’ ” (*Building* 122).

thing to be told... that you *are* the primitive” [her emphasis] (98). Although referencing black culture in Harlem when penning these remarks, Douglas’ remarks could apply to the tomboyish inhabitants of Gilman’s utopia. More than simply emulating primitives, these young women literally and figuratively embody them.

The first and perhaps most obvious link between the tomboy and the primitive is the tomboys’ active physicality. Maria Torgovnick argues, “Within Western culture, the idiom ‘going primitive’ is in fact congruent in many ways to the idiom ‘getting physical’” (Torgovnick *Gone* 228). Throughout the *fin-de-siecle*, leaders such as Theodore Roosevelt advocated what T. Jackson Lears characterizes as “the cult of the strenuous life” (Lears *No* xii). Eager to instill a sense of masculine strength and power in young men, Roosevelt encouraged them to participate in such aggressive sports as hunting, boxing and football.

Although Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s Herlanders do not participate in any team sports during the novel, they repeatedly engage in physical activity. The first time Terry, Jeff and Vandyck encounter the utopian women, in fact, they are amazed by the speed and agility with which the Herlanders can climb trees. While the men must concentrate to keep their balance, Vandyck notes that the three young women “swung before us, wholly at ease” (Gilman *Herland* 17). At several other points in the narrative, young and old Herlanders are depicted as tomboyishly active and physically fit. During one especially amusing scene at a gymnasium, Vandyck is embarrassed to confess that the skills of even the elder women greatly exceed their own: “Terry was the strongest of us, though I was wiry and had good staying power, and Jeff was a great sprinter and hurdler, but I can tell you those old ladies gave us cards and spades” (Gilman *Herland* 34).

In addition to possessing active physicality, tomboys and primitives also share a wild and unfettered nature. As Marianna Torgovnick argues, “[p]rimitives are our untamed selves, our id forces.... Primitives are free” (Torgovnick *Gone* 8). Unlike the majority of “civilized” men and women in the Western world, primitives are untainted by the artifice and fakery of modern society. Unencumbered by restrictive manner and mores, they are both physically and emotionally uninhibited.

Echoing this trait, from the moment Terry, Jeff and Vandyck arrive in Herland, they note the free-spirited nature of the female inhabitants. Upon first seeing Alima, in fact, Vandyck describes her eyes as “splendid, wide, fearless” (Gilman *Herland* 18). When the trio attempts to communicate with the women later in the narrative, they are astounded by the Herlanders’ bravery and unchecked curiosity. Defying stereotypes about women’s squeamishness, the Herlanders are boldly “unaware of danger” (Gilman *Herland* 17).

A penchant for being fearless and adventuresome is not the only element tomboys and primitives share. In addition to being active and unfettered, these figures are also known for their childlike purity or innocence. Unaware of the deception, competition and even carnage of the modern world, the “savage” lives in a state of blissful ignorance. Similar to young children, they are oblivious to the ills of Western society.<sup>12</sup>

Although a more knowledgeable youth than her feminine counterparts in many ways, the tomboy shares this sense of innocence. In the same way modern society frequently juxtaposed “the child’s sincerity against the adult’s artifice” (Lears *No* 145),

---

<sup>12</sup> Throughout both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, numerous critics and historians have made links between savages and children and *vice versa*. As Sander Gilman notes in “Sexology, Psychoanalysis, and Degeneration: From a Theory of Race to a Race to Theory,” for countless sexologists and anthropologists, “The child is the primitive form of man” (“Sexology” 73).

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* similarly juxtaposes readerly knowledge of Western corruption with the innocence of her tomboyish inhabitants. Recalling the geographically isolated primitive, Gilman's Herlanders have been disconnected from outside society for 2,000 years. As a consequence, they are unaware of the disease and corruption that is commonplace in civilized nations. When Jeff, Vandyck and Terry allude to even the mildest forms of injustice, the utopian women express shock and often revulsion. After the practice of keeping cattle for milk in the United States is explained, for instance, the utopian inhabitants become physically ill. Believing that the process "robs the cow of her calf, and the calf of its true food.... They heard it out, looking very white, and presently begged to be excused" (Gilman *Herland* 50). In light of such responses, when the men discuss more shocking issues as abortion and the death-based religion of Christianity, their horror increases exponentially.

Although the women of *Herland* are ignorant of conditions in the "civilized" world, they are not oblivious to uncivilized nature. Unlike Westerners, who often position the natural and the civilized as antithetical, the citizens of *Herland* exist in harmony with their environment. Upon first seeing the utopian community, Jeff, Terry and Vandyck are astounded by the symbiotic relationship the women share with their surroundings. In marked contrast to the filth, noise and pollution in most American cities, the region was "in a state of perfect cultivation, where even the forests looked as if they were cared for; a land that looked like an enormous park, only it was even more evidently an enormous garden" (Gilman *Herland* 13). In both awe and amazement, Jeff observes, " 'There's no dirt.... There's no smoke' " (Gilman *Herland* 21). As they circle the settlement with their biplane, such accolades continue. Even on close inspection,

“[e]verything was beauty, order, perfect cleanness, and the pleasant sense of home over it all” (Gilman *Herland* 21). When the trio finally lands and begins to explore the region by foot, they discover that the Herlanders have made their environment not simply beautiful, but practical. “On either side a double row of trees shaded the footpaths; between the trees, bushes or vines, all fruit-bearing, now and then seats and little wayside fountains; everywhere flowers” (Gilman *Herland* 20). Their world is a perfect blend of form and function.

Similar to previous characteristics, this close connection with nature echoes modernity’s conception of the primitive. Unlike inhabitants of the civilized world who are artificially disconnected from their environment, primitives were often regarded as “mystics, in tune with nature, part of its harmonies” during the *fin-de-siecle* (Torgovnick *Gone* 8). By having direct contact with the flora and fauna of their region, tribal people were romanticized as existing in harmony with their surroundings.

In spite of such an idealized portrait, modernity’s conception of the primitive was not all positive. In addition to such commendable qualities as free-spiritedness and environmentalism, primitivism was also associated with violence and warfare. T. Jackson Lears notes, in a society fixated on self-control, “War promised both social and personal regeneration” (Lears *No* 98, 100). Although the Western world participated in many militant acts—when Gilman penned and released *Herland*, in fact, World War I was raging—aggression remained the realm of the “savage.” For Americans and Europeans alike, “many... began to hope that the warrior might return to redeem them from enervation and impotence” (Lears *No* 100).<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> In *No Place of Grace*, T. Jackson Lears connects the growing interest in warfare and the growing enthusiasm for athletics during the *fin-de-siecle*. Rather than identifying them as separate phenomena, he

Although it is seldom discussed in either Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 1915 novel or in the criticism about it, the inhabitants of Herland also share this trait. The male members of this mountaintop community were not the only ones to engage in warfare. When the slaves within their society initiate a revolt, the women do not hesitate to fight back. After the rebels had "killed their remaining masters even to the youngest boy, killed the old women too, and the mothers, intending to take possession of the country with the remaining young women and girls," they take up arms themselves (Gilman *Herland* 56). Rather than submit to the rebels, the young women "rose in sheer desperation and slew their brutal conquerors" (Gilman *Herland* 56). Justifying this unexpected outburst of bellicosity, Vandyck argues "this succession of misfortunes was too much for those infuriated virgins" (Gilman *Herland* 56). Couching their reaction in primitivist language, one could say that the rebellion brought out the "savage" in these young women.

A childlike innocence, close association with nature, and participation in warfare were not the only characteristics with which primitivism became associated during the *fin-de-siecle*. As Marianna Torgovnick points out, this concept was also "coded metaphorically as feminine" in this era (*Passions* 8). Throughout the 1910s and 1920s, "familiar tropes for primitives became the tropes conventionally used for women" (Torgovnick *Passions* 8). Echoing these sentiments, Rita Felski argues in *Gendering Modernity*, "Woman was identified with a primitive or preindustrial era in the same way

---

argues that they were merely different expressions of the same sentiment. "The revived love of war is not an isolated phenomenon. Martial bellicosity paralleled the growing enthusiasm for boxing, football, bicycling, and outdoor life in general.... Through athletics, a 'delicate, indoor, genteel race, might receive 'a saving touch of honest, old-fashioned barbarism' " (Lears *No* 108).

as she was linked through her maternal function to unselfconscious being-in-the-world of the not yet socialized infant” (39).

Even before Vandyck, Terry and Jeff enter the all-female society of Herland, they associate primitivism with femininity and civilization with masculinity. Speculating on the nature of “Feminisia,” Terry asserts, “ ‘[W]e mustn’t look for inventions or progress; it’ll be awfully primitive’ ” (Gilman *Herland* 10). When the trio arrives in Herland and witnesses the society’s social and technological innovations, this perspective does not change. Rather than acknowledge that women are capable of creating civilization, they insist there must be males hidden somewhere. Epitomizing such sentiments, Vandyck exclaims at one point, “ ‘[W]hy, this is a *civilized* country.... There must be men’ ” [author’s emphasis] (Gilman *Herland* 12).

Although the trio eventually concedes that Herland is, as its name suggests, a society of women, their ability to create a sophisticated culture does not make them any less “primitive” or savage. Echoing stereotypes about the association of femininity with primitivism and masculinity with civilization, the three adventurers frequently characterize the Herland women in such primitivistic ways as a “pack of Fe-Fe-Females” (Gilman *Herland* 81).

While the language used to describe primitivism may be “feminized” in many ways, the association between it and femininity seems too broad. As the behavior of Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s utopian characters suggests, rather than being associated with women’s behavior in general, primitivism may be more accurately linked to a specific type of female conduct: tomboyism.



Although commonly seen as a sign of stagnation and even regression when applied to people of color, the primitivist elements possessed by Gilman's Herlanders are paradoxically deemed progressive. While the three male adventurers may occasionally disparage the unfeminine aggressiveness and animalistic physicality that the Herlanders' connection with primitivism provides, they simultaneously envy the power that accompanies these traits. At various points throughout the novel, the men acknowledge the physical, cultural and even intellectual superiority of Herland society. At the very least, they concede that the utopian women are genetically superior to females in the West. As Vandyck observes, they "were tall, strong, healthy, and beautiful as a race" (Gilman *Herland* 78). Unlike various races and ethnicities in the West, they "lacked all morbid and excessive types" (Gilman *Herland* 78). At least in part, the mental and physical superiority of Herland women can be attributed to their tomboyish co-opting of primitivism. Rather than cause them to regress to atavistic states of evolutionary development, the active physicality, unfettered spirit and even warlike aggressiveness precipitates the rejuvenation of their gender and, by extension, the superiority of their society.

These details add a new dimension to Charlotte Perkins Gilman's project of rescripting the paradigms established by Rider Haggard's fantasy *She*. In marked contrast to his colonialist novel, the utopian inhabitants of Herland see primitivism as an element to be valued and harnessed at home rather than a quality to be conquered and subdued abroad. Inverting the trajectory of Haggard's *She*, Gilman's tomboyish characters strive to improve the internal project of bettering their land of mothers instead of seeking external conquests for the glory of the colonial motherland.

In *Gone Primitive*, Maria Torgovnick makes the compelling observation: “The primitive does what we ask it to do. Voiceless, it lets us speak for it.... The primitive has been and will be whatever Euro-Americans want it to be” (8). Although commonly seen as a static concept, Torgovnick reveals that Western notions of the primitive are fluid and malleable. In the same way primitivism can embody both what is regenerative and what is regressive, it can also encompass a wide range of other seemingly oppositional ideas. As Western needs for primitivism shift and change, so does our definition of primitivism. For these reasons, Barkan and Bush assert, “As for ‘primitives,’ they never existed. Only Western ‘primitivism’ did” (2).

Although not commonly connected with this facet of modernity, Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland* participates in it. Throughout her 1915 utopian narrative, the primitivism present in her tomboyish main characters embodies a panoply of contradictory and even competing elements. In the course of the novel, the process of “going (tomboyishly) primitive” is presented as simultaneously male and female, progressive and pejorative, valued and reviled, different and same. Maria Torgovnick once wrote, “For Euro-Americans, to study the primitive brings us always back to ourselves, which we reveal in the act of defining the Other” (*Gone* 8). In many ways, Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland* exemplifies these sentiments. The 1915 utopian novel may draw on concepts of the exotic primitive, but these qualities ultimately help construct the familiar Western tomboy.

#### Part IV. Putting the “Prim” in “Primitive”; or, Sex and the (Utopian) City:

##### The Attraction of Atavism and The Atavism of Attraction in *Herland*

Although Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herlanders* share many qualities with modernity's conception of “the primitive,” one important area of contrast remains: sexuality. While the *Herlander's* ignorance of the corruption and injustice in American society is understandable given their cultural and geographic isolation, their childlike innocence of this issue is less explicable. Terry has orgiastic fantasies about what will happen when he and his two male companions enter the all-female society, but the aftermath of their arrival is much different. In marked contrast to the sex drives of Western women, the *Herlanders* “hadn't the faintest idea of love—sex-love, that is” (Gilman *Herland* 89). After reproducing parthenogenetically for the past 2,000 years, sexual lust had become relatively absent from the inhabitants. As Vandyck laments, “There was no sex-feeling to appeal to, or practically none.... Their dress and ornaments had not a touch of the ‘come-and-find-me’ element” (Gilman *Herland* 92, 127). Instead, all of the female inhabitants “lacked the sex motive” (Gilman *Herland* 100).

Because the utopian inhabitants reproduce parthenogenetically, they no longer have a biological need for sexual attraction.<sup>14</sup> Since erotic desire has lost its social usefulness in *Herland*, it is considered an obsolete and even atavistic quality. Hence, as Vandyck notes, women who possess any sex drive are not only considered “atavistic exceptions” but are “often, by that very fact, denied motherhood” (Gilman *Herland* 93).

---

<sup>14</sup> In recent years, Gilman's elimination of sexual desire and her insistence that sex-love is unnecessary for the health and happiness of the population has come under tremendous criticism. In addition to the racial and ethnic biases in her writing, this detail has been cited by numerous biographies and critical essays as another serious flaw in the writer and intellectual's utopian ideology.

As a consequence of this condition, not only are the Herland women childishly ignorant of sexuality, but—similar to a prepubescent child—they are even somewhat fearful of it. Although three of the utopian women agree to marry Jeff, Terry and Vandyck, they do not agree to consummate their marriages. Similar to the behavior of young girls, Vandyck notices that when he touches Ellador, she withdraws both emotionally and physically. “She trembled in my arms, as I held her close, kissing her hungrily. But there rose in her eyes that look I knew so well, that remote clear look as if she had gone far away even though I held her beautiful body so close, and was now on some snowy mountain regarding me from a distance” (Gilman *Herland* 136).

Even though Gilman’s tomboyish characters remain childishly ignorant of sexual relations, “the primitive” is consistently connected with the salacious. As Marianna Torgovnick argues, “since ancient times and the earliest explorations of Africa and the Americas, primitive peoples had excited fierce interest” in the West (*Passions* 8). In addition to admiring their “idyllic closeness to nature,” the sexually repressed modern era was both fascinated by and fearful of “the primitives’ ... licentiousness” (Torgovnick *Passions* 8).

Although this paradigm of sexual freedom applied to primitive men, it was especially pertinent for women. In the words of Rita Felski, “From the paintings of Gustav Klimt to the writings of Lou Andreas-Salome” the figure of the primitive female “emerged as an erotic-mythic creature, an enigmatic incarnation of elemental and libidinal forces that exceeded the bounds of reason and social order” (*Gender* 50). Given the racial charge associated with primitivism, such views combined with existing stereotypes about black women’s sexuality. Deborah Gray White notes in *Ar’n’t I a*

*Woman?*, “Black men and women were thought to have such insatiable sexual appetites that they had to go beyond the boundaries of their race to get satisfaction” (38). In addition to creating myths about black men’s predatory interest in white women, these beliefs facilitated such phenomenon as the Hottentot Venus. With her unique genitals and ample buttocks, she was seen by thousands of white men and women during the 1810s as the epitome of primitive sexuality. Simultaneously titillated and terrified by her salacious physicality, Sander Gilman notes that thousands flocked to this dark “forbidden fruit” when she was displayed in London and Paris (129).

Such sexual frigidity may distance the Herland women from conventional stereotypes about the primitive, but it paradoxically adds a further dimension to the racialization of Terry’s wife Alima. In spite of the young woman’s adherence to seemingly white codes of sexual modesty, her dark skin causes her to be placed in the position of many black women at the hands of white men. Because of her “savage” beauty, Terry repeatedly uses slave rhetoric to describe the sexual dynamics between him and his wife. Throughout the novel, he makes frequent reference to wanting to “master” his dark new bride (Gilman *Herland* 30, 94, 129, 131). Similarly, although Vandyck has repeatedly mentioned that the Herlanders lack all sex drive, Alima is often characterized as an exception to this rule. At several points in the novel, the narrator suggests that the dark young woman possesses this “atavistic” quality: “I think Alima retained some faint vestige of long-descended feeling which made Terry more possible to her than to the others...” (Gilman *Herland* 94). Recalling stereotypes about the bossy black woman in the work of Michelle Wallace and other critics, Alima is described as having a “more

stormy temperament than... the others” (Gilman *Herland* 123). Compared to the calm nature of the bulk of Herlanders, she is considerably more strong-willed and opinionated.

This constellation of qualities undermines Alima’s allegiance to white women’s sexual codes. In many ways, in fact, they enhance her kinship to both black women and their supposedly libidinous sexuality. When Terry’s repeated attempts to consummate his union with Alima fail, the chauvinistic character responds in a way that recalls the fate of many black women who are sexually pursued by white men. After singing the refrain, “The things that I learned from the yellow and the black, / They’ve helped me a ‘cap with the white,” he tries to force himself on his new wife (Gilman *Herland* 129). Not only does Terry feel “he had a right to do as he did” (Gilman *Herland* 130), but even the more liberal-minded Vandyck excuses his behavior. Telling readers, “Of course I blame her somewhat” for what happened, the narrator draws on racially charged language to explain why his friend is not solely to blame. Characterizing Alima as “a *shade* more alluring, and several *shades* less able as a practical psychologist...,” he suggests that she was simultaneously too beautiful and too inept to handle her new spouse’s advances [my emphasis] (Gilman *Herland* 129). In light of such views, Terry “convinced himself that it would be better for her” to consummate their marriage even if it meant doing so by force (Gilman *Herland* 130). When presented with such an appealing “forbidden fruit,” Vandyck suggests that his misogynistic companion simply could not control himself.

In the compelling chapter from *White*, Richard Dyer discusses the relationship between gender and colonization. Arguing that the process of imperialism reinscribes whiteness, he asserts a common pattern of colonial conquest: “The white male achieves and maintains the empire; the white female soul is associated with its demise” (184). In

countless novels and short stories, the arrival of Caucasian women signaled colonial downfall. In addition to numerous literary images of “the memsahib as more snobbish and crueller to the natives than the men,” Dyer also discusses female sexuality as a commonly cited liability (*White* 185). Isolated from their peers and “driven mad by the heat and boredom” of their new location, many narratives present women as “more liable to be prey to adultery and worse” (Dyer *White* 185).

As a literary revision of the colonialist novel and its accompanying set of conventions, Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland* offers an intriguing variation on this theme. Since the 1915 narrative depicts an all-female utopia, *Herland* cannot be toppled by the arrival of women. Instead, the arrival of three male adventurers and the (re)institution of bisexual reproduction signals an equally profound paradigm shift. The social, cultural and even racial intermingling between the *Herland* women and the Western adventurers mark an end to the novel’s isolating colonist vision of the past and the beginning of its globalized conception for the future. Recalling Richard Dyer’s remarks about women and imperialism once again, these events signal the end of nineteenth-century paradigms of colonization and the inauguration of twentieth-century patterns of globalization.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Admittedly, globalization and colonization are often considered different versions of the same practice. Especially in the wake of the recent World Trade Organization protests, many theorists assert that globalization is not the antithesis of imperialism, but simply a new incarnation of it. For more on this issue, see James Petras and Henry Veltmeyer’s *Globalization Unmasked: Imperialism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Halifax: Fernwood, 2001), Tomas Larsson’s *The Race to the Top: The Real Story of Globalization* (Washington: CATO Institute, 2001), and Mohammed A. Bamyeh’s *The Ends of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

## Part V. "It's a Small World After All":

### Thinking Locally, Acting Globally in *Herland*

In *Utopia and Cosmopolis*, Thomas Peyser argues that in addition to preventing the continued subjugation of women, Charlotte Perkins Gilman also strove "to prevent the incursion of the global upon the local" (65). Keenly aware of the threat immigrants posed to America's old-time purity, much of her fictional and factual writing can be "characterized by a tenderly cultivated nostalgia for the days of undisputed Anglo-Saxon ascendancy" (Peyser 69).

Although critics commonly cite such factual works *Women and Economics* (1898) to illustrate this phenomenon, Peyser argues that Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 1915 utopian novel *Herland* also participates in it. In light of the author's "anxiety about the consequences of America's intercourse with the rest of the world," her utopian narrative constructed "a place immune from the consequences not only of patriarchy but also of globalization" (Peyser 79). Located on an isolated plot of land, her female utopia shows "greater reverence for the local, for that which resists incorporation into the universal" (Peyser 87). Reproducing parthenogenetically and practicing negative eugenics, the Herlanders have become a nearly flawless race. Unlike the mongrelization of men and women in the United States, Vandyck notes that the utopian society "lacked all morbid and excessive types" (Gilman *Herland* 78). Instead, he asserts that they "were tall, strong, healthy, and beautiful as a race" (Gilman *Herland* 78). For these reasons, Peyser argues that *Herland* should also be read as a "reactionary defense against the encroachments of the global upon the local" (6).



Although arising from nativist impulses in many ways, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* is not entirely a product of anti-globalization sentiments. On the contrary, many elements from the narrative exist in a globalized context. Gilman's Herlanders may have at least a nominal connection to Aryan ancestry, but they are neither Anglo-Saxon nor American. Similar to many of the new immigrants arriving in the United States, not only do the utopian women speak a decidedly "foreign" language, but their community is also located on a distant part of the globe: South America. The opening pages of Gilman's narrative, in fact, recount the extensive travels in which Terry, Vandyck and Jeff must engage to reach the remote settlement. Traveling by biplane, boat and then foot, the adventurers traverse thousands of miles and venture into a different hemisphere. In this way, it seems paradoxical that in order to forestall globalization, the men must travel the globe. In order to avoid "foreign" contamination, they ironically must immerse themselves in a foreign culture.

In addition to the globalized circumstances of *Herland*, the racial composition of the utopian settlers also undermine beliefs that the novel arises from fantasies of preventing the encroachment of the global upon the local. In marked contrast to Peyser's assertion that the writer and intellectual attempted to construct a homogenous environment free from the "contaminating" forces of racial and ethnic minorities, her utopian settlers do not showcase unadulterated Caucasian purity. Throughout the novel, Gilman's Herlanders are repeatedly described with brown skin, dark features and even simian traits. Rather than emblems of racial homogeneity, Gilman's Herlanders reflect the global commingling of the races and the increasing interconnectedness of peoples and cultures in America's pluralistic environment.

Coupled with being products of global mixing themselves, the Herland women also precipitate this process in the male adventurers. Terry, Jeff and Vandyck are initially resistant to Herland culture, but several of them gradually concede that it is superior to the West in many ways. Although uncomfortable by the gender neutrality of the Herland dress, Vandyck admits that the outfit is “absolutely comfortable” (Gilman *Herland* 28). When the trio attempts to escape several chapters later, he again praises the comfort and utility of the local garments. In addition to providing a full range of movement, the clothing has many helpful pockets: “They were in all their garments, and the middle of one in particular was shingled with them” (Gilman *Herland* 40).

More than simply adopting the dress of the female utopia, the three white adventurers intermarry and—in the case of Jeff and Vandyck—even interbreed with the racially ambiguous Herlanders. In the closing pages of the narrative, Celis “could with ineffable joy and pride announce that she was to be a mother” (Gilman *Herland* 140). Similarly, although Vandyck’s wife Ellador is not yet expecting, she reiterates her desire to become a mother (Gilman *Herland* 140).

The racial intermingling between the utopian Herlanders and the male adventurers places Gilman’s 1915 novel in dialogue with her views on women and reproduction. In an oft-quoted argument based on Lester Ward’s gynocentric theory, Gilman asserted that women are the “race-type.” As she argues in *Women and Economics*, the “duty of mother is first to produce children as good as or better than herself... to build up and improve the human race through her enormous power as a mother” (93). Revisiting these views nearly a decade in *Man-Made World*, she discussed their impact on contemporary courtship conventions. Rather than wait for a man to choose her, Gilman argues that

women ought “to select among... varying males the specimens she finds most valuable to the race” (Gilman *Man-Made* 49).

Although critics and biographers often discuss the debt Gilman owes to Lester Ward for his gynocentric view of sexual selection, few mention the universal implications of these beliefs. Significantly, in Gilman’s discussion of women as the race-type, the writer and intellectual does not specify “American women” or “Anglo women.” Recalling the globalized vision of *Herland*, she thinks beyond the boundaries of race, ethnicity and even nationality to advocate for the betterment of the entire human race.

Although the utopian inhabitants of Gilman’s novel attribute their loss of sexual desire to disconnection from the male species for nearly 2,000 years, this explanation is not entirely accurate. The men of Herland may have died centuries ago, but the tribe who lives in the region below their mountaintop community has male members. Not only are these people aware of the all-female settlement—a small group of them, in fact, guides Terry, Vandyck and Jeff to the region—but the Herland women are similarly cognizant of their existence. Although primitives themselves in many ways, the Herlanders ironically do not wish to reproduce with these tribal people. Instead, the women resist mating with the local and instead wait two thousand years for the arrival of the global. Seeing themselves as the “race-type,” they refuse to reproduce with a group they consider their inferiors.<sup>16</sup> Even though it means going outside the boundaries of their culture and even

---

<sup>16</sup> Even though I read Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland* in a more globalized context than previous critics, I do not mean to erase or even minimize the author’s pronounced resistance to these ideas. The union between Gilman’s white male adventurers and her racially ambiguous Herlanders can be read as a form of miscegenation in many ways, but it is not meant to imply that the author would have supported interracial unions outside the boundaries of her fiction. At various points throughout her career, in fact, Gilman spoke out against the mixing of “high” Anglo races and “low” people of color. In one especially xenophobic statement in *Women and Economics*, she asserted: “Marry a civilized man to a primitive savage, and their child will naturally have a dual nature. Marry an Anglo-Saxon to an African or Oriental

their continent, the Herlanders would rather reinstate bisexual procreation with men from a “foreign” land. Recalling Gilman’s idea of women as the race-type, they place a primacy on the betterment of their race over the convenience of their location.

Discussing Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s deceptively simple literary style, Ann J. Lane once wrote: “what appears to be simply repetition is often not that” (*Beyond* 274). Although commenting on the author’s recurring interest in women and economics, Lane’s remarks could apply to her utopian novels in general and *Herland* in particular. The bulk of Gilman’s writings may have sought to prevent the incursion of the global upon the local, but her 1915 utopian narrative presents the opposite message. In marked contrast to whatever isolationist fantasies the author entertained during her lifetime, *Herland* turns the global into the local in many ways. With an international setting and racially ambiguous characters, her 1915 novel affirms that “it’s a small world after all.”

Giving further credence to this conjecture is the 1916 sequel to *Herland*. More than simply continuing to affirm globalization, *With Her in Ourland* provides a more extensive and even detailed portrait of it. After educating Vandyck in the history, culture and language of Herland, Ellador is eager to learn about the homeland of her spouse. Although she has heard abstract details about his nation, she longs to visit it in person. Accordingly, when Terry is expelled for the attempted rape of Alima, Vandyck and Ellador decide to accompany him. In addition to ensuring that Terry leaves the utopian settlement, the trip affords Vandyck the opportunity to give Ellador a tour of—as the title of the novel suggests—“Ourland.”

---

and the.... result [is] what we all know so well—the human soul in its pitiful, well-meaning efforts, cross-eyed, purblind...” (163 – 4).

In marked contrast to readerly expectations, the “Ourland” to which Vandyck refers is not the nation from which he or his two companions hail, the United States. On the contrary, it is the globe. While Vandyck and Ellador eventually do make an extensive tour of the United States, they travel first to Europe, Asia, India, and Africa. Rather than limiting their travels to Vandyck’s native land, the duo circumnavigates the globe to help Ellador understand the environment from which her new husband hails. These actions imply that Vandyck is not simply a citizen of the United States, but rather a citizen of the world.

In accordance with this view, Ellador holds her spouse at least partially accountable for the actions of various nations and nationalities. Although Vandyck is not from Germany, she turns to him for an explanation upon seeing the bloody battlefields of World War I. The fact that the specific country from which her husband hails—the United States—is not currently involved in the conflict makes little difference. Taking the possessive pronoun of *Ourland* literally, Ellador considers the distinctions between nations insignificant. Envisioning the global as the local, Vandyck may ostensibly identify as American, but his wife considers him part of a global society.

In his oft-quoted *Our America*, Walter Benn Michaels argues that the question posed by many anti-imperialists during the early-twentieth century was “Nation or Empire?” (17). After centuries of witnessing imperialist conquest abroad while domestic problems went neglected at home, men and women began to feel that these desires were incompatible: a country could not simultaneously build an empire and build its own nation. Because each activity drained resources from the other, many felt a nation must

choose between conquering peoples in foreign lands or conquering the domestic ills of their own citizens.

Since the publication of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland*, critics have commonly concluded that her utopian narrative aligns itself with the "nation" side of this debate. Presenting an isolated community of Aryan women, the text embodies a place immune from the contaminating effects of America's contact with the world. The presence of Gilman's racially ambiguous, South American Herlanders undermines this critical consensus. Moving beyond the binary of nation or empire, her utopian novel advocates a third alternative that effectively combines the two. Seeking to strengthen not simply the American or the Aryan race but the human one, she unites both nation and empire. The male adventurers do more than simply tolerate the racial, cultural and religious differences of the utopian women, they come to value them. Seeing the benefits of the Herlanders' tomboyish primitivism, Jeff and Vandyck abandon hierarchical nativism in favor of a more democratized pluralism. With the exception of Terry, the men begin to revere rather than repudiate difference. In marked contrast to critical beliefs that Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 1915 novel is attempting to escape globalization, the text ultimately embraces it. By offering a globalized vision, Charlotte Perkins Gilman subverts the message on a modern-day bumper sticker. The writer's primary impetus for *Herland* may have been thinking locally—of problems in the United States and its accompanying Anglo-Saxon race—but her solution to these ills necessitated acting globally.

In spite of her dubious attitudes about race and ethnicity, Charlotte Perkins Gilman has been and will undoubtedly continue to be remembered as one of the leading

feminist thinkers of her time. The sheer volume of books and articles that showcase this trait suggest its prevalence in both past and present criticism. Appearing in works such as Mary A. Hill's *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: The Making of a Radical Feminist, 1860 – 1890* and Libby Folk Jones and Sarah Webster Goodwin's *Feminism, Utopia and Narrative*, Gilman's status as a feminist thinker and writer is solidified.

In a noteworthy irony, Charlotte Perkins Gilman would have repudiated this characterization. Throughout her career, the writer and intellectual argued that her ostensible aim may be to end the oppression of women, but her larger objective was to advocate for the advancement of all people, male and female alike. As a result, she repeatedly insisted that she was not a feminist but a humanist ("Feminism" 139).

In spite of this explicit self-conceptualization, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's wish to be seen as a humanist and not feminist is rarely reflected in writings about her life and work. Although some critics and biographers do make reference to this desire, most continue to deem her a feminist author. Among the various causes for this phenomenon, the lack of a multicultural or globalized vision in her writings constitute an important one. Given her racism, nativism and xenophobia, it is difficult to take seriously her insistence that she sought to better all peoples and cultures rather than simply the Anglo-Saxon one.

The presence of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's tomboyishly primitive Herlanders undermines this critical consensus and helps close the gap between her insistence on being seen as a humanist and the separatist attitudes she expressed in her other writings. The globalized context of cultural contact and even interracial mingling that permeates her 1915 utopian novel places the seemingly isolationist *Herland* in dialogue with many

of the leading concerns of modernity. In doing so, it makes Charlotte Perkins Gilman's lifelong insistence on being seeing in more humanistic and thus, one may infer, globalized terms more comprehensible. More than simply seeking to improve the condition of (white) women in the United States, her 1915 utopian narrative sought in many ways to improve the quality of life for men and women around the globe.



## **Chapter 5.**

### **(Un)Settling the Frontier:**

#### **Body-Building and Border-Crossing in Willa Cather's Prairie Novels**

Susan Rosowski notes, "From the beginning of discussions about American literature, writers have identified its 'Americanness' with the West" (*Birth* 1). As early as 1782, Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur articulated the American character through the mouthpiece of a western settler. In *Letters from an American Farmer*, Crèvecoeur's fictive alter ego argues that his coarse dress and unconventional demeanor "comes out of the wilderness" (851). Although grotesque to Europeans, these manners and mores are the result of his contact with the new continent.

More than a century later, in 1893, Frederick Jackson Turner took these observations one step further. Instead of simply associating the changes in European settlers with the American landscape, Turner argued that they were the basis for the American character. In what has become an (in)famous remark from *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*, he insisted, "The frontier is the line of most rapid and effective Americanization" (Turner 5). In addition to European settlers changing the land upon their arrival, they are also changed by it. While clearing the new continent, they are cleared of many of their European ways. Charting this transformation, Turner argues, "The wilderness masters the colonist. It finds him a European in dress, industries, tools, modes of travel, and thoughts. It takes him from the railroad car and puts him in the birch canoe. It strips off the garments of civilization and arrays him in the hunting shirt

and moccasin" (Turner 5). Over time, the end result of this "meeting point between savagery and civilization" produces a new type of individual, the American (Turner 5).<sup>1</sup>

In addition to being associated with the origins of American character, the West is also home to another national phenomenon: the tomboy. As Alfred Habegger notes, during "the late 1860s... a Western heroine first dressed as a man in one of Beadle's dime novels" ("Funny" 173). Although frequently associated with women's writing, the tomboy actually originated in genres largely written by, about and for men. In the pages of such masculinist frontier fiction as Frederick Whittaker's *The Mustang-Hunters* (1871) and Edward Wheeler's *Deadwood Dick* (1877), gender-bending female figures made their first appearance in American literature and culture.

Although numerous writers address the relationship between gender and the West, the life and work of Willa Cather was inextricably connected with these issues. From her own tomboyish childhood on the Nebraskan prairie to her creation of gender-bending female characters in her adult fiction, Cather's life and work were linked to the frontier in general and its relationship to tomboyism and the emerging field of American literature in particular. In fact, the novels on which Willa Cather established her reputation and for which she is commonly remembered, present gender-bending Western women as their main characters. Both *O Pioneers!* (1913) and *My Antonia* (1918) are set on the untamed Nebraskan prairie and showcase a similarly untamed tomboy. The first time readers meet Alexandra Bergson in *O Pioneers!*, for instance, she is wearing "a man's long ulster... not

---

<sup>1</sup> Although commonly seen as a benchmark in American history, Turner's analysis contains many flaws. As Patricia Nelson Limerick, among other historians, has noted, the formation of American identity was not as simplistic as *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* suggests. Not only does Turner ignore the impact of the West on women, racial and ethnic minorities, and members of the working class, but he also neglects future examples of Westward expansion. As Limerick asserts, "[t]here is simply no definition of 'the closing of the frontier' that is anything but arbitrary and riddled with exceptions and qualifications" (*Legacy* 23).

as if it were an affliction, but as if it were very comfortable and belonged to her" (Cather *Pioneers!* 5). Meanwhile, Antonia "Tony" Shimerda in *My Antonia* plows the fields, flexes her muscles and prides herself on being able to "work like a mans" (Cather *Antonia* 80).

While the way in which Willa Cather's conception of "wild" tomboyism exists in tandem with her portrayal of the "wild" West is frequently discussed, the way in which these elements may be a product of her Southern ancestry and not simply prairie experience is seldom explored. Although commonly remembered as a Midwestern writer who possessed an affinity for the prairie, Willa Cather was born in the South. Until the age of nine, the future author and her family resided in Back Creek, Virginia. As Joyce McDonald points out, Cather "may have rebelled against her mother's genteel traditions, and she may have chosen to ignore her Southern roots, but ultimately the influence of those early years prevailed" (ix). Throughout both her fictional and factual writings, Willa Cather's Virginian heritage repeatedly emerged. In addition to a handful of short stories that incorporate Southern settings, the narratives that are commonly viewed through this rubric are *A Lost Lady* (1923) and *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* (1940).<sup>2</sup> Although set in Colorado, many of the characters in Cather's *A Lost Lady* possess a Southern ancestry. At various points in the novel, comparisons are made between the exploitation of the West by unscrupulous speculators and the treatment of the South by Northern carpetbaggers. Moreover, in her final full-length novel, *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, Cather took her interest in Southern history one step further. Rather than make passing reference to Virginia, she takes it as her main focus. Set in 1856, the narrative

---

<sup>2</sup> In addition to these full-length novels, Cather wrote a number of Southern short stories, including "The Elopement of Allen Poole" (1893), "A Night at Greenaway Court" (1896), "The Sentimentality of William Tavener" (1900), "El Dorado: A Kansas Recessional" (1901) and "Old Mrs. Harris" (1932).

chronicles the escape of a black slave by a character based on her Grandmother Rachel Boak. Blurring the lines between fiction and memoir, Cather includes herself in the novel's epilogue.

The racialization of Alexandra Bergson and Antonia Shimerda raises the possibility that Willa Cather's prairie novels can also be seen from a Southern perspective. Although the tomboys featured in *O Pioneers!* and *My Antonia* are ostensibly Caucasian, they possess brown skin and dark features. Throughout *My Antonia*, for instance, repeated reference is made to the main character's "brown legs and arms" (Cather *Antonia* 99). Similarly, in *O Pioneers!*, Alexandra Shimerda's face, features and hair darken as she becomes increasingly connected with the dark soil.

Because Cather mined childhood memories of the prairie to create a new type of literary subject matter, critics commonly remark that she "hit the home pasture" upon releasing *O Pioneers!* and *My Antonia* (Bennett xiii). No longer trying to imitate the style of other writers—as in her Jamesian first novel—she drew on her own knowledge and experiences. Given both Willa Cather's Southern ancestry and the racially charged way in which her ostensibly Caucasian tomboys are described throughout her prairie novels, the "home pasture" depicted in these narratives may have been Virginia and not exclusively Nebraska.

Rather than embodying a divergence from Willa Cather's interest in the West, the link between her prairie novels and Southern fiction adds a new facet to it. Critics commonly cite Owen Wister's *The Virginian* (1902) as the narrative that inaugurated the Western genre. More than simply incorporating shootouts and roundups, the novel also showcases a displaced Southerner as its main character. As its title suggests, the text

chronicles the adventures of a transplanted Virginian. Similar to Wister's novel, Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!* and *My Antonia* provide a means to put the South in the West. Coupled with their presentation of racialized white tomboys, *My Antonia* also showcases a Virginian as its narrator. Although a seemingly bizarre choice in storytellers, this decision makes sense when placed in the context of national race relations. While debates about slavery are commonly divided along the lines of North and South, Patricia Nelson Limerick notes, "the Western territories were deeply implicated in the national struggle over slavery" (*Legacy* 277). From the Free Soil Movement of the 1840s and the passage the Missouri Compromise in 1850 to the emendations of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854 and the eruption of hostilities at Harper's Ferry in 1856, "the South's 'problem' had long ago moved West" (Limerick *Legacy* 277).

In this way, while Alexandra Bergson and Antonia Shimerda settle the Wild West, they simultaneously unsettle conventional notions of blackness and whiteness. Ostensibly removed from Southern racial dynamics, the way in which these young women acquire a dark hue in *O Pioneers!* and *My Antonia* suggests a continuity between Nebraska and Virginia. Recalling Owen Wister's *The Virginian* once again, Cather's construction of the frontier may be predicated on—rather than a divergence from—the South.

## Part I. "The Virginian":

### Willa Cather's Southern Heritage

In spite of all the attention past and present critics have paid to Willa Cather's views on the various immigrant groups, comparatively little work has been done on her attitudes toward African Americans. Although the writer was heavily influenced by the ethnic minorities she encountered on the prairie, she spent the first nine years of her life in the racially bifurcated world of Virginia. Critics commonly assume that the stark prairie soil was the region that had a profound impact on her, but Willa Cather's "first landscape was the land on Back Creek that her family had farmed since Colonial times for six generations" (Robinson *Willa* 9). The difficulty the young girl experienced when her family relocated to Nebraska arose at least in part from her attachment to the lush hills of Virginia. In a 1913 interview, she conceded, " 'I would not know how much a child's life is bound up in the woods and hills and meadows around it, if I had not been jerked away from all these and thrown into a country as bare as a piece of sheet iron' " (Bohlke 10). In addition to being shocked by the barrenness of the frontier, these remarks suggest that she was pained by her separation from the South.

More than simply being affected by the Virginian landscape, Willa Cather was also influenced by its accompanying racial economy. Even though the writer left Willow Shade before adolescence, "she learned her situation in a deeply hierarchical social world" (O'Brien "Dixie" 86). In what has become an oft-quoted anecdote from *Willa Cather Living*, Edith Lewis recounts an incident from Willa Cather's Virginian childhood that exemplifies this observation. When an elderly judge came to visit her parents, he "began stroking her curls and talking to her in playful platitudes" (Lewis 13). An avid

tomboy who cut her hair short and insisted on being called “William,” the future author resented being treated in such a feminized way. Her rebuke to the patronizing judge, however, went far beyond gender rebellion. To the horror of her Southern belle mother, Cather turned to the gentleman and exclaimed, “ ‘I’s e a dang’ous nigger I is!’ ” (Lewis 13). While critics have debated the precise meaning of this outburst, most agree that it indicates her conversance with gender and racial codes in the South. As Sharon O’Brien asserts, the future author had “absorbed the etiquette of race relations” and learned her place within this stratified world (“Dixie” 86).

Although Willa Cather’s parents did not own slaves, they did employ numerous black servants. In the words of Edith Lewis, there were “no dull days at Willow Shade. Negroes and poor whites were employed in the fields and about the houses where spinning and quilting... were carried on by the house-servants” (Lewis *Living* 8). As a result of this close proximity to men and women of color, the future writer “heard the intimate lives of African Americans” (O’Brien “Dixie” 86). Years later, when she began penning *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, Willa Cather remarked that the impetus for the novel was the sound of Negro voices. According to article in the *New York Herald Tribune Books*, “[s]o clear was this part of her life that the speech of the people, white and black, as she had heard it as a child, came back to her as if it had been stored on phonograph records in her brain” (Bohlke 136).

In addition to conversing with the black servants at her parent’s estate, Willa Cather was aware that many of these men and women were former slaves. Born in 1873, the future writer resided in Virginia during the height of Reconstruction.<sup>3</sup> Although her

---

<sup>3</sup> In numerous interviews and essays throughout her life, Willa Cather stated that she was born in 1876. This incorrect date, in fact, is what the author asked to be carved on her gravestone in Jaffrey, New

parents were not greatly affected by the financial fallout of the war, the same could not be said for many of their neighbors and friends. Everywhere the young girl looked, she saw once-glorious plantations in ruins. As James Woodress notes, throughout Frederick County “marauding soldiers had... destroyed crops, driven off stock, and burned barns” (12). As a result of this widespread devastation, the hardships caused by slavery remained all too vivid for blacks and whites alike.

While Willa Cather’s paternal relatives were staunchly against the “peculiar institution,” her mother’s family endorsed it. Not only did many of them own slaves, but they also supported Lee.<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, given the anti-slavery views of her parents, the future author expressed an affiliation with her Confederate kin. Even after her family’s relocation to Nebraska, she maintained a strong affiliation to her Southern ancestry in general and her secessionist relatives in particular. As a teenager, she was photographed wearing a Confederate cap and liked to pretend that she had been named after a maternal relative who died fighting for the South in the war.<sup>5</sup> In a 1902 poem appropriately titled “The Namesake,” Cather eulogized her Uncle William Boak who had fallen at Manassas. Similar to many writings lauding the Confederate dead, Cather refers to his grave as a “bed of glory” and offers to help him “hold his gun” (25). In the final stanza, she solidifies both her solidarity with the man who wore the “jacket grey” and the cause for

---

Hampshire. Although the precise reason why Cather chose a different date of birth is unclear, many critics speculate that it arose from embarrassment about her late start as a fiction writer.

<sup>4</sup> These differing opinions over slavery caused a rift between the Cather and Boak families that lasted for a decade. It wasn’t until ten years after the end of the Civil War that Cather’s mother was able to bring the two sides back together. In 1875, Virginia Cather organized a party and traveled to all her relatives to invite them personally. Unable to refuse the young woman to her face, both the Boaks and the Cathers accepted and were present in the same room for the first time in ten years. Phyllis C. Robinson noted of Virginia’s plan, “It was a delicate maneuver, requiring goodwill and tact as well as the high-handedness for which she was famous, but the important thing was that it worked” (8).

<sup>5</sup> For a full-page image of Cather wearing the cap, see Janis Stout’s *Willa Cather: The Writer and Her World* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2000).



which he died: “Proud as I am to know / In my veins there still must flow, / There to burn and bite away; / And I’ll be the winner at the game / Enough for two who bore the name” (Cather “Namesake” 26).<sup>6</sup>

Given the kinship Willa Cather felt with her Uncle William, Sharon O’Brien argues that her childhood tomboyism can be seen as much more than a youthful gender revolt. Cutting her hair short, wearing her uncle’s Confederate cap and calling herself “William Cather, Jr.,” the future author embodied a version of white Southern masculinity (O’Brien “Dixie” 86).<sup>7</sup> Embedded within her gender rebellion was the image of a Confederate Rebel.

More than simply a childhood fascination with the Civil War, Willa Cather’s early career in journalism belies her Southern heritage and even lauds the antebellum South. In an 1894 theater review of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Cather sounds more like pro-slavery apologist E. D. E. N. Southworth than the progressive prairie writer for which she is remembered. Calling Stowe “a Puritan bluestocking,” she disparages the outsider’s portrayal of the South (Slote 270). The young writer asserts that Stowe “sat up under cold skies of the north and tried to write of one of the warmest, richest and most highly colored civilizations the world has ever known” (Slote 270). As a result of such sentiments, Cather dismissed Stowe’s 1852 novel as “exaggerated” and “overdrawn” (Slote 269).<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Cather’s grief for her fallen uncle paled in comparison to her mother’s sadness over the loss of her sibling. As Phyllis C. Robinson notes, Virginia Cather “cherished the rebel sword of her adored brother who fell early in the war, and it held a hallowed place in her home until she died” (8).

<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that several critics challenge this assertion. Although Willa Cather adopted her Confederate uncle’s first name, she retains the surname of her anti-slavery parents. In this way, Joyce McDonald argues that the appellation “William Cather, Jr.” can be seen as the future author’s “way of uniting her patriarchal and matriarchal heritage, and of reuniting both North and South” (25).

<sup>8</sup> In spite of such disparaging remarks, Cather admitted to being captivated by the play when she was young. Phyllis C. Robinson notes in *Willa: The Life of Willa Cather*, “For children in the little prairie

In a further expression of her Southern pride, Willa Cather adopted the last name of her mother's slave-owning relations—the Seiberts—as her own middle name. Significantly, this change did not occur while the future author was living in Virginia, but after her family had relocated to Red Cloud (Lewis *Living* 19). Although spelling it “Sibert,” Cather included the name in the majority of her journalistic and early fiction writing. The title pages for both *O Pioneers!* and *My Antonia*, in fact, contain the appellation.

In addition to the alteration of both her name and her appearance, Willa Cather's presentation of African Americans reflects her Southern heritage. Although lauded for her heroic portrait of immigrants, her presentation of black men and women is decidedly less flattering. The African-American servant in *A Lost Lady*, for instance, is treated as little more than property. Bearing the suggestive name “Black Tom,” the free man is passed around like a mere possession. When Mrs. Forrester hosts a party, for instance, she asks Judge Pommeroy if he will lend her his servant for the evening (Cather *Lost* 27).<sup>9</sup>

Such disparaging portraits of African Americans are not limited to narratives in which race plays a minor role. Cather's final full-length novel, *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, is riddled with racist stereotypes about blacks and even coded apologies for slavery. Although the text is an ostensible meditation on the evils of the “peculiar institution,”

---

towns the experience was unforgettable. Even the *Uncle Tom's Cabin* companies, admittedly the poorest, had living bloodhounds and ‘how the barking used of these dogs behind the scenes used to make us catch our breath!’ ” (37).

<sup>9</sup> In an ironic twist, Mrs. Forrester can be seen in a racialized way herself. In addition to being frequently eroticized by Niel Herbert, the young woman is repeatedly associated with such racially charged qualities as “blue black hair,” a “wild” spirit and a “fascinating gift for mimicry” (Cather *Lost* 11, 94, 58). Even more telling, she and her husband have a statue of an exotic slave girl in their home. In many ways, the beautiful but fettered woman symbolizes the similarly tantalizing but trapped Mrs. Forrester. Niel Herbert notes, “There, by the door, on a table under the hat rack, was a scantily clad figure, an Arab or Egyptian slave, holding in her hands a large flat shell from the California coast” (Cather *Lost* 97).

Henry Colbert is unable to find Biblical evidence forbidding slavery and also believes that black men and women are better off as chattel. The white miller “knew he had a legal right to manumit any of his wife’s negroes; but that would be an outrage to her feelings, and an injustice to the slaves themselves. Where would they go? How would they live? They had never learned to take care of themselves or to provide for tomorrow” (Cather *Sapphira* 108). As a result of such attitudes, Henry considers the importation of slaves “a deliverance” because it allows these heathenish men and women to become Christians (Cather *Sapphira* 108).

Even more shocking than Henry Colbert’s views on slavery is the fact that the black characters largely share his sentiments. When the miller attempts to free his most trusted assistant, the black man begs to remain. Although guaranteed a position at a Quaker mill in Pennsylvania, Sampson tells his master, “This was his home. Here he knew everybody. He didn’t want to go out among strangers” (Cather *Sapphira* 109).<sup>10</sup> Recalling the novels of E. D. E. N. Southworth once again, many other slaves refuse to leave after they have been manumitted.<sup>11</sup> Although Henry emancipates the black men and women upon the death of his wife, “ ‘it was hard to git rid of free niggers befo’ the war.... In the end he had to drive ‘em into town himself an’ put ‘em down at the hotel,

---

<sup>10</sup> In a further link to Southworth’s portrayal of both slaves and slavery, the black mill hand is presented in minstrelized ways. Henry notes, “His head was full behind the ears, shaped more like a melon lying down than a peanut standing on end” (Cather *Sapphira* 109).

<sup>11</sup> Given such portraits of blacks enjoying their enslavement, Cather’s novel also includes tales about how these men and women are not suited for emancipation. In one especially poignant moment, Till informs her daughter, “Then followed a sad story. I knew it well. Many a time I had heard about Tap, the jolly mill boy with shining eyes and shining teeth, whom everybody liked. ‘Poor Tap’ he was always called now. People said he hadn’t been able to handle his freedom. He went to town (‘town’ always meaning Winchester), where every day was like circus day to a country-bred boy, and picked up various jobs until the war was over. Early in the Reconstruction time a low German from Pennsylvania opened a saloon and pool hall in Winchester, a dive where negroes were allowed to play, and gambling went on. One night after Tap had been drinking too much, he stuck another darky on the head with a billiard cue and killed him. The Back Creek farmers who remembered Tap as a boy went to his trial and testified to his good character. But he was hanged, all the same” (Cather *Sapphira* 290).

an' tole 'em fur the las' time they wasn't needed at the mill place no more' ” (Cather *Sapphira* 288).<sup>12</sup>

The racism present in these and other passages complicate common critical views of Willa Cather as tolerant and even progressive. Similar to the impact of nativism and xenophobia on the legacy of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, they cast a pall over her reputation.<sup>13</sup> In a recent essay, in fact, Elizabeth Ammons argues that it is a mistake to separate the prairie writer's disparaging portrait of African Americans from her laudatory representation of women and immigrants. As she asserts, “rationalizing Cather's failure to rise above bigoted attitudes at the same time that we praise her for enlightened attitudes toward certain European immigrants or certain groups of women represents the height of willful delusion” (Ammons “*Antonia*” 62).

While disappointing, Willa Cather's attitude towards African Americans ought not to imply that she was an unequivocal racist. Similar to such contemporaries as William Faulkner, she struggled with conflicted feelings about her Southern roots. Although proud of her heritage, she was also ashamed of its connection to racism, classism and sexual exploitation. As a result of such ambivalent attitudes about the South, Willa Cather frequently downplayed her Virginian heritage. Never openly denying her roots, later in life she found many ways to obfuscate the details. In an oft-

---

<sup>12</sup> Such comments about the benevolent nature of slavery ought not to imply that *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* is exempt from portraying its equally unflattering aspects. At the same time Cather's narrative makes apologies for slavery, it also offers a harsh condemnation of the institution. Janis Stout notes, “To be sure, the system of slavery is confronted and shown, in a variety of ways, to be evil” (284). In addition to describing Sapphira's verbal and often physical abuse of her black handmaid, the narrative culminates with the young woman's dramatic escape. When Sapphira insists that the beautiful girl sleep outside her door, where the lascivious Martin will be certain to find and rape her, Nancy enlists the help of Mrs. Colbert's daughter for passage to Canada.

<sup>13</sup> In a further link between Gilman and Cather, Edith Lewis begins her memoir of the author with a similar discussion of Cather's exceptional pedigree. Tracing the Cather family ancestry back to medieval Wales and their presence in America back to colonial times, Lewis showcases her friend and companion's seemingly untainted heritage.

quoted remark from a 1921 interview, for instance, Cather asserted that the most influential years for a developing writer “are between the ages of eight and fifteen” (Bohlke 31). Given that the author left Virginia with her family when she was nine, these comments minimize the importance of her time in the South. In the words of Phyllis Robinson, they imply that life for the future author “did not begin until Nebraska” (*Willa* 14).

In addition to downplaying the influence of her Virginian roots, Willa Cather resisted being seen as a Southern author. Throughout her career, she repeatedly refused to serve on panels about the South or to align herself with other Southern writers. Exemplifying this trend, Joyce McDonald notes that Cather made a conscious effort to shed her Virginian accent (21). Soon after arriving in Red Cloud, the future author became aware that her speech differed from that of her neighbors and classmates. Thus, she worked to change her enunciation. In spite of such efforts, James Woodress argues that Cather retained elements of her Virginian cadence. While vacationing in New England during the 1940s, in fact, the author was surprised when a stranger detected her Southern accent (98).

If Willa Cather believed it necessary to eliminate her Virginian accent, one can only imagine the urgency she felt to erase her former ties to the Confederacy. In 1907, she transformed her poetic eulogy “The Namesake,” about her fallen Confederate uncle, into a story about a Union soldier. Given the author’s previous identification with this relative, the reasons for this change are unclear. Joyce McDonald speculates, “Perhaps, having begun a new life in the Northeast, she felt the need to conform or to establish an alternative identity” (24).

In spite of the influence—both positive and negative—that Willa Cather’s Virginian ancestry exerted over her life and work, it is only in recent years that attention has been paid to the Southern aspects of her writing. During the past decade, critics have reconsidered many of Willa Cather’s novels and short stories in light of her Virginia background in general and Confederate affiliations in particular. Although these investigations are generally limited to such explicitly Southern tales as *A Lost Lady* and *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, it may be possible to include her prairie novels in this rubric. Although commonly seen as exempt from Southern influences, the way in which her ostensibly Caucasian tomboys acquire a dark hue in *O Pioneers!* and *My Antonia* places them in dialogue with Southern racial economies. Possessing brown skin and participating in the racially charged occupation of field labor, Alexandra Bergson and Antonia Shimerda share many traits with Southern stereotypes about African Americans. Given the author’s Virginian background and her conversance with the color line, it seems unlikely that she could present her prairie tomboys with these characteristics and not realize the racial implications they possessed.

In an oft-quoted remark from *Willa Cather Living*, Edith Lewis discusses her friend and longtime companion’s resistance to writing about her Southern heritage. Prior to Cather’s composition of *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, she “had often been urged to write a Virginian novel; but for a long time some sort of inhibition—a reluctance, perhaps, to break through those old memories that seemed to belong to another life—had deterred her” (Lewis *Living* 182).

While the death of Cather’s parents is commonly seen as the impetus that made her exploration of Southern themes possible, her racialized prairie tomboys call this

chronology into question. Although not as overt as her examination of race relations in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, the way in which these ostensibly Caucasian characters acquire a dark hue places them in dialogue with such texts. Decades before the publication of her explicitly Southern novel, the author may have begun to explore her racially charged Virginian ancestry. More than simply gender-bending characters who disrupt conventional notions of male and female, Alexandra Bergson and Antonia Shimerda also disrupt conventional notions of black and white. As Janis Stout argues in a recent biography, Willa Cather “carried an awareness of her Southern roots whenever she went for as long as she lived” (3). The racialized portraits of Alexandra Bergson and Antonia Shimerda suggest that the author may have done more than simply carry this awareness to the Nebraskan prairie. In *O Pioneers!* and *My Antonia*, she may have written about it.

## Part II. Farmer Brown, Farmer Bergson:

### Soil Cultivation and Skin Transformation in Willa Cather *O Pioneers!*

Since its publication in 1913, critics have viewed Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!* as a celebratory account of the taming of the Nebraskan prairie by immigrants. In marked contrast to *Alexander's Bridge* (1912), the book that she frequently referred to as her "second first novel" is not a psychologized character study. In many ways, in fact, the text takes the opposite approach. Rather than focusing on a person, *O Pioneers!* fixates on a place. From the opening pages of the narrative to its final utterances, it recounts the transformation of "this wild land into orderly fields of wheat and corn, orchards of fruit trees 'knee-deep in timothy grass,' into pasture ponds planted with willows and gardens" (Gelfant ix). As a result, many critics have argued that the "real hero" of Cather's narrative is not the tomboyish main character, but the prairie itself. As Alexandra tells Carl in the closing pages of the narrative, "'We come and go, but the land is always here' " (Cather *Pioneers!* 209).

The narrative trajectory of *O Pioneers!*, however, undermines this common critical assumption. Contrary to beliefs that the novel documents the cultivation of the Nebraskan prairie, Damaree Peck points out "the actual chronicle of the pioneer's taming of the wild frontier is precisely what Cather omits in a sixteen-year hiatus in the plot" (5). Although the narrative's purported focus, these events are ironically not discussed. Between the first and second segments of *O Pioneers!*, readers turn to the page to find that the land has been miraculously transformed: "It was sixteen years since John Bergson died.... Could he rise from beneath [the soil], he would not know the country under which he had been asleep.... The Divide is now thickly populated. The rich soil



yields heavy harvests; the dry, bracing climate and the smoothness of the land make labor easy for men and beasts” (Cather *Pioneers!* 51).

Although Willa Cather may omit the taming of the dark soil, she does not omit the darkening of a similarly untamed tomboy. Throughout *O Pioneers!*, the narrator recounts the slow but steady racialization of Alexandra Bergson. Echoing Frederick Jackson Turner’s belief that the nation’s culture originates from contact with “primitive conditions on a continually advancing frontier line” (4), the dark prairie soil and uncivilized terrain help construct the similarly “dark” and “uncivilized” tomboy. Unmistakably Caucasian at the start of the text, the young woman’s face and features become increasingly darker as she becomes increasingly associated with the dark soil. Initially blonde-haired and fair-hued, Alexandra’s skin tone and hair color soon become as brown as the prairie. By the end of the novel, Alexandra’s once fair complexion is brown “like a poppy” (Cather *Pioneers!* 53). Meanwhile, her once yellow curls have been supplanted by “dark brown braids” (Cather *Pioneers!* 33).

In her well-known *The Lay of the Land*, Annette Kolodny discusses the way in which the New World was both feminized and racialized in writings by early male explorers. Described as fertile, curvaceous and deep brown in color, the landscape was often likened to a comely Indian maiden (Kolodny 5). Although Kolodny interrogates the way in which these descriptions gave the American soil a racial charge, she does not address the possibility that these elements could, in turn, racialize its Caucasian settlers. Phrased in a different way, that the dark soil could become a type of racial “contagion” that would darken its ostensibly white homesteaders. Rather than the

“cultural atavism” Frederick Jackson Turner advocates in *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*, Alexandra experiences a type of racial one.

In addition to forging a connection between *O Pioneers!* and early American writings, the racialization of Cather’s prairie tomboy suggests an alternative and more culturally based way of reading the novel. Rather than a meditation on the “‘taming’ and ‘conquering’ of the intractable prairie” (Gelfant x), it may be possible to see the prairie narrative as a meditation on the “taming” and “conquering” of a similarly intractable category in the United States: race.

In a memorable incident from Willa Cather’s *A Lost Lady* (1923), Judge Pommeroy makes a compelling parallel between the blurring of racial and moral boundaries. Lamenting the current change in values, he asserts that when he was young, “‘the difference between an honest man and a scoundrel was greater than the difference between a white man and a nigger’ ” (Cather *Lost* 76). Although written and released a decade before Judge Pommeroy uttered this remark, *O Pioneers!* anticipates the blending of racial lines that he describes. Initially Caucasian, Alexandra Bergson acquires a racial charge as the novel progresses. Recalling the various forms of racechange that Susan Gubar traces through the twentieth century, Willa Cather’s prairie tomboy illustrates that the once hard-and-fast distinctions between whiteness and blackness can shift to become more indistinct. More than simply flirting with the idea of being a racial chameleon, Alexandra’s acquisition of a dark hue suggests that it now may be possible to become one.

In spite of its title, readers are introduced to the harsh prairie landscape rather than the men and women settling it in the opening pages of *O Pioneers!*. The first section of

the novel, in fact, is titled “The Wild Land.” As in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland*, the language of primitivism is used to characterized this “uncivilized” region.<sup>14</sup> As Alexandra’s father asserts, “The record of the plow was insignificant” here (Cather *Pioneers!* 13). During the eleven years he has been working, John Bergson “had made but little impression upon the wild land he had come to tame.... [T]his land was an enigma. It was like a horse that no one knows how to break to harness that runs wild and kicks things to pieces” (Cather *Pioneers!* 13). After years of engaging in this futile struggle, John is eager to surrender and succumb to the prairie. “He was ready to give up..... he was quite willing to go down deep under his fields and rest, where the plow could not find him” (Cather *Pioneers!* 16 – 17).

Although the untamed prairie may receive primacy in Cather’s narrative, it is not the only “wild” or “untamed” entity in *O Pioneers!*. In addition to spotlighting an “uncivilized” landscape, the novel also showcases an “uncivilized” young tomboy, Alexandra Bergson. Similar to many of the gender-bending figures highlighted in this study, when Alexandra is first introduced to readers, she is cross-dressed. As the narrator notes, the young woman wears “a man’s long ulster... not as if it were an affliction, but as if it were very comfortable and belonged to her” (Cather *Pioneers* 5). Recalling Willa Cather’s tomboyish co-opting of the Confederate military when young, Alexandra is described as carrying herself “like a young soldier” (Cather *Pioneers* 5). Accentuating this characterization, the young woman’s countenance possesses an “Amazonian

---

<sup>14</sup> As Mike Fisher points out in “Pastoralism and its Discontents: Willa Cather and the Burden of Imperialism,” such characterizations erase the various Native American tribes inhabiting the prairie or, at the very least, dehumanize them. Although the Norwegian, Bohemian and Scandinavian immigrants may have been the first European settlers on the prairie, the land was far from “barren” or “uncivilized.” As Janis Stout notes, “the Indians were in fact a far more numerous presence” than any immigrant group during the period in which Willa Cather’s novels take place (Stout 157).

fierceness” (Cather *Pioneers!* 6). When a traveling salesman engages in an inappropriate glance, she responds in a characteristically tomboyish manner. Drawing in her “lower lip” to achieve a “most unnecessary severity,” she gives him a look that the narrator characterizes as nothing short of “stabbing” (Cather *Pioneers!* 6). The cumulative effect of Alexandra’s reaction is so intense that the drummer is unmanned. After seeing the young woman scowl, he “felt cheap and ill-used, as if some one had taken advantage of him” (Cather *Pioneers!* 6).

Alexandra’s tomboyish manner is not limited to her choice in attire and response to unwanted male attention. In addition to wearing men’s clothes, the “wild” young woman also has a keen interest in and ability to work the “wild” land. John Bergson notes that from the time she was a young girl, his daughter had an innate, almost inexplicable connection to the prairie. “Before Alexandra was twelve years old she had begun to be a help to him, and as she grew older he had come to depend more and more upon her resourcefulness and good judgment” (Cather *Pioneers!* 15). Although her two brothers work physically hard in the fields, Alexandra is spiritually connected with the soil. Mr. Bergson observes, “It was Alexandra who read the papers and followed the markets, and who learned by the mistakes of their neighbors. It was Alexandra who could always tell about what it had cost to fatten each steer, and who could guess the weight of a hog before it went on the scales closer than... himself” (Cather *Pioneers!* 15). More than simply having a concern for the business interests of her family, Alexandra has a psychic bond with the prairie. Unlike the other farmers in the area, she has a nonverbal kinship with the soil.

In light of this connection, Mr. Bergson leaves Alexandra and not her two brothers in charge of the land when he dies. After telling his daughter, “ ‘you will have to do the best you can for your brothers. Everything will come on you,’ ” he implores her to not get frustrated and sell the farm (Cather *Pioneers!* 17). Above all else, he instructs, “ ‘Don’t let [your brothers] get discouraged and go off like Uncle Otto. I want them to keep the land’ ” (Cather *Pioneers!* 17).

In the years that follow, Alexandra does more than simply keep this promise; she actualizes her father’s dream of creating a prosperous farm. By the beginning of Part II, “[a]nyone thereabouts would have told you that this was one of the richest farms on the Divide, and that the farmer was a woman, Alexandra Bergson” (Cather *Pioneers!* 55).<sup>15</sup> Even during times of hardship and despair when, “ ‘everybody... was trying to crawl out’ ” (Cather *Pioneers!* 39), Alexandra maintains her belief in the prairie. After visiting farms in the river region, she returns with a renewed faith in the area where her family has settled. Riding home with Emil, “she had a new consciousness of the country, felt almost a new relation to it” (Cather *Pioneers!* 47). Rather than selling out and moving away like many of their neighbors, she tells Emil, “ ‘I want to hold on harder than ever, and when you’re a man you’ll thank me’ ” (Cather *Pioneers!* 43). When her brother Lou asks her how she knows the land will double in value during the next five years, she responds in a way that points to her unspoken kinship with the prairie: “ ‘I can’t explain that.... You’ll have to take my word for it. I *know*, that’s all. When you drive around the country you can feel it coming’ [author’s emphasis] (Cather *Pioneers!* 45). Though other

---

<sup>15</sup> Although the young woman does possess extensive knowledge about the land, it is important to note that she does not accomplish this feat solely on her own. In addition to the physical labor provided by her brothers, Alexandra also receives crucial information about both farming and the region from the university boy experimenting with a new type of clover hay (Cather *Pioneers!* 43). Thus, while Alexandra may be the first to plant alfalfa in her area, she culls the idea from another.

farmers in the area were disillusioned, the prairie “seemed beautiful to her, rich and strong and glorious” (Cather *Pioneers!* 44). At one point, Alexandra is so overcome with the landscape that “Her eyes drank in the breadth of it, until the tears blinded her” (Cather *Pioneers!* 44).<sup>16</sup>

Although Alexandra’s tomboyish appearance and proclivity for the outdoors likens her to many gender-bending figures discussed in previous chapters, one crucial difference remains: her skin tone. Unlike the racialized tomboys, the young woman is not connected with a dark hue in the opening pages of the narrative. In marked contrast to her brown-skinned and dark-haired counterparts, Alexandra’s eyes are a “deep blue” and her thick mass of hair consists of “reddish-yellow curls” (Cather *Pioneers!* 5, 6).

Similar to Hagar Churchill in E. D. E. N. Southworth’s *The Deserted Wife*, Alexandra’s skin tone does not remain static throughout the novel. As the narrative progresses, her complexion, hair color and even features darken. Anticipating the racial fluidity that will gradually come to characterize the twentieth century, the young woman’s hue is not fixed or permanent. Instead, as the tomboyish figure becomes more intimately involved with the brown earth, her face, features and hair become browner as well. The young woman’s once blonde-tinted braids begin to lose their yellow highlights. Within months after the death of her father, they are described as so brilliantly “reddish” that they “fairly burned in the sun” (Cather *Pioneers!* 33). By the beginning of Part II, her complexion has darkened even more. During the sixteen years that have elapsed, the once fair-skinned young woman has become “like a poppy, round

---

<sup>16</sup> However strong, Alexandra’s faith in the land is not unshakable. While she maintains her belief that the prairie will be prosperous someday, she grows weary of advocating this view at several points in the novel. When Carl Linstrum announces that he and his family are selling their fields and returning to Chicago, Alexandra muses, “Sometimes I feel like I’m getting tired of standing up for this country” (Cather *Pioneers!* 36).

and brown, with rich color in her cheeks and lips” (Cather *Pioneers!* 53). When Carl Linstrum returns to the area and sees his childhood friend once again, he observes that although Alexandra’s personality “has changed very little,” her appearance has altered with time (Cather *Pioneers!* 60). “Her figure is fuller, and she has more color” (Cather *Pioneers!* 60). The dark nature of Alexandra’s skin and features is accentuated by her family’s pale complexion. The tomboyish character’s mother is described as “fair-skinned” (Cather *Pioneers!* 19). Similarly, her brother Lou possesses “a blue eye, a thin, fair skin” and “stiff yellow hair” while Oscar has a “pale face” and hair so light that his eyebrows seem “white” (Cather *Pioneers!* 37).

Although it may be tempting to attribute Alexandra’s dark complexion with her exposure to the sun, the young woman is never seen engaging in outdoor activity. Unlike Tony Shimerda in *My Antonia*, Alexandra sees farm implements as mere props rather than implements of labor. When Carl comes to see her one afternoon, “she was not working. She was standing lost in thought, leaning upon her pitchfork, her sunbonnet lying beside her on the ground” (Cather *Pioneers!* 33). As these comments suggest, Alexandra’s coloration does not arise from working *in* the soil and getting temporarily tanned. Instead, it can be attributed to her contact *with* the soil and her skin becoming permanently transformed.

In the opening paragraph to *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*, Frederick Jackson Turner asserts, “The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of the American settlement Westward, explain American development” (3). Released exactly twenty years after the publication of Turner’s thesis, the frontier in Willa Cather’s *O Pioneers!* does more than simply explain the formation of

the American character. In the case of tomboy Alexandra Bergson, it also explains her acquisition of a dark hue.

In 1913, after the publication of her first prairie novel, Willa Cather made an unlikely trip. For the first time since her departure at the age of nine, she returned to Virginia. Given that the writer had just completed one novel about the Nebraskan prairie and was preparing to craft another, her destination seems unusual; one would expect that Cather would travel West rather than South.<sup>17</sup>

Whether the author's trip to her Southern birthplace compelled her to consider black-white relations or whether these thoughts were already on her mind before she left, they may have helped construct her 1918 prairie novel, *My Antonia*.<sup>18</sup> The ostensible setting of the narrative may be the Nebraskan Divide, but the presentation of her tomboyish main character more accurately suggests the racial divide in Virginia. Rather than having her tomboyish character acquire a generic or nonspecific dark hue, Antonia's skin tone evokes a specific race. Although hailing from the European nation of Bohemia, the young woman's racial status is more closely associated with African Americans in the United States.

---

<sup>17</sup> Giving further credence to this expectation, when Willa Cather was preparing to draft *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, she traveled to Virginia. In 1938, the author and her longtime companion Edith Lewis made an extended visit to the Shenandoah Valley (Woodress 28).

<sup>18</sup> Between the publication of *O Pioneers!* and the release of *My Antonia*, of course, Willa Cather published another novel that was set, at least preliminarily, on the prairie: *The Song of the Lark* (1915).



### Part III. Retreating to the (Southern) Past:

#### *My Antonia* and the (Jim) Burden of Willa Cather's (Virginia) Heritage

Five years after the release of *O Pioneers!*, Willa Cather published another novel that showcased the untamed prairie and an untamed tomboy. Rather than repeating the trope of dark soil engendering a dark hoyden, *My Antonia* offers a variation on this motif. In marked contrast to Alexandra Bergson, Antonia is racialized from the opening pages of the narrative. Described with brown skin and dark features, the ostensibly Caucasian character is associated with a dark hue even before she arrives on the Divide.

Antonia's possession of dark features is not the only element that differentiates her from her literary predecessor. Unlike the earth-centered nature of Alexandra Bergson's dark hue in *O Pioneers!*, Antonia's racialization is not predicated on her connection to the prairie soil. Although references to the young woman's brown skin often exist in tandem with those of the brown land, her acquisition of a dark hue can be associated with another source. Hailing from the European nation of Bohemia, the Catholic young woman is, in many ways, already a racial Other. A Romanist in a Protestant land and a foreign-speaking immigrant in a nation populated by Anglo-Americans, Antonia and her family exist outside of conventional conceptions of both whiteness and Americanness.<sup>19</sup> Although the young woman is eager to learn both American customs and the English language after she arrives on the prairie, an accompanying process of cultural "whitewashing" does not occur. From the opening pages of Cather's novel to its final utterances, Antonia remains a racial Other in the

---

<sup>19</sup> In "The Possessive Investment in Whiteness," George Lipsitz argues that one of the motivating factors for many Europeans to immigrate to the United States during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries was to change their racial status. Commonly considered racial "others" in their homelands, Lipsitz discusses "how people who left Europe as Calabrians or Bohemians became something called 'whites' when they got to America and how that designation made all the difference in the world" (370).

minds of the settlers and, most importantly, in the mind of the text's American narrator, Jim Burden.

Notwithstanding Antonia's nation of birth, her racialized nature does not have its root in European origins. Similar to the dark hue with which Jo March is associated, the Bohemian young woman's brown skin can be linked to African American-inflected sources in general and those of the antebellum South in particular. In addition to her possession of dark skin, Antonia's tomboyish connection with heavy field labor and especially her treatment as an object of desire by many white men places her in dialogue with stereotypes about African Americans. Rather than evoking a Europeanized difference, the way in which the immigrant young woman is described and treated throughout the novel recalls the long, complicated history of black-white relations in the United States.

Unlike the third-person narration in *O Pioneers!*, Antonia's story is told from the perspective of a character with a specific racial and socio-economic background. Echoing Willa Cather's own Southern heritage, Jim Burden is also a displaced Virginian. The opening pages of *My Antonia*, in fact, trace the young man's transplantation from the lush landscape of his birthplace to the barren terrain of the Divide. As he discloses, "I was ten years old then; I had lost both my father and mother within a year, and my Virginian relatives were sending me out to my grandparents, who lived in Nebraska" (Cather *Antonia* 7). In addition to bringing his father's field hand Jake Marpole with him, Jim also brings his Southern values and even prejudices. Not only does he recognize that unlike many of the coarse individuals on the prairie his grandmother converses in a "polite Virginia way" (Cather *Antonia* 49), but he also realizes the

demographic differences between the South and Nebraska. As Sharon O'Brien notes, "In Virginia, the 'foreigners' with brown skin are of course African Americans—within memory, slaves" ("Dixie" 98).

Throughout Willa Cather's 1918 prairie novel, the presentation of Antonia Shimerda is filtered through Jim's Southern consciousness. Everything readers learn about the tomboyish young woman is a product of his memory and/or imagination. To a young man who has been raised in a world dominated by the binaries of black and white, Antonia's unfamiliar European heritage becomes supplanted by the more familiar African American one. Recalling stereotypes about race as both a stain and a contagion, Jake commends Jim's decision to not kiss Antonia because "'you're likely to get diseases from foreigners'" (Cather *Antonia* 6). Possessing brown skin, a penchant for field labor, and an irresistible sexuality, the tomboyish girl shares many traits with stereotypes about blacks in the South.<sup>20</sup> Although the Bohemian youth technically belongs to a different ethnicity, Jim comes to classify her as "almost a race apart" from the Caucasian families in town (Cather *Antonia* 127).<sup>21</sup>

In addition to providing a new way of viewing and interpreting Willa Cather's 1918 prairie novel, the presence of her racialized tomboy also adds a new facet to her participation in the Western genre. Although commonly seen as sloughing off their family ancestry and sectional history, many prairie settlers were former Southerners.

With the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854 and the Homestead Act in 1862,

---

<sup>20</sup> In a recent article, Sharon O'Brien offers a compelling corollary to this reading. Rather than viewing Jim's reaction to Antonia through his Southern heritage, she discusses Jim's reaction to the tomboyish character's parents in general and father in particular. In "Displacing Dixie: The Southern Subtext in *My Antonia*," O'Brien argues that Jim's affection for the displaced violinist along with his dislike for Mrs. Shimerda "can be explained in terms of all-too-familiar Southern values" (O'Brien "Dixie" 97).

<sup>21</sup> In an interesting parallel, the family from which Henry Colbert hails in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* is so different from the other similarly Caucasian households that they "were termed 'immigrants'" in Back Creek (Cather *Sapphira* 23).

Southern families flocked to Western territories to claim land, establish farms and lobby for the admission of additional pro-slavery states. Although territories such as Nebraska did not muster any Confederate regiments during the Civil War, many of its residents returned to the South to enlist.

After the abolition of slavery and the financial hardships brought about by Reconstruction, Southern migration to the West increased exponentially. With their own plantations in ruins, many families moved to the prairie to start over. As a result of this massive influx of Southern settlers, formerly sparsely populated territories were able to file for statehood. Within only two years after the end of the Civil War, for instance, the population of Nebraska increased to a level that qualified the region for entrance to the union.

Although largely reticent about the historical events that occurred either before or during the time in which *My Antonia* is set, the novel takes place during a turbulent period in the nation's racial and sectional history. Commencing in 1885 and ending in 1916, the migration of immigrants from Europe to the United States and, later, from the Eastern seaboard to the Western prairie was not the only mass relocation taking place during this time. In addition to the movement of immigrant populations to and within the United States, African Americans were also migrating from the South to the North in staggering numbers. Commonly deemed the Great Migration, this shift was the largest emigration of black men and women in the nation's history. Living in New York City while penning *My Antonia*, Willa Cather was an eyewitness to this phenomenon. Given Joseph Urgo's assertion that the author "was acutely aware of the continuum between our own sense of homelessness and exile and the waves of immigrants passing through Ellis

Island and into New York City and then dispersing across the American continent” (16), it seems likely that she was similarly attuned to the impact of this geographic relocation for black men and women. Albeit for very different reasons, the future author was herself compelled to leave the South and resettle in a distant and seemingly alien land.

Although not commonly considered part of the author’s imaginative repertoire, *My Antonia* can be said to engage contemporary social concerns about race. In addition to witnessing the burgeoning black population in her adopted city, Willa Cather was also aware of the dire poverty and the massive increase in lynchings that spurred this movement. As Joel Williamson argues in *The Rage for Order*, the number of interracial lynchings in the South increased from a few hundred to several thousand after 1889 (122). Coupled with the rapid influx of new black residents, the United States’ entrance to the Great War in 1917 made New York the center of a heated controversy over whether African Americans would serve in the military. Debated everywhere from government offices to street corners, these discussions often turned violent. During Willa Cather’s composition of *My Antonia*, Janis Stout argues that these events “were played out in her daily newspapers, if not virtually on her doorstep” (Stout 288).

Although nearly seventy years have passed since the publication of Granville Hicks’ essay, “The Case Against Willa Cather,” his remarks continue to shape the way in which she is viewed by critics. Accusing Cather of practicing a “supine romanticism,” Hicks argued that her fear of modern technology caused her to “recoil from our industrial civilization.” Unable to see anything redemptive about the twentieth century, the author used fiction as a medium to retreat to the past. Setting her novels further and further back

in history, Cather positioned herself and her work, according to Hicks, as irrelevant to the twentieth century and, by extension, its emerging body of literature.<sup>22</sup>

While most critics challenge Hicks' accusations and even refute them, the discussion that follows embraces his position, at least to a degree. Although the novel is ostensibly about the settling of the Nebraskan prairie, *My Antonia* retreats to Cather's Virginian past to become a palimpsest of Southern race relations. Rather than using history as a means to avoid contemporary social concerns, as Hicks suggests, Willa Cather uses it to confront them. More than simply a meditation on what it means to be a Western settler in the nineteenth century, *My Antonia* becomes a meditation on what it means to be a racial Other in the twentieth.

From the opening pages of Cather's narrative, Jim presents Antonia as what Toni Morrison would call an "American Africanist" figure. In addition to possessing dark eyes and hair, the Bohemian young girl is described as "bright as a new dollar" by the train conductor (Cather *Antonia* 6). Although the term "bright" could refer to Antonia's buoyant personality, Patricia Hill Collins notes that the word was frequently used during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries to describe the luminescent nature of brown or black skin (*Black* 109).<sup>23</sup>

When Jim arrives on the Divide and meets Antonia, her connection to this racially charged trait is accentuated. From the moment the young man is introduced to the Bohemian girl, he notices her "brown skin," the "rich, dark color" of her cheeks and her

---

<sup>22</sup> Although meant as a chastisement, Willa Cather was ironically not offended by Hicks' observations. In many ways, in fact, she agreed with them. In a rebuttal to his essay that appeared in her collection *Not Under Forty*, Cather posed what she considered the rhetorical question, "What has art ever been but escape?"

<sup>23</sup> Echoing this trend, the tomboyish Nelly Deane in Cather's short story, "The Joy of Nelly Deane" is also characterized in this manner. In addition to possessing "yellow-brown eyes," the young woman also has noticeably "bright cheeks" (Cather "Joy" 56, 59).

“wild-looking” hair (Cather *Antonia* 17).<sup>24</sup> Antonia keeps the sleeves of her dress rolled up, and Jim notes how her arms and throat were “brown as a sailor’s” (Cather *Antonia* 79). Similarly, after dinner one evening, Antonia proudly shows off both her “manly muscles” and her “brown arm” (Cather *Antonia* 89). Even when not working outdoors, she retains this dark hue; Jim continues to comment on her brown skin while she is employed as a domestic in Black Hawk (Cather *Antonia* 99).

In addition to the racial charge of Antonia’s coloration, her tomboyish connection to the land can also be seen in racialized ways. Although the young woman’s outdoor labor may not darken her complexion, it does contribute to her Africanist nature.<sup>25</sup> As Joel Williamson notes, from the arrival of the first slave ships, black men and women were associated with field labor. Even after emancipation, this paradigm remained. While the nation’s Northern cities were seen as the domain of white professionals, “[e]nlightened textile leaders and their philosophical friends had no difficulty at all in finding the Negro’s proper calling and in urging him to take it. His future was in the cotton fields” (Williamson *Rage* 223). Throughout *My Antonia*, Cather’s dark tomboy is repeatedly associated with laboring in the dark prairie soil. After the death of her father, in fact, this occupation is seen as her right and proper calling. Wearing “the boots her

---

<sup>24</sup> Similar to Alexandra Bergson’s blond-haired and fair-skinned brothers in *O Pioneers!*, Antonia’s siblings also have pale complexions. The skin tone of her younger sister, Yulka, for instance, is described as “fair” (Cather *Antonia* 17).

<sup>25</sup> In the same way Antonia’s indoor labor does not lighten her skin, the outdoor work of fellow character Lena Lingard does not darken her hue. Although the young woman’s “yellow hair was burned to a ruddy thatch on her head” from herding cattle, her “legs and arms, curiously enough, in spite of their constant exposure to the sun, kept a miraculous whiteness” (Cather *Antonia* 106). Even more astounding, although engaging in the decidedly “unfeminine” occupation of animal husbandry, Lena is not connected with tomboyism. Unlike Antonia, she tells Jim, “‘I never did like out-of-doors work’” (Cather *Antonia* 105). In addition, while most “girls usually get rough and mannish after they went to herding,” she retains her femininity. As Jim concedes, “Before I knew Lena, I thought of her as something wild, that always lived on the prairie, because I had never seen her under a roof” (Cather *Antonia* 106). Yet, when he encounters the young woman in town, he is astounded by her femininity: “She looked demure and pretty, and made a graceful picture in her blue cashmere dress and little blue hat....” (Cather *Antonia* 103).

father had so thoughtfully taken off before he shot himself, and his old fur cap,” Antonia abandons her domestic duties and begins working in the fields with her brother (Cather *Antonia* 79). Not only does she repeatedly discuss “how much ploughing she had done that day,” but she is competitive about it with the neighbors (Cather *Antonia* 79). One afternoon, for instance, she implores, “ ‘Jim, you ask Jake how much he ploughed to-day. I don’t want that Jake get more done in one day than me. I want we have very much corn this fall’ ” (Cather *Antonia* 79). When classes begin and Grandmother Burden wants Antonia to attend, she scoffs at the idea. “ ‘School is all right for little boys’ ” she asserts, but “ ‘I can work like a mans now’ ” (Cather *Antonia* 80).

Whereas Alexandra’s connection to the land is lauded in *O Pioneers!*, Tony’s is denigrated. As Marilee Lindemann points out, the tomboyish young woman’s interest in the land is heavily policed and criticized. While several characters acknowledge the help Antonia’s field labor provides her family, they also disparage these actions for being unfeminine. Soon after Tony begins plowing, for instance, Jim notes how his Bohemian friend “could talk of nothing but the prices of things, or how much she could lift and endure” (Cather *Antonia* 81). In addition, he dislikes the way in which she “ate so noisily now, like a man, and she yawned often at the table and kept stretching her arms over her head, as if they ached” (Cather *Antonia* 81). Disgusted by such behavior, Jim asks Antonia one day, “ ‘Why do you all the time try to be like Ambrosch?’ ” (Cather *Antonia* 90). In the mind of the young male narrator, the young girl “was too proud of her strength” (Cather *Antonia* 81).

Although Jim’s objections are commonly seen to arise from fears of emasculation, the motivation behind these comments may not be this one-dimensional. Recalling the



young man's Virginian heritage once again, they contain a racial component. In the South, (white) women do not engage in field labor, nor do they possess brown skin. These activities and their accompanying racial characteristics are reserved for men in general and blacks in particular. In this way, more than simply defying conventional gender roles for women, Antonia's behavior causes her to exist outside of those for *white* women. Her tomboyish participation in field labor and her connection with a dark hue conflicts with Jim's Southern ideas of female gentility.<sup>26</sup>

Also from Virginia, Jim's grandmother shares such attitudes about racially charged labor and women's proper behavior. Soon after Antonia joins her brother in the fields, Mrs. Burden begins to fear, " 'Heavy field work'll spoil that girl' " (Cather *Antonia* 81). Elaborating on such sentiments, the kindly old woman predicts, " 'She'll lose all her nice ways and get rough ones' " (Cather *Antonia* 81). By "nice ways," one presumes she is referring to those that differentiate not only women from men, but also white domestics from black field hands. As a result of such sentiments, Grandmother Burden gets Antonia a job in town so she may engage in more gender-appropriate and—one may argue—Southern genteel behavior. Keenly aware of this intention, the tomboyish girl tells Jim soon after arriving, " 'Maybe I be the kind of girl you like better, now I come to town' " (Cather *Antonia* 100). More than simply learning the manners and mores more commonly associated with women, Antonia is being instructed in those for *white* women.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Interestingly, Jim does not accord the same disapproval to the equally tomboyish but native-born Frances Harling. As Marilee Lindemann notes, the young man admires her "linguistic dexterity—i.e., her ability to talk with her father 'like two men' on business matters and to understand the country grandmothers 'who spoke no English' " (64).

<sup>27</sup> In addition to arising from different gender and racial codes, Tony's gender-defiant behavior is also a product of class differences as well. After the death of her father, the young woman has little choice but to help her brother in the fields. When Jim asks Antonia at one point, " 'Why do you all the time try to be like

Antonia's "rescue" from heavy field labor, however, does not rescue her from her position as a racially charged figure. Even far removed from the "dark" influence of the soil, the young woman is still seen in Africanist ways. As Jean Schwind notes, in the spirit of "the old plantation South," Jim refers to the hired girls "as if they were the property of their employers" (58). Making repeated reference to the "Harling's Tony" and the "Marshall's Mary," the immigrant women are commonly considered the possession of these households. In addition to providing their servant girls with food, shelter and meaningful labor, the white families feel an obligation to shape their moral, spiritual and cultural development. Encouraging the young women to abandon their native ways by attending Protestant church, acquiring an English-language education, and learning Anglo-American culture, this arrangement goes beyond the noblesse oblige that Jim and the other characters consider it. Instead, it recalls the paternal benevolence often associated with slavery.

In addition to Antonia's dark skin and her connection to racially charged forms of labor, Jim's portrait of her is also conversant with sexual stereotypes about women of color. As with several of the racialized tomboys highlighted in previous chapters, Antonia's untamed tomboyism causes her to be associated with a similarly untamed sexuality. As the young narrator observes, immigrant girls such as Antonia were commonly considered almost "a race apart" from the Caucasian families in Black Hawk

---

Ambrosch?,' " she responds in a way that highlights the economic security that is a prerequisite for conforming to conventional codes of (white) femininity. Pointing to the big, comfortable house in which Jim and his grandparents live compared to the mud hovel that the Shimerdas occupy, Antonia remarks, " 'If I live here, like you, that is different. Things will be easy for you. But they will be hard for us' " (Cather *Antonia* 90). A few chapters later, when Antonia gets a job in town, the class-based nature of gender roles recur. Soon after occupying her new position in the Harling's fine home, "Antonia looked eagerly about the house and admired everything. 'Maybe I be the kind of girl you like better, now I come to town,' she suggested hopefully' " (Cather *Antonia* 100). Implicit in this remark is that the suggestion that Antonia may now be the type of girl of which Jim approves because she finally has the economic privilege to do so.

(Cather *Antonia* 127). Because “physical exercise was thought rather inelegant for the daughters of well-to-do [white] families,” the girls from town were pale, thin and frail (Cather *Antonia* 127). According to Jim, “[w]hen one danced with them.... their muscles seemed to ask but one thing—not to be disturbed” (Cather *Antonia* 128). In contrast, the daughters of immigrant farmers were strong and robust. Their “out-of-doors work had given them a vigor which, when they got over their first shyness on coming to town, developed into a positive carriage and freedom of movement” (Cather *Antonia* 127).<sup>28</sup>

Although not as powerful a link as either her brown skin or her connection with field labor, the tomboyish strength with which Antonia is associated can also be seen as a signifier for blackness. In *Black Macho*, Michele Wallace argues that white beliefs about the physical might of African American women helped construct the myth of the black “superwoman.” Unlike Caucasian females subjugated by the white patriarchy, black women were perceived to be undisputed matriarchs. Similar to the complex feedback cycle that emerges between tomboys and primitives in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland*, an analogous relationship forms between Cather’s prairie tomboy and stereotypes about black women. If Antonia displays a form of strength that is uncharacteristic of white women but considered common among their black counterparts, she can be seen as possessing a kinship with these figures. In brief, she can be said to exist on a continuum with women of color. Echoing this conjecture, Jim Burden notes that in addition to being “conspicuous among Black Hawk women” because of their

---

<sup>28</sup> In addition to making the country girls stronger and more beautiful, Jim notes that their tomboyish behavior also makes their families more prosperous. Because white parents would not allow their girls to be hired out, they did not get ahead as fast as their immigrant counterparts. As Jim observes, “After the fathers were out of debt, the daughters married the sons of neighbors—usually of like nationality—and the girls who once worked in Black Hawk kitchens are to-day managing big farms and fine families of their own; their children are better off than the children of the town women they used to serve” (Cather *Antonia* 128).

strength, the immigrant girls “were considered a menace to the social order.... Their beauty shone too boldly out against a conventional [i.e., middle-class Anglo] background” (Cather *Antonia* 129). Although never named as such, the differences between immigrant and town women are so great that marriage between a white boy and country girl is considered a form of miscegenation. While the male residents of Black Hawk may admire the robust hired women, Jim notes that Caucasian mothers need not fear. “The respect for respectability was stronger than any desire in Black Hawk youth” (Cather *Antonia* 129). The “white-handed, high-collared clerks and bookkeepers” may lust after the robust immigrant girls, but they will dutifully marry a woman from their own socio-economic circle (Cather *Antonia* 129).

Although Jim may criticize the tendency of white town boys to fetishize girls from the country, he participates in it himself. Recalling the eroticization of dark women, the young man considers Antonia “the prettiest girl I ever saw” (Cather *Antonia* 99). When the tomboyish youth comes to work in Black Hawk, he fetishizes her “fine brown legs” and cheeks “like big dark red plums” (Cather *Antonia* 99).<sup>29</sup> Reiterating stereotypes that women of color possess passionate sexual desires, the young man expects Antonia to kiss him after he walks her home. “When we were in the Cutters’ yard, sheltered by the evergreens, I told her she must kiss me good night” (Cather *Antonia* 143).<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Ironically, one of the ways in which the young man expresses his attraction to the young girl is by equating her with Snow White. In spite of the fact that the “dark color in her cheeks never changed,” Jim insists upon seeing Antonia at one of the pavilion dances that “like Snow-White in the fairy-tale, [she] was still ‘fairest of them all’ ” (Cather *Antonia* 143, 137).

<sup>30</sup> Admittedly, one of the reasons Jim feels so entitled to Antonia’s affections is because fellow tomboy Lena Lingard allows him to behave in these ways. As he tells his Bohemian friend, “‘Lena Lingard lets me kiss her... and I’m not half as fond of her as I am of you’ ” (Cather *Antonia* 143). Perhaps it is Lena’s sexual liberties with Jim—not to mention Ole Benson—that causes him to have erotic dreams about her and not Antonia. He confesses, “One dream I dreamed a great many times, and it was always the same. I was in a harvest-field full of shocks, and I was lying against one of them. Lena Lingard came across the stubble barefoot, in a short skirt, with a curved reaping-hook in her hand, and she was flushed like the

With Antonia's dark features and connection with Africanist occupations, Jim is not the only white character to eroticize her. In marked contrast to her desexualized predecessor in *O Pioneers!*, she is repeatedly presented in libidinous ways. In addition to Jim, several other young men take an interest in the young woman at the pavilion dances. "Antonia's success at the tent had its consequences. The iceman lingered too long now, when he came into the covered porch to fill refrigerator. The delivery boys hung about the kitchen when they brought the groceries" (Cather *Antonia* 132). While these instances are relatively platonic, one young man takes his infatuation one step further. Although Harry Paine "was to marry his employer's daughter on Monday," he tried to kiss Antonia one night after walking her home. When the Bohemian girl protested, he did not respect her wishes. Instead, Harry "caught her and kissed her until she got one hand free and slapped him" (Cather *Antonia* 132). Echoing attitudes about the promiscuous nature of both black and working-class women, Mr. Harling blames Antonia rather than the young man who precipitated the incident. Rebuking the hired girl, he asserts, " 'This is what I've been expecting, Antonia. You've been going with girls who have a reputation for being free and easy, and now you've got the same reputation' " (Cather *Antonia* 132).

Antonia's experience with unwanted sexual advances is not limited to her encounter with Harry Paine. While this young man may steal an unwanted kiss, it is the notorious Wick Cutter who enacts the rape stereotype. Recalling Nancy Till in Cather's

---

dawn, with a kind of luminous rosiness all about her. She sat down beside me, turned to me with a soft sight and said, 'Now they are all gone, and I can kiss you as much as I like.' I used to wish I could have this flattering dream about Antonia, but I never did" (Cather *Antonia* 144). Ironically, given Lena's seemingly promiscuous sexual behavior, she does not become the fallen woman that everyone in town predicts. Instead, by the end of the novel, she is one of the most successful dressmakers in San Francisco. Refraining from marriage, she lives with fellow spinster and business woman Tiny Soderball.

*Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, Antonia's white employer deliberately places her in a position of sexual vulnerability. Before leaving town with his wife, Cutter "made her promise that she would not sleep away from the house, or be out late in the evening, while was gone. He strictly forbade her to ask any of the girls she know to stay with her at night. She would be perfectly safe, he said, as he had just put a new Yale lock on the front door" (Cather *Antonia* 157). The first night after his departure, Wick returns to the house and tries to force himself on Antonia. Fortunately, on the advice of his grandmother, Jim has taken her place. Even after Cutter realizes that it is a man and not a woman who is resisting his advances, he does not leave in shame. Thinking Jim is Antonia's sex partner rather than her substitute, he calls her a "nasty whelp" and even a "hussy" (Cather *Antonia* 158). Rather than blaming Cutter for his abominable conduct, Jim also holds Antonia responsible. Similar to Mr. Harling, he is disgusted by his tomboyish friend. "I heard Antonia sobbing outside my door, but I asked grandmother to send her away. I felt that I never wanted to see her again. I hated her almost as much as I hated Cutter. She had let me in for all this disgustingness" (Cather *Antonia* 159).

Years later, when Antonia falls in love with train conductor Larry Donovan and decides to get married, she is once again the victim of sexual mistreatment. Recalling a trajectory that extends back to the first American bestseller, *Charlotte Temple* (1794), Antonia is first impregnated and then abandoned by her husband-to-be. Returning to Black Hawk, she confides to the Widow Steavens, " 'I'm not married.... and I ought to be' " (Cather *Antonia* 200). As a result, Antonia returns home to live with her brother

and confront her shame. As the Widow Steavens notes, Antonia gave birth to her daughter “without calling anybody, without a groan” one evening (Cather *Antonia* 203).<sup>31</sup>

Ostracized from both respectable white culture and reputable women’s society, Antonia takes the only option available to her: she returns to the tomboyish and racially charged occupation of field labor. “All that spring and summer she did the work of a man on the farm; it seemed to be an understood thing. Ambrosch didn’t get any other hand to help him” (Cather *Antonia* 202). The young woman traded her pretty dresses for “a man’s long overcoat and boots, and a man’s felt hat with a wide brim” (Cather *Antonia* 203). Similar to Antonia’s behavior after the death of her father, she “talked about the grain and the weather as if she’d never had another interest” (Cather *Antonia* 202). Reaffirming her connection to the land in general and racially charged field labor in particular, Antonia tells Jim when he comes to visit, “‘I belong on a farm’ ” (Cather *Antonia* 221).

In spite of the stigma of being a fallen woman, Antonia eventually does marry. Even when she assumes the traditional (white) role of wife and mother, the Bohemian woman is unable to escape from racially charged associations. Recalling societal beliefs that skin color is both a stain and a contagion, Antonia’s eldest son, Leo, inherits his mother’s dark hue. Unlike the young woman’s association with Africanist features, her son’s “tawny” coloration recalls another minority in the United States: tribal Indians. As the first American-born member of the Cuzak family, Leo is literally and figuratively a “native American.” Extending this connection, the young man’s mischievous behavior

---

<sup>31</sup> Although Antonia may be ashamed of her pregnancy when she first returns to the Divide, she abandons this stance soon after the baby is born. While visiting a photographers in town, Jim notices a portrait of Antonia’s baby proudly displayed in the window. With mixed emotions, the narrator muses of his friend, “Another girl would have kept her baby out of sight, but Tony, of course, must have its picture on exhibition at the town photographer’s, in a great gilt frame. How like her!” (Cather *Antonia* 195).

likens him in many ways to stereotypes about “wild Indians.” Antonia confesses to Jim in the closing pages of the novel, “ ‘That’s Leo; he’s the worst of all.... And I love him the best’ ” (Cather *Antonia* 216).<sup>32</sup>

In “Time, Change and the Burden of Revision in *My Antonia*,” Miles Orvell makes a compelling comparison between Willa Cather’s 1918 prairie novel and Mark Twain’s 1887 classic, *Huckleberry Finn*. Arguing that both narratives “were constructing representations of a social class generally held in contempt by the dominant social group,” he sees the friendship between Jim Burden and Antonia as analogous in many ways to that between Huck and Jim (Orvell 35). Rather than equate Cather’s untamed tomboy with the similarly untamed Huck, Orvell makes a case for seeing Antonia as the textual equivalent to Twain’s Jim. Similar to African Americans during the period in which *Huck Finn* is set, “the immigrant in the twentieth century has often been considered a kind of primitive, closer to ‘natural’ life than her ‘civilized’ counterpart, more in touch with the earth, the seasons, the forces of regeneration, more related to the human body itself” (Orvell 35). For these reasons, the critic concedes that while the

---

<sup>32</sup> Although Antonia Shimerda is the most pertinent character to this study, she is not the only ostensibly Caucasian figure to be associated with a dark hue in Cather’s novel. Both the Widow Steavens and Mrs. Gardiner, for instance, possess skin that is so brown that it is reminiscent of an Indian woman (Cather *Antonia* 117, 197). Similarly, Jim’s grandmother, Emmaline Burden, is described as a tall woman with “black hair” and “wrinkled brown skin” (Cather *Antonia* 8). Although not in possession of a dark hue, Jim’s grandfather is similarly associated with exotic features. A missionary once remarked that his crinkly white beard and bald crown makes him look like “an Arabian sheik” (Cather *Antonia* 10). While these characters are connected with racially charged elements, farmhand Otto Fuchs is by far the seemingly Caucasian character who acquires the darkest hue in Cather’s novel. Recalling the racialization of Alexandra Bergson in *O Pioneers!*, his acquisition of a dark hue is intertwined with his connection to the dark prairie. Although born in Austria, Otto’s “adventurous life in the Far West among mining-camps and cow outfits” transforms him both physically and psychologically (Cather *Antonia* 11). Not only is his skin “brown as an Indians,” but similar to Emil Bergson in *O Pioneers!*, he has adopted the dress and manners of Mexican culture (Cather *Antonia* 7). Recalling the experiences of countless other racialized characters, Otto is presented in highly sexualized ways. Similar to stereotypes about the “black buck,” the brown-skinned man becomes “the object of undeserved notoriety” when a woman he was asked to look after while traveling to America gives birth to not one but three children (Cather *Antonia* 46). “The steerage stewardess was indignant with him, the doctor regarded him with suspicion. The first-cabin passengers, who made up a purse for the woman, took an embarrassing interest in Otto, and often inquired of him about his charge” (Cather *Antonia* 46).



“relationship between Jim Burden and Antonia is surely not as daringly conceived as that between a white boy and a Negro,” it can be seen as transgressing “accepted social lines” (Orvell 35).

The likening of Antonia Shimerda with black slave Jim may be more apt than Orvell surmised. Repeatedly presented in American Africanist ways by an author who was well-versed in the color line, the tomboyish young woman embodies a powerful counterpoint to the white Southern narrator. Similar to the pairing of Huck and Jim in Twain’s novel, the pair presents differing racial and class positions.

More than simply establishing a kinship between Willa Cather’s Southern heritage and her Western fiction, this racially charged way of seeing the relationship between Antonia and Jim adds a new facet to the title of her 1918 narrative. In an introductory section that underwent extensive revision, Cather recalls the series of events by which Jim came to draft the narrative.<sup>33</sup> After writing down all he could remember about his childhood friend, he brings the manuscript to his friend’s apartment. Delivering the pages on a stormy night in New York, Jim asserts that not only does the book have “no form,” but, he supposes, “ ‘It hasn’t any title, either’ ” (Cather *Antonia* 2). Going into the next room, Jim sits down at a desk and writes the word “Antonia” across the cover. Dissatisfied with this appellation, he “frowned... then prefixed another word” (Cather *Antonia* 2). Recalling the long history of human ownership in the United States, the young man adds the possessive pronoun “My” to Antonia’s name. Not only did this emendation seem “to satisfy him” (Cather *Antonia* 2), but it also made the manuscript complete. Recalling Southern views that both women and blacks are the property of

---

<sup>33</sup> For an in-depth discussion of the differences between the 1918 original Introduction and the 1926 revision that became the novel’s copy text, see Anthea E. Amos-Bankester’s “Teaching *My Antonia*: The ‘Introductions’ and the Impact of Revisions” (*Nebraska English Journal*. 37.1 Fall 1991: 99 – 109).

white men, the Virginian narrator considers his tomboyish friend to literally and figuratively be “*My Antonia*.”

Coupled with this new way of reading and interpreting Willa Cather’s prairie novels, the presence of her racialized tomboys provides an important link to the exploration of colonial conquest in her later fiction.<sup>34</sup> As Guy Reynolds notes, Willa Cather’s subsequent narratives “are about empire. They fictionalize the transfer of European empires to America, and the subsequent growth of an American empire” (*Context* 46). In addition to her treatment of the French empire in *Shadows on the Rock* (1931), several of her novels focus on her fascination with the Spanish one. In *The Professor’s House* (1925) and especially in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927), Cather is captivated by both the exploration and exploitation of the American Southwest.

The way in which the dark prairie soil creates an American Africanist presence in *O Pioneers!* and *My Antonia* provides an important precursor to this interest. Years before Willa Cather turned her attention to the American Southwest, she was finding ways to put the South in the West. Given the repeated racialization of Alexandra Bergson and Antonia Shimerda, one could argue that the presence of another colonized people—African Americans—and equally imperialistic tradition—the Confederate plantation—formed the background to her tomboyish main characters.

---

<sup>34</sup> Of course, Willa Cather’s prairie novels contain more elements of conquest than simply their connection to Westward expansion. In addition to the complex—but often unexplored—relationship these areas have with Native Americans, several passages make direct reference to various colonial exploits. In *My Antonia*, for instance, Jim finds what he believes to be the sword used by Coronado while searching for the Seven Cities of Gold.

## Part IV. Blacking up and Lighting Out:

### Imitation and Immigration, Minstrelsy and (Western) Migrancy

In addition to being associated with the origins of the American character and the American tomboy, the West is also heavily connected with another unique national phenomenon: blackface minstrelsy. As Nathan Huggins notes, the “two principle characters types who define this theater—Jim Crow and Jim Dandy (or Zip Coon)—are unlike any concept of the plantation black or even the Sambo stereotype” (*Harlem* 249). In marked contrast to popular expectation, these figures were products of the white imagination in general and white Western icons Mike Fink and Davy Crockett in particular. “Jim Crow... is clearly part of the backwoods and riverboat tradition, a blackface Mike Fink or Davy Crockett” (Huggins *Harlem* 249). Meanwhile, “Jim Dandy.... is the blackface counterpart to Yankee Doodle” (Huggins *Harlem* 249). While these figures may have been presented as black, they were involved in a complex form of racial chameleonism. Played by Caucasian actors who blacked up to look African American, Jim Crow and Zip Coon actually had their roots in white popular culture. Although ostensibly mimicking slaves, Nathan Huggins argues that they “were really standard [white] American comedy types underneath the burnt cork” (*Harlem* 249).<sup>35</sup>

In light of the white Western origins of minstrelsy, it comes as no surprise that in addition to lampooning race, blackface also supported Manifest Destiny. As David Roediger notes, “minstrels solidly supported American expansion” (*Wages* 119).

---

<sup>35</sup> Although Nathan Huggins and other blackface historians mention that minstrel characters were patterned after white Western heroes, few of them mention that these figures also possessed a shared political agenda. As Alexander Saxton points out in *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic*, in addition to being white and from the “wild” West, icons Mike Fink and Davy Crockett were also staunch advocates for the Free Soil Movement (198). In this way, while blackface characters Jim Dandy and Zip Coon were representations of plantation slavery, they were ironically also connected, however distantly, with the abolition of this institution.

Stephen Foster's "Oh! Susanna," for instance, "was first performed in the year of Scott's conquest of Mexico and reached the height of its popularity during the California Gold Rush" (Saxton 74). Moreover, countless other minstrel songs celebrated the movement West. The lyrics to one especially popular tune asserted, "Mose he went to Mexico, and dar he saw Santa Anna; / He sent a message to de camp, telling Zack [Taylor] not to surrender. / Says Santa Anna, 'Who are you—you seem to be so witty?' / Says Mose, 'Go 'long—I'm one of de boys—I'm from de Empire City'" (Twain *Autobiography* 64).

Coupled with encouraging Westward expansion, blackface was also involved in satirizing immigrants. Robert C. Toll notes, "After the Civil War, the content of minstrelsy changed pervasively and fundamentally as its form did" ("Social" 86). With the abolition of slavery, blackface performers focused less on Southern Negroes and instead turned their attention to other pressing national issues. With the threat to white male hegemony posed by immigration during the postbellum period, blackface performances began targeting newly arrived "foreign" peoples. "Minstrelsy's simplified ethnic caricatures made the nation's diverse immigrants seem cartoonish" (Toll "Social" 86). For many patrons in isolated frontier towns, "minstrels actually provided their audiences with one of the only bases many of them had for understanding America's increasing ethnic diversity" (Toll "Social" 92). By distilling a set of easily recognizable traits for each group, "these caricatures made America's human heterogeneity and complexity more comprehensible and thus more psychologically manageable to members of the audience" (Toll "Social" 92). Because they presented newly arrived immigrants as laughable, they minimized the threat these men and women posed to native-born white Americans.

Although Asians were minstrelsy's most derided group, troupes also targeted ethnic minorities on the frontier.<sup>36</sup> As Janis Stout notes, Germans were by far the most populous immigrant group on the prairie (155). Because these men and women "made a permanent place for themselves in America, they earned a similar position in the minstrel show" (Toll "Social" 95). Although faring better than their Irish counterparts, German men and women were presented as "speaking 'Dutch' dialects" and indulging "their immense appetites for sauerkraut, sausage, cheese, pretzels, and beer" (Toll "Social" 95). In one popular song, minstrels lampooned both their thick accents and stereotypically hefty physiques. Describing a courtship between a German man and woman, the tune recounts: "Vonce dere lifed a dailor's darter / Und a vellar vot loofed her very much; / Dat vellar used to take her up to Shon's Woods / Und dreat her do everding fine, / Lager bier, und pretzels, blenty of Limburger Cheese" (Toll "Social" 95).<sup>37</sup>

Interestingly, this shift from depicting Southern blacks to presenting European immigrants did not necessarily indicate an accompanying shift in performance style. "When minstrelsy shifted away from Negro topics, they did not, however, automatically discard their blackface" (Toll "Social" 87). Even though white performers were lampooning ethnic groups who could be considered Caucasian, they continued to apply burnt cork. In the words of Robert Toll, "The blackface that was originally such an eye-catching novelty became, after the war, little more than a familiar stage convention" ("Social" 87). To indicate a shift from African-American to immigrant characters,

---

<sup>36</sup> Because of their vastly different language, culture and customs, Robert Toll notes most minstrel troupes presented the Chinese as "totally alien," Barnum-esque "curiosities" ("Social" 93). Performers mocked Asian dress in burlesque dances, "the sounds of their language with their 'Ching, chang, chung,' " and stereotypes that they ate domesticated animals in dishes such as " 'Bow-wow soup, roasted bow-wow, and bow-wow pie' " (Toll "Social" 93).

<sup>37</sup> Although based on gross stereotypes, Robert Toll notes that such skits nevertheless presented the German lovers as a model of proper courtship (Toll "Social" 95).

performers simply refrained from using black dialect. The absence of this specific vernacular “permitted blackface characters to sing of their blue-eyed, blond-haired lovers without provoking any protests or to use Irish and German dialects to portray immigrant groups” (Toll “Social” 87). In this way, Alexander Saxton argues that even during the postbellum period, minstrelsy was engaged in an “endless evocation of the old South” (75). Even when addressing white ethnic minorities and not black plantation life, these issues were palimpsestic. The subtext of each blackface performance was just that: a black face.

In spite of minstrelsy’s role in criticizing immigrants, both Eric Lott and David Roediger point out that blackface was crucial to the construction of immigrant identity during the late-nineteenth century. Although Irish and German immigrants were often ridiculed during blackface shows, members from these groups were often the primary participants in and even audiences for minstrelsy. Gathering together for a common form of entertainment, working-class immigrants experienced a sense of unity in blackface. As a result, minstrelsy could be characterized by what Eric Lott identifies as a process of “love and theft.” Rather than a forum that simply derided ethnic minorities, blackface became a “product of self-commodification” for them (Lott *Love* 39).

Although little attention has been given to Willa Cather’s relationship to minstrelsy, evidence suggests that she was conversant with this performance style. Similar to nineteenth-century predecessor Louisa May Alcott, Cather had a lifelong passion for the theater. Throughout her high school and college career, the future author was both a frequent attendee and an occasional performer on the stage. Her early

journalistic writings, in fact, contain reviews of numerous plays and profiles of many actors and actresses.

Given Willa Cather's interest in the theater and the pervasiveness of minstrelsy at the time, it comes as no surprise that she encountered blackface at several points in her life. The writer may have been critical of Harriet Beecher Stowe's representation of the South in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but Phyllis Robinson notes that Cather was captivated by the Tommer shows based on the novel. With their elaborate sets and use of live animals, the performances were memorable ones for a child living on the sparse Nebraskan prairie. As the author would later concede, " 'how the barking of these dogs behind the scenes used to make us catch our breath!' " (Robinson *Willa* 37).

In addition to attending at least this one blackface performance, Willa Cather incorporated what may be characterized as minstrelized elements into her narratives. Her earliest published writings, in fact, contain elements of minstrelsy. Several poems from her collection *April Twilights* (1903) use the term "minstrel." Her eulogies "Sleep, Minstrel, Sleep" and "The Poor Minstrel" showcase the word in their title. Although a minstrel is a medieval term for singer, it was also a pervasive performance mode by the time these poems were written and released. As a result, it seems unlikely that Cather could have chosen this word and been unaware of its racialized connotations. Echoing this pattern, several of the author's short stories draw on minstrelized elements. Her narratives "The Treasure of Far Island" (1902) and "The Enchanted Bluff" (1909), for instance, make reference to the "Empire City." Although ostensibly referring to a town in Nebraska, "Empire City" is also the common minstrel name for New York.

Throughout the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, numerous minstrel songs denoted the Big Apple in this way.

The West's relationship to minstrelsy, minstrelsy's interest in both deriding and defining immigrants, and Willa Cather's possible awareness of these complex cultural processes merge in her prairie novels.<sup>38</sup> Although blackface is never explicitly mentioned in *O Pioneers!*, it permeates the novel in many ways. First, Willa Cather decided to take the title of her 1913 novel from the work of a poet who was an enthusiast of both Manifest Destiny and blackface minstrelsy: Walt Whitman. In addition, Alexandra's racialization and her success with the land mirror several key elements of this performance mode. In *The Wages of Whiteness*, David Roediger notes, "Psychoanalytically, the smearing of soot or blacking over the body represents the height of polymorphous perversity, an infantile playing with excrement or dirt" (*Wages* 118).<sup>39</sup> Recalling this facet of blackface performance, Alexandra's acquisition of a dark hue is predicated on her connection with soil or dirt. While Cather's ostensibly Caucasian tomboy is never presented as physically unclean in the narrative, she becomes—in minstrelized language—"racially dirty" as the novel progresses.

In addition to Alexandra's acquisition of a racial charge, her farming and financial prowess can also be yoked with minstrelsy. Due to the tremendous popularity of blackface throughout the nineteenth century, David Roediger notes that many performers received extravagant salaries (*Wages* 119). Minstrel shows were so lucrative, in fact, that

---

<sup>38</sup> Minstrelsy's interest in transvestism can also be connected with Cather's prairie tomboys. As discussed in the Introduction, one of the central facets of nearly all minstrel shows was cross-dressed performers. Since this characteristic is applicable to nearly all the gender-bending female characters highlighted in this study and not simply Alexandra Bergson and Antonia Shimerda, I decided to omit it.

<sup>39</sup> Michael Rogin argues that, more than simply positing a connection between minstrelsy and hygiene, the application of burnt cork "is a primal scene in every blackface musical.... The scene lets viewers in on the secret of the fetish" (*Blackface* 182).



they inspired several “highly successful performers and promoters (including P. T. Barnum) to do blackface for a time as a prelude to fame and fortune elsewhere” (Wages 119). As a result, Roediger argues, “In a real sense.... rubbing on black was an accumulating capitalist behavior” (Roediger *Wages* 119). In addition to precipitating her acquisition of a dark hue, Alexandra’s connection with the land also provides her with considerable wealth. By the time Carl Linstrum returns to the Divide, Alexandra owns the most prosperous farm in the region (Cather *Pioneers!* 55).

While blackface minstrelsy may form the backdrop to Willa Cather’s *O Pioneers!*, it plays an explicit role throughout *My Antonia*. At several points in the narrative, blackface is not only mentioned but even performed by various characters. Significantly, the first reference to minstrelsy in Cather’s 1918 novel involves another ostensibly Caucasian tomboy: Sally Harling.<sup>40</sup> The thirteen-year-old girl not only has short hair and is “clever at all sports,” but is also characterized as a “wild thing” with “brown skin” (Cather *Antonia* 97). Even more telling, the youngster enjoys both listening to and even playing minstrel music. “When Sally got back from school, she sat down in her hat and coat and drummed the plantation melodies that Negro minstrel troupes brought to town” (Cather *Antonia* 102).<sup>41</sup>

The blackface minstrelsy present in *My Antonia* is not limited to tomboy Sally Harling. In the middle of this novel about predominantly Caucasian settlers in a predominantly Caucasian prairie town, a mulatto musician arrives. As Elizabeth

---

<sup>40</sup> Unlike Antonia, however, Sally is a native-born American. Hence, both her tomboyishness and her racialization offer a compelling counterpoint to the foreign-born main character.

<sup>41</sup> Interestingly, Sally is not the only Harling daughter who can be connected with a dark hue in Cather’s *My Antonia*. The family’s eldest daughter, Frances, wears a man’s sealskin coat and talks with her father about “grain-cars and cattle, like two men” (Cather *Antonia* 98). More importantly, perhaps, the young woman’s complexion is described as “dark like her father” (Cather *Antonia* 98).

Ammons quips in a recent essay, the black pianist Blind d'Arnault "erupts as if out of nowhere" ("*Antonia*" 73). Recalling the separate-but-equal policy operating in the South during this period, d'Arnault's choice in instruments is appropriate. With both black and white keys, Blythe Tellefsen points out that the piano is also structured around a dictum of "eternally separate but equal" (236).

Although presented as a musical genius, Blind d'Arnault's physical description and even musical profession are in dialogue with racist stereotypes of blacks on the minstrel stage. Recalling African-American characters from the novels of antebellum author E. D. E. N. Southworth, the piano player is presented as a figure with a "soft, amiable Negro voice," hair like "close-clipped wool" and a face that is perpetually happy (Cather *Antonia* 118). In addition to his minstrelized appearance, Blind d'Arnault's choice in music can also be associated with blackface. Although Elizabeth Ammons connects the mulatto pianist with ragtime, he plays several well-known minstrel songs. Upon seeing the mulatto performer, in fact, Mrs. Gardener remarks, " 'Seems like we might have some good old plantation songs tonight' " (Cather *Antonia* 119). In accordance with this prediction, d'Arnault commences his concert with Stephen Foster's popular minstrel tune "My Old Kentucky Home" (Cather *Antonia* 119). For the remainder of the evening, Jim notes that the men "sang one Negro melody after another" to d'Arnault's musical accompaniment (Cather *Antonia* 119).

More than forming simply a tangential detail to the racialization of *Antonia* Shimerda, the presence of this minstrelized musician provides an important lapse in her status as an American Africanist figure. Significantly, the only time in which *Antonia* interacts freely with the white men of Black Hawk is while listening to d'Arnault.

Discovered dancing behind a door with some of the immigrant girls, Antonia and her friends are urged to join the men. "Kirkpatrick caught Tiny by the elbows. 'What's the matter with you girls? Dancing in here by yourselves, when there's a roomful of lonesome men on the other side of the partition!' " (Cather *Antonia* 122). Similar to the racial blurring that occurs in minstrel shows, this moment is the only time when the white men from Black Hawk and such racialized hired girls as Antonia become racial equals. Recalling arguments by Eric Lott and David Roediger about how blackface made various immigrant groups paradoxically more white, d'Arnault's minstrel music eradicates, albeit only temporarily, the tomboyish young woman's status as a racial Other.<sup>42</sup> While the plantation melodies play, she is able to shirk her own black mask.

In addition to causing a momentary disruption in the racial divide, this incident also establishes a kinship between racialized tomboy Antonia Shimerda and the mulatto musician. Jim's conflicted reaction to d'Arnault mirrors his attraction and repulsion to Antonia. Making a rare reference to his Southern past, Jim remarks upon seeing the blind pianist that he had the "happiest face I had seen since I left Virginia" (Cather *Antonia* 118). After years of living on the desolate prairie, the young narrator finds great comfort from his "soft, amiable Negro voice, like those I remembered from early childhood" (Cather *Antonia* 118).

This nostalgic view of the mulatto musician does not fully encapsulate Jim's feelings about him. At the same time the young narrator romanticizes the pianist as an idyllic reminder of his former life in Virginia, he is also repulsed by this figure. Echoing Jim's simultaneous view of Antonia as both gorgeous and grotesque, he counters his

---

<sup>42</sup> In *Blackface, White Noise*, Michael Rogin takes this observation one step further. Since minstrelsy can be seen as a means to whitewash ethnic Americans, he asserts that it "opens the doors to the meanings of whiteness in the United States" (Rogin 27).

praise of d'Arnault with references to his "conical little skull," "shriveled eyelids" and "definite animal desires" (Cather *Antonia* 118, 119). While recounting the mulatto's life story, in fact, Jim asserts "his mother... was so ashamed of his ugliness that she couldn't bear to have white folks see him" (Cather *Antonia* 119).

In *Blackface, White Noise*, Michael Rogin discusses minstrelsy as not simply a performance mode in the early-twentieth century but a process of Americanization. "In turning white to black and back again, minstrelsy played with the process of identity change that transformed poor into rich, daughters into wives and mothers, and immigrants into Americans" (Rogin *Blackface* 49). Because minstrelsy created a division between the largely Irish and Jewish performers and the black men and women they portrayed on stage, Rogin argues that it allowed minorities to participate in "the American melting pot" (*Blackface* 56). For the first time since their arrival in the United States, these men were able to play a person of color instead of being confused for one (Rogin *Blackface* 102).

Although connections between blacking up and becoming American are commonly applied to Irish and Jewish immigrants, they could pertain to the tomboyish characters in Willa Cather's prairie novels as well. In addition to crossing the boundaries between black and white, Alexandra Bergson and Antonia Shimerda also test the differences between immigrant and native. As racialized figures who hail from Europe, these young women simultaneously defy while they define what it means to be American. Recalling Rogin's observations on the Americanizing effects of minstrelsy once again, their possession of a dark hue forms a central facet of this phenomenon. By figuratively

**“blackening-up,” Alexandra Bergson and Antonia Shimerda offer a compelling critique about the politics of inclusion in (white) American society.**

## Part V. The (Un)Making of the Americans:

### Sex/tionalism and the “American” Girl

Although depicting the picturesque landscape of Nebraska, debates over Americanization reached a heated and often explosive intensity during the period in which *O Pioneers!* and *My Antonia* were written and released. Concerns over the rapid influx of increasingly “foreign” arrivals, coupled with fears over their ability to “melt” into (white) American culture, sparked an epidemic of xenophobia among native-born men and women.

Rather than avoid these issues, Willa Cather took a bold stance on present-day questions of assimilation, citizenship and nationhood. Defying popular calls for either the exclusion of foreign immigrants or their forced assimilation, she repeatedly showcased the value of immigrant culture, customs and even languages. During a 1921 lecture, in fact, “Miss Cather told her audience that one of the things which retarded art in America was the indiscriminate Americanization work of overzealous patriots who implant into the foreign minds a distaste for all they have brought of value from their own country” (Bohlke 146 – 7). Posing the rhetorical question, “Will it make a boy or girl any less American to know one or two other languages?” the author predicted that without some knowledge of European culture, “your one hundred percent American [will] be a deaf mute” (Bohlke 148).

During a 1924 interview for the *New York Times Book Review*, Willa Cather expanded on these sentiments. After chastising “social workers” and “missionaries” who dedicate their lives to days transforming newly-arrived immigrants into “stupid replicas of smug American citizens,” she identifies the “passion for Americanizing everything and

everybody [as] a deadly disease with us" (Bohlke 148). Disgusted by this practice, Willa Cather was the first writer to give immigrants a "heroic stature" in American literature (Rosowski *Voyage* 45).<sup>43</sup>

In addition to providing links to Willa Cather's Southern heritage, her racialized prairie tomboys add a new dimension to her participation in the debates over Americanization. In *Imaging American Women*, Martha Banta discusses the new types of womanhood that emerged in American literature and culture at the turn into the twentieth century. In addition to the "Beautiful Charmer" and the "New England Woman," Banta identifies the "American Girl" or "Outdoors Pal" (46). Whereas the Charmer flirted and the New England Woman read, the Outdoors Pal cavorted. Similar to the behavior of tomboys, this active, energetic figure engaged in "vigorous athleticism" (Banta 76). In marked contrast to stereotypes about weak and feminine women, she wore trousers, rode bicycles, and even swam in the open ocean.

As Banta goes on to assert, however, a "genuine interest in athletics" was not the only qualification for the Outdoors Pal (Banta 88). In addition to engaging in tomboyish behavior, this new American figure also needed to be of a certain racial, ethnic and even religious heritage. Emerging during the rapid influx of "foreign" immigrant groups, the American Girl was "singled out as the visual and literary form to represent the values of the nation and codify the fears of its citizens" (Banta 2). As a result, coupled with being athletic, "the Girl was expected to be young, pretty, unmarried, white, Protestant, and

---

<sup>43</sup> Willa Cather's laudatory views of immigrants and her dislike for nativist sentiments ought not to imply that she was devoid of all prejudice. As Janis P. Stout points out, the author's praise was selective. Although celebrating the Bohemians, Scandinavians and Norwegians inhabiting the Divide, both her fictional and factual writings contain disparaging comment about Asians, Jews and Chicanos. Moreover, in accordance with the anti-German sentiments of her day, Cather "obscured the fact that Germans were by far the largest single group of immigrants" in Nebraska (Stout 155). For these reasons, praise of Cather's progressivism when it comes to European immigration and American pluralism must be carefully qualified.

‘American’” (Banta xxxii). Fearful about the low birth rates among Caucasian women and their frail health, the Outdoors Pal “supported the views of conservatives who reasoned that their daughters should cultivate an excellent physique as insurance for a stable society founded on sound motherhood” (Banta 88). In both the verbal and visual iconography of the day, great care was taken to preserve “the racists’ need to keep the pure blood-stock of the American Girl inviolate” (Banta xxxii). Throughout *Imaging American Women*, therefore, Banta explores “the *Americanization* of these forms and the shaping from them into a native ‘art idea’ ” [author’s emphasis] (Banta xxxiii).

In marked contrast to many of her contemporaries, Willa Cather was both skeptical of and even repulsed by the “types” Banta outlines. Rather than seeing the emergence of the “Outdoors Pal” as evidence of women’s changing gender roles and the emergence of a socially acceptable form of tomboyism, she saw it as another manifestation of the conformity brought about by mechanization. During a 1921 interview, Cather remarked, “At present... there seems to be an idea that we all must be like somebody else, as much as if we had all been cast in the same mold. We wear exactly the same clothes, drive the same make of car, live in the same part of town, in the same style of house. It’s deadly!” (Bohlke 46). Lamenting what she perceived as an increasing tendency towards assembly-line Americans, Cather called for a more individualistic approach to definitions of the national character.

The depiction of her racialized prairie tomboys presents the possibility that there is more room for diversity than Banta’s profile of the “Outdoors Pal” suggests. Rather than stigmatizing Alexandra and Antonia for their acquisition of a dark hue, Willa Cather’s novels celebrate it. Even though Alexandra and Antonia exist outside



conventional definitions of this figure as largely Anglo-Saxon, Protestant and middle-class, they are held up as exemplars of the national spirit by characters who could be considered “real” Americans. In *O Pioneers!*, Chicago-native Carl Linstrum insists Alexandra has “always been a triumphant kind of person” (Cather *Pioneers!* 205 – 6). Similarly, in the final pages of *My Antonia*, American-born Jim Burden characterizes Antonia as “a rich mine of life, like the founder of primitive races” (Cather *Antonia* 227). Hailing from different continents, religious backgrounds and even races, the young women offer a more pluralistic portrait of the “American Girl.”

Coupled with being gender-bending figures who disrupt prevailing notions of what it means to be female, Willa Cather’s Alexandra Bergson and Antonia Shimerda also call into question what it means to be American. As products of bilingual environments, these women highlight the necessity for more pluralistic ways of seeing the national character. Rather than being limited to individuals of a specific race, religion and socio-economic background, Cather’s prairie tomboys call for an approach to American culture that includes multiculturalism.<sup>44</sup>

In a recent study on race and ethnicity in the United States, Lawrence Fuchs introduced the concept of “voluntary pluralism.” Dissatisfied with extant explanations about America’s racial and ethnic composition, Fuchs offered a compelling alternative. Under voluntary pluralism, “individuals [are] free to express their ancestral affections and sensibilities, to choose to be ethnic, however and whenever they [wish] or not at all by

---

<sup>44</sup> Interestingly, in spite of all his fascination with the role the West played in the construction of the “American,” Frederick Jackson Turner did not like Cather’s fiction. Although the historian was captivated by the social mobility depicted in her prairie novels, “he was less enamored of the racial mixing and interfusion” that also accompanied them (Reynolds 66). As a result, the theorist who is commonly credited with articulating the process by which immigrants became Americans paradoxically was not enamored with her depiction of this event.

moving across group boundaries easily” (Fuchs 5). The end result of this process is the formation of a civic culture “in which immigrant settlers from Europe and their progeny [are] free to maintain affection for and loyalty to their ancestral religions and cultures while at the same time claiming an American identity by embracing the founding myths and participating in the political life of the republic” (Fuchs 5).

While Fuchs was referencing colonial Pennsylvania when he penned these remarks, they could apply to the Nebraskan prairie depicted in *O Pioneers!* and *My Antonia*. When Willa Cather published her first frontier novel in 1913, critics praised her for introducing “a totally new kind of story” and “a new and interesting type” to the nation’s fiction (Gelfant ix). Given the way in which both Alexandra Bergson and Antonia Shimerda retain their European roots and resist complete assimilation into American society, one could add a new facet to this characterization. More than simply inaugurating a new literary type, Willa Cather’s prairie novels present a new type of American.

Although ostensibly conforming to American manners and mores, Alexandra Bergson from *O Pioneers!* retains many elements from the old country. While the tomboyish woman speaks English and decorates her house in conventionally American ways—placing “jars and punch-bowls and candlesticks in the company rooms ... [because she knows] guests liked to see about them these reassuring emblems of prosperity” (Cather *Pioneers!* 66)—she simultaneously preserves an affection for European customs. Upon learning that an elderly neighbor dislikes bathing in her family’s “modern” porcelain tub, she exclaims, “‘Poor old Mrs. Lee! They won’t let her wear nightcaps, either. Never mind; when she comes to visit me, she can do all the old things in the old

way, and have as much beer as she wants' ” (Cather *Pioneers!* 64). Ruminating on this plan with Ivar, she announces, “ ‘We’ll start an asylum for old-time people’ ” (Cather *Pioneers!* 64).<sup>45</sup>

This reverence for European ways—and mainstream American culture’s resistance to it—is amplified in *My Antonia*. From the opening pages of Cather’s 1918 novel, numerous characters express xenophobic sentiments about the various immigrant groups settling the prairie. The kindly Grandmother Burden, for instance, not only repeatedly refers to families such as the Shimerdas as “these foreigners,” but also speaks to them in a loud tone as if they were deaf (Cather *Antonia* 73, 17). Similarly, while out playing one afternoon, Jim chastises Antonia for “jabbering Bohunk” when she sees a rattlesnake (Cather *Antonia* 32). Several chapters later when the tomboyish girl discusses her father’s dissatisfaction with his new homeland, he takes such sentiments one step further. Unsympathetic to his friend’s family woes, Jim retorts, “ ‘People who don’t like this country ought to stay home’ ” (Cather *Antonia* 59). At one point in *My Antonia*, even a migrant tramp becomes a mouthpiece for nativism. While helping with the threshing, he is shocked to learn that new types of immigrants are arriving on the prairie. “ ‘My God!,’ he says, ‘so it’s Norwegians now, is it? I thought this was Americy’ ” (Cather *Antonia* 114). Rather than live with this ever-increasing pluralism, the tramp jumps head-first into the thresher and commits suicide.<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> As several critics have noted, Cather’s dislike for modern bathtubs in many ways epitomized her dislike for modern technology and its accompanying forms of mechanization. Not only do many of her fictional characters express displeasure with the porcelain basins, but the author herself disliked the appliance, finding it a nuisance rather than an improvement on old methods.

<sup>46</sup> These examples are not the only instances of nativism in Cather’s text. In addition to Grandmother Burden, Jim and the tramp, Jake Marpole and Otto Fuchs also express many xenophobic remarks. The Virginian field hand Jake Marpole, for instance, insists, “ ‘These foreigners ain’t the same. You can’t trust ‘em to be fair.... They ain’t to be trusted’ ” (Cather *Antonia* 84). Similarly, although an immigrant himself

Contrary to Jim's belief in complete assimilation, Antonia becomes increasingly less American as the novel progresses. Instead of learning the language, culture and customs of her adopted country, she and her family retain many ways from Bohemia. As Guy Reynolds points out, the Cuzak home has "a domestic culture that is solidly European" (83). Not only does Antonia marry a man who is a recent arrival from her homeland, but they also raise their children to speak only Bohemian.<sup>47</sup> In marked contrast to *O Pioneers!*, where Lou and Oscar Bergson are ashamed of their native language and forbid its use in their house, none of Antonia's eleven children can speak or understand English. Similarly, when Jim visits his childhood friend in the closing pages of the novel, Antonia struggles to converse in English. " 'I can't think of what to say, you've got me so stirred up. And then, I've forgot my English so. I don't often talk it any more. I tell the children I used to speak real well' " (Cather *Antonia* 216). Upon meeting Antonia's husband, the narrator is aware that Cuzak speaks English out of "politeness" rather than preference (Cather *Antonia* 229). In the words of Guy Reynolds, the Cuzak home represents "an idealized projection of a liberal Americanization that would accommodate European ways in the New World" (*Context* 171). Embodying a radical critique of current views on assimilation, Cather's novel presents a balance between the New and Old Worlds.

Although Willa Cather may advocate a more pluralistic definition of the American character in her prairie novels, it is important to note that she does not follow this line of thought to its logical conclusion, with the advocacy of interracial marriage

---

from Austria, Otto has a strong dislike for various groups, especially Czechs. At one point, for instance, he proclaims, " 'You can't tell me anything new about a Czech; I'm an Austrian' " (Cather *Antonia* 85).

<sup>47</sup> Especially in recent criticism, much has been made about the fact that Antonia's husband, Anton Cuzak, possesses the male version of her name. Critics and biographers alike have read this phenomenon as everything from an instance of doubling to a type of displaced lesbian coupling.

and miscegenation. Although it is clear that Jim has a lifelong love affair with Antonia, he never considers marrying her. Recalling the young man's observation that the immigrant girls of Black Hawk are "almost a *race* apart" [my emphasis] (Cather *Antonia* 127), he seems to believe that doing so would be to engaging in a type of miscegenation. As a result, the narrator marries a member of his own socio-economic class: a wealthy and unmistakably white society woman in New York. In marked contrast to Antonia's fertile coupling with Anton, the young man's marriage is both loveless and childless. As Marilee Lindemann notes, Jim's barren union can be seen as an emblem of "nativist fears about declining birth rates in the American-born population" (68).

Echoing this pattern is Alexandra Bergson in *O Pioneers!*. In the closing pages of the novel, the tomboyish character does marry childhood friend Carl Linstrum. As many critics have pointed out, however, their coupling is both pragmatic and passionless. In addition to Alexandra's matter-of-fact rationale " 'I think when friends marry, they are safe' " (Cather *Pioneers!* 209), Carl Linstrum concedes that the land has always had more of her heart. " 'You belong to the land,' Carl murmured, 'as you have always said. Now more than ever' " (Cather *Pioneers!* 208). The late age at which Alexandra weds contributes to Carl's assertion that she is an earth mother and not a human one. By the time the tomboyish character marries, she is beyond childbearing age. Even if her union with Carl were sexual, it would not lead to progeny. Although it seems an inconsequential detail of Cather's narrative, this fact becomes a crucial component when seen from the standpoint of miscegenation. The advanced age at which Alexandra marries eliminates the possibility that this dark-skinned woman and her fair-skinned mate will produce interracial or, at least, inter-ethnic children.

Giving further credence to this conjecture are the intensely sexual fantasies Alexandra has about the soil. Unable to connect sexually with her fair-skinned husband, the young woman's most intimate connection is with the dark soil. "Sometimes, as she lay... luxuriously idle, her eyes closed, she used to have an illusion of being lifted bodily and carried by someone very strong. It was a man, certainly, who carried her, but he was like no man she knew; he was much larger and stronger and swifter, and he carried her as easily as if she were a sheaf of wheat" (Cather *Pioneers!* 137). Rather than simply fantasize about a strong man who can carry her over the land, she dreams of one who seems to have arisen from it. A few moments later, Alexandra describes him as "yellow like sunlight" and smelling "of ripe cornfields" (Cather *Pioneers!* 137). For these reasons, Alexandra's imaginary lover is never identified, but Blanche Gelfant among other critics speculate that he is the mythic Corn God (xxx).

Rather than being an isolated incident, this fantasy recurs. Near the end of novel, Alexandra "had again, more vividly than for many years, the old illusion of her girlhood, of being lifted and carried lightly by someone very strong. He was with her a long while this time, and carried her very far, and in his arms she felt free from pain" (Cather *Pioneers!* 191). When the imaginary gentleman returns Alexandra to her bed, she is able to see him for the first time. Although his face is covered with a white cloak, his skin is as brown as both the soil and Alexandra herself. "His shoulders seemed as strong as the foundations of the world. His right arm, bared from the elbow was *dark and gleaming, like bronze*, and she knew at once that it was the arm of the mightiest of all lovers" [my emphasis] (Cather *Pioneers!* 192).

Significantly, the only character to arise from interracial coupling in Cather's prairie novels—the piano player Blind d'Arnault in *My Antonia*—forms a poignant example of the perils that accompany racial mixing. Although a gifted musician, the mulatto character is born blind and commonly believed to suffer from mental retardation. In this way, while Cather may have praised the cultural commingling of different races and ethnicities on the prairie, she stops short of advocating their sexual union. In spite of Cather's pro-immigrant stance, her characterization of Blind d'Arnault recalls Lothrop Stoddard's assertion in *The Rising Tide of Color* that the end result of racial and ethnic mixing is “a mongrel—a walking chaos” (166).

In an 1897 review of Frances Hodgson Burnett's *A Lady of Quality*, Willa Cather wrote, “we can never really outlive our past... it becomes a part of us, it is in our blood” (Curtin 359). Although the author would have agreed that her prairie novels were connected with conceptions of the past, she never would have imagined that they could be associated with the concept of blood. As both a synonym for family purity (your blood, your kin) and a sign of racial contamination (the infamous one-drop rule), this term possesses a powerful array of both connotative and denotative meanings in the United States.

Perhaps because Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!* and *My Antonia* arose from memories of her Nebraskan and especially Virginian heritages, these novels are inextricably connected with what can be contained in and determined by blood. Throughout each of the texts, Cather's pride in her family's Southern pedigree, her incorporation of a similarly pure-blooded Virginian narrator, her interest in the blood

composition of the American people and her resistance to the mixing of blood in interracial marriage play a crucial, albeit often coded, role.

An oft-quoted political proverb asserts, "Sometimes democracy must be bathed in blood."<sup>48</sup> The representation of Willa Cather's racialized prairie tomboys echoes these sentiments in many ways. For both Alexandra Bergson and Antonia Shimerda, the democratization of gender roles, economic prosperity, and even criteria for American citizenship are predicated on their immersion in both complementary and competing blood systems. Whether referencing their family heritage or their perceived racial contagion, various transfusions of and confusions about blood are the benchmarks on which Willa Cather's prairie novels and her tomboyish main characters are based.

---

<sup>48</sup> Ironically, this remark is attributed to Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet.



**Chapter 6.****The Carnal and the Carnavalesque:****Carson McCullers, the Civil Rights Movement and the Decline of Racialized White Tomboys**

In both past and present criticism, much attention has been given to the representation of human freaks and oddities in the life and work of Carson McCullers. While critics frequently disagree over the author's place within the canon, all agree that this element is inextricable from her writing. Each of the central characters in all of McCullers' full-length novels and many of her short stories possesses some physical or psychological trait that deems them abnormal. Given the pervasiveness of grotesque characters, one critic remarked that in the writer's narratives "not even the horse is normal" (Evans *Carson* 80).

In spite of all this attention to Carson McCullers' interest in human freaks and oddities, her relationship to a form of American entertainment that has been closely associated with this phenomenon remains unexplored: blackface minstrelsy. Although it is seldom discussed in histories of minstrelsy, this performance mode made its debut in such venues as P. T. Barnum's museum of curiosities and "freaks" in New York City. According to *P. T. Barnum: America's Greatest Showman*, the self-proclaimed "king of humbuggery" featured a blackface troupe at his Manhattan American Museum as early as October 1836 (Kunhardt, Kunhardt and Kunhardt 25). By the 1840s, Dan Rice, one of the originators of blackface, was on the showman's payroll.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Echoing this trend, Robert Toll notes in *Blacking Up* that all four of the men who are commonly credited with introducing minstrelsy to the American stage—Billy Whitlock, Frank Pelham, Dan Emmett, and Frank Bower—"had experience as blackface entertainers with circuses" (30).

When minstrel adaptations of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* began sweeping the nation in the 1850s, Barnum played a major role in disseminating these productions. Although born in Connecticut, the showman was a slaveholder at several points in his life. During the 1830s, Barnum owned "A woman and child at one point and, earlier, a personal valet" (Kunhardt et al. 74). More than simply participating in slavery, the showman was also known to participate in Simon Legree-like mistreatment of his slaves. On one occasion, when he suspected a black servant of having stolen from him, "Barnum... gave him fifty lashes, and took him to New Orleans where he was sold at auction" (Kunhardt et al. 74). As many biographers note, the showman commonly referred to blacks as "darkeys," "argued for the necessity of ongoing slavery and remained adamantly opposed to the moral cause of the abolitionists" (Kunhardt et al. 74). The King of Humbuggery believed that if blacks were freed and " 'there was no army to protect the whites, the blacks would murder them and take possession of their property' " (Kunhardt et al. 74).

Although Barnum's attitudes about African Americans changed later in life, the entertainment featured at his museum during the 1850s reflected both his initial race prejudice and his slave-holding past.<sup>2</sup> The adaptation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* presented on his stage was decidedly pro-South. As Robert Toll notes, the "most famous and widely performed pro-Southern version of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, written by Henry J. Conway, opened in New York in P. T. Barnum's American Museum in November 1853" (*Blacking* 91). Conway modified the characterization of several key figures and even the

---

<sup>2</sup> As African Americans formed an increasing portion of patrons at Barnum's museum, his racial ideology steadily modified. In 1855, for instance, the showman conceded in a letter to Unitarian minister and ardent abolitionist Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "I have spent months on the cotton plantations of Mississippi, where I have seen more than one 'Legree' " (Saxon 86). In addition, while on a lecture tour in 1865 Barnum delivered "a much publicized speech in favor of enfranchising Negroes" (Saxon xxx).

novel's ending to render it less sympathetic to the plight of black slaves. Among other changes, his version omitted the martyrdom of Uncle Tom and also "placed Eliza and George Harris under the protection of the rifle-toting Drover John" (Dennett *Weird* 132). So influential was P. T. Barnum in the success of Conway's production that when the show opened at the National Theatre years later, it tipped its hat to the showman's museum. In a line added to the script, a character asks Topsy, "Did you ever hear of Barnum?" (Dennett *Weird* 136).

Similar to George L. Aiken's previous version, Conway's adaptation was performed in blackface. But, unlike Aiken's show (which appeared simultaneously in Upstate New York), it ran for an astounding one hundred consecutive performances. In the years to come, "no fewer than half a dozen productions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*" appeared on Barnum's stage (Dennett 35).<sup>3</sup> In spite of the showman's Southern leanings, he eventually employed both George Aiken and Henry Conway at his American Museum. The proslavery Conway was the in-house dramatist in the 1850s while the abolitionist Aiken occupied this position during the following decade. (Dennett *Weird* 96).

In addition to showcasing a uniquely pro-South version of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, P. T. Barnum often participated in minstrelsy himself. As Henry W. Root notes in *The Unknown Barnum*, on several occasions when a performer was ill or absent, the showman "blackened up and sang the songs himself" (70). By 1837, such appearances earned

---

<sup>3</sup> Rather than denoting a theatrical anomaly at Barnum's museum, it should be noted that dramas showcasing "slavery and temperance wielded a clout in the Lecture Room unrivaled by any other themes" (Dennett *Weird* 117). Repeatedly emphasizing the respectable, family-oriented nature of his museum, such moralistic productions were the staple of his stage.

Barnum the reputation for being an “acceptable blackface singer” in his own right (Kunhardt et al. 25).

Although P. T. Barnum left the dime museum business for the traveling circus in the late 1860s, this change did not signal the end of his interest in minstrelsy. One of the showman’s most famous sideshow “freaks,” in fact, was African-American William Henry Johnson. Billed as the great “What Is It?” or the “Man-Monkey!,” Barnum nicknamed him “Zip” for the popular minstrel figure Zip Coon.

By the time the “What Is It?” appeared in the showman’s traveling circus, minstrel shows had become a popular performance mode in their own right. Although touring independently from the freak shows in which they got their start, they retained many elements from their original roots. According to Robert Toll, antebellum troupes were known for “assimilating successful features from other entertainment forms, beginning with Barnum’s freaks. In 1850, Cambell’s Minstrels had offered a ten-foot, three-inch African giant, ‘alias a Barnum humbug,’ at no extra cost. George Christy had responded with a twelve-foot African, ‘the largest man in the world.’ And in 1857, Charles White’s Minstrels had advertised a ‘company of Dancing Turkeys and Singing Cats’ newly arrived from Paris, ‘who will go through their performances in the style of the Ravels’ ” (Toll *Blacking* 136). As these remarks indicate, a close connection existed between the showman and blackface shows from the late 1830s. Many historians, in fact, consider Barnum a key figure in the development and dissemination of this performance mode in the United States. “More than any other individual, P. T. Barnum

pioneered the techniques that made popular entertainment successful and paved the way for minstrelsy” (Toll *Blacking* 18).<sup>4</sup>

While there is no indication that Carson McCullers was conversant with blackface minstrelsy, she was an enthusiast for Barnum-esque freak shows in which this form of American entertainment made its debut. As Virginia Spencer Carr notes in her biography, the author had a lifelong fascination with circus sideshows. “As a ten year old in the deep South in 1927, Lula Carson Smith viewed... with terror and fascination the midway freaks who made their fall trek to her hometown, Columbus, Georgia. Lula Carson knew intuitively their abject loneliness and felt a kinship through some mysterious connection” (Carr *Lonely* 1). The future author was magnetically attracted to these spectacles and could not pull herself away from the human oddities displayed. Significantly, the young McCullers frequently indulged this passion at Barnum and Bailey’s circus. When “The Greatest Show on Earth” came to town, she would forgo such treats as hot dogs and cotton candy and spend all her money viewing “the Rubber Man... The Pin Head, the Cigarette Man, the Lady with the Lizard Skin” (Carr *Lonely* 1).

In light of Carson McCullers’ childhood fascination with human freaks and oddities, it comes as no surprise that when she began writing years later, many of her characters contained qualities that deemed them abnormal. In the opening pages of her

---

<sup>4</sup> Ironically, in the same way P. T. Barnum played an instrumental role in popularizing blackface, his later ventures posed a significant threat to its continued existence. By the 1870s venues such as the showman’s traveling circus began to eclipse minstrelsy. Although the “Big Top” did not specifically feature blackface performers, it provided numerous and diverse forms of entertainment, from exotic animals and acrobats to clowns and concessions. As a result of being a more economical form of entertainment, the circus became a more popular one. By the late 1870s, Robert Toll notes that many minstrel acts found themselves “dodging circuses” to ensure ticket sales (*Blacking* 204). As Barnum’s famous slogan suggests, they simply could not compete with “The Greatest Show on Earth.” Rather than eliminating minstrelsy altogether, this phenomenon ironically brought it back to its roots. To compete with the variety at circuses, blackface attached itself to vaudeville, a mode of entertainment that had been inspired by the dime museums where minstrelsy got its start.

first novel, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* (1940), readers are introduced to an eccentric deaf-mute, a macho bartender wearing a woman's wedding ring, and a gender-bending young girl "pulling a couple of snotty babies in a wagon" (McCullers *Heart* 14). To this list, Allison Langdon from McCullers' follow-up novel, *Reflections in a Golden Eye* (1941), could be added. Distraught by the death of her daughter, the disturbed young woman cuts off her nipples with garden shears. While the specific details may change, these examples indicate that nearly all of the characters featured in Carson McCullers fiction possess some physical and/or emotional trait that deems them freakish.

Unlike many of her other fictive oddities, the tomboyish Miss Amelia Evans from *The Ballad of the Sad Café* (1943) forms a possible point of convergence between minstrel shows and the freak shows at which they debuted. In addition to being cross-eyed, over six feet tall and in love with her "freakish" cousin, the hunchback dwarf Lymon, the seemingly Caucasian young woman also appears "blackened up" in McCullers' narrative. From the opening pages of the novella, she is described as possessing a brown face, dark skin and brown fingers and hands. These racializing traits, in fact, form a central facet of her "freakishness."<sup>5</sup> Unlike Alexandra Bergson in Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!*, Amelia did not acquire such dark pigmentation from working in the sun; the townspeople insist the grotesque young woman "had been born dark" (McCullers *Ballad* 14).<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> In addition to being a human curiosity herself, Amelia's "most prized piece of furniture in the parlor was a big, glass-doored cabinet in which was kept a number of treasures and curios" (McCullers *Ballad* 35). Among the items in this bizarre collection is an acorn she picked up the day her father died and the kidney stones she passed in Cheehaw some years ago.

<sup>6</sup> Coupled with being described as "freakish," characters such as McCullers' Amelia Evans are frequently deemed grotesque. As Delma Eugene Presley notes in "The Moral Function of Distortion in Southern Gothic," the author had a "fascination with the grotesque" throughout her career. Nearly every character in her novels can be seen through this rubric. In *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, Amelia's six foot stature and crossed eyes are not the only elements that earn her this classification of "grotesque;" the young woman's

Since the publication of *The Ballad of the Sad Café* in 1943, many critics have described Carson McCullers' novella as a dream-like fantasy removed from such "real life" concerns as race. Aside from Miss Amelia's black cook, Jeff, the Southern-based narrative contains no other people of color. In the opening pages of *The South in Black and White*, McKay Jenkins wonders, "How did white writers in the 1940s construct images of race and race relations as they put together narratives that professed to have little, if anything, to 'do' with race? In what ways did images of race bubble to the surface in these texts, even those with apparently few, if any, black characters?" (1).

The repeated characterizations of Amelia Evans as brown throughout *The Ballad of the Sad Café* provides possible answers to these questions. In marked contrast to critical assumptions that McCullers' novella is divorced from race, the text combines freak shows, minstrel shows and Barnum's "Greatest Show on Earth" to comment on this issue. Released on the brink of the Feminist, Civil Rights, and Gay and Lesbian Movements, the text examines the way in which gender, sexuality and racial difference are often deemed "freakish" by society.

The fluidity that results from this shared characterization frustrates the era's faith in the "knowable" or distinct nature of identity. Recalling Mikhail Bakhtin's remarks about the transgressive nature of medieval carnivals, the carnivalesque tomboy defies conventional categorization. By presenting Amelia Evans as simultaneously black and white, female and tomboyish, *The Ballad of the Sad Café* anticipates postmodern understandings of racial and sexual boundaries as blurred, ambiguous, and even

---

gender identity can also be characterized in this manner. As Louise Westling notes, "[as] a girl the tomboy is charming, but as an adult she is grotesque" (*Sacred* 113). Although not as strong a link as her brown pigmentation, Amelia's grotesque nature forms another connection to minstrelsy. Numerous historians note that blackface figures were frequently characterized as grotesque by both popular and critical audiences.

indeterminate. During this era, these mutually exclusive binaries transformed to become mutually constructed. As the hard-and-fast distinctions between black and white broke down, so did the prevalence of racialized white tomboys in American women's fiction. Soon after the release of McCullers' novella, this more than century-long tradition largely disappeared from then nation's mainstream literature and culture.



## Part I. "Georgia on My Mind":

### The Southern Heritage and Heresy of Carson McCullers

More than any other author highlighted in this study, Carson McCullers was raised in a society that literally arose from and collapsed into skin color. Born in Columbus, Georgia in 1917, the author was immersed in a world that was predicated on race. In addition to the strict Jim Crow segregation that permeated the area, many of the adults McCullers knew as a child boasted of their involvement with the Ku Klux Klan.

In spite of being raised in such a highly prejudicial and rigidly segregated environment, Carson McCullers had progressive attitudes about race. In marked contrast to such Northern-born predecessors as Sarah Orne Jewett and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, the author believed in racial equality for blacks and whites.<sup>7</sup> Throughout her life, McCullers had a genuine interest in and sympathy for men and women of color. When the author and her husband moved to Fayetteville, Georgia soon after getting married, she boldly crossed the color line to freely associate with blacks. Her neighbors "watched her engage blacks in earnest conversation, sympathize with them, and attempt to allay their suspicions, for they, too, wondered why she sought them out" (Carr *Lonely* 86). More than simply casually conversing with African Americans on the street, the young writer often sought more deliberate and even intimate relations with them. On one especially

---

<sup>7</sup> Although Carson McCullers may have had progressive attitudes about race, her future spouse did not. Throughout his childhood, adults and older playmates frequently called James Reeves McCullers, "boy." " 'Hey, boy, you play here. Boy, you play there. Boy, get out of the game,' Reeve's teammates shouted...." (Carr *Lonely* 53). Although Virginia Spencer Carr suggests that the young man was infuriated by the moniker because it was diminutive, a racially charged reason is also possible. In slang throughout the South, the term "boy" was a well-known pejorative for black men. This racialized explanation may account for the reason McCullers' wiry future husband vowed to fight anyone who called him by this nickname (*Lonely* 53). In addition to suggesting that he was a child, the appellation also suggested that he was black. At the precocious age of thirteen, of course, McCullers engaged in a similar action by renouncing a name. Rather than protesting a racially charged nickname she had acquired, the young woman repudiated her first name, Lula. Deeming it overly feminine, Virginia Spencer Carr notes that the tomboyish girl "insisted on being called *Carson* and refused to answer again to her double name" [her emphasis] (Carr *Understanding* 7).

shocking occasion, McCullers defied the staunchest racial taboo by welcoming an African American man into her home. Virginia Spencer Carr notes, “Once the townspeople observed a black enter Carson and Reeves’ apartment, and they felt certain he was there at Carson’s invitation” (Carr *Lonely* 86).

Although the young author may have longed to defy segregation and connect with people of color in her community, the bulk of her neighbors did not approve of such behavior. Raised in the deep South during the height of Jim Crow, McCullers’ Caucasian peers were outraged by her association with blacks. On many occasions, the aspiring author’s actions caused her to be ridiculed and even ostracized. As one biographer noted, for the bulk of time McCullers lived in Fayetteville, “no one willingly socialized with her” (Carr *Lonely* 86).

The stigma Carson McCullers faced as a result of her friendship with African Americans had a profound impact on her relationship with the region of her birth. Although deeply influenced by her Georgian roots, she was also infuriated by the racial prejudice that permeated the area. In a letter the author’s husband wrote to a mutual friend, he conveyed McCullers’ frustration with the South. “ ‘I have to keep Carson tied by a leg to the bedpost at times to keep her from going mad she hates the South so’ ” (Cook 9). As a result of such sentiments, McCullers and her husband moved to New York City within a few years after getting married. Although the author would make many visits to the region of her birth, she would never again live below the Mason-Dixon line.

Throughout her residency at various locales in the North, Carson McCullers continued to challenge racial divides. The critical and popular praise she received at

various point in her career afforded her the opportunity to meet many notable writers and intellectuals. In addition to consorting with W. H. Auden and Tennessee Williams, McCullers also formed a friendship with African-American novelist Richard Wright. For a brief period during the 1940s, in fact, Wright and his family lived with the author in the now-famous February House on Middagh Street. Interestingly, it was McCullers' self-destructive drinking and not societal objections about an interracial household that prompted Wright to move his family to a private apartment. Realizing that the hard-drinking young woman "appeared to be driving herself to destruction," the African American novelist "did not want his family around when it finally occurred" (158).

In light of Carson McCullers' Georgian roots and her immersion in race relations, critics have often commented on her engagement with the South in general and such social concerns as race in particular. Frequently compared to such contemporary authors as William Faulkner and Eudora Welty, she has been seen by many as having a synoptic vision. Similar to *Absalom!*, *Absalom!* (1936) and *Delta Wedding* (1946), her writing also records the struggle of a region to come to terms with a cultural history that is largely a history of enslavement.

In spite of all this attention to Carson McCullers as a Southern writer, interest in her treatment of race relations has largely been limited to her depiction of black characters. From the publication of her first novel, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* (1940), this facet of her work has been seen as a metaphor for race in the South. In what has become an oft-quoted review, Richard Wright praised McCullers' treatment of race in the narrative: "To me, the most impressive aspect of *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* is the astonishing humanity that enables a white writer, for the first time in Southern fiction, to

handle Negro characters with as much ease and justice as those of her own race” (195).

Among other black characters, the novel spotlights African-American physician Benedict Mady Copeland, who has dedicated his life to the Civil Rights Movement.<sup>8</sup>

The critical reception of McCullers’ third novel, *The Member of the Wedding*, echoes Wright’s praise in many ways.<sup>9</sup> From its appearance in 1946, numerous commentators have lauded the compassionate portrayal of black housekeeper Bernice Sadie Brown. Existing outside of stereotypes of the black Mammy, she is as humanistic as the white characters.<sup>10</sup> At one point, for instance, she unapologetically shares her thoughts about the status of African Americans in the United States. Discussing segregation, Bernice tells Frankie that whites “done drawn completely extra bounds around colored people. They done squeezed us off in one corner by ourself” (McCullers *Member* 114). In light of such candid remarks, Ihab Hasaan, among other critics, has argued that Bernice is “the rock on which the novel rests” (Hasaan *Radical* 223).

Although both *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* and *The Member of the Wedding* contain African American characters, those men and women are only minor figures in a narrative that focuses on white men and women. In Carson McCullers’ final novel *Clock Without Hands* (1961) this pattern is reversed. From the opening pages of the narrative to its final utterances, the status of blacks is the central rather than ancillary concern. One

---

<sup>8</sup> Although *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* may provide a progressive portrait of black characters, it also presents a depressing one. After years of struggle and sacrifice, for instance, the aging Dr. Copeland is disillusioned that neither his fellow citizens nor his own children share his convictions. By the end of the text, his wife has divorced the fanatic activist while his four children have estranged themselves from him.

<sup>9</sup> In “Erasing the ‘We of Me’ and Rewriting the Racial Script,” Thadious Davis argues that the same cannot be said for the 1951 dramatic adaptation of *Member*. Unlike the full-length novel, the play is a “narrowing down of [the] author’s vision to suit preconceived racial attitudes...[and provide] the largest possible audience identification of comfortably familiar characters and stereotypical actions” (206).

<sup>10</sup> Such critical accolades, however, do not mean that the novel is devoid of all racial stereotypes. Half-way through the text, for instance, Frankie muses that Bernice’s sour and stubborn expression makes her look like a “long-eared mule” (McCullers *Member* 84).

of the text's main characters is a dark mulatto boy who is so enraged by race relations that he joins a Black Panther-like group called the "Golden Nigerians."<sup>11</sup> In the final pages of the novel, the Supreme Court rules on the desegregation of schools and the racially stagnant Southern town where the young man lives must come to terms with this decree.

The presence of racialized white tomboy Amelia Evans in *The Ballad of the Sad Café* broadens and deepens the exploration of race in McCullers' life and work. Rather than being limited to her presentation of African Americans, it can be extended to include her depiction of white characters. In light of Carson McCullers' personal as well as professional immersion in race relations, it seems improbable that she could repeatedly describe an ostensibly Caucasian character as "brown" and not realize the accompanying racial ramifications. Raised in an environment where the mere suggestion that a white person possessed black blood could trigger a lynching, she was well versed in the both the signs for and implications of skin color. Moreover, as Jane Hart argues in "Carson McCullers, Pilgrim of Loneliness," the author's work was always carefully and self-consciously constructed. "Every detail is selected, every aspect of a description is well chosen; there is nothing which does not contribute either overtly or intrinsically to the theme" (Hart 58). Although such remarks are often made about authors, McCullers' infamous perfectionism when it came to her work gives them added resonance.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Admittedly, as several critics have pointed out, the characters in *Clock Without Hands* are not as individualized as in McCullers' previous novels. Both black and white figures rely, often heavily, on racial stereotypes. As Floyd C. Watkins argues, these men and women often collapse into mere caricatures, with the "Negro as loving and cultured and intelligent as the white is cruel and ignorant and stupid" (21)

<sup>12</sup> While all authors revise sections of their work, McCullers was known for repeatedly writing and rewriting entire manuscripts. Although this practice allowed her to produce narratives that were tightly constructed, it also consumed tremendous amounts of time, energy and especially money. In "The Flowering Dream: Notes on Writing," McCullers wryly comments on this trait. In the opening pages of the

Although not commonly considered a war story, Carson McCullers' *The Ballad of the Sad Café* was both written and released during the height of American involvement in the Second World War. Appearing in the pages of *Harper's Bazaar* during 1943, each installment of the novella shared space with advertisements calling for women to join the war effort by donning trousers and taking a job in a military factory.

In a recent essay, Charles Hannon rereads *The Ballad of the Sad Café* through this original context. Arguing that the full force of McCullers' message is only apparent "when we recoup the historical subtext of the pages of *Harper's Bazaar*," he provides an in-depth discussion of the propagandistic images that accompanied the narrative (Hannon 100). While addressing the wartime restrictions the Federal Government placed on writers, Hannon quotes from a 1943 campaign called "Toughening up for War." Published in the *Magazine War Guide*, the edict asked editors to solicit "[f]iction stories that are written *war-mindedly*" [his emphasis] (Hannon 102). Even when addressing non-war subjects, these narratives "accept the changed standards of living war creates as part of the 'color' and 'background' of the stories" (Hannon 102).

With its depiction of a gender-bending Amelia Evans, Hannon goes on to discuss the way in which Carson McCullers' *The Ballad of the Sad Café* incorporates the "background" of wartime conditions for women. He argues that the tomboyish main character's thrift, economy and self-sufficiency were qualities the Federal Government wished to instill in its civilian women. Hence, McCullers' novella about an ostensibly non-normative Southern woman was ironically held up as the norm of wartime gender roles in many ways.

---

essay, she quips, "My lawyer has figured out how much I made from the book *The Member of the Wedding*, and it is, over the five years I worked on it, twenty-eight cents a day" (277).

Although Hannon's essay articulates the various ways in which wartime conditions for women form part of the "background" of *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, he does not address how these elements constitute what the *Magazine War Guide* refers to as the narrative's "color." In addition to being released during a turbulent period in gender roles for women, the novella also appeared during an important moment in the nation's racial history. Throughout the Second World War, the government was placed in the hypocritical position of asking African Americans who were being denied basic liberties at home to fight for freedom abroad. Moreover, they were requiring them to do so from the position of second class citizens. Until an executive order by Harry Truman in 1948 changed the state of affairs, the Armed Forces were segregated along race lines.

In addition to incorporating the gender background of wartime America into her narrative, Carson McCullers' *The Ballad of the Sad Café* can also be seen to literally and figuratively engage the era's color. While Charles Hannon argues "American women of the 1940s might have identified with Amelia, whose professional success during the absence of her husband... corresponded with the developing myth of their wartime fortunes" (97), white middle-class housewives may not have been the only group who saw their reflection in McCullers' novella. The repeated racialization of ostensibly Caucasian Amelia Evans as brown raises the possibility that *The Ballad of the Sad Café* may have also mirrored their black counterparts.

## Part II. "Monkey Business":

### *The Origin of Species and The Origin of McCullers' The Ballad of the Sad Café*

Past and present critics commonly cite "the almost legendary figure of a hunchback dwarf that frequented a bar in her neighborhood of Brooklyn" as the inspiration for Carson McCullers' *The Ballad of the Sad Café* (Cook Carson 12). Living in the now-famous February House on Middagh Street when she conceptualized the novella, the hunchback roamed into the Sand Street saloon almost daily. In her essay, "Brooklyn is My Neighborhood," McCullers affectionately described him as "a little hunchback who struts in proudly every evening, and is petted by everyone, given free drinks, and treated as a sort of mascot by the proprietor" (219). As these remarks indicate, thoughts of this deformed figure had infected the writer's imagination; in time, these images would serve as the nexus for her novella.

In a provocative 1964 article, Robert S. Phillips challenged this critical consensus. His essay identified another equally influential but less-discussed source of inspiration: Isak Dinesen's 1934 short story "The Monkey." Set in Europe during the nineteenth century, the narrative recounts the matchmaking efforts of the Cloister Seven's virgin Prioress to unite her nephew, Boris, and his childhood friend, Athena Hopballehus. Although the young man obtains the blessing of both his aunt and Athena's father, he is shocked to receive a rejection from the young woman herself. Trying to both console the scorned lover for his loss and make amends for his own broken promise, Count Hopballehus writes a letter to the young man explaining his daughter's desire to remain a maiden. He says that Athena has not so much renounced Boris's proposal of marriage in particular, as renounced marriage in general: "She surely feels no reluctance toward this



alliance... but she tells me that she will never marry, and that it is even impossible for her to consider the question at all” (Dinesen “Monkey” 135).

Outraged by her nephew’s rejection, the Prioress plots a sinister plan to force the young girl into wedlock. Inviting Athena to dinner, she stupefies her first with intoxicating wine and then with drugging incense. After the young woman is sufficiently incapacitated, Boris seduces her. The next morning, the Prioress smugly announces “ ‘that Boris, guilty as he be, has still a sense of duty left. He will marry you even now’ ” (Dinesen “Monkey” 157). Although Athena at first flatly refuses, she is frightened by the possibility of bearing an illegitimate child and disgracing her family. Hence, she consents to marry Boris but not without vowing to murder him “whenever I can do so” (Dinesen “Monkey” 160).

An avid reader and longtime enthusiast of Isak Dinesen’s work, Carson McCullers first encountered “The Monkey” in 1938. As Louise Westling notes, the author “never ceased to praise” the “strange ambience” of the collection *Seven Gothic Tales*, in which the story appeared (120). In many interviews and magazine articles, McCullers claimed “to reread Dinesen every year” (Jenkins 156). When the pair met at an Academy of Arts and Letters dinner, the young author was thrilled to learn that Dinesen was also an enthusiast of her work; the respect and admiration she felt for the South African author was mutual. Years later, in the autobiographical essay “Isak Dinesen: In Praise of Radiance,” McCullers lovingly recalled the friendship that the two writers shared.

During the five years that elapsed between McCullers’ reading Dinesen’s “The Monkey” and composing *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, Robert S. Phillips argues that the

short story haunted McCullers' imagination. Although Dinesen's narrative is set in Europe during the nineteenth century and McCullers' novella in the American South during the early twentieth century, numerous parallels exist between Athena and Amelia. Both characters, for instance, are female "giantesses" or Amazons, measuring over six feet in height. In addition, both are raised exclusively by their fathers and possess many tomboyish traits. Clad in overalls and swamp boots, the muscular Amelia is a skilled carpenter and shrewd businesswoman. Meanwhile, Athena "has been.... son and daughter" to her father (Dinesen "Monkey" 136). Finally—and perhaps most strikingly—both young women violently rebuff the sexual advances of men. The first time they are approached by suitors, the young women knock out several of the gentlemen's teeth. On the second romantic overture, both Athena and Amelia engage in brutal wrestling matches with the men.

Given these parallels, the Prioress' pet monkey, to which Athena has a bizarre attachment, is often read as the textual counterpart to Amelia's equally bizarre human "pet": her hunchback cousin. From the moment the young woman first sees the mysterious traveler, she feels a magnetic attachment to him. Inviting the stranger into her home, she is soon offering him the master bedroom, chauffeuring him to parades in neighboring towns, and even lavishing trinkets on him. During Cousin Lymon's six year residence at the Café, the woman who has a reputation for being stingy "can refuse him nothing" (Cook *Carson* 88).

Although Lymon Willis may be the structural equivalent to the monkey in Dinesen's narrative, he does not resemble this animal. Nowhere in McCullers' *The Ballad of the Sad Café* is the hunchback described in simian ways. As many critics have

pointed out, bird imagery is used to characterize him. When the wayward wanderer gives Amelia the picture of his mother and her half-sister, for instance, his twisted hands are likened to “dirty sparrow claws” (McCullers *Ballad* 8).<sup>13</sup>

While the title of Isak Dinesen’s short story “The Monkey” denotes a legitimate animal, this scientific classification is not the only way in which this word can be interpreted. Throughout the South, where Carson McCullers was raised and where she set *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, the term “monkey” doubled as a racial pejorative. As Stephen Jay Gould argues in *The Mismeasure of Man*, the pseudoscience of craniometry during the nineteenth century established a racist hierarchy of human races and ethnicities. Comparing such elements as facial bone structure and cranial capacity, it argued that the high forehead and thin nose of Caucasians resembled the refined features of Greco-Roman figures while the broad nose and large jaw of Negroes mirrored uncivilized primates such as monkeys and chimpanzees. By fortifying the racist association of blacks with animals in antebellum America, these conclusions justified the various forms of socio-economic discrimination against them, especially slavery. If people of color were “scientifically proven” to be little more than primates, they were dehumanized. Hence, liberal arguments that their “inferiority [was] purely cultural and that it [could] be completely eradicated by education to a Caucasian standard” seemed preposterous (Gould *Mismeasure* 32). “Savage” blacks could no more be taught “civilized” (white) ways than a tiger could be taught table manners. As a result, prior to the publication of Darwin’s *Origin of Species*, theorists quibbled over the biological relationship, if any, between the races. Polygenists argued that whites and blacks arose

---

<sup>13</sup> McCullers’ 1930s short story, “Court in the West Eighties,” also contains such imagery. Observing a young cellist player in a nearby apartment, the narrator says “her little hands [were as] delicate as a sparrow’s claws” (McCullers “Court” 14).

from separate developmental chains. Meanwhile, monogenists insisted that they were merely at different points of evolutionary progression.

Although seldom discussed in histories of the circus, this fascination with the origins of species can be linked with the origin of sideshow freaks. Throughout the nineteenth century, African Americans were frequently used as amusements for the largely white circus audiences. Possessing a skin tone, culture, and even hair texture that seemed “exotic” to middle class Caucasians, black men and women were presented as both scientific specimens and freak show spectacles.<sup>14</sup> Exemplifying this trend, Andrea Stulman Dennett argues in *Weird and Wonderful: The Dime Museum in America* that in addition to evoking minstrelsy, Barnum’s “Man-Monkey” was also “[c]apitalizing on the ever growing interest in theories of evolution and the origin of man” (30).<sup>15</sup> Similar to an orangutan named Mlle. Milly that Barnum had exhibited in the 1840s, the mentally retarded Johnson who “stood between four and five feet tall... with a large nose, protruding eyes, and no hair except a little tuft at the center of his forehead” was presented as the possible “missing link” (Dennett 30). To accentuate this connection, Barnum costumed the “What is It?” in “a monkey or other animal coverall, and positioned him in front of a jungle background” (Dennett 30). Moreover, the showman instructed Johnson to speak “jungle language,” smile continuously and lean on a long staff he had given him as if the task of standing on two legs was too much for him. If

---

<sup>14</sup> For additional examples of this phenomenon, see Rachel Adams’ *Sideshow U.S.A.: Freaks and the American Cultural Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2001). In chapter two, Adams discusses the display of Otwa Benga, a Batwa Pygmy from Central Africa in the monkey house at the Bronx Zoo, and Ishi, a Yahi Indian, in the Hearst Museum of Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley during the early-twentieth century.

<sup>15</sup> Several years before blackface minstrelsy made its debut on Barnum’s stage, the showman billed the popular plate-spinner Signor Vivalla. Although Italian and not African American, Barnum characterized the gentleman by the racially charged term, “trick monkey” (Adams *Pluribus* 4).

Johnson failed in these duties or, even worse, revealed his true identity, the showman vowed to dock his pay (Kunhardt et al. 149).<sup>16</sup>

P. T. Barnum's display of William Henry Johnson as "The Man-Monkey" was not the first time he had used a person of color as a spectacle. In 1835, one of the showman's first hoaxes was a black woman he claimed had been the childhood nurse of George Washington. Although billed as an astounding 161 years old, Joice Heth was barely beyond middle age. Like many of his other ruses, both her astonishing age and her connection to the first President had been fabricated. After purchasing Heth from her Kentucky master, Barnum and his partner Levi Lyman "forcibly extract[ed] her teeth, coach[ed] her in religion and in the legend of George Washington, and artificially age[d] her on a diet of whiskey and eggs" (Adams *Pluribus* 3).

Although journalists eventually uncovered Barnum's Joice Heth fraud, the showman would continue to use people of color as attractions in both his museum sideshows and later in the main ring of his traveling circus. As Andrea Stulman Dennett asserts, venues such as the showman's American Museum in New York were known for their "displays of human primitivism" (*Weird* 7). While such racially charged attractions as "Pure White Negroes, or Moors" were frequent sights at Barnum's New York freak shows, his (in)famous "Congress of Nations" took this practice an astonishing step further (Werner 247). In an 1882 letter the showman wrote to various American dignitaries living abroad, he articulated his vision for the project: "I desire to carry out as

---

<sup>16</sup> As Andrea Stulman Dennett argues, the beliefs that African Americans were genetically inferior helped inspire and ironically even "excuse" Barnum's exhibition of the "Man-Monkey" or "What is It?" By connecting his display of an African American "with 'scientific' theories of evolution, Barnum avoided making a racial statement about blacks in antebellum America. While a Northern white audience surely was curious about slavery, Barnum masterfully averted the politically-charged discourse on the status of African Americans with the ambiguity of the 'What Is It?' title" (31).

far as possible an idea I have long entertained of forming a collection, in pairs or otherwise, of all the uncivilized races in existence, and my present object is to ask you kindly to render me what assistance is in your power to acquire any specimens of these uncivilized peoples” (Saxon *Letters* 226 – 7).

While it took Barnum nearly two years to assemble the “collection, in pairs or otherwise, of all the uncivilized races,” the menagerie received top billing as the “Ethnological Congress of Savage and Barbarous Tribes” when it debuted at the 1884 circus season. Containing men and women from such “exotic” locales as India, Africa, Australia, Polynesia and Afghanistan, “[n]othing of its kind had ever been seen before in America or elsewhere” (Kunhardt et al. 296). Echoing the fraught relationship between whites and people of color, the showman “saw himself as a kind of father figure to all these assembled ‘child-like’ peoples of the world” (Kunhardt et al. 296). As a result of this attitude, rather than educating white middle-class Americans about diversity, Barnum’s “Congress of Nations” simply reinforced racist color lines.<sup>17</sup>

Although seldom discussed in biographies and critical essays, Carson McCullers participated in this phenomenon in many ways. The author’s interest in the freak show Other can be connected with her interest in the racial Other. Long before McCullers began frequenting circus sideshows, she would walk through the segregated Negro sections of town, entranced by the strange sounds of blues music and black dialect. In the words of Richard M. Cook, “It was in her ramblings through Columbus’ hot main streets, its cramped Negro quarters, the slum dwellings of the mill workers and the shaded avenues of the wealthy that Carson picked up the myriad impressions that form the rich

---

<sup>17</sup> For an in-depth treatment of Barnum’s use of non-Western peoples, see chapter five of Andrea Stulman Dennett’s *Weird and Wonderful: The Dime Museum in America* (New York: NYU, 1997).

sensuous world of her later fiction (*Carson* 3 – 4). These encounters constituted her first experience with the non-normative and undoubtedly fueled her interest in the physical oddities of sideshow freaks years later.

Rather than forming a tangential issue to the intertextuality between Isak Dinesen's "The Monkey" and Carson McCullers *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, these details form a central concern. In spite of numerous similarities between Athena and Amelia, one crucial difference remains: their skin tones. While Athena is described as "white as milk.... So fair and clear of skin that she seemed to lighten up the hall on entering it" (Dinesen "Monkey" 129), the seemingly Caucasian Amelia Evans is repeatedly characterized as brown or dark throughout *The Ballad of the Sad Café*. The manner in which the young woman acquires a dark hue in many ways resembles the experiences of the Caucasian tomboys discussed in previous chapters. Numerous references are made, for instance, to the young woman's brown face, dark hair and especially her brown fingers and hands. Warming herself by the fire in the opening segment of the novel, "her brown, long face was somewhat brightened" by the glow of the stove (McCullers *Ballad* 23). Moreover, whenever Amelia is angered, her "face darkened so that it looked quite black" (McCullers *Ballad* 31). Unlike Alexandra Bergson in Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!*, Amelia did not acquire such dark pigmentation from working in the sun; the townspeople insist she "had been born dark" (McCullers *Ballad* 14).

In light of this unexpected and even unexplained coloration, one of Amelia's favorite issues to ponder is "the reason why Negroes are black" (McCullers *Ballad* 37). As the narrator notes, this subject is one of the few "topics of conversation... in which she took pleasure" (McCullers *Ballad* 36). Because it brought to mind "problems which

could be worked over for decades and still remain insoluble,” the question was fascinatingly “interminable” (McCullers *Ballad* 36).

In addition to being overtly described as “brown” and “dark,” Miss Amelia is often associated with events that contribute to her swarthy characterization. When her cousin Lyman comes to town searching for his kin, for instance, he echoes statements often used by slave catchers. Arriving at his relative’s home, he tells a group of men, “ ‘I am hunting for Miss Amelia Evans’ ” (McCullers *Ballad* 7). A few days later, when rumors circulate that Amelia has murdered the hunchback, the townspeople describe her apprehension in ways that more accurately characterize a lynching rather than an arrest.<sup>18</sup> The men and woman imagine “dragging... Miss Amelia through the streets on the way to prison” (McCullers *Ballad* 14). Given this depiction, it comes as no surprise when Amelia symbolically tears her ex-husband’s old Klansman’s robe to cover her tobacco plants.

When Marvin Macy is released on parole later in the narrative, Amelia’s account of their marriage adds to this characterization. From the moment his brother relays the news, murmurs of Marvin’s “sins left unmentioned” infect the Café (McCullers *Ballad* 43). Although these transgressions are never named, similar to the fate of many black women at the hands of white men, they suggest rape.<sup>19</sup> When Amelia first learns of her ex-husband’s release, her inability to complete a sentence describing him to Cousin

---

<sup>18</sup> The same could be said for Bernice’s descriptions of WWII atrocities in *The Member of the Wedding* (1946). Discussing the war with Frankie and John Henry, the black housekeeper imagines “stiff corpses hanging from the Europe trees” (McCullers *Member* 91).

<sup>19</sup> In an untitled short story that is a early prototype for *The Member of the Wedding*, McCullers explores this theme more directly. In the final pages of the unpublished narrative, readers learn that Andrew Leander engaged in sexual relations with his black housekeeper, Vitalis, while visiting her home in the Negro section of town. Trying to console the bewildered youth afterward, Vitalis tells him it “ain’t nothing real wrong” because, sadly, “It ain’t the first time” this has happened to her with a white man (McCullers “Untitled” 102). Uncomforted by this thought and fearful others will learn of his shameful behavior, Andrew leaves town and spends three years roaming the nation.



Lymon adds further credence to this belief. After indignantly saying Macy is not worth mentioning “[b]ecause he is a -----’ .... Her voice hoarsened” and she was unable finish her thought (McCullers *Ballad* 43).

In this way, the destruction of Amelia’s Café by Lymon and Macy after the wrestling match can be read as more than the retribution many critics have interpreted. Put simply, it can be seen as a symbolic rape. Unable to possess Amelia sexually when they were married, Marvin gets revenge by “violating” her possessions. Even more tellingly, this event eliminates or at least lightens the young woman’s signature dark hue. When the narrator describes Amelia years after the destruction of the Café and Lymon’s desertion, her face is described as both “sexless” and “white” (3).<sup>20</sup>

In the racially charged year of 1961, Carson McCullers released her fourth and final novel, *Clock Without Hands*.<sup>21</sup> A gripping narrative about the struggles of a mulatto young man to find a sense of identity and community in a racially stagnated Southern town, the text received harsh reviews. In addition to attacking its loosely constructed plot, many commentators criticized what they considered its heavy-handed treatment of race.<sup>22</sup> Although black/white relations appear in nearly all of the author’s other novels,

---

<sup>20</sup> Interestingly, McCullers’ 1930s short story “The Orphanage” reverses this pattern by drawing on a different set of stereotypes. The narrator’s young friend Hattie “explained... what made colored people colored” (McCullers “Orphanage” 37). Yoking together sexual double standards with hysterical fears of interracial romance, Hatties says, “If a girl... kissed a boy she turned into a colored person, and when she was married her children would be colored, too. Only brothers were excepted from this law” (McCullers “Orphanage” 37).

<sup>21</sup> As Judith Giblin James notes in *Wunderkind*, the text was released only “four months after the Civil Rights demonstrators known as Freedom Riders sustained bloody attacks by white vigilantes in Alabama” (4).

<sup>22</sup> Perhaps Virginia Spencer Carr best exemplified these sentiments when he said that “unlike the earlier books, there is no single central event holding the action together” (*Understanding* 111). Ironically, the novel’s portrait approach is a formalistic throwback to McCullers’ first novel, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*. Similar to *Clock Without Hands*, the text shifts between four central characters. Although this vignette-like technique was praised in 1940, the style was almost universally condemned when she revisited it two decades later. In this text, critics and commentators thought this approach rendered the narrative choppy and disconnected.

*Clock* was the first to spotlight the issue. To readers accustomed to McCullers' fixation on the dream-like world of freaks and oddities, her social commentary was both unexpected and unwanted. Many lamented her departure from this "true" subject to what they considered a "preachy" and even propagandistic style. In a critical overview of McCullers' work, for instance, Richard M. Cook considered *Clock without Hands* "seriously marred" for its protracted indulgence in social issues (123). Meanwhile, "Gore Vidal termed the novel a 'near-failure' because McCullers, whose vision had always been 'intensely private,' threw her work 'a little out of kilter' by pursuing a public issue" (McDowell Carson 97).<sup>23</sup>

The reception history of Carson McCullers' 1943 novella *The Ballad of the Sad Café* echoes this trend. In many ways, the text's literary merit rests on its connection to a mythic land of fairy tales rather than its ability "to gesture toward the problems of the world at large" (James Wunderkind 3).<sup>24</sup> As Richard M. Cook notes, the romance between Amelia and Lymon "resembles in some ways the kind of love that might attract a princess to a frog or a beautiful girl to a beast" (Carson 101). As a result, articles have been written on the elfish ear-wiggling Cousin Lymon and the timeless surrealism of the Southern mill town.

The repeated characterization of Amelia Evans as brown, the novella's connection with Dinesen's "The Monkey," and this animal's link with both African Americans and

---

<sup>23</sup> As a result of such drubbing, most critics attribute the novel's five-month stint at sixth place on the best-seller list to the fifteen years that had elapsed since the release of McCullers' last book rather than to the literary merits of *Clock Without Hands* itself.

<sup>24</sup> A notable exception to this trend is Margaret Walsh's article, "Carson McCullers' Anti-Fairy Tale: 'The Ballad of the Sad Café.'" Published in a 1988 issue of *Pembroke Magazine*, the essay argues that "unlike the redeeming love of fairy tales, love in McCullers' tale is the spell that weakens the will, the enchantment that can dwarf giants" (43). Unlike the "happily ever after" endings that are the hallmark of this genre, the Cinderella-esque Amelia is left with only defeat, destruction and desertion at the end of McCullers' novella.

the displays of blacks in freak shows all call this belief into question. Rather than using the fantasy realm of freaks to divorce or at least distance itself from real life concerns, the text may employ the freakishly dark Amelia Evans to engage them. The presence of this racialized character undermines current critical consensus that the narrative's social content is only "little or sporadically noticed" (James *Wunderkind* 3). In marked contrast to its reputation of being a dream-like fairy tale removed from the concerns of contemporary society, *The Ballad of the Sad Café* offers a critical, albeit coded, commentary on them.

In his oft-quoted discussion about the social purpose of medieval carnivals, Mikhail Bakhtin argued that the cathartic festivities allowed men and women from all stations to be "reborn for purely human relations" (Bakhtin 46). Although the carnivalesque appearance of Carson McCullers' Amelia Evans does not precipitate reincarnation, it does impact a certain type of "relations," namely her sexuality. In addition to her freakish physical appearance and dark skin tone connecting her to racially charged elements in American culture, Amelia's gender identity and even sexual orientation also yoke her to prevailing attitudes about the "primitive."

### Part III. Freakishly “Queer” and “Queerly” Freakish:

#### The (Primitive) Sexuality of Amelia Evans

Miss Amelia's dark skin and freakish features are not the only elements that contribute to her racialization. Her gender identity and even sexual development can also be seen in both non-normative and racially charged ways. Although over thirty years old, Amelia still behaves like an adolescent child in many ways. Echoing pre-teen tomboys Mick Kelly in McCullers' *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* and Frankie Addams from *The Member of the Wedding*, she wears overalls, crops her hair short, and has the unconscious habit of poking the muscles in her arm.

Significantly, Amelia's resistance to female gender roles carries over into sexual ones. Even in adulthood, she maintains prepubescent attitudes about sexuality, caring “nothing for love or men” (McCullers *Ballad* 4).<sup>25</sup> After marrying the handsome Marvin Macy, for instance, she refuses to consummate the marriage. When her new spouse tries to take his new wife to bed, she seems naïvely unaware of marital relations. Shocked and even disgusted by his advances, Amelia stomps downstairs and spends the night smoking her father's pipe with her feet up on the kitchen stove. After ten days of violently repudiating Marvin, Amelia throws her new husband out of the house, victorious in her refusal to engage in intercourse.

Contrary to what one might assume given this portrait, Amelia Evans is not a lesbian. Although a gifted herbalist who has a reputation for being able to heal any disease, she is both ignorant of and even repulsed by the female body. If a woman came

---

<sup>25</sup> As Virginia Spencer Carr notes in *Understanding Carson McCullers*, Amelia's dislike for men is ironic given her identification in dress, demeanor and even “labors of sausage making, bricklaying and carpentry” with them (59).

in complaining of a “female trouble,” Amelia’s face “darkened with shame” and she was unable to help (McCullers *Ballad* 17).<sup>26</sup>

In addition to the “queer” repulsion Amelia feels for the female body and her equally bizarre rejection of her husband, the tomboyish figure engages in another relationship that can also be classified as non-normative: she becomes enamored with her freakish cousin, the hunchback Lymon Willis. Although an ostensibly heterosexual coupling, it is also a “queer” match in many ways. From the moment the hunchback enters Amelia’s house, their relationship is “an inversion of traditional heterosexual patterns” (Westling “Amazon” 115); Amelia assumes the traditional male role while Lymon frequently plays the part of a woman. During their first meal together, for instance, Amelia “eats like a field hand” with her elbows on the table and legs apart beneath her chair (McCullers *Ballad* 11). Meanwhile, the finicky Cousin Lymon takes dainty bites and effeminately insists upon a clean place for his second course (McCullers *Ballad* 11). Later in the narrative, when Amelia invites Lymon to move in with her, she offers him the spacious master bedroom while she sleeps in the small chamber she had as a child. Throughout Lymon’s stay with Amelia, such gender reversals continue. While Amelia serves the men liquor and keeps the books, for instance, Lymon gossips with the customers. Recalling stereotypes about a doting husband indulging his convivial wife, Amelia drives the hunchback to revivals, parades and funerals (McCullers *Ballad* 24).<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> In spite of this decidedly “unfeminine” behavior, Amelia does possess at least one attribute that conforms to traditional gender roles: her affinity for helping children. Fearful of causing pain to a little boy who needs a boil lanced, Amelia gives him a sedative. After making sure that he is asleep, she gently lifts “the child from the table, being careful not to touch the sore part of his leg” (McCullers *Ballad* 41).

<sup>27</sup> As several critics have pointed out, the pocket watch Amelia gives Lymon during his second year at the Café forms a rare instance when gender roles are not reversed between the duo. Not only is the watch a gender-appropriate gift from a woman to a man, but the kidney stones “set as ornaments in the watch chain” possess a strange kinship with childbirth. The manner in which Amelia describes passing the stones recalls delivering a baby: “It had been a terrible experience, from the first minute to the last, and all

Although Cousin Lymon and Amelia Evans live together for six years, they do not engage in a sexual or even romantic relationship. Their feelings are either purely platonic or—given Lymon’s desertion with Marvin Macy at the end of the novella—apparently one-sided. More importantly, while Amelia pines after the “brokeback” claiming to be her kin, it is not clear that she would want a physical relationship even if he were interested in having one. As far as the narrator notes, the young woman never attempts to kiss Lymon and only touches him for medicinal purposes: she gives him menthol rubs to ease his tubercular lungs and ointment to loosen his rheumatic joints.<sup>28</sup>

Given these details, in the language of contemporary gay and lesbian theory, Amelia possesses a “queerly” freakish or freakishly “queer” sexuality. As if anticipating this classification, the life and even lovers of this tomboyish figure are repeatedly characterized as “queer” throughout the narrative. In the opening pages of the novella, for instance, her union with Marvin Macy is described as a “queer marriage” (McCullers *Ballad* 5). Similarly, her next object of affection, Cousin Lymon, is described as “queerly-shaped” (McCullers *Ballad* 18). Significantly, the *Oxford English Dictionary* notes that the word “queer” was first used as a reference to homosexuality by McCullers’ close friend and February House roommate W. H. Auden in 1932. Recalling her own

---

she had got out of it were those two little stones; she was bound to set great store by them, or else admit to a mighty sorry bargain” (McCullers *Ballad* 35–6).

<sup>28</sup> The only possible exception to this condition is when Amelia’s ex-husband is released on parole. From the moment Marvin Macy walks into the Café, Lymon is magnetically attracted to him. Forming a homosexual crush that is so common in McCullers’ narratives, the hunchback follows Marvin around. Even when the ex-con begins insulting and ridiculing Lymon, he is not deterred. Seeing this behavior, Amelia becomes frustrated by her cousin’s infatuation with her nemesis and decides to forgo her overalls and wear her Sunday dress every day. As several critics have pointed out, however, it is unclear whether Amelia dons the feminine garment to entice Lymon or to taunt Macy. Not only does the dress suggest the feminine role Amelia refused to play when the pair was married, but its red color also suggests her intact virginity.

experience of living with Auden and other homosexuals in Brooklyn, McCullers characterized it as a “queer aggregate of artists” (Adams 555).

During the period *The Ballad of the Sad Café* was written and released, Amelia’s “queer” behavior would not have been seen as the mere personality “quirk” or dispositional “idiosyncrasy” that it might have a century earlier. By 1951, when the novella was published in book form, the writings of Sigmund Freud had entered the mainstream. As Richard H. Pells notes in *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age*, the father of modern psychology had become a veritable demigod in both popular and intellectual circles by this period (72). Everyone was either reading Freud or at least talking about him. As Pells notes, his ideas were referenced in intellectual conversation and streetcorner humor alike (72).

In addition to developing his now-famous theory on the “Oedipal Complex” in men, Sigmund Freud also explored sexual development in women. In several essays and lectures, the father of modern psychology revealed his theories on such female sexual dysfunctions as frigidity. Echoing the “dark” characterization of McCullers’ Amelia Evans, he frequently employed colonialist language in his analyses. Lecturing on “Femininity,” for instance, Freud argued that sexual aversion in women arose from “primitive” or arrested psycho-sexual development (114).

Although Sigmund Freud died four years before *The Ballad of the Sad Café* was first published, had he encountered Amelia Evans, one may surmise that he would have diagnosed her with the sexual dysfunction of frigidity. Similar to many of the women in his case studies, Amelia has an aversion to—and even terror of—intimacy with men. Her repulsion to heterosexual sex is so strong, in fact, that she will use violence to avoid it. In

this way, not only does the tomboyish character possess the racializing traits of brown skin and dark features, but she is also in possession of what popular Freudian psychology of the time would have deemed “primitive” sexual development.

As several critics and biographers have noted, Amelia’s distaste for sexual contact in many ways mirrors McCullers’ own feelings about intimacy. Although the author flirted shamelessly with both men and women, she was disinterested in physical relations. While living at both the February House and Yaddo artists’ community, she was known to crawl into bed with both genders.<sup>29</sup> As McKay Jenkins points out, this proclivity arose from a desire for a sleeping partner, not a sexual one. Similar to many of the characters in her novels and short stories, “Sex, to her, was violent, terrifying, spiritually isolating” (Jenkins 148).<sup>30</sup> Such a strong aversion to physical intimacy, however, did not preclude the author from becoming infatuated with members of both sexes, often in simultaneous and triangulated relationships. Although married to Reeves at the time, she dedicated her second novel, *Reflections in a Golden Eye* (1941), to a woman with whom she had fallen desperately in love, Annemarie Clarac-Schwarzenbach.<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile, during the time in which McCullers was composing *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, she developed a crush on fellow writer Katherine Ann Porter. In the words of several biographers, this infatuation in many ways mirrored Amelia’s relationship with Cousin Lymon. Recalling the

---

<sup>29</sup> For a careful and detailed analysis of McCullers’ sexual identity, see Lori J. Kenschaft’s “Homoerotics and Human Connections: Reading Carson McCullers ‘As a Lesbian’ ” in Beverly Lyon Clark and Melvin J. Friedman’s *Critical Essays on Carson McCullers* (New York: G. K. Hall, 1996) and Rachel Adams’ “ ‘A Mixture of Delicious and Freak’: The Queer Fiction of Carson McCullers” in *American Literature* (vol. 71, no. 3, September 1999).

<sup>30</sup> This sentiment applied even to intimacy with her husband. “In Paris in 1945, Carson told her friend Eleanor Clark ‘about her hatred of sexual intercourse with men, including her husband Reeves’ ” (Jenkins 161). As one might imagine, such feelings took their toll on her marriage. In a letter Reeves wrote to a friend, he lamented, ‘We simply are not husband and wife any more.... After all, she sleeps with whom she pleases, sees whom she wants. I’m not her husband any longer’ (Jenkins 161).

<sup>31</sup> For a detailed account of McCullers’ short but salacious affair with this young woman, see Virginia Spencer Carr’s biography, *The Lonely Hunter* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday & Co., 1975).



situation years later, Porter wrote, "I have many friends who are homosexual and the fact does not bother me, but with Carson... the thought seemed intolerable' " (Jenkins 161). Complicating such love triangles even further, when *The Ballad of the Sad Café* was finally released, it was dedicated to David Diamond—a man with whom both she and her husband had been romantically involved.<sup>32</sup>

Although Amelia Evans' romantic relationships are not as complex as those of her creator, her sexual ambiguity in many ways mirrors her racial ambiguity. In addition to being an ostensibly Caucasian figure who has brown skin, she is also a grown woman who is sexually repulsed by both men and women. Moreover, in the language of popular Freudian psychology, Amelia's frigidity contributes to and even helps construct her racialization. In both skin tone and sexual orientation, she can be characterized as "primitive."

In her outline for the narrative that would eventually become *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, Carson McCullers stressed that her themes would not be "stated nakedly" because she believed "a good book implies a great deal more than the words actually say" (McCullers "Mute" 124). Although the author never made such proclamations about *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, the same remarks could apply. Rather than making blunt declarations about the construction of race, gender and sexuality in the United States, McCullers provides a coded commentary on the complex feedback cycles that exist between them. Decades before the emergence of either postcolonial or queer theories,

---

<sup>32</sup> In 1941, McCullers' liberal attitudes about race combined with her conversance in "queer" sexualities precipitated a threat on her life. Virginia Spencer Carr notes in her biography, "An anonymous phone call at home a few weeks after the appearance of *Reflections in a Golden Eye* upset her family far more than it did Carson. An alleged Ku Klux Klansman called to say that he and his friends were going to get her that night. She had been a 'nigger lover' in her first book, he said, and how she had proven herself 'a queer' as well. Carson's indignant father waited all night on the front porch of their Starke Avenue home to greet the Klansman with a loaded shotgun and was disappointed when no one attempted to carry out the threat" (Carr *Lonely* 136 – 7).

McCullers' narrative often suggests "a great deal more than the words actually say" on the convergence of these ideologies.

## Part IV. The (Frankie) Addams Family:

### Physical Anomaly and/as Racial Ambiguity in the Later Fiction of Carson

#### McCullers

Although this chapter focuses on the racialization of ostensibly Caucasian Amelia Evans, she is not the only character in Carson McCullers' work whose freakish physical appearance makes her racially ambiguous. In many of the novels and short stories the author published after *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, she included at least one figure whose distinct physical nature causes them to be racially indistinct.

Most famous among these perhaps is Bernice Sadie Brown from her 1946 *The Member of the Wedding*. When a vicious ex-husband gouges out her eye during a fight, the black housekeeper selects a glass replacement that boasts a blue iris. Bernice's vision for a racially harmonious future helps account for this unexpected and even "freakish" choice.<sup>33</sup> Unlike the fantasies of Frankie and John Henry, her visions include a world with "no colored people and no white people to make the colored people feel cheap and sorry through their lives" (McCullers *Member* 91). Echoing her choice in glass eyes, all human beings would be "light brown color with blue eyes and black hair" (McCullers *Member* 91). As Marguerite Young observes, "Bernice does not precisely dream of turning white, but her blue glass eye is a terrible commentary on the color line, and the arbitrary divisions which shut people off from each other" (152).

More than a decade later, in *Clock Without Hands* (1961), McCullers took Bernice's fetish for brown skin and blue eyes one step further. Rather than acquiring

---

<sup>33</sup> In *Sacred Groves and Ravaged Gardens*, Louisa Westling takes this observation one step further. She argues that Bernice's kitchen can be seen as "a living freak show peopled by a transvestite boy, a black cook with a left eye of bright blue glass, and a gangling tomboy. It is a horrifying prison for Frankie" (*Sacred* 181).

such features artificially, the dark-skinned Sherman Pew was born with haunting slate blue eyes. Before readers are formally introduced to the eighteen year-old, repeated mention is made of this unusual and—to the white pharmacist J. T. Malone—terrifying trait. Echoing stereotypes about men and women who hail from biracial pairings, Sherman often displays a confused sense of his racial identity. Although the boy keeps a record of local hate crimes against African Americans, he also possesses a strong reverence for white culture. Playing German music on the piano and boasting of his appetite for caviar, Sherman mimics the manners and mores of the white aristocracy.<sup>34</sup>

In addition to black characters who cross-identify with white culture, several of McCullers' Caucasian figures possess strong bonds to the African American community. Most significant to the racialization of Amelia Evans is Frankie Addams from her 1946 novel, *The Member of the Wedding*. Constituting McCullers' most famous text and the one on which her reputation is largely based, the narrative also showcases a racialized white tomboy. In the words of Thadious M. Davis, "Frankie's suppressed identifications throughout the text... are with those racialized as black" ("Erasing" 208). In addition to describing her face as a " 'dark ugly mug' " early in the novel, the young girl experiences a profound moment of identification with an elderly black man. While walking to the market on a Saturday morning, Frankie notices "[a]n old colored man, stiff and proud on his rattling wagon seat" driving a "sad blindered mule" (McCullers *Member* 50). When the pair makes eye contact, the young girl "looked at him, he looked at her, and to the

---

<sup>34</sup> Recalling the trope of the "tragic mulatto," Sherman's divided nature leads to his self-destruction. Feeling ashamed that he has not done more to work for racial equality after discovering that his father was black, the young man rents a house in a white neighborhood. Within weeks after moving in, this bold act proves to be a suicidal one. While playing the piano, Sherman is killed when a white supremacist bombs his house. Ironically, the bombing was organized by a white man who used to refer to him as a "jewel," his former boss, Judge Fox Clane.

outward appearance that was all. But in that glance, F. Jasmine felt between his eyes and her own eyes a new unnamable connection, as though they were know to each other” (McCullers *Member* 50). At one point, this connection became so strong that the tomboyish youngster had a “vision of his home field and country” (McCullers *Member* 50).<sup>35</sup>

Although Frankie experiences the “same thing... again and again” with many men and women as she continues walking, this process is precipitated by a person of color.<sup>36</sup> Recalling McCullers’ dual fascination with black culture and circus sideshows, Frankie’s only other identifiatory experience prior to this moment is with freaks at the circus sideshow. The young girl “was afraid of all the Freaks, for it seemed to her that they had looked at her in a secret way and tried to connect their eyes with hers, as though to say: ‘we know you’ ” (McCullers *Member* 18). Echoing P. T. Barnum’s display of the African American “What is it?,” one of the freaks that entranced Frankie was the “Wild Nigger.” Similar to many of the showman’s hoaxes, rumors circulate that this figure is not from “some savage island,” but—as the narrator notes—simply “a crazed colored man from Selma” (McCullers *Member* 14).

In addition to sharing ostensibly Caucasian tomboys who have various links to black culture, *The Member of the Wedding* and *The Ballad of the Sad Café* also share similar dates of composition. As several critics and biographers have noted, in the

---

<sup>35</sup> As both Margaret McDowell and McKay Jenkins argue, Frankie also shares a connection with Bernice Sadie Brown. When the black housekeeper laments Honey’s need to lash out, the young tomboy concedes that she also feels “like I want to break something, too... like I wish I could just tear down the whole town” (McCullers *Member* 114). For these reasons, McDowell characterizes Bernice as “Frankie’s mirror” (85).

<sup>36</sup> In addition to having a connection to African Americans, Frankie also flirts with a Hispanic identity. While talking with her neighbors one day, the young tomboy quips, “Me speak no English” (McCullers *Member* 56). In spite of this remark, Frankie’s claim to a Chicana identity possesses neither the strength nor the duration of her connection with the old black man or the sideshow freaks. Unlike the other experiences, she is not transformed by her claim. For Frankie, wearing the sombrero and pretending to not understand English was just imaginative play.

summer of 1941 Carson McCullers interrupted work on the manuscript that would eventually become *The Member of the Wedding* to draft *The Ballad of the Sad Café*. Haunted by thoughts of the new narrative, the author went to the artists' community Yaddo where she spent just six weeks drafting the novella.

Given the simultaneous composition of these two works, it comes as no surprise that *The Ballad of the Sad Café* and *The Member of the Wedding* share similar themes as well. In addition to showcasing Caucasian tomboys who possess a kinship with black culture, both works also include Dinesen's motif of the monkey. As the young tomboy wanders the streets early in *The Member of the Wedding*, she is entranced by the waxing and waning of the monkey-man's organ. Recalling McCullers' own experiences with sideshow freaks, it "seems to [Frankie] a long time since she last saw the monkey and the monkey-man and she takes it as a 'sign' that she should meet them again on what she imagines to be her last day in town. She searches eagerly for them, and it seems to be important to her to 'let them know about the wedding,' and 'tell them goodbye' " (77). Even more significant, perhaps, is Frankie's past identification with these figures. The narrator notes that the young tomboy used to stare at them for so long that she "began to take on the same expression as she followed them around" (McCullers *Member* 62). Given this powerful connection, it is not surprising that the monkey seeks asylum on Frankie's shoulder when an argument erupts over his future owner. As Wikborg argues, McCullers may have used the connection between Frankie, the monkey and the monkey-man as "a reflection of universally human feelings" in general and Frankie's own confusion about the boundaries of her identity in particular (78 – 9).

Although *The Ballad of the Sad Café* and *The Member of the Wedding* share similar themes, characters and dates of composition, they were not released in the same year; McCullers' novella about Amelia Evans was released in 1943 while her full-length novel about Frankie Addams was published three years later, in 1946. Interestingly, when *The Ballad of the Sad Café* made its appearance in the pages of *Harper's Bazaar*, it went largely unnoticed. Although McCullers had been hailed as "the best American novelist in a generation," few gave *The Ballad of the Sad Café* much consideration (Whitt 209). It was not until the novella appeared in book form in 1951 that it received either critical or popular attention. Lending its name to an omnibus collection of McCullers' novels and short stories, *The Ballad of the Sad Café* was instantly hailed as a masterwork. Due to this delay in critical reception, however, the publication date for *The Ballad of the Sad Café* is often incorrectly listed as 1951. This erroneous year gives the novella a misleading place in McCullers' career, appearing after rather than before her 1946 novel *The Member of the Wedding*.

In spite of this confusion over chronology, the presence of Frankie Addams, Sherman Pew and Bernice Sadie Brown demonstrate that the freakishly brown Amelia Evans is herself not an anomaly. After the publication of *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, the presence of physically distinct characters who are racially indistinct became something of a convention in the later fiction of Carson McCullers. Nearly all of the narratives the author released after her 1943 novella contain some manifestation of this motif. At the same time, figures such as Amelia, Frankie and Bernice suggest a new way of viewing the use of human oddities in McCullers' fiction. Although critics commonly see the physical aberrations the author assigns her characters as "an exaggerated symbol of what

she considered everyman's 'caught' condition of spiritual isolation," a racially charged reason is also possible (Rubin 117). Recalling the interconnected history of the freak show, the minstrel show and even "The Greatest Show on Earth," the author may have included them to comment on the way in which blackness and whiteness mutually construct each other in the United States. With their dark skin and blue eyes, characters such as Sherman Pew and Bernice Sadie Brown are products of racial hybridity. In addition to symbolizing human alienation, these men and women can also be seen to emblemize black/white miscegenation.



**Part V. When a *Ballad* is a Swan Song:**

**The Postmodern, Post-Minstrel Decline of Racialized White Tomboys**

Although many similarities exist between Amelia Evans and the racialized white tomboys discussed in previous chapters, one crucial difference remains: her age. Unlike the figures featured in works by Louisa May Alcott, Sarah Orne Jewett and Willa Cather, Amelia is not an adolescent girl when first introduced to readers. Instead, she is a mature adult approaching thirty years of age. By the time *The Ballad of the Sad Café* begins, in fact, she has not only been through a divorce but used “hard work and cutthroat business practices [to] become the richest person in town” (Cook *Carson* 87).

The advanced age of McCullers’ Amelia Evans mirrors the long expanse of time encompassed by the tradition of racialized white tomboys. Making its debut in the novels of E. D. E. N. Southworth during the 1840s, this trend in the fiction by American women was more than a century old. In spite of both the power and pervasiveness of “blacking up” seemingly Caucasian tomboys, *The Ballad of the Sad Café* marks an end to this phenomenon in mainstream American culture. Minstrelsy and racialized white tomboys emerged and also faded during the same period. Not coincidentally, the decade in which McCullers’ novella was released was also the decade that largely signaled a close to blackface.

The period between the 1943 serial publication of *The Ballad of the Sad Café* and its 1951 release in book form was a time when the nation was poised on the brink of tremendous social change. Victimized by such horrifying practices as lynching and segregation for generations, the burgeoning Civil Rights Movement led by the NAACP fought to change the position of African Americans in the United States. As one might

imagine, one of their first tasks was to combat blackface. After more than a century of minstrelsy in cabaret acts, vaudeville shows, Hollywood films, radio programs, and television specials, black men and women lobbied to ban this racist form of entrainment from American popular culture. As Michael Rogin illustrates in *Blackface, White Noise*, the NAACP argued that the images disseminated by minstrelsy “reinforced the racial stereotypes that made blacks unacceptable to whites” (256). The battle over blackface reached its apogee when the minstrel-inspired radio program *Amos ‘n’ Andy* was turned into a television show in the early 1950s. Although the NAACP led a failed boycott to get the radio version removed from the airwaves, mounting pressure caused the television adaptation to finally cease production in 1953 and be removed from syndication in 1966. In many ways, this event marked the end of blackface minstrelsy in the United States. After this period, whites were no longer able to “black up” with the ease of social sanction.

In the coming years, events such as the 1954 *Brown v. the Board of Education* and the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott forever changed the way the nation thought about skin color. With a new awareness of race in whites and racial pride in blacks, practices such as “blackening up” stage performers or even literary characters became unacceptable. Echoing this change in consciousness, when *The Ballad of the Sad Café* was adapted as a play by Edward Albee in 1963, neither the dialogue nor stage directions describe Amelia’s skin as brown.<sup>37</sup> The film *Merchant and Ivory* made of the novella in 1991

---

<sup>37</sup> While the play distances Amelia from her racialization in the novella, it seems to strengthen Cousin Lymon’s connection to the short story on which the narrative was based, Isak Dinesen’s “The Monkey.” As discussed earlier, bird and not simian imagery is used to describe the hunchback in McCullers’ story. In Albee’s play, however, townspeople Emma Hale complains about the transformations in town since Lymon’s arrival. Recalling the Prioress’s pet monkey on which the hunchback is textually based, Emma tells Miss Amelia, “They is some good cafes in these parts, I hear, where they is not monkeys crawling around the floor; where they owners’ pets is not...” (Albee 57).

takes this phenomenon one step further, casting Vanessa Redgrave as Amelia with her hair dyed platinum blond. In this way, the transformation of Amelia's face from "brown" to "white" after the destruction of her Café and desertion by Lymon acquires added resonance. More than simply signaling the end of Amelia's racialization, the event also signals the end of a more than century-long tradition of white tomboys acquiring a similarly dark hue in American women's fiction.

Changes in the nation's social structure, however, were not the only elements that contributed to the abolition of both blackface minstrelsy and the blacking up of seemingly Caucasian tomboys. As McKay Jenkins notes, in addition to grappling with shifts in race relations, this "period was also lurching toward an engagement with the fundamental tenets of postmodernity: fractured identity, blurring regional boundaries, and ethnic multiplicity...." (4).<sup>38</sup> In the years to come, these concerns would cause the lines separating black and white to become less certain. Once rigid and concrete, the demarcation became blurred, ambiguous, and even indeterminate. Norman Mailer's 1957 treatise on the hipster or "white Negro" is perhaps the most famous example of these changes. Disparaged by whites in the South as well as the North for decades, black culture and speech patterns had occupied the lowest rung on the cultural ladder. For the first time in history, however, attitudes began to change and these manners and mores were viewed as desirable and even trendy. Mailer argues in the opening pages of his essay that from the mid-1950s "the source of [white] Hip is the Negro." Before long, urban bohemian envy of African American culture spread to the mainstream. Playing

---

<sup>38</sup> In many ways, Jake Blount from McCullers' *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* (1940) can be placed in dialogue with this phenomenon. At several points in the novel, the drunken white labor agitator describes himself as arising from a panoply of races and ethnic groups. While in the bar one evening, for instance, Blount asserts, "I'm part nigger and wop and bohunk and chink. All of those" (McCullers *Heart* 23).

black-inspired rock 'n' roll, performers such as Elvis Presley did what would have been unthinkable only a generation before: make millions of white middle-class women swoon.

As the distinction between black and white broke down in postmodern American culture, so did the effectiveness of racializing ostensibly white tomboys. Although still daring in many ways, the practice lost the provocative charge of earlier decades. As a result, it faded from the mainstream. Poised on the brink of this phenomenon, the aged and defeated Amelia Evans symbolizes this aged and defeated facet of American women's fiction. After Carson McCullers' *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, white tomboy characters would largely cease to acquire the dark hues with which they had been so often associated for over a century.

**Epilogue.****Fade to Black:****The Legacy of Racialized White Tomboys in Lesbian Pulp Fiction and Popular Film, 1950 - 1980**

Although racialized white tomboys largely disappeared from American women's fiction in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement, they did not drop off the cultural radar altogether. As changes in society made it unacceptable for mainstream fiction to racialize white characters in overt ways, these images went underground to more subversive forms, namely lesbian pulp fiction and, later, popular film.

While the production and dissemination of inexpensive paperbacks largely emerged in the United States during the late 1930s, the boom for this market came after the Second World War. As Kenneth C. Davis notes in *Two-Bit Culture: The Paperbacking of America*, during the 1950s and 1960s, "[s]chlock [was] turned out to appease a gluttonous mass appetite for sex and sensationalism" (xi). In addition to the numerous westerns and detective stories released, lesbian-themed novels that literally teemed with butchy tomboys were also published. These paperbacks provided not only a forum for the burgeoning post-War lesbian culture, but also a refuge for images of racialized white tomboyism. In Ann Bannon's *Journey to a Woman* (1960), for instance, Beth Ayers and Vega Purvis rendezvous for their first romantic encounter at a beatnik coffee house where "an incredibly dirty minstrel twanged on a cracked guitar and sang what passed for old-English ballads" (35). Similarly, in Paula Christian's *The Other Side of Love* (1965), the main character's son may have been formally named Paul after her husband, but he was nicknamed "Sambo" shortly after birth (6). The first segment of the

epilogue explores the legacy of minstrelized tomboyism in 1950s and 1960s lesbian pulp novels. During this discussion, the way in which lesbianism and blackness have been mutually constructed is of central importance. As Lisa Walker observes in *Looking Like What You Are: Sexual Style, Race, and Lesbian Identity*, “the effeminate white homosexual and the masculine black lesbian” became the paradigm for many twentieth-century representations of homosexuality (66).

After the first section explores the butchy tomboys of lesbian pulp novels, the second segment of the epilogue does the same with popular film. As Rebecca Bell-Metereau observes in *Hollywood Androgyny*, “the popularity of the tomboy [in American cinema] reached its peak in the years after the Second World War” (96). Responding to the freedoms gained by the growing Women’s Rights Movement, films such as Clarence Brown’s *National Velvet* (1945) and George Cukor’s *Pat and Mike* (1952) showcased young women who self-consciously defied traditional gender roles.

In the 1970s and 1980s, representations of “girls who would be boys” assumed a racy radicalism. As Judith Halberstam argues in *Female Masculinity*, “butch, wise-cracking, aggressive little tykes such as Jodie Foster (*Foxes* [1980] and *Alice Doesn’t Live Here Anymore* [1974]), Tatum O’Neal (*Paper Moon*, 1973), and Kristy McNichol (*Little Darlings*, 1980)... made girlhood interesting and exciting and even sexy” (188). In many of these films, in fact, girlhood was synonymous with tomboyhood. As a result, Halberstam argues that while the tomboy film may have originated in the late 1940s and early 1950s, its heyday came several decades later.

As in many of the novels written by women a century earlier, cinematic tomboys from the 1970s and 1980s were often the main characters and thus the object of audience

desire and/or identification. More importantly, perhaps, these young women were frequently racialized. Not only did such tomboy stars as Jodie Foster and Robin Johnson possess dark hair, eyes and skin tones, but they were also filmed in ways that called attention to these qualities. As Richard Dyer argues in *White*, cinematic illumination is far from color blind. Various lighting techniques can be used to accentuate and even create skin hue, such as the (literal) “dark villain.” Not only does this process draw on the racist association of whiteness with innocence and blackness with evil, but it also racializes an actor if they are not already a person of color.

This final segment of the epilogue explores the presence of racialized tomboys in late-twentieth century American film. Why did Hollywood movies become a veritable refuge for racialized tomboys after the 1950s? Moreover, what social, political, and/or sexual role do such figures play in these films? Are these roles in any way analogous to those occupied by their literary counterparts? Finally, do tomboys continue to “fade to black” in the nation’s most recent films? In answering these and other questions, I examine what happened to the more than century long tradition of racialized white tomboys as the new millennium approached, how and onto what this phenomenon got displaced, and where remnants of it can still be found in American literature and culture.

## **Part I. Postwar, Pulps and Posses:**

### **The “Dark Passage” of White Tomboys through Cold War Fiction**

As one popular television show put it, the 1950s are often seen as the “Happy Days” in American culture. They are a period associated with “Leave it to Beaver” wholesomeness, squeaky clean good fun and an “aw-shucks” sensibility. With a victory in what would become the last “Good War” of the century, the nation enjoyed unparalleled economic prosperity and unflappable confidence. For the first time in history, record numbers of middle-class families were able to buy cars, move out the to the suburbs and realize the “American Dream.”

Not far beneath the surface of this smiling conformity, however, lurked a dark underbelly. Fears over global nuclear holocaust, the future of race relations and urban/suburban economic disparity also occupied the national consciousness and shaped individual behavior. Although a strict “separate but equal” dictum kept blacks and whites segregated in both the North and South, the relationship between the two races was much more complicated. As Wini Breines put it, “[f]ar from being an invisible border culture, African American culture was at the center of white American life and imagination, where youth, Southern civil rights activists, and jazz and rhythm and blues artists were key players” (54). Although whites had been fascinated by black culture for centuries, for the first time in history, many Caucasians wanted to *be* black. More than simply fetishizing dark skin tones, they envied and even empathized with the black condition. Disillusioned by the American Dream and what it had to offer, middle-class Caucasian men and women “began to see themselves positioned like blacks, as victims and dupes of the status quo” (Breines 56). Sharing the doubt, despair and lack of control blacks had



long known, Caucasians “started acknowledging their latent black values” and, with time, “sped toward black culture deliberately” (Lhamon *Deliberate* 39 - 40). White suburban youth who wanted to announce themselves as both dangerous and disenfranchised began to wear black during the 1950s and 1960s. Black turtlenecks, black leather jackets, even black berets and sunglasses became fashion staples in both the beatnik and bohemian countercultures. In the words of Wini Breines, “Dissenters, or aliens in the central cities, were, felt, or were imagined to be dark” (69). More than simply signaling an affinity with a certain social crowd, black came to be seen as the essence of cool. As Norman Mailer famously asserted in a 1957 treatise, “the source of [white] Hip is the Negro.” Everything black men said and did—from the way they walked and talked to the clothes they wore—was envied and imitated by Caucasian youth. As a result, what Mailer dubbed the “White Negro” was born.

White envy for black culture was not the only social craving to arise during the Cold War. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, white America’s newfound taste for black culture existed in tandem with a growing national appetite for paperback novels. Although the origins of these pocket-sized, mass-marketed books can be traced to the 1930s, the boom for this market came after the Second World War. As Kenneth C. Davis asserted, “Paperback books and the baby boomers were made for each other, a mass medium for a mass generation” (*Two-Bit* 1). With titles ranging from Dr. Spock’s book on childrearing to the emerging new genre of science fiction (which, coincidentally, also featured a Spock) these texts democratized reading in the United States. Universally priced at twenty-five cents, “[s]uddenly, a book could reach not hundreds or thousands of readers, but millions, many of whom had never owned a book before” (Davis *Two-Bit*

xii). Marketed like magazines and adorned with colorful and often lurid cover illustrations, these paperbacks could be found in drug store racks and reputable bookstores alike. In the words of Frank L. Schick, “[n]ever before had so many books at such a low price found such a large number of readers” (72).

While westerns and detective stories were among the most consistent sellers, a stable of many pulp publishing houses were lesbian-themed novels. Forming part of pulp’s interest in what came to be known as the “three S’s”—sex, sadism and the smoking gun—they simultaneously appealed to male heterosexual readers and to the gay and lesbian communities that had emerged after the Second World War. Originating in many ways with the release of Tereska Torres’s groundbreaking *Women’s Barracks* (1950) and culminating with Ann Bannon’s popular Beebo Brinker series (1957 - 1962), these texts provided both voyeuristic pleasure and mainstream gay visibility. As Allan Berube argues in *Coming Out Under Fire*, although they often pandered to negative stereotypes about homosexuality, such novels were instrumental in the formation of both a lesbian identity and a sense of community during the 1950s and 1960s. As it provided homosexual women with a medium in which they could see their lives represented, Lisa Walker asserts that the mere process of “finding, buying and keeping these novels was a political act” (*Looking* 84).

In many ways, the nation’s white envy of black culture and its interest in inexpensive paperbacks merged in lesbian pulp fiction. As Siobhan Somerville argues in *Queering the Colorline: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture*, “it was not merely a coincidence that the classification of bodies as either ‘homosexual’ or ‘heterosexual’ emerged at the same time that the United States was aggressively

constructing and policing the boundary between ‘black’ and ‘white’ ” (3). Although referencing the *fin-de-siecle* when she penned these remarks, they could apply equally to the 1950s when *Brown v. the Board of Education* made skin color one of the most hotly contested topics. In the same way the “separate but equal” dictum of Jim Crow prevented blacks from entering white spaces, the McCarthy hearings rooted out homosexuals who were trying to “pass” in the heterosexual population. Although this phenomenon is more commonly associated with gay men, it also applied to lesbians. Throughout his career, for instance, Sigmund Freud used racially charged language to characterize such female sexual “dysfunctions” as lesbianism. Arguing at various points that female homosexuality resulted from “primitive” development, the father of psychoanalysis made the implicit connection between lesbians and people of color.<sup>1</sup> Not coincidentally, Freud’s theories enjoyed mass appeal and unprecedented popularity during the 1950s. As discussed in chapter five, his essays could be found on both the racks of drug store checkouts and the shelves of academic bookstores.

In this way, lesbian pulp fiction during the Cold War performed more cultural work than simply providing a forum for the burgeoning post-War lesbian culture; these texts also became a refuge for images of racialized white tomboyism. Associating butchness with blackness, these novels often depicted their tough Caucasian tomboys with a racial charge. Although ostensibly white, many were described with black hair, dark features and even brown or olive skin tones. The most paradigmatic example of this phenomena is also among the most famous: Beebo Brinker from Ann Bannon’s series by the same name. Throughout every novel in which Beebo appears, she is repeatedly

---

<sup>1</sup> Robin Hackett, in her recent Dissertation, explores manifestations of this phenomenon during the modernist period, arguing that “figurations of blackness and degeneracy are central to representations of lesbianism” during this period (iv).

presented with short dark curls that look almost blue-black in the dim light of the Greenwich bars. Recalling stereotypes about both the hypersexuality of black women and their emasculating aggressiveness, the passion that Beebo herself possesses and that she arouses in other women is repeatedly described in atavistic and even animalistic ways. In Bannon's *Women in the Shadows* (1959), for instance, Laura is tormented by her "bare animal desire" for the tough tomboy, arising from a potent combination of Beebo's butch strength and her sexual prowess (Bannon *Women* 64).

More than simply associating tomboyish butchness with blackness, some pulps from the 1950s and 1960s connected all forms of female homosexuality with a racial charge. Anticipating Homi Bhabba's observation that there is something about lesbians that deems them "not quite white," the representation of "gay girls" in many Cold War pulps was refracted through African American culture and even blackface minstrelsy. In Paula Christian's *The Other Side of Love* (1965), for instance, the main character's eldest child is named Paul after his father, but acquires the racially suggestive nickname "Sambo" soon after birth (6). Even more telling, no explanation is given for this appellation; the youngster does not imitate blackface characters nor does he engage in such minstrelized antics as mimicry. His nickname is presented matter-of-factly, as if the reason were obvious.

The nicknaming of Carrie's son "Sambo" is not the only minstrelized element in Christian's *The Other Side of Love*. When the young woman considers getting a job and asks her husband about his advertising business, he begins singing "I've Been Workin' on the Railroad." Although currently known as a campfire tune, "I've Been Workin' on the Railroad" was originally composed as a coon song. Initially titled "Levee Song"

when copyrighted in 1894 by *Carmina Princetonia*, the name was changed several years later to “The Eyes of Texas” after an admonishment by General Robert E. Lee: “Young gentlemen, the eyes of the South are upon you.” As James Fuld notes in *The Book of World-Famous Music*, students at the University of Texas modified the lyrics and set them to a melody by John Lang Sinclair for a minstrel show they presented on May 12, 1903 (Fuld 309). The popularity of this show and the appeal of its catchy tune form the direct musical antecedent for the version of “I’ve Been Workin’ on the Railroad” known today.

Although it does not draw on minstrel music, one of the first novels Ann Bannon released, *Journey to a Woman* (1960), also contains representations of what may be called “minstrelized lesbianism.” For their first romantic rendezvous, Beth and Vega meet at a beatnik Café where “an incredibly dirty minstrel twanged on a cracked guitar” (Bannon *Journey* 35). Speculating on whether Beth’s husband is aware of their tryst, Vega uses simian language to refer to the same-sex affair: “‘You said yourself he already suspects monkey business’ ” (Bannon *Journey* 73). Similar to the dark soil of the prairie and the dark skin of Alexandra Bergson in Willa Cather’s *O Pioneers!*, Beth’s dark features are often mentioned in tandem with references to her questioning sexuality. The restless young wife has a mass of “short dark curls” while her college lover, Laura, was “soft and blonde with blue eyes” (Bannon *Journey* 8, 11). When Charlie becomes exasperated by his wife’s lack of interest in sex, he responds in a way that recalls the fate of many black women at the hands of white men: he tries to rape her. Although separated from her husband for several months, Beth tells him soon after arriving in

California, “ ‘[I]f you think I’ve come two thousand miles just to let you *rape* me—’ ”  
[author’s emphasis] (Bannon *Journey* 14).

Rather than implicitly connecting female homosexuality with blackness, Bannon’s *Women in the Shadows* (1959) does so explicitly. In this novel, the writer presents an interracial couple in which one character’s blackness becomes a metaphor for her lesbianism. Although claiming to hail from New Delhi, dancer Tris Robischon (a.k.a., Patsy Robinson) is actually a light-skinned African American from New York.<sup>2</sup> Inverting the 1950s white envy for black skin, Tris fetishizes light hues.<sup>3</sup> At the beach with Laura, she insists her light-skinned lover put on sunscreen. When Laura refuses, Tris asserts that if she had skin that fair, she would do anything to keep it so. “ ‘If mine were that light I would never expose it like you do. I’d do everything to keep it as light as I could. Even bleach it. They say buttermilk works wonders’ ” (Bannon *Shadows* 94).

Since Tris sees white skin as racially “normative,” it comes as no surprise that she also associates it with what is commonly considered erotically “normative”: heterosexuality. When Laura learns that her exotic lover is both married and not from

---

<sup>2</sup> Rather than simply an inconsequential detail of Bannon’s narrative, Tris’s decision to pass for Indian belies an important racial hierarchy in the United States. Loathing her own race and skin tone, the young woman would rather be seen as an immigrant from New Delhi because she perceives Hindus as “more white” or, at least, “less dark” than African Americans. For the bulk of Bannon’s narrative, Tris goes to great lengths to present herself as an “Oriental.” In addition to wearing a cotton bandeau, placing a red dot on her forehead and draping her dance studio in “exotic” cushions and fabrics, she also affects what Laura characterizes as a “British-like accent” (Bannon *Shadows* 40, 44).

<sup>3</sup> Tris’s inversion of this paradigm ought not to imply that white envy for black skin does not appear in Bannon’s novel. Echoing this common 1950s tendency, Laura is drawn to Tris largely because of her skin tone. When Laura sees the dark, exotic woman for the first time, she remarks how her hue “is three parts coffee and one part cream” (Bannon *Shadows* 31). When Laura goes to Tris’s dance studio a few weeks later, she elaborates on this description. Calling Tris’s color “luminous,” she envies her “luscious tan from waist to bottom” (Bannon *Shadows* 31, 41). As the two lie together in bed one evening, Laura comments that the light and dark of their bodies together look like sheet music. “ ‘Me so white and you so brown. It looks pretty, Tris. Like music, if you could see music’ ” (Bannon *Shadows* 95). When Tris warns Laura not to get too close lest her brown tone rubs off and sullies her lily-white purity, Laura hopes this will happen. “ ‘You’d have to touch me everywhere then, every corner of me, till we were both the same color. Then you’d be almost white and I’d be almost tan—and yet we’d be the same’ ” (Bannon *Shadows* 95).

New Delhi, she asks her why she has misrepresented both her race and her sexuality. In a pivotal statement that reveals Tris's conflation of these categories, she tells Laura: " 'If you force me to chose between black and white, I'm white,' ..... and Laura thought she heard a double emphasis on the word 'white.' I like men more than women' " (Bannon *Shadows* 45 – 46). Tris's "double emphasis" indicates that in addition to referring to race, it also references to sexuality. By this logic, if white becomes a stand-in for heterosexual then black becomes a stand-in for lesbianism. In this way, "Tris is caught between two worlds on more than one level" (Walker *Looking* 112).

Just as Tris equates whiteness with heterosexuality and blackness with lesbianism, Laura also uses skin color as a stand-in for differences other than racial ones. As Lisa Walker points out, the Caucasian young woman "had mistakenly replaced one form of difference—gender difference between [butch and femme] lesbians—with another: racial difference. Laura has misguidedly equated the attraction of Tris's 'fragrant tan skin' with the attraction of Beebo's masculinity" (*Looking* 113). Recalling the racially suggestive title of Bannon's novel once again, they become literal and figurative "women in the shadows."

Admittedly, neither Laura nor Tris is very tomboyish; both have long hair, feminine clothes and dainty features. Given the near-obsessive interest during the 1950s with both the redomestication of women and Freudian interpretations of sexuality, however, these details make little difference. The pair may engage in other forms of "feminine" behavior, but their refusal to participate in heterosexual marriage and motherhood places them on spectrum of what Judith Halberstam would characterize as

“female masculinity.” Although conforming to nearly every other gender code for women, Laura and Tris would be seen as “mannish” because of their lesbianism.

In many ways, placing lesbian pulp novels from the 1950s and 1960s on a continuum with such nineteenth-century tomboy narratives as Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* seems ludicrous. Written during different centuries, for different audiences and with different goals or objectives in mind, these two genres ostensibly have nothing in common. As Mary Elliott has pointed out, however, powerful connections can be made between these two seemingly disparate modes of writing. “Poised nearly a century apart, tomboy and pulp texts complete each other’s unfinished sentences: tomboy narratives ask what life would be possible for girls and young women outside of heterosexual family relationships and gendered social limitations; lesbian fiction provides a complex answer to those questions from within the Cold War culture of redomestication” (Elliott iv). Many similarities exist between the plot structures and character portraits of these two genres. In addition to challenging prevailing notions of gender and sexuality, tomboy narratives and lesbian pulps also share similar “bad endings” (Elliott 19). Due to either implicit public pressure (as with women’s fiction) or explicit legal mandate (as in the case of pulps), both narratives often end with the abrupt eradication of non-normative behavior through death, insanity, or forced marriages.<sup>4</sup>

To this list of commonalities, the association of spunky white women with dark hues could be added. Whether it is the connection of butchness with blackness or the more general yoking of lesbianism with African American culture, lesbian pulps and tomboy fiction exist on an unlikely but nevertheless potent circuit of influence. In the

---

<sup>4</sup> For more on the issue of pulp fiction and censorship (including the now-infamous Gathings Committee hearings), see chapter eight, “The Lady Goes to Court,” in Kenneth C. Davis’ *Two-Bit Culture* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984).



Preface to *Conflicting Stories: American Women Writers at the Turn into the Twentieth Century*, Elizabeth Ammons poses the provocative question, "What happens to our academic construction of the American literary past when we unite women writers... rather than scatter or ignore them?" (vii). Although she was referencing canonical fiction from the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries when penning these remarks, they could apply to tomboy narratives and Cold War lesbian pulp. Commonly seen as a response to writing by men, these genres are actually in dialogue with one another. Rather than an unusual or even unexpected pairing, these seemingly disparate modes of writing share many links. Recalling the remarks of Elizabeth Ammons about *fin-de-siecle* women's fiction, tomboy narratives and lesbian pulp fiction participate in the complex feedback cycle that exists among and between women writers throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

## Part II. Tomboyhood Comes to Hollywood:

### Popular Film and the Transformation of Racialized White Tomboys, 1940 - 1980

Pulp Fiction—lesbian or otherwise—was not the only entertainment genre to experience a surge during the 1940s and 1950s. In the same way the production of mass market paperbacks featuring lesbian characters increased during this period, so did the presence of feature-length films with tomboyish young women. A product of expanding notions of women's gender roles, Rebecca Bell-Metereau argues "the popularity of the tomboy reached its peak in the years after the second World War" (96). Citing such examples as Clarence Brown's *National Velvet* (1945) and George Cukor's *Pat and Mike* (1952), these films did not simply represent spunky young women, but showcased them as their main characters.

Similar to their antecedents in both pulp fiction and canonical women's literature, many of the ostensibly Caucasian tomboys depicted in these films are associated with racialized and even minstrelized traits. The tomboyish younger sisters Agnes and Tootie Smith in Vincent Minelli's *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944) have their hands and face partially blackened for Halloween. Dressed as hobo-like ragamuffins, their elder sibling Rose carefully chars a cork over a candle and then applies the soot as the "finishing touch" for their costumes. Similarly, in one of the now-classic songs from *Calamity Jane* (1953), "Just Blew in From Chicago," Doris Day enumerates all the wonders of the Windy City. In addition to the large crowds and tall buildings, minstrel shows are among the splendors she mentions.

Recalling the association of butchness with blackness in lesbian pulp fiction, Joan Crawford's powerful character Vienna in *Johnny Guitar* (1954) is repeatedly

associated with dark colors and even dark actions. In addition to wearing black clothes for the bulk of the film, Vienna is also threatened with a racialized fate. Wrongly accused of bank robbery, the saloon-owner is nearly hanged. Significantly, when asked about this brush with death, Vienna uses the racially charged term “lynching” to characterize it.

Although 1940s and 1950s may be the period when tomboy films emerged as a distinct cinematic category in the United States, Judith Halberstam argues that this genre did not reach its height or heyday until several decades later, in the 1970s and 1980s. During this period, “the effects of the rise of feminism in the 1960s were finally beginning to affect childrearing. Tomboyism flourished in a climate of liberal parenting where parents were questioning sex role orientation and challenging the conventional wisdom about girls and boys” (Halberstam *Female* 188). This boom in what may be called “domestic tomboyism” was mirrored in the era’s popular films. From the mid-1970s to the late 1980s, numerous feature-length films showcased a spunky female heroine. From Jodie Foster’s brief cameo in *Alice Doesn’t Live Here Anymore* (1974) to Robin Johnson’s starring performance in *Times Square* (1980) these movies, as Halberstam notes, “tended to imagine girlhood as tomboyhood” (*Female* 188).

Interestingly, nearly all of the cinematic tomboys during the 1970s and 1980s were played by white actresses. Of the many spunky female figures that emerged in this era, very few of them hailed from minority groups. Even more telling, with the exception of Tatum O’Neal, nearly all them were brunettes who possessed dark features; even the young O’Neal had what would have been called “dirty blonde” or light brown locks.

While the possession of brown hair and dark features alone is not enough to associate them with a racial charge, many of these ostensibly Caucasian figures were filmed in ways that accentuated or, at least, called attention to these traits. As Richard Dyer notes in *White*, cinematic illumination is far from colorblind. Various lighting techniques can be used to augment or even create a certain skin tone or hair color. By dimming the lights or shooting an actor in dull light, you can “darken” skin hue. Several tomboy films from the 1970s and 1980s consciously or unconsciously drew on this strategy. Nearly all of the interior scenes in Adrian Lyne’s *Foxes* (1980), for instance, present the tomboyish Jody Foster in drab, almost grey light. Although this technique does not cause the young woman to look African American, it does dull the whiteness of her skin and thus her connection to an untainted racial pedigree.

The use of lighting techniques to darken the skin tones of cinematic tomboys is not the only change with which these figures can be associated during the 1970s and 1980s. Throughout late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century fiction by women, racialized white tomboys were directly associated with dark hues, black culture and even blackface minstrelsy. Figures such as Capitola Black, with her racially charged birthmark during the 1840s, and Ameila Evans, who was said to have been born dark nearly one hundred years later, these figures constitute what Toni Morrison would call an “American Africanist” presence.

Although ostensibly Caucasian characters continue to “fade to black” in feature films from the 1970s and 1980s, the process by which this occurs changes. Rather than being directly linked or associated with dark skin, black culture or blackface, these cinematic figures are immersed in a racialized surrounding. In many tomboys films from

this period, the Caucasian characters themselves do not possess any racially charged traits, but the environment in which they reside arises from and collapses into skin color.

Of the many tomboy films from the 1970s and 1980s that showcase this trend, Peter Bogdanovich's *Paper Moon* (1973) is perhaps the most powerful example. Although the movie's tomboyish main character Addie Pray does not possess brown skin, dark features or minstrelized traits herself, the world she inhabits is continually punctuated by such elements. Filmed in a grainy black and white and set in the Depression Era, the movie has a vaudevillian look. Although her adult guardian is named "Moses," she refers to him by the nickname "Moze." Ostensibly a term of endearment, this carefully chosen appellation evokes several racially charged connotations.<sup>5</sup> The young man's traffic in cons and scams, for instance, recalls the life and career of Moses Kimball. Although not well-remembered today, Kimball was the close friend and sometimes business partner of the self-proclaimed "king of humbuggery," P. T. Barnum. Recalling Addie's remark that when Moze "was wound up right, he could sell doodle bugs for doorknobs" (Brown 30), Andrea Stulman Dennett asserts that Barnum and Kimball "mastered the rhetoric of moral elevation, scientific instruction, and cultural refinement in presenting their attractions"(6). Even though the pair denied involvement in the so-called Moon Hoax of the 1840s, Barnum and Kimball were repeatedly credited with this scam, which anticipates the title of Bogdanovich's film. In addition, as biographers have pointed out, P. T. Barnum got his start in both business dealings and

---

<sup>5</sup> Giving further credence to the symbolic significance of Moses' nickname, throughout Joe David Brown's novel *Addie Pray* (1971), on which the film is based, the traveling Bible salesman does not possess this nickname. Although his first name remains the same, he acquired the Freudian nickname "Long Boy" because he is so tall: "His real name was Moses Pray, but everybody started calling him Long Boy because he shot up to his full height of six feet three when he was only twelve or thirteen years old" (Brown *Addie* 16). Throughout Brown's novel, Addie refers to her traveling companion and fellow conman by this appellation; the nickname "Moze" never appears.

“puffery” selling Bibles door-to-door. Although no evidence suggests that the showman participated in same scam as Moses Pray—going to the homes of recent widows and claiming that their husbands ordered “deluxe edition” Bibles with their names stamped in “child of the manger” gold—this detail provides a compelling link. Reflecting the showman’s knack for presentation, Moses Pray even has a fake gold tooth that he wears for such occasions. Recalling the profession for which P. T. Barnum is now (in)famous, Moze meets his sweetheart, “Harem Slave” dancer Miss Trixie Delight, at a carnival sideshow. As a result of Moze’s various links to humbuggery, it is no surprise that a line from the opening song of Bogdanovich’s *Paper Moon* asserts, “It’s a Barnum and Bailey world.”

In addition to recalling the life and career of a circus showman, Moses’ nickname also evokes a popular minstrel character. As David Roediger notes, “Likewise possessed of a checkered past was the name Mose, which originally denoted the most interesting white male character type on the American stage” (*Wages* 99). Making his first appearance during the antebellum period, this figure was synonymous with the rough b’hoys of New York City. “A low-comedy representative of young urban maleness—a fighter and a lover—Mose was typically an unemployed or apprentice artisan and a member of the volunteer fire department whose disorderly behavior provoked the wrath of city fathers before the Civil War” (Roediger *Wages* 99). Rather than being limited to the stages of New York, “Mose transcended regionalism.... and stood for the new urban mass culture as against the ‘high’ culture of the elite” (Saxton *Rise and Fall* 170). By 1852, minstrel troupes throughout the nation “began performing a number titled, ‘Wake Up Mose’ ” (Saxton *Rise and Fall* 169). Before long, as Eric Lot observes, there was

even a “bit part in Conway’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* for a slave called Little Mose” (*Love* 228).<sup>6</sup>

Although Moses Pray is neither a husband nor a fireman in *Paper Moon*, he does play the role of father figure and even urban dandy. Always impeccably dressed in stylish suits with slicked hair, he is frequently depicted fussing with his appearance: adjusting his tie or getting his hair trimmed and styled.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the traveling Bible salesman may repeatedly deny that he is Addie’s Pa, but he nevertheless becomes a father figure for the young girl. After reluctantly agreeing to transport the youth to her relatives, he begins to take a parental interest in her. At the train depot, he buys Addie a snack and soon suggests they “go into business” together. By the end of the film, Moses has decided to permanently adopt the youngster. The final scene of Bogdanovich’s film depicts Addie forsaking the guardianship of her aunt and hopping into Moses’ jalopy.

Recalling the unsteady identity of racialized white tomboys, the skin tone of the minstrel Mose was not static; it changed over time. Although originally conceptualized as a white character, various minstrel troupes soon began presenting him in blackface. “White Mose enjoyed a striking, but relatively brief, popularity.... But Mose in blackface proved quite durable, incarnated as both an urban dandy and as a fatherly Southern Black” (Roediger *Wages* 100). By the early twentieth century, the figure of Mose had transformed once again, this time surfacing in American material culture. David

---

<sup>6</sup> For an extended, in-depth discussion of the various productions and manifestations of Mose on the minstrel stage see Richard M. Dorson’s 1943 article “Mose the Far-Famed and World-Renowned” in *American Literature* (vol 19, issue 15, pages 288 – 300).

<sup>7</sup> Once again, these details form another point of departure between Bogdanovich’s film and Joe David Brown’s novel. In marked contrast to Moze’s unflappable city-slicker ways in the film, Addie asserts that her “business partner” is country boy in the novel. “Mama was always poking fun at Long Boy’s countrified ways, but she did it fondly. Long Boy was a country boy through and through. His family was grub-poor, and he was raised on one of those forty-acres-and-a-mule farms down in Coffee County” (Brown *Addie* 16).

Roediger notes, “He became Aunt Jemima’s husband in the ragdoll and salt-n-pepper shaker families of the twentieth century” (*Wages* 100). Rather than forming a tangential detail to the presentation of Moze in Bogdanovich’s film, this information is of central importance. Throughout *Paper Moon*, the ostensible destination of Moze and Addie’s car trip is St. Joe, Missouri. In addition to being the locale in which Addie’s future guardian resides, it is also the town in which the blackface character Aunt Jemima became a pancake mix icon. According to M. M. Manring in *Slave in a Box: The Strange Career of Aunt Jemima*, in 1889, Missouri entrepreneur Chris Rutt was looking for a spokesperson for his new self-rising pancake flour. After seeing the Aunt Jemima character at a local minstrel performance, the former editorial writer for the *St. Joseph Gazette* “had found his trade name, and Aunt Jemima, as we know her today had met her maker” (Manring *Strange* 61).

In spite of all the links between Bogdanovich’s Moze and the minstrel Mose, the Bible salesman never blacks up in *Paper Moon*. Similar to the racial chameleonism of the blackface character with which he shares his name, however, his actions often have a racially charged impact on Addie. After becoming romantically involved with the carnival dancer/prostitute, Moze has his tomboyish companion sit in the back seat with Trixie’s black maid, Imogene. Infuriated by this second-class status, Addie refuses to return to the car one afternoon unless she can resume her place in the front beside Moze. When this stand-off proves unsuccessful, the youngster joins forces with the black maid to separate the pair.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> One final detail of Addie’s immersion in a racially charged environment that is present in Joe David Brown’s novel but did not appear in Bogdanovich’s film: her favorite novel, *Gone With the Wind*. At several points throughout *Addie Pray*, the tomboyish young girl asserts that her “most favorite book of all” is the plantation narrative (Brown *Addie* 157).



Bogdanovich's *Paper Moon* is not the only film to place its tomboyish main character in a racialized and minstrelized environment. The representation of both tomboyism and lesbianism in the now-classic film *Desert Hearts* (1985) can also be described in such ways. Throughout the movie, the tomboyish character Cay is connected to many racially charged aspects of the 1950s, the period in which the film is set. Recalling the Dark Lady/Fair Maiden coupling seen so many times in past chapters, Richard Dyer points out that the sexually aggressive young woman is a brunette while her more passive and feminine love-interest is a blonde. "The dark/fair contrast is still in place in the already deviant context of a lesbian romance film like *Desert Hearts*, in which uptight, intellectual, traditionally moral and straight Vivian is pale and fair, while raunchy, physical, artistic, promiscuous and lesbian Cay is dark" (Dyer *White* 60).

This association of the ostensibly Caucasian Cay with a dark hue is not limited to her dark features. Throughout the film, the young woman is connected with the racially charged music of rock 'n' roll. As numerous historians have noted, this musical style originated in black culture. Drawing on the rhythms, lyrics and even dance moves found in African American communities, rock 'n' roll has been characterized as the epitome of "white negroism" during the 1950s (Nelson 67). Elvis Presley, among other white singers, has been characterized as little more than "a white man imitating a black man" (Breines 54).

Nearly every time Cay is on-screen in *Desert Hearts*, a popular rock 'n' roll tune from the 1950s plays in the background. The first time viewers meet the reckless and rebellious young woman, in fact, Buddy Holly's "Rave On" blares on the soundtrack. Significantly, the fair and feminine Vivian is not connected with this music. In marked

contrast to her younger, darker and more tomboyish love-interest, Vivian is associated with a form of music that epitomizes refined white culture in many ways: classical. In one especially memorable scene, while giving Vivian a ride into town, Cay engages in a type of tug-of-war with her girlfriend, Gwen, over the radio station: while her young lover wants to keep the stereo tuned to rock 'n' roll, Cay repeatedly changes the station to classical for Vivian's sake.

Cay's association with such racially charged elements as dark features and rock 'n' roll throughout *Desert Hearts* is made even more pronounced by the fact that these traits do not appear in the book on which the film is based. Throughout Jane Rule's *Desert of the Heart* (1964), no mention is made of the young woman's dark hair or her proclivity for music that W. T. Lhamon, Jr. identifies as belonging to the "blackface lore cycle" (*Raising 80*).<sup>9</sup> More than simply connecting Cay with rock 'n' roll, Donna Deitch's film also makes sure viewers know that the story takes place during what may be considered the birth of this musical genre. In marked contrast to Jane Rule's novel once again, in the opening scene of *Desert Hearts*, a banner announces that the year is 1959.

In spite of what may be characterized as a boom in tomboy films during the 1970s and early 1980s, Judith Halberstam argues in *Female Masculinity* that the end of the decade also signaled the end of this genre. "As gays and lesbians became more visible

---

<sup>9</sup> The absence of rock 'n' roll and omission of Cay's hair color are not the only differences between Jane Rule's 1964 novel and Donna Deitch's 1985 film. In addition to the obvious change in title, the names of the characters (in Rule's novel Vivian Bell is named Evelyn Hall while Cay Rivvers is dubbed Ann Childs), along with their occupations (Cay is a sculptor in *Desert Hearts* but a cartoonist in *Desert of the Heart*), place of origin (Vivian is from New York City and teaches at Columbia in the film but hails from Oakland, California and is an instructor at Cal State in the book), former sexual experience (in Rule's novel, Evelyn has had a prior lesbian encounter whereas in Deitch's film Vivian gives no indication of such an experience), and even living situation (Cay lives in her own cottage on the ranch in *Desert Hearts*, but Ann occupies a room in the main house in *Desert of the Heart*) also differ.

[during the 1970s].... the effects of that visibility changed. Although at first queer visibility offered the promise of some kind of proliferation of sympathetic representations of gays and lesbians, as time wore on, the tomboy and the sissy boy, within a public psychologized discourse on homosexuality, became the visible markers for the potentially queer child. I believe that the tomboy film faded from view by the end of the 1980s partly owing to the implicit link between tomboys and lesbians” (*Female* 188).

If films depicting spunky female figures declined during the late-1980s because of fears that tomboys were proto-lesbians, then movies which presented tomboyish lesbians increased for precisely the same reason. For the first time in history, mainstream films contained strong, powerful and independent lesbian characters. More than simply including these figures as minor characters, films such as *Go Fish* (1994), *Bound* (1996) and *Set It Off* (1996) showcased them as their main protagonists.

Similar to lesbian pulp novels, many feature-length films during the late-1980s and mid-1990s depicted a black-white interracial lesbian couple. Bracketed by *She Must Be Seeing Things* in 1987 and *Work* in 1996, an astounding four such movies were released in 1995 alone: *Bar Girls*, *The Incredibly True Adventures of Two Girls in Love*, *Boys on the Side* and *When Night is Falling*.<sup>10</sup> The sheer number of these films caused Ann Pellegrini to remark that the black-white interracial couple became “the cinematic face of lesbianism” during the 1990s (88).

While many critics read this increase in black/white coupling as a product of the ever-increasing concern over the place of race in feminist and queer theories, the more than century-long tradition of associating both tomboyism and lesbianism with a dark hue

---

<sup>10</sup> Admittedly, Patricia Rozema’s *When Night is Falling* is a Canadian film. Because it had both a wide release in the United States and a large American audience, I decided to include it.

offers an alternative possibility. The rapid increase in interracial pairs during the 1990s can be seen as a literal manifestation of the racial charge that has long been associated with these elements. Recalling Ann Bannon's *Women in the Shadows* (1959), such films as Herbert Ross' *Boys on the Side* uses blackness to signal differences in both gender and sexuality. Discussing the presentation of Whoopi Goldberg's character Jane in the film, Ann Pellegrini asserts, "Where and how can you tell the difference between female homosociality and female homosexuality? This, I want to suggest, is the work Jane's blackness does. Of the three female friends, Jane is the only lesbian character named as such; she is also the only woman of color. Her blackness visibly mars out the difference between the lesbian and the straight woman she loves and who may even love her in return...." (90). Donning a leather jacket and unlaced work boots while smoking cigarettes, Goldberg's character stands in marked contrast to her fair and feminine co-stars. In addition to characterizing future flame Robin as "the whitest woman on the face of the earth" upon first meeting her, Jane's former unrequited love interest, Holly, is a platinum blonde.

Even in films such as *The Incredibly True Adventures of Two Girls in Love*, where the tomboyishly butch character is not the African American one, the presence of a black-white interracial couple suggests the interdependency of race, gender and sexuality. In *Blackface, White Noise*, Michael Rogin argues "American film was born from white depictions of blacks" (15). The four films that are commonly seen to as the foundation for American film history are all inextricably connected with the complicated history of black-white relations: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1903), *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), *The Jazz Singer* (1927) and *Gone with the Wind* (1939) (Rogin 73). In light of both this strong

cinematic relationship with race and the more than century-long tradition of associating white tomboys with dark hues in American literature and culture, it comes as no surprise that tomboyhood came to Hollywood after the Second World War. From its inception, American cinema has been a medium in which Caucasians—tomboyish or otherwise—could “fade to black.”

### **Part III. Looking Forward, Looking Backward:**

#### **Whiteness and White Tomboyism at the Millennium**

More than any other era highlighted in this study, the 1990s were a time of great sensitivity to difference in the United States. Operating under the *modus operandi* of “political correctness,” it was a period that did more than give lip service to, but made ardent strides towards meeting the needs of men and women from racial, ethnic, religious and sexual minority groups. For the first time in history, the National Census Bureau recognized individuals who hailed from multiracial backgrounds as well as those who co-habitated as a same-sex couple. In addition, as part of a growing interest in multiculturalism and all its forms, the 1990s was also the time for the mainstream recognition of such previously marginalized specialties as Latino/a Studies, Disability Studies and interdisciplinary work concerned with issues of aging.

Given this heightened awareness of difference, one might assume that the 1990s rang the death-knell for the legacy of racialized white tomboyism in the United States. During a decade of acute wakefulness to issues of gender, race and sexuality, it seems unlikely that even subtle acquisitions of a dark hue by white characters would be permissible. Put more bluntly, if changes in black-white relations during the 1950s made it unacceptable to overtly racialize white tomboys, then the near-obsession with race, gender and sexuality during the 1990s would make even subvert representations anathema.

Rather than eradicating the association of ostensibly Caucasian characters with a dark hue, however, the politically correct 1990s merely caused this phenomenon to mutate. In marked contrast to the 1970s proclivity for tomboys who were dark brunettes,

numerous novels and films during the late 1980s and 1990s showcased spunky female figures who were platinum blondes. The presentation of Amelia Evans in Merchant and Ivory's 1991 cinematic version of *Ballad of the Sad Café* discussed in chapter five forms a poignant example. Contrary to the description of this character in McCullers' novella, Vanessa Redgrave's Amelia has bleached-blond hair. To this trend, the suggestively named Watts in Howard Deutch's film *Some Kind of Wonderful* (1987), Imogene "Idgie" Threadgoode from Fannie Flagg's novel *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle-Stop Café* (1987), the butch Tracey from Marita Giovanni's movie *Bar Girls* (1995), and Randall "Randy" Dean from Maria Maggenti's film *The Incredibly True Adventures of Two Girls in Love* (1995) could be added. In each of these works, the tomboyish young women possess locks that are either bleached-blond or have been artificially lightened.<sup>11</sup>

In the same way the hair color of Caucasian tomboys changed during the late 1980s and early 1990s, so did the means and ends of their racializations. From the mid-1840s, when racialized white tomboys first made their appearance in American literature and culture, ostensibly Caucasian figures who acquired a dark hue sought to blur or bend the boundaries between black and white. Although ostensibly white, these young women flirted with the idea of being a racial minority. Described with brown skin, black hair and dark features, they were often depicted and even described in ways that recalled the long, complicated history of black-white relations in the United States.

During the 1990s, this paradigm shifted and even inverted. Rather than co-opting African American culture to establish a kinship with blackness, Caucasian tomboys become associated with it to comment on whiteness. Although paradoxical, the

---

<sup>11</sup> More than simply presenting blonde-haired tomboys, it should be noted that *Some Kind of Wonderful* and the 1991 film version of *Fried Green Tomatoes* use the same actress to do so: in both movies, Mary Stuart Masterson plays the tomboyish heroine.

association of spunky white women with a dark hue allowed them to (de)construct what it means to be Caucasian in the United States.

Of the various novels and films that contain this phenomenon, perhaps the most poignant—and among the most popular—is Fannie Flagg’s *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle-Stop Cafe* (1987). From the opening pages of the narrative, the tomboyish Imogene “Idgie” Threadgoode is repeatedly associated with blackness and black culture. When the young woman installs a radio at the Cafe, she invites anyone to come use the device. Significantly, the show to which she suggests listening is the racially charged *Amos ‘n’ Andy*. More importantly, in the highly segregated Alabama of the 1930s when the novel is set, Idgie repeatedly supports and even defends black people. At one point, the tomboyish young woman brazenly tells the sheriff how ridiculous she finds KKK parades: “ ‘I think a bunch of grown men getting liquored up and putting sheets on their heads is pretty damn funny’ ” (Flagg 54). A few moments later, Idgie insists on serving blacks at her Cafe. Justifying this decision, the tomboyish young woman jokes that white men are “ ‘terrified to sit next to a nigger and have a meal, but they’ll eat eggs that came right out of a chicken’s ass’ ” (Flagg 55).<sup>12</sup> As a result of such behavior, the sheriff uses a racially charged cliché—“stubborn as a mule”—to characterize the opinionated young woman (Flagg 54).

Throughout the remainder of *Fried Green Tomatoes*, Idgie continues to be connected with blacks and black culture. After the death of her brother, Buddy, the young woman frequents Troutville and, later, Slagtown, both black ghettos, where she

---

<sup>12</sup> In one of the many interesting differences between Flagg’s novel and Jon Avnet’s film, it is the black maid Sipsey and not Idgie who utters this remark in the movie.



plays cards, drinks whiskey and communes as if she were one of the residents.<sup>13</sup> As the narrator notes, Idgie “had as many friends over in Troutville as she did in Whistle Stop. She was always over there preaching at some funeral if a friend of hers died. She told me one time that she preferred them to some of the whites she knew’ ” (Flagg 284).

More than simply associating with blacks, Idgie also actively tries to aid them. Empathetic to the mass poverty among people of color during the Depression, the tomboyish young woman disguises herself as a male hobo who rides government trains and throws off parcels of food for blacks. “ ‘I suddenly figured out why I’d seen her and Old Grady Kilgore, the railroad detective, always whispering. He’d been the one who was tipping her off about the train schedules... it had been my Aunt Idgie jumping them trains all along’ ” (Flagg 332). In a gesture that recalls blackface minstrelsy, when assuming the role of “Railroad Bill,” the young woman uses coal dust to disguise her identity. “I heard them talking and pretty soon they came out, and Aunt Idgie was drying her hands and face. When I got in there, the sink was still full of coal dust” (Flagg 332).<sup>14</sup>

In marked contrast to nearly all of the racialized white tomboys examined in this study, Idgie’s connection with black culture does not make her racially ambiguous. At no point is the spunky young woman presented in racially charged ways because of her affinity with people of color. Instead, as Ann Pellegrini notes, Idgie’s connection with blackness “seems, in the end, to be all about whiteness” (92). Throughout Flagg’s novel,

<sup>13</sup> Once again, in Jon Avnet’s movie based on Flagg’s novel, these details have been changed. Although black men and women inhabit the gambling and drinking establishments in which Idgie is a regular, they are by no means all-black ghettos. Many whites—more, in fact, than blacks—populate these communities.

<sup>14</sup> Forming yet another area of difference between Flagg’s novel and the feature-length film, Idgie neither disguises herself as Railroad Bill when engaging in this philanthropic act nor does she distribute food to blacks alone. In Jon Avnet’s film, the fair-skinned and platinum blonde young woman dispenses food to a shanty town that is populated by both blacks and whites.

the way in which a Caucasian treats African Americans becomes a type of litmus test for whether he/she is an admirable character and not. Ruth's ex-husband, Frank Bennett, for instance, is disparaged both because he hits women and also because he is a member of the Klan. His racism "becomes a way of making distinctions within the category of whiteness between 'good' white people and 'bad' white people" (Pellegrini 91). In this way, rather than establishing a link between Idgie and African American culture, her empathy for people of color establishes her as a admirable white character.<sup>15</sup>

The use of black culture as a means to comment on whiteness is not the only change with which the legacy of racialized white tomboys can be associated during the 1990s. In addition to a shift in the ends and means of their racializations, the minority groups with which these figures are associated also alter. From the mid-1840s, when racialized white tomboys first appeared in the United States, the vast majority of these figures used African American culture to acquire their dark hues. Possessing brown skin tones, blue-black hair and/or minstrel-sized characteristics, these ostensibly Caucasian young women established a kinship with blacks and black culture.

During the 1990s, this trend shifted. Mirroring the decade's growing awareness that race relations in the United States encompassed more than simply blacks and whites,

---

<sup>15</sup> Similar to Jane Rule's *Desert of the Heart* and Donna Deitch's *Desert Hearts*, the printed and cinematic versions of Flagg's novel are not synoptic. Of the many changes between the 1987 novel and the 1991 film, perhaps the most noticeable is the depiction of Idgie. In Flagg's text, the narrator is Virginia "Ninny" Threadgoode, Idgie's sister. In Jon Avnet's movie, however, there is a strong suggestion that the elderly woman telling the story is Idgie herself. Although seemingly insignificant, this change is important because of its implications for the later part of Idgie's life, since the narrator married eventually and had a child. Additionally, the change eliminates much of the racism found in Flagg's narrative. At various points in *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe*, Ninny makes disparaging comments about African Americans. Recalling stereotypes about both the transient nature of blacks and theories that "they all look the same," Virginia remarks that not only can you never really know where a colored person comes from, but "you can also never really tell how old colored people are" (Flagg 47, 50). A few chapters later, Ninny is surprised both that "colored people come in so many colors" and that there are black nurses because it requires education (Flagg 73, 74). Finally, near the end of the novel, Mrs. Threadgoode misses what she characterizes as the "Amos 'n' Andy" ways of blacks during the old days (Flagg 249).

the racialization of Caucasian tomboys expanded to include minority groups other than African American.<sup>16</sup> In both Dorothy Allison's *Bastard out of Carolina* (1992) and Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* (1993), for instance, links are established between the tomboyish main characters and Native Americans.<sup>17</sup> Born in the American Southwest, Jesse Goldberg in *Stone Butch Blues* is raised among the desert's Indian culture. "The Dineh women sang when I was born.... And so I grew in two worlds, immersed in the music of two languages. One world was Wheaties and Milton Berle. The other was fry bread and sage. One was cold, but it was mine; the other was warm, but it wasn't" (Feinberg 14). Before her family leaves the desert for the snowy suburbs of Buffalo, Jesse's Dineh grandmother gives her a ring that she claims will protect her in life. Although only six years old when she receives the gift, the talisman is treasured by the young girl. "I looked at the ring on my finger. It fit snugly. I pledged to never take it off" (Feinberg 48). Until the ring is stolen by a police officer later in the novel, Jesse wears it proudly. When she runs away from home at fifteen, in fact, the young girl makes sure to retrieve the item. "As soon as I got home I took two pillowcases and stuffed all my pants and shirts into them.... The ring! I took it out of my mother's jewelry case and slipped it on my left hand. I hurried, afraid my parents would come home and catch me"

---

<sup>16</sup> To a lesser degree, the same could be said of Flagg's *Fried Green Tomatoes*. Although African American is certainly the most common racial identity with which the tomboyish Idgie is associated, it is not the only one. When engaging in boisterous pranks or being especially mischievous, the spunky young woman adopts the Native American-sounding alter ego, "Towanda."

<sup>17</sup> While this phenomenon signals a shift in the racialization of white tomboys during the 1990s, it should be noted that this is not the first time spunky young women are connected with Native American culture. As mentioned in the Introduction, the tomboyish main character in Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie* repeatedly mentions the light of the tribal peoples. It is important to note, however, that Laura simply displays sympathy or even empathy for these men and women. Unlike the main characters in *Stone Butch Blues* or *Bastard Out of Carolina*, she does not claim an indemnificatory kinship or shared ancestry with them.

(Feinberg 47).<sup>18</sup> Whenever Jesse feels frightened or afraid, she finds comfort in the culture and climate of the Southwest that the ring evokes. During one especially brutal rape and beating, for instance, she was “rescued... from watching my own degradation: I just went away.... I found myself standing in the desert. The sky was streaked with color.....” (Feinberg 62).

Similarly, at several points in Dorothy Allison’s *Bastard Out of Carolina* (1992), the illegitimate Ruth “Bone” Boatwright is likened to her Cherokee granddaddy.<sup>19</sup> Although most members of her family have light skin and blond hair, Bone has “blue-black” locks, “Cherokee cheekbones” and what is repeatedly characterized as “Indian eyes” (Allison *Bastard* 27, 30, 25). More than simply looking like her Native American ancestor, Ruth acts like him. A quiet man who “[w]ouldn’t fight, wouldn’t barely talk,” Ruth is also a reticent youth. Rather than displaying the boisterousness for which the Boatwrights are (in)famous, the young girl often finds, “I could not have said a word if my Great-Great-Granddaddy had been standing there looking back at me with my own eyes” (Allison *Bastard* 27).<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Although *Stone Butch Blues* draws mainly on Native American traditions, at several points the oppression faced by transgender Jesse Goldberg is likened to the prejudiced faced by African Americans. To help her contextualize a recent beating, the young woman’s friend gives her copies of classic African American texts. “Ed gave me *The Ballot and the Bullet* by Malcolm X. She encouraged me to read W. E. B. DuBois and James Baldwin” (Feinberg 57).

<sup>19</sup> Although Ruth asserts a Native American heritage, it should be noted that several members of the family call both the legitimacy and the importance of this ancestry into question. When Bone’s grandmother begins telling the youth about her Cherokee granddaddy, for instance, her Uncle Earle retorts: “Oh, hell.... Every third family in Greenville Country swears it’s part of Cherokee Nation. Whether our great-granddaddy was or wasn’t, it don’t make a titty’s worth of difference. You’re a Boatwright, Bone, even if you are the strangest girl-child we got’ ” (Allison *Bastard* 27).

<sup>20</sup> In the same way Imagene “Idgie” Threadgoode can be connected with both African American and Native American cultures in Fannie Flagg’s *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe* (1987), the same could be said for Ruth Boatwright in *Bastard Out of Carolina*. Although predominantly connected with her Cherokee ancestors, there is some speculation that the family also contains black blood. Commenting on the Boatwright tendency to tell stories, Bone’s Aunt Raylene believes “that we have a little of the tarbrush on us” (Allison *Bastard* 53). When the young girl asks her cousin the significance of this remark, he asserts, “Means we got some colored people somewhere back up the line” (Allison *Bastard* 53). Although the possibility that the Boatwrights hail from a multiracial background is never confirmed, it is

In the same way a connection to black culture is used to signify the difference between “good” and “bad” whites in Flagg’s novel, the same could be said for the affinity Bone Boatwright and Jesse Goldberg share with Native Americans. Throughout both *Stone Butch Blues* and *Bastard Out of Carolina*, the girls’ connection to tribal peoples comments on their whiteness, rather than likening them to non-white minorities. Compared with many of the adults who surround Bone and Jesse, the girls are relatively devoid of prejudice. Unlike her white neighbor, for instance, Bone never asserts, “Cherokees were niggers anyway” (Allison *Bastard* 54). Similarly, while working at the factory, Jesse crosses racial lines to befriend her Native American co-workers. Listening to the songs the Native women sing while they work, Jesse strives “to hear the boundaries of each word, the patterns and repetitions” (Feinberg 78). One afternoon, without thinking, she begins to sing along. Unfortunately, Jesse is not yet part of the union, and her supervisor notices this participation and quickly fires her. “I knew management had been watching the growing solidarity with great trepidation. But my shame rekindled as I realized the foreman probably heard my voice rising alone in the song” (Feinberg 80). The progressive attitudes both Bone and Jesse possess about racial minorities announce them as “good” whites and, by extension, the novels’ heroines.

Although the ways and means of racializing white tomboys have undergone significant changes since making their first appearance in American literature and culture, their legacy lives on. To this day, many spirited young women—both literal and literary—regard Capitola Black and especially Jo March as tomboy “foremothers.” Given that these Caucasian characters revered as tomboy paradigms are also the ones

---

also never denied. In addition to the one cousin who has “kinky hair, and took some teasing for it,” a friend of the family swears to Ruth “that Cherokees were niggers anyway” (Allison *Bastard* 54).

inextricably connected with a dark hue, it seems impossible to separate the admiration of tomboyish figures with the fetishization of people of color. The reverence for one appears yoked to the fascination with the other.

In the opening pages of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970), the narrator observes, "There is really nothing more to say—except *why*. But since *why* is difficult to handle, one must take refuge in *how*" [author's emphasis] (34). Positioned as a prefatory comment to the process by which Pecola Breedlove gave birth to her daddy's doomed baby, the remark makes a distinction between the process by which an event occurs and the reason or impetus for that event. Tracing a trajectory of the ways in which white tomboyism has often been predicated on black culture in fiction by American women, this project challenges Morrison's assertion. Rather than viewing the "why" as independent from the "how," it positions them as interdependent. The various ways in which ostensibly Caucasian tomboys acquire a dark hue cannot be separated from the motivations behind these phenomena. Calling attention to this unexplored facet of female gender transgression, "Tom/Boys: The Racialization of White Tomboys in American Women's Fiction, 1840 - 1950" illuminates a further point of convergence between race and gender in the United States. As such, it contributes to the disruption of both the supposed naturalness of gender roles and the purported coherence of whiteness.

In what has become an oft-quoted statement, Naomi Wolf once pointed out that illuminating the racisms of the past is one of the comforting things "well-meaning white people" often do without necessarily dismantling racist logic. More than simply outlining the shameful way in which white tomboyism has historically fetishized people of color, the larger aim of this project is to construct this legacy so that it may be

dismantled or deconstructed. By highlighting the racist logic that has served as a scaffolding for this phenomenon, “Tom/Boys” offers the first step toward imagining a form of white gender rebellion that is not shored up by black culture.

### Selected Tomboy Bibliography

#### **Adult and Children's Fiction (chronological):**

- Catharine Maria Sedgwick, *Hope Leslie* (1827)  
 Catharine Maria Sedgwick, *The Linwoods* (1835)  
 E. D. E. N. Southworth, *The Deserted Wife* (1849)  
 E. D. E. N. Southworth, *The Hidden Hand* (1859 serialized, 1888 pub)  
 Susan Warner, *The Wide, Wide World* (1850)  
 Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852)  
 Alice Cary, *Hagar* (1852)  
 Caroline Chesebro', *Susan, The Fisherman's Daughter; or, Getting Along* (1855)  
 Mary J. Holmes, *'Lena Rivers* (1856)  
 Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Dred* (1856)  
 Harriet Wilson, *Our Nig* (1859)  
 Elizabeth Barstow Stoddard, *The Morgesons* (1862)  
 Louisa May Alcott, *Moods* (1865)  
 Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, *Gypsy Breynton* (1866)  
 Eliabeth Stuart Phelps, *Gypsy's Cousin Joy* (1866)  
 Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, *Gypsy's Sowing and Reaping* (1866)  
 Eliabeth Stuart Phelps, *Gypsy's Year at the Golden Crescent* (1867)  
 Martha Finley, *Elsie Dinsmore* (1867)  
 Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women* (1868)  
 Frederick Whittaker, *The Mustang-Hunters; or, The Beautiful Amazon of the Hidden Valley* (1871)  
 Susan Coolidge, *What Katy Did* (1872)  
 George M. Baker, *Running to Waste: The Story of a Tomboy* (1874)  
 Lillie Devereux Blake, *Fettered for Life* (1874)  
 Susan Coolidge, *What Katy Did At School* (1874)  
 Edward Wheeler, *Deadwood Dick, The Prince of the Road; or, The Black Rider of the Black Hills* (1877)  
 Henry James, *Watch And Ward* (1878)  
 Louisa May Alcott, *Jack and Jill: A Village Story* (1880)  
 John Hay, *The Bread-winners* (1883)  
 Henry James, *The Bostonians* (1886)  
 Sarah Orne Jewett, "Farmer Finch" (1886)  
 Izola L. Forrester, "Tom Junior – Tomboy." (1886/7)  
 Susan Coolidge, *What Katy Did Next* (1887)  
 Martha Finley, *Elsie's Widowhood* (1889)  
 Mary Wilkins Freeman, "Louisa" *New England Nun* (1891)  
 Wenona Gilman, *Val, the Tomboy* (1891)  
 Mark Twain, "Hellfire Hotchkiss" (written 1897, unpublished)  
 Gertrude Altherton, *The Californians* (1898)  
 Lily F. Wesselhoeft, *Torpeanuts the Tomboy* (1898)  
 L. T. Meade, *A Modern Tomboy* (190?)  
 Jeanette L. Gilder, *The Autobiography of a Tomboy* (1901)  
 Kate Douglas Wiggin, *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* (1903)  
 Jeanette L. Gilder, *The Tom-Boy at Work* (1904)



- Beulah Marie Dix, *Merrylips* (1906)  
 Anna Fuller, "The Tomboy" *Later Pratt Portraits* (1911)  
 H. B. Marriott Watson, *The Tomboy and Others* (1912)  
 Sui Sin Far, "A Chinese Boy-Girl," *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* (1912.)  
 Sui Sin Far, "The Smuggling of Tie Co," *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* (1912)  
 Sui Sin Far, "Tian Shan's Kindred Spirit," *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* (1912)  
 Mary Johnston, *Hagar* (1913)  
 Willa Cather, *O Pioneers!* (1913)  
 Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland* (1915)  
 Willa Cather, *My Antonia* (1918)  
 Willa Cather, "Tommy, The Unsentimental" (1896)  
 Zitkala-Sa, "A Warrior's Daughter," *American Indian Stories* (1921)  
 Lilian Garis, *Gloria at Boarding School* (1923)  
 Helen Woodbury, *The Misty Flats* (1925)  
 Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* (1926)  
 Phyllis Duganne & Harriet Gersman, "Tomboy!" *The American Girl* (1928)  
 Lilian Garis, *A Girl Called Ted* (1929)  
 Lilian Garis, *Tony and Ted: Two Girls of Today* (1929)  
 Dinah Stevens, *Tomboy* (1930)  
 Carolyn Keene, *The Nancy Drew Mystery Stories* (1930 – 1957)  
 Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Little House in the Big Woods* (1932)  
 Bess Moyer, *The Girl Flyers on Adventure Island* (1932)  
 Willaim Faulkner, *Light in August* (1932)  
 Ellis Butler & Louise Kent, *Jo Ann, Tomboy* (1933)  
 Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Farmer Boy* (1933)  
 Nathaniel West, *Miss Lonelyhearts* (1933)  
 Patrick Cassidy, "Honolulu Tomboy," *The Sun and the Rain* (1934)  
 F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Tender is the Night* (1934)  
 Anne Pence Davis, *Mimi at Camp: The Adventures of a Tomboy* (1935)  
 Carol Ryrie Brink, *Caddie Woodlawn* (1935)  
 Kate Seredy, *The Good Master* (1935)  
 Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Little House on the Praire* (1935)  
 Gale Wilhelm, *We Too Are Drifting* (1935)  
 Ruth Sawyer, *Roller Skates* (1936)  
 Sara Haardt, "Tomboy," *Southern Album* (1936)  
 Clair Blank, *The Adventure Girls in the Air* (1936)  
 Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood* (1936/7) [Robin Vote]  
 Laura Ingalls Wilder, *On the Banks of Plum Creek* (1937)  
 Elizabeth Enright, *Thimble Summer* (1938)  
 Laura Ingalls Wilder, *By the Shores of Silver Lake* (1939)  
 Ruth Sawyer, *The Year of Jubilo* (1940)  
 Laura Ingalls Wilder, *The Long Winter* (1940)  
 Carson McCullers, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* (1940)  
 Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Little Town on the Praire* (1941)  
 Laura Ingalls Wilder, *These Happy Golden Years* (1943)  
 Carson McCullers, *The Member of the Wedding* (1946)

- T. H. White, *Mistress Masham's Repose* (1946)  
 William Hand, *Fair City – The Tomboy* (1946)  
 Carson McCullers, *The Ballad of the Sad Café* (1951)  
 Peggy Goodin, *Clementine* (1946)  
 Lois Lenski, *Texas Tomboy* (1950)  
 Hal Ellson, *Tomboy* (1950)  
 Allyn Allen, *Lone Star Tomboy* (1951)  
 Ruth Seid, *The Changelings*, (1955)  
 Paula Marshall, *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959)  
 Carolyn Keene, *The Nancy Drew Mystery Series* (1959) (reissue)  
 Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960)  
 Louise Fitzhugh, *Harriet the Spy* (1964)  
 Elizabeth Burleson, *Middl'un* (1968)  
 ? Isabel Miller, *Patience and Sarah* (1969)  
 Jane Langton, *The Boyhood of Grace Jones* (1972)  
 Laura Ingalls Wilder, *The First Four Years* (1972)  
 Rita Mae Brown, *Rubyfruit Jungle* (1973)  
 B. Miles, *The Real Me* (1974)  
 Maxine Hong Kingston, *Woman Warrior* (1975)  
 Norma Klein, *Tomboy* (1978)  
 Edith Summer Kelly, *Weeds* (1982)  
 Nancy Garden, *Annie on My Mind* (1982)  
 Robin McKinley, *The Blue Sword* (1982)  
 Jamaica Kincaid, *Annie John* (1983)  
 Robin McKinley, *The Hero and the Crown* (1984)  
 Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (1984)  
 Cynthia Voight, *Jackaroo* (1985)  
 Ernest Hemingway, *The Garden of Eden* (wr. 1946 – 61; pub. 1986)  
 Jane Rule, *Desert of the Heart* (1986) [Ann]  
 Fannie Flagg, *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistlestop Café* (1987)  
 Toni Morrison, *Sula* (1987)  
 Sandra Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street* (1984)  
 Jamaica Kincaid, *At the Bottom of the River* (1992)  
 Leslie Finberg, *Stone Butch Blues* (1993)

**Lesbian Pulp Novels (chronological):**

Gale Wilhelm, *We Too are Drifting* (1935, 1955)  
 Diana Fredericks, *Diana: The Story of a Strange Love* (1939)  
 Anna Elisabet Weirauch, *The Scorpion* (1948)  
 Felice Swados, *House of Fury* (1941)  
 Tereska Torres, *Women's Barracks* (1950)  
 Hal Ellson, *Tomboy* (1951)  
 Lucie Marchal, *The Mesh* (1951)  
 Janet Pritchard, *Warped Women* (1951)  
 Hal Ellson, *Tomboy* (1951)  
 Lilyan Brock, *Queer Patterns* (1952)  
 J. C. Priest, *Forbidden* (1952)  
 Elizabeth Craigan, *Either is Love* (1952)  
 Nancy Morgan, *City of Women* (1952)  
 Packer Vin, *Spring Fire* (1952)  
 Claire Morgan, *The Price of Salt* (1952)  
 Vincent E. Burns, *Female Convict* (1952)  
 Joan Henry, *Women in Prison* (1953)  
 Florence Stonebraker, *Strange Passions* (1953)  
 Calire Morgan, *The Price of Salt* (1953)  
 Gale Wilhelm, *The Strange Path* (1953)  
 Flora Fletcher, *Strange Sisters* (1954)  
 Sara Harris, *The Wayward Ones* (1954)  
 Ann Aldrich, *We Walk Alone* (1955)  
 R. V. Cassell, *Dormitory Women* (1955)  
 Michael Norday, *Warped* (1955)  
 Agnete Holk, *Strange Friends* (1955)  
 Edwina Mark, *My Sister, My Beloved* (1955)  
 Jordan Park, *Sorority House* (1956)  
 Guy des Cars, *The Damned One* (1956)  
 Anonymous, *Adam and Two Eves* (1956)  
 Ann Bannon, *Odd Girl Out* (1957)  
 Carol Emery, *Queer Affair* (1957)  
 Reed Marr, *Women Without Men* (1957)  
 Carol Emery, *Queer Affair* (1957)  
 Valerie Taylor, *Whisper Their Love* (1957)  
 Orrie Hill, *Girls' Dormitory* (1958)  
 Ann Aldrich, *We, Too, Must Love* (1958)  
 Tereska Torres, *The Dangerous Games* (1958)  
 March Hastings, *Three Women* (1958)  
 Ann Aldrich, *We Walk Alone* (1958)  
 Wenzell Brown, *Prison Girl* (1958)  
 Vin Packer, *The Evil Friendship* (1958)  
 Ann Bannon, *Women in the Shadows* (1959)  
 Ralph Dean, *One Kind of Woman* (1959)

Sloane Britain, *First Person, 3<sup>rd</sup> Sex* (1959)  
 Don King, *Bitter Love* (1959)  
 J. C. Priest, *Private School* (1959)  
 Edwina Mark, *The Odd Ones* (1959)  
 Randy Salem, *Chris* (1959)  
 Lesley Evans, *Strange Are the Ways of Love* (1959)  
 Orrie Hitt, *Mimi* (1959)  
 Ann Bannon, *I Am A Woman* (1959)  
 Paula Christian, *Edge of Twilight* (1959)  
 Vincent G. Burns, *Female Convict* (1959)  
 Don Holiday, *Sin School* (1959)  
 Kay Addams, *Queer Patterns* (1959)  
 Ann Aldrich, *Carol in a Thousand Cities* (1960)  
 Norman Bligh, *The Sisters* (1960)  
 Kay Martin, *The Whispered Sex* (1960)  
 Flora Flechter, *Strange Sisters* (1960)  
 Harry Whittington, *Rebel Woman* (1960)  
 Ann Bannon, *Journey to A Woman* (1960)  
 Sloane Britain, *Meet Marilyn* (1960)  
 Sloane Britton, *Unnatural* (1960)  
 Valerie Taylor, *The Girls in 3-B* (1960)  
 Kay Addams, *Warped Desire* (1960)  
 Marjorie Lee, *The Lion House* (1960)  
 Shirley Verel, *The Other Side of Venus* (1960)  
 Arline McNamee Hammond, *Tomboy* (1960)  
 Ann Bannon, *The Marriage* (1960)  
 Valerie Taylor, *Stranger on Lesbos* (1960)  
 Lee Morell, *Nurses' Quarters* (1960)  
 Ray Morrison, *Reformatory Girls* (1960)  
 Evans McKnight, *She Made Her Bed* (1960)  
 Paula Christian, *Love is Where You Find It* (1961)  
 Martha Marsden, *Intimate* (1961)  
 Jay Warren, *The Path Between* (1961)  
 Sheldon Lord, *Of Shame and Joy* (1961)  
 Peggy Swenson, *The Unloved* (1961)  
 March Hastings, *The 3<sup>rd</sup> Theme* (1961)  
 Arthur Aldon, *By Love Depraved* (1961)  
 Jan Hudson, *Satan's Daughter* (1961)  
 Ann Bannon, *Beebo Brinker* (1962)  
 Randy Salem, *Tender Torment* (1962)  
 Sloane Britain, *Ladder of Flesh* (1962)  
 Alain Abby, *Libido Beach* (1962)  
 Paul Gregory, *The Price was Perversity* (1962)  
 Arthur Aldon, *The One Between* (1962)  
 Creighton Brown Burnham, *Born Innocent* (1962)  
 Lason Hytes, *The Doctor and the Dike* (1962)

Lester Lake, *Lady Lovers* (1962)  
 Jack Lynn, *3 Passionate Sisters* (1962)  
 Joan Ellis, *Gay Girl* (1962)  
 James Harvey, *Degraded Women* (1962)  
 Loren Beauchamp, *Strange Delights* (1962)  
 Miriam Gardner, *The Strange Women* (1962)  
 Andrew Shaw, *Reform School Girls* (1962)  
 Sheldon Lord, *21 Gay Street* (1962)  
 Arthur Aldon, *Strange Seduction* (1962)  
 Dallas Mayo, *Voluptuous Voyage* (1962)  
 Robert Turner, *Strange Sisters* (1962)  
 Arthur Adlon, *The Odd Kind* (1962)  
 Kimberly Kemp, *Perfume and Pain* (1962)  
 Joan Ellis, *Gay Scene* (1962)  
 Arthur Alson, *The Odd Kind* (1962)  
 Richard Villanova, *Her Woman* (1962)  
 Edie Fisher, *Prisoner of My Past* (1962)  
 March Hastings, *The Third Sex Syndrome* (1962)  
 Kimberly Kemp, *Operation: Sex* (1962)  
 Randy Salem, *The Sex Between* (1962)  
 Kimberly Kemp, *Lap of Luxury* (1962)  
 Paula Christian, *This Side of Love* (1963)  
 Valerie Taylor, *A World Without Men* (1963)  
 Sheldon Lord, *Marta* (1963)  
 Jo Ann Radcliff, *They Call Me Lez* (1963)  
 Tom Foran, *The Twisted Ones* (1963)  
 March Hastings, *Imitation Lovers* (1963)  
 Jason Hytes, *The Wild Week* (1963)  
 Peggy Swenson, *Pajama Party* (1963)  
 Sheldon Lord, *The Sisterhood* (1963)  
 Jessie Dumont, *I Prefer Girls* (1963)  
 Orrie Hitt, *Torrid Wench* (1963)  
 Anonymous, *Deviate Wife* (1963)  
 Richard Villanova, *The Other Kind* (1963)  
 Valerie Taylor, *Return to Lesbos* (1963)  
 Lee Thomas, *Mask of Lesbos* (1963)  
 Celia L. Powers, *Lesbo Wife* (1963)  
 Herb Roberts, *The Narrow Line* (1963)  
 Barbara Brooks, *Just the Two of Us* (1963)  
 Kel Holland, *The Strange Young Wife* (1963)  
 J. Malcolm Maxwell, *The Other Side of Love* (1963)  
 Anonymous, *A Gay, Gay World* (1963)  
 March Hastings, *The Heat of Day* (1963)  
 Anonymous, *Strange Lust* (1963)  
 Michael Norday, *Strange Thirsts* (1963)  
 Jack Noble, *Unnatural Lovers* (1963)

Valerie Taylor, *Journey to Fulfillment* (1964)  
 Kay Addams and Orrie Hitt, *My Lesbians Loves* (1964)  
 D. W. Craig, *Only in Secret* (1964)  
 Peggy Swenson, *The Gay Partners* (1964)  
 Kirby MacLane, *For Women Only* (1964)  
 Helen Morgan, *Killer Dyke* (1964)  
 Sheldon Lord, *The Third Way* (1964)  
 Kay Johnson, *Her Raging Needs* (1964)  
 Anonymous, *The Beds of Lesbos* (1964)  
 Peggy Swenson, *Queer Beach* (1964)  
 Peggy Swenson, *Lesbian Lure* (1964)  
 Tom Vail, *This is Love* (1964)  
 Edwin West, *Young and Innocent* (1964)  
 Miriam Gardner, *Twilight Lovers* (1964)  
 Peggy Swenson, *Suzy and Vera* (1964)  
 Danni Sherwood, *So Strange a Love* (1964)  
 Rea Michaels, *Two-Way Street* (1964)  
 Jill Emerson, *Enough of Sorrow* (1965)  
 Amory Paine, *The Beauty Game* (1965)  
 Kimberly Kemp, *Coming Out Party* (1965)  
 Peggy Swenson, *Pamela's Secret Agony* (1965)  
 Sloan Britain, *Finders Keepers* (1965)  
 Kimberly Kemp, *Private Party* (1965)  
 Randy Salem, *Sex in the Shadows* (1965)  
 March Hastings, *Abnormal Wife* (1965)  
 Ank Shield, *Lesbian Nurse* (1965)  
 Paula Christian, *Amanda* (1965)  
 Paul V. Russo, *Into the Fire* (1965)  
 ? Jess Stren, *The Grapevine* (1965)  
 Monica Roberts, *Woman of Darkness* (1966)  
 Sloane Britain, *Strumpets' Jungle* (1966)  
 Fred Haley, *Satan was a Lesbian* (1966)  
 Julie Rowe, *By Appointment Only: Sex Salon* (1966)  
 Pauline Cooner, *The Olive Branch* (1967)  
 March Hastings, *Anybody's Girl* (1967)  
 Sheldon Lord, *69 Barrow Street* (1967)  
 Rhoda Rollins, *The Strange Trio* (1967)  
 Stacey Cubb, *Left of Sex* (1967)  
 March Hastings, *The Unashamed* (1968)  
 Eve Linkletter, *Lesbian Orgies* (1968)  
 Steve Harragin, *The Queer Sisters* (ND)  
 Nelson Edge, *Passion Fruit* (ND)  
 Fletcher Bennett, *Moment of Desire* (ND)

**Drama / Musicals (chronological):**

Elizabeth Frances Gupthill, *Brave Little Tomboy: A Play of the Revolution* (1912)  
 Lillian Hellerman, *The Children's Hour* (1934)  
 Charles George, *My Tomboy Girl: A Musical Comedy in Three Acts* (1936)  
 Irving Berlin, *Annie Get Your Gun* (1946)  
 Carson McCullers, *The Member of the Wedding* (1951)  
 William Walden, *Tomboy Wonder: A Comedy in Three Acts* (1958)  
 Edward Albee, *The Ballad of the Sad Café* (1963)  
 Jessica Martin, *Tomboy* (2000)  
 Jim Jacobs & Warren Casey, *Grease* (1972)  
 Leonard Bernstein, Stephen Sondheim, and Arthur Laurents, *West Side Story* (1957)

**Film (chronological):**

Dir. J. Stuart Blackton, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1910)  
 Dir. William Robert Daly, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1914)  
 Dir. Sidney Drew, *A Florida Enchantment* (1914)  
 Dir. William Desmond Taylor, *Her Father's Son* (1916)  
 Dir. Harry A. Pollard, *Miss Jackie of the Navy* (1916)  
 Dir. Sherwood MacDonald, *Sunny Jane* (1917)  
 Dir. Harley Knoles, *Little Women* (1918)  
 Dir. J. Searle Dawley, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1918)  
 Dir. Oscar Opfel, *Phil-for-short* (1919)  
 Dir. Wayne Mack, *Bubbles* (1920)  
 Dir. William Beaudine, *Little Annie Rooney* (1925)  
 Dir. Clarence G. Badger, *She's a Sheik* (1927)  
 Dir. Harry A. Pollard, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1927)  
 Dir. William A. Wellman, *Beggars of Life* (1928)  
 Dir. Henry King, *She Goes to War* (1929)  
 Dir. Rouben Mamoulian, *Queen Christina* (1933)  
 Dir. George Cukor, *Little Women* (1933)  
 Dir. George Stevens, *Annie Oakley* (1935)  
 Dir. Harold D. Schuster, *A Very Young Lady* (1941)  
 Dir. John English, *Raiders of Sunset Pass* (1943)  
 Dir. Vincente Minnelli, *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944)  
 Dir. Henry Hathaway, *Home in Indiana* (1944)  
 Dir. Clarence Brown, *National Velvet* (1945)  
 Dir. George Marshall, *Incendiary Blonde* (1945)  
 Dir. William Wellman, *Yellow Sky* (1948)  
 Dir. Victor Fleming, *Joan of Arc* (1948)  
 Dir. Mervyn LeRoy, *Little Women* (1949)  
 Dir. Lew Landers, *Stagecoach Kid* (1949)  
 Dir. George Sidney, *Annie Get Your Gun* (1950)  
 Dir. Charles Lamont, *Flame of Araby* (a.k.a. *Flame of the Desert*) (1951)  
 Dir. Roy Del Ruth, *On Moonlight Bay* (1951)  
 Dir. Norman Z. McLeod, *Never Wave at a WAC* (1952)  
 Dir. George Cukor, *Pat and Mike* (1952)

Dir. Fred Zinneman, *The Member of the Wedding* (1952)  
 Dir. David Butler, *Calamity Jane* (1953)  
 Dir. Alan Dwan, *Passion* (1954)  
 Dir. George Cukor, *Pat and Mike* (1954)  
 Dir. Nicholas Ray, *Johnny Guitar* (1954)  
 Dir. Don Weis, *The Adventures of Hajji Baba* (1954)  
 Dir. Orson Welles, *A Touch of Evil* (1958)  
 Dir. Francis D. Lyon, *Tomboy and the Champ* (1961)  
 Dir. Robert Wise, *West Side Story* (1961)  
 Dir. William Wyler, *The Children's Hour* (1961)  
 Dir. Robert Mulligan, *To Kill A Mockingbird* (1962)  
 Dir. Norman Taurog, *Palm Springs Weekend* (1963)  
 Dir. Robert Mulligan, *Inside Daisy Clover* (1965)  
 Dir. Doris Wishman, *Bad Girls Go To Heaven* (1965)  
 Dir. John Ford, *Seven Women* (1965)  
 Dir. Sande N. Johnsen, *Teenage Gang Debs* (1966)  
 Dir. John Huston, *Reflections in a Golden Eye* (1967)  
 Dir. Robert Aldrich, *The Killing of Sister George* (1968)  
 Dir. Henry Hathaway, *True Grit* (1969)  
 Dir. Peter Bogdannovitch, *Paper Moon* (1973)  
 Dir. Martin Scorsese, *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* (1974)  
 Dir. John Berry, *The Bad News Bears* (1976)  
 Dir. Michael Pressman, *The Bad News Bears in Breaking Training* (1977)  
 Dir. John Water, *Desperate Living* (1977)  
 Dir. Woody Allen, *Annie Hall* (1977)  
 Dir. John Berry, *The Bad News Bears Go To Japan* (1978)  
 Dir. Randal Kleiser, *Grease* (1978)  
 Dir. David Lowell Rich, *Little Women* (1978)  
 Dir. Bryan Forbes, *International Velvet* (1978)  
 Dir. Adrian Lyne, *Foxes* (1980)  
 Dir. Alan Myole, *Times Square* (1980)  
 Dir. Ronald F. Maxwell, *Little Darlings* (1980)  
 Dir. Howard Zieff, *Private Benjamin* (1980)  
 Dir. Blake Edwards, *Victor/Victoria* (1982)  
 Dir. Slava Tsukerman, *Liquid Sky* (1982)  
 Dir. Susan Seidelman, *Smithereens* (1982)  
 Dir. Robert Towne, *Personal Best* (1982)  
 Dir. Barbra Streisand, *Yentl* (1983)  
 Dir. Herb Freed, *Tomboy* (1985)  
 Dir. Jeremy Paul Kagan, *The Journey of Natty Gann* (1985)  
 Dir. James Cameron, *Aliens* (1986)  
 Dir. Paul Schneider, *Something Special* (1986)  
 Dir. Donna Deitch, *Desert Hearts* (1986) [Cay]  
 Dir. Penny Marshall, *Jumpin' Jack Flash* (1986)  
 Dir. Paul Schneider, *Willy/Milly* (1986)  
 Dir. Howard Deutch, *Some Kind of Wonderful* (1987)



Dir. Daniel Goldberg, *Feds* (1988)  
 Dir. Simon Callow, *The Ballad of the Sad Café* (1991)  
 Dir. Jonathan Demme, *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991)  
 Dir. Jon Avnet, *Fried Green Tomatoes* (1991)  
 Dir. Percy Aldon, *Salmonberries* (1992)  
 Dir. Stephen Herek, *The Mighty Ducks* (1992)  
 Dir. Penny Marshall, *A League of Their Own* (1992)  
 Dir. Nicole Conn, *Claire of the Moon* (1992)  
 Dir. Maggie Greenwald, *The Ballad of Little Jo* (1993)  
 Dir. Yurek Bogayevicz, *Three of Hearts* (1993)  
 Dir. Gillian Armstrong, *Little Women* (1994)  
 Dir. Jonathan Kaplan, *Bad Girls* (1994)  
 Dir. Rose Troche, *Go Fish* (1994)  
 Dir. Maria Maggenti, *The Incredibly True Adventures of Two Girls in Love* (1995)  
 Dir. F. Gary Gray, *Set it Off* (1996)  
 Dir. Annette Haywood-Carter, *Foxfire* (1996)  
 Dir. Larry and Andy Wachowski, *Bound* (1996)  
 Dir. Mary Harron, *I Shot Andy Warhol* (1996)  
 Dir. Cheryl Dunye, *The Watermelon Woman* (1996)  
 Dir. J. Michael McClary, *Annie O* (1996)  
 Dir. Alex Sichel, *All Over Me* (1997)  
 Dir. Alessandro De Gaetano, *Butch Camp* (1997)  
 Dir. Fiedler Cook, *The Member of the Wedding* (1997)  
 Dir. Ridley Scott, *G. I. Jane* (1997)  
 Dir. Max Färberböck, *Aimée and Jaguar* (1999)  
 Dir. Jamie Babbit, *But I'm A Cheerleader*, (1999)  
 Dir. Francine Rzeznik, *Equinox Knocks*, (1999)  
 Dir. Gina Prince-Bythewood, *Love & Basketball* 2000)  
 Dir. Karyn Kusama, *Girlfight* (2000)  
 Dir. Christopher Guest, *Best In Show* (2000)  
 Dir. Donald Petrie, *Miss Congeniality* (2000)  
 Dir. Harriet Dodge, *By Hook or By Crook* (2001)  
 Dir. David Fincher, *Panic Room* (2002)

#### **Hollywood Prison Pictures:**

Dir. Lew Landers, *Condemned Women* (1938)  
 Dir. Lambert Hillyer, *Women in Prison* (1938)  
 Dir. John Cromwell, *Caged* (1950)  
 Dir. Lewis Seiler, *Women's Prison* (1955)  
 Dir. Edward L. Cahn, *Girls in Prison* (1956)  
 Dir. Tom DeSimone, *Prison Girls* (1972)  
 Dir. Jonathan Demme, *Caged Heat* (1974)  
 Dir. Tim Kincaid, *Bad Girls Dormitory* (1985)

**Music (chronological):**

Red Norvo and his Swing Septet, "Tomboy," *Swing Groups, 1931 - 1936*  
 Steve Allen, "Tomboy," vol 1., *Beautiful Songs by Steve Allen, 1964 -1993*  
 The Beach Boys, "Hey Little Tomboy," *M. I. U. Album* (1978)  
 The Romantics, "Tomboy," *National Breakout* (1980)  
 Crosby, Stills and Nash, "Tomboy," *Live it up* (1990)  
 Cris Williamson & Tret Fure, "Tomboy Girl," *Radio Quiet* (1998)  
 Perry Como, "Tomboy," *Definitive Collection* (2000)  
 Rhudabega, "Tomboy," *Rhudabega* (2000)  
 Cunha, "My Honolulu Tomboy," *Lei of Stars* (various artists) (2000)  
 Robert Burke Warren "Tomboygirl," *To This Day* (2000)

## Works Cited

- Adams, Bluford. *E Pluribus Barnum: The Great Showman and the Making of U. S. Popular Culture*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 1997.
- Adams, Rachel. "‘Mixture of Delicious and Freak’: The Queer Fiction of Carson McCullers." *American Literature*. 71.3 (September 1999): 551 – 83.
- Adams, Rachel. *Sideshow, U. S. A.: Freaks and the American Cultural Imagination*. Chicago: U of Chicago, 2001.
- Albee, Edward. *The Ballad of the Sad Café: The Play*. 1963. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970.
- Alcott, Louisa May. "The Abbot’s Ghost: or, Maurice Treherne’s Temptation." 1867. *Louisa May Alcott Unmasked: Collected Thrillers*. Edited by Madeleine Stern. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1995. 539 – 82.
- , "Anna’s Whim." *Silver Pitchers*. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1876. 47 – 78.
- , "Ariel. A Legend of the Lighthouse." 1865. *Louisa May Alcott Unmasked: Collected Thrillers*. Ed. Madeleine Stern. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1995. 265 – 93.
- , "Aunt Klipp." *Proverb Stories*. 1876. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1908. 25 – 58.
- , "The Banner of Beaumanoir." *Spinning-Wheel Stories*. 1884. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1931. 125 – 48.
- , "The Baron’s Gloves." *Proverb Stories*. 1882. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1908. 179 – 290.
- , "Behind a Mask; or, A Woman’s Power." 1866. *Alternative Alcott*. Ed. Elaine Showalter. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1988. 95 – 202.
- , "La Belle Bayadere." 1870. *Louisa May Alcott Unmasked: Collected Thrillers*. Edited by Madeleine Stern. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1995. 742 – 51.
- , "Betrayed by a Buckle." 1870. *Louisa May Alcott Unmasked: Collected Thrillers*. Edited by Madeleine Stern. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1995. 733 – 41.
- , "Bianca: Operatic Tragedy." *Comic Tragedies*. 1893. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1904. 257 – 75.

- "The Blue and the Gray. A Hospital Sketch." *Louisa May Alcott: Selected Fiction*. Ed. Daniel Shealy, Madeleine B. Stern and Joel Myerson. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1990. 168 – 184.
- "The Brownie and the Princess." *Lulu's Library*. Vol. 2. 1887. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1901.
- "The Candy Country." *Lulu's Library*. Vol. 1. 1885. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1886. 36 – 63.
- "Captive of Castille; or, The Moorish Maiden's Vow." *Comic Tragedies*. 1893. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1904. 95 – 145.
- "A Christmas Dream, and How it Came True." *Lulu's Library*. Vol. 1. 1885. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1886. 7 – 35.
- "Cockyloo." *Lulu's Library*. Vol. 1. 1885. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1886. 95 – 108.
- "Colored Soldiers' Letters." *Louisa May Alcott on Race, Sex and Slavery*. Ed. Sarah Elbert. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1997. 41 – 6.
- *Comic Tragedies*. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1893.
- "Corny's Catamount." *Spinning-Wheel Stories*. 1884. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1931. 231 – 55.
- "Countess Varazoff." 1868. *Louisa May Alcott Unmasked: Collected Thrillers*. Ed. Madeleine Stern. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1995. 638 – 47.
- "Cupid and Chow-Chow." *Aunt Jo's Scrap Bag*. Vol. 3. *Cupid and Chow-Chow*. 1873. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1880. 1 – 40.
- "A Double Tragedy. An Actor's Story." 1865. *Louisa May Alcott Unmasked: Collected Thrillers*. Edited by Madeleine Stern. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1995. 251 – 64.
- *Eight Cousins*. 1875. New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1980.
- "Eli's Education." *Spinning-Wheel Stories*. 1884. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1931. 50 – 75.
- "Enigmas." *A Whisper in the Dark: Twelve Thrilling Tales by Louisa May Alcott*. Ed. Stefan Dziemianowicz. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1996. 451 – 85.
- "The Fate of the Forrests." 1865. *Louisa May Alcott Unmasked: Collected*

- Thrillers*. Ed. Madeleine Stern. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1995. 144 – 74.
- , “France.” *Aunt Jo’s Scrap Bag*. Vol. 2: *Shawl-Straps*. 1872. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1893. 68 – 127.
- , “The Greek Slave.” *Comic Tragedies*. 1893. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1904. 147 – 206.
- , “A Happy Birthday.” *Aunt Jo’s Scrap Bag*. Vol. 4: *My Girls*. 1877. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1878.
- , “Honor’s Fortune.” 1869. *Louisa May Alcott Unmasked: Collected Thrillers*. Ed. Madeleine Stern. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1995. 704 – 13.
- , “Hope’s Debut.” *Louisa May Alcott: Selected Fiction*. Ed. Daniel Shealy, Madeleine B. Stern and Joel Myerson. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1990. 79 – 98.
- , “Hospital Sketches.” 1863. *Alternative Alcott*. Ed. Elaine Showalter. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1988. 1 – 73.
- , “An Hour.” *Louisa May Alcott on Race, Sex and Slavery*. Ed. Sarah Elbert. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1997. 47 – 68.
- , “How They Ran Away.” *Lulu’s Library*. Vol. 1. 1885. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1886. 128 – 55.
- , “Ion.” *Comic Tragedies*. 1893. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1904. 207 – 56.
- , *Jack and Jill: A Village Story*. 1880. Garden City, NJ: Nelson Doubleday, 1956.
- , “Jerseys; or, The Girls’ Ghost.” *Spinning-Wheel Stories*. 1884. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1931. 149 – 77.
- , “La Jeune; or, Actress and Woman.” 1868. *Louisa May Alcott Unmasked: Collected Thrillers*. Edited by Madeleine Stern. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1995. 625 - 37.
- , *Jo’s Boys*. 1886. New York: Bantam, 1995.
- , “The Lady and the Woman.” *Louisa May Alcott: Selected Fiction*. Ed. Daniel Shealy, Madeleine B. Stern and Joel Myerson. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1990. 35 – 55.
- , “Little Button-Rose.” *A Garland for Girls*. 1887. Boston: Little, Brown and

- Company, 1905. 174 – 220.
- , “Little Gulliver.” *Aunt Jo’s Scrap Bag*. Vol. 6. *An Old-Fashioned Thanksgiving*. 1882. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1888. 163 – 77.
- , “The Little House in the Garden.” *Spinning-Wheel Stories*. 1884. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1931. 179 – 205.
- , *Little Men*. 1871. New York: Penguin, 1986.
- , “Little Things.” *Spinning-Wheel Stories*. 1884. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1931. 99 – 123.
- , *Little Women*. 1868. Edited by Elaine Showalter. New York: Penguin, 1989.
- , “London.” *Aunt Jo’s Scrap Bag*. Vol. 2. *Shawl-Straps*. 1872. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1893. 194 – 226.
- , *Long, Fatal Love Chase*. wr. 1866. New York: Dell, 1995.
- , “Madam Cluck, and her Family.” *Aunt Jo’s Scrap Bag*. Vol. 1. *My Boys*. 1871. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1872. 100 – 10.
- , “A Marble Woman: or, The Mysterious Model.” 1864. *Plots and Counterplots: More Unknown Thrillers of Louisa May Alcott*. Ed. Madeleine Stern. New York: William Morrow and Company, 1976. 133 – 237.
- , “Marian Earle; or, Only An Actress!” 1858. *Plots and Counterplots: More Unknown Thrillers of Louisa May Alcott*. Ed. Madeleine Stern. New York: William Morrow and Company, 1976.
- , “May Flowers.” *A Garland for Girls*. 1887. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1905. 1 – 42.
- , “Merry’s Monthly Chat.” *Louisa May Alcott: Selected Fiction*. Ed. Daniel Shealy, Madeleine B. Stern and Joel Myerson. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1990. 252 – 5.
- , “M. L.” *Louisa May Alcott on Race, Sex and Slavery*. Ed. Sarah Elbert. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1997. 3 – 28.
- , “A Modern Cinderella; or, The Little Old Shoe.” *Louisa May Alcott: Selected Fiction*. Ed. Daniel Shealy, Madeleine B. Stern and Joel Myerson. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1990. 228 – 51.
- , “A Modern Mephistopheles.” 1877. *A Whisper in the Dark: Twelve Thrilling*

- Tales by Louisa May Alcott.* Ed. Stefan Dziemianowicz. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1996. 1 – 131.
- *Moods.* 1865. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1996.
- "Music and Macaroni." *Lulu's Library.* Vol. 3. 1889. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1895. 94 – 141.
- "My Boys." *Aunt Jo's Scrap Bag.* Vol. 1: *My Boys.* 1871. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1872. 1 – 34.
- "My Contraband." 1863. *Louisa May Alcott on Race, Sex and Slavery.* Ed. Sarah Elbert. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1997. 69 – 86.
- "My Girls." *Aunt Jo's Scrap Bag.* Vol. 4: *My Girls.* 1877. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1878. 7 – 27.
- "My Mysterious Mademoiselle." *The Lost Stories of Louisa May Alcott.* Ed. Madeleine Stern. New York: Citadel Press, 1995. 111 - 126.
- "Naughty Jocko." *Lulu's Library.* Vol. 1. 1885. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1886. 64 – 79.
- "Nelly's Hospital." *Louisa May Alcott on Race, Sex and Slavery.* Ed. Sarah Elbert. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1997. 29 – 40.
- "A Night." *Louisa May Alcott: Selected Fiction.* Ed. Daniel Shealy, Madeleine B. Stern and Joel Myerson. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1990. 155 – 67.
- "Norna; or, The Witch's Curse." *Comic Tragedies.* 1893. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1904. 15 – 94.
- "A Nurse's Story." 1865/6. *Louisa May Alcott Unmasked: Collected Thrillers.* Ed. Madeleine Stern. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1995. 294 – 360.
- "Off." *Aunt Jo's Scrap Bag.* Vol. 2: *Shawl-Straps.* 1872. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1893. 1 – 17.
- *An Old-Fashioned Girl.* 1870. New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1980.
- "Onawandah." *Spinning-Wheel Stories.* 1884. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1931. 76 – 98.
- "On Picket Duty." *Proverb Stories.* 1882. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1908. 141 – 78.
- "A Pair of Eyes; or, Modern Magic." 1863. *Louisa May Alcott Unmasked:*

- Collected Thrillers*. Edited by Madeleine B. Stern. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1995. 59 – 81.
- , "Pauline's Passion and Punishment." 1863. *Louisa May Alcott Unmasked: Collected Thrillers*. Ed. Madeleine Stern. Boston: Northeastern, 1995. 3 – 31.
- , "Perilous Play." 1869. *Louisa May Alcott Unmasked: Collected Thrillers*. Ed. Madeleine Stern. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1995. 686 – 94.
- , Preface. *Proverb Stories*. 1882. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1908.
- , "Recollections of My Childhood." *Lulu's Library*. Vol. 3. 1889. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1895. 7 – 21.
- , "The Rival Painters: A Tale of Rome." *Louisa May Alcott: Selected Fiction*. Ed. Daniel Shealy, Madeleine B. Stern and Joel Myerson. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1990. 5 – 9.
- , "The Rival Prima Donnas." 1854. *Louisa May Alcott: Selected Fiction*. Ed. Daniel Shealy, Madeleine B. Stern and Joel Myerson. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1990. 10 – 20.
- , "The Romance of a Summer's Day." *Silver Pitchers*. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1876. 102 – 35.
- , *Rose in Bloom*. 1876. New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1980.
- , "Seven Black Cats." *Aunt Jo's Scrap Bag*. Vol. 5. *Jimmy's Cruise in the Pinafore*. 1879. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1896. 52 – 66.
- , "The Sister's Trial." *Louisa May Alcott: Selected Fiction*. Ed. Daniel Shealy, Madeleine B. Stern and Joel Myerson. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1990. 215 – 27.
- , "The Skeleton in the Closet." 1867. *Plots and Counterplots: More Unknown Thrillers of Louisa May Alcott*. Ed. Madeleine Stern. New York: William Morrow and Company, 1976. 241 – 60.
- , "Sophie's Secret." *Lulu's Library*. Vol. 3. 1889. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1895. 165 – 204.
- , "Taming a Tartar." 1867. *Louisa May Alcott Unmasked: Collected Thrillers*. Ed. Madeleine Stern. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1995. 583 – 616.
- , "Tessa's Surprise." *Aunt Jo's Scrap Bag*. Vol. 1: *My Boys*. 1871. Boston:



- Roberts Brothers, 1872. 35 – 57.
- , "Thrice Tempted." *Louisa May Alcott: Selected Fiction*. Ed. Daniel Shealy, Madeleine B. Stern and Joel Myerson. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1990. 99 – 116.
- , "Transcendental Wild Oats." 1874. *Alternative Alcott*. Ed. Elaine Showalter. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1988. 364 – 379.
- , "Trudel's Seige." *Lulu's Library*. Vol. 3. 1889. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1895. 219 – 58.
- , *Under the Lilacs*. 1878. Garden City, NJ: Nelson Doubleday, 1955.
- , "The Unloved Wife; or, Woman's Faith." *Comic Tragedies*. 1893. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1904. 277 – 317.
- , "V. V.: or, Plots and Counterplots." 1865. *Louisa May Alcott Unmasked: Collected Thrillers*. Edited by Madeleine Stern. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1995. 82 – 143.
- , "Water-Lilies." *A Garland for Girls*. 1887. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1905. 96 – 131.
- , "What Becomes of the Pins." *Aunt Jo's Scrap Bag*. Vol. 5: *Jimmy's Cruise in the Pinafore*. 1879. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1896.
- , "What the Girls Did." *Aunt Jo's Scrap Bag*. Vol. 4: *My Girls*. 1877. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1878. 101 – 217.
- , "Which Wins?" 1869. *Louisa May Alcott Unmasked: Collected Thrillers*. Ed. Madeleine Stern. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1995. 695 – 703.
- , *Work*. 1873. New York: Penguin, 1994.
- Allen, Allyn. *Lone Star Tomboy*. New York: Franklin Watts, Inc. 1951.
- Allen, Paula Wynn. *Building Domestic Liberty: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Architectural Feminism*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts, 1988.
- Allen, Theodore W. *The Invention of the White Race*. London: Verso, 1994.
- Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore*. Dir. Martin Scorsese. Perf. Ellen Burstyn, Kris Kristofferson, Billy Green Bush, Alfred Lutter, Dianne Ladd, Jodie Foster, Harvey Keitel, Valerie Kurtin. Warner Brothers, 1974.
- Allison, Dorothy. *Bastard Out of Carolina*. New York: Dutton, 1992.

- Ammons, Elizabeth. *Conflicting Stories: American Women Writers at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*. New York: Oxford UP, 1991.
- , "Material Culture, Empire, and Jewett's *Country of the Pointed Firs*." *New Essays on The Country of the Pointed Firs*. Ed. June Howard. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994. 81 – 99.
- , "My *Antonia* and African American Art." *New Essays on My Antonia*. Ed. Sharon O'Brien. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999. 57 – 83.
- Amos-Bankester, Anthea E. "Teaching *My Antonia*: The Introductions and the Impact of Revisions." *Nebraska English Journal*. 37.1 (Fall 1991): 99 – 109.
- Backus, Harriet Fish. *Tomboy Bride: A Woman's Personal Account of Life in Mining Camps of the West*. 1969. Boulder, CO: Pruett Publishing Company, 1977.
- Baker, George M. *Running to Waste: The Story of a Tomboy*. Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1874.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. "Rabelais and his World." *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. Ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998. 45 – 51.
- , *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Trans. Vern W. McGee. Austin: U of Texas, 1986.
- Ballad of the Sad Café*. Dir. Simon Callow. Perf. Vanessa Redgrave, Keith Carradine, Rod Steiger, Cork Hubbert, Austin Pendleton. Merchant-Ivory, 1991
- Bannon, Ann. *Beebo Brinker*. Greenwich, CT: Fawcett Gold Medal, 1962.
- , *I Am a Woman*. Greenwich, CT: Fawcett Gold Medal, 1959.
- , *Journey to a Woman*. 1960. Tallahassee, FL: Naiad Press, 1986.
- , *The Marriage*. Greenwich, CT: Fawcett Gold Medal, 1960.
- , *Odd Girl Out*. Greenwich, CT: Fawcett Gold Medal, 1957.
- , *Women in the Shadows*. Greenwich, CT: Fawcett Gold Medal, 1959.
- Banta, Martha. *Imaging American Women: Idea and Ideals in Cultural History*. New York: Columbia UP, 1987.
- Barale, Michele Aina. "When Jack Blinks: Si(gh)ting Gay Desire in Ann Bannon's *Beebo Brinker*." *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*. Edited by Henry Albelove, Michele Aina Barale, and David Halperin. New York: Routledge, 1993. 604 – 15.

- Bardes, Barbara and Suzanne Gossett, eds. *Declarations of Independence: Women and Political Power in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction*. New Brunswick: Rutgers, 1990.
- Bar Girls*. Dir. Marita Giovanni. Perf. Nancy Allison Wolfe, Liza D'Agostino, Camilla Griggs, Justine Slater, Lisa Parker. Orion, 1994.
- Barnum, P. T.. *Struggles and Triumphs; or Forty Years' Recollections of P. T. Barnum, Written by Himself*. Buffalo, 1873.
- Bean, Annemarie, James V. Hatch, & Brooks McNamara. Preface. *Inside the Minstrel Mask: Reading in Nineteenth-Century Blackface Minstrelsy*. Hanover: UP of New England, 1996. xi - xiv.
- Beauvoir, Simone de. *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*. Trans. James Kirkup. Cleveland, World Pub. Co., 1959.
- Bedell, Jeanne F. "A Necessary Mask: The Sensational Fiction of Louisa May Alcott." *Publications of the Missouri Philological Association*. 5 (1980): 8 – 14.
- Bedell, Madelon. *The Alcotts: Biography of a Family*. New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1980.
- Bell-Metereau, Rebecca. *Hollywood Androgyny*. New York: Columbia UP, 1993.
- Bennett, Mildred R. Introduction. *Early Stories of Willa Cather*. New York: Dodd, Mead, 1957.
- Berman, Ruth. "No Jo Marchs!" *Children's Literature in Education*. 29.4 (December 1998): 237 – 47.
- Bernstein, Susan Naomi. "Writing and *Little Women*: Alcott's Rhetorical Subversion." *American Transcendental Quarterly*. 7 (1993): 29 – 45.
- Bérubé, Allan. *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two*. New York: Macmillan, 1990.
- Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- , "The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism." *Literature, Politics, Theory*. Ed. Francis Barker, Peter Hulme, Margaret Iversen and Diana Loxley. London: Methuen, 1986. 148 – 72.
- The Birth of a Nation*. Dir. D. W. Griffith. Perf. Lillian Gish, Mae Marsh, Henry B. Walthall, Mariam Cooper, Robert Harron. Epoch, 1915.

- Bishop, Freman. "Sarah Orne Jewett's Ideas of Race." *The New England Quarterly*. 30.2 (June 1957): 243 – 49.
- Blanc, Marie Therese. "Le Roman de la Femme-Médecin." Trans. Richard Cary. *Colby Library Quarterly*. 7.11 (September 1967): 488 – 503.
- Blanchard, Paula. *Sarah Orne Jewett: Her World and Her Work*. Reading, MA: Madison-Wesley, 1994.
- Bohlke, Brent, ed. *Willa Cather in Person: Interviews, Speeches, Letters*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska, 1986.
- Bound*. Dir. The Wachowski Brothers. Perf. Jennifer Tilly, Gina Gershon, Joe Pantoliano, John Ryan, Christopher Meloni, Richard C. Sarafin. Gramercy, 1996.
- Boyle, Regis Louise. *Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth, Novelist*. Washington, D.C.: Catholic U of America P, 1939.
- Boys on the Side*. Dir. Herbrt Ross. Perf. Whoopi Goldberg, Mary-Louise Parker, Drew Barrymore, Matthew McConaughey, James Remar. Warner Brothers, 1995.
- Bratlinger, Patrick. "Victorians and Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent." "Race," *Writing and Difference*. Edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr.. Chicago: U of Chicago, 1986. 185 – 222.
- Breines, Wini. "Postwar White Girls' Dark Others." *The "Other" Fifties: Interrogating Mid-century American Icons*. Ed. Joel Foreman. Urbana: U of Illinois, 1997. 53 – 77.
- Brink, Carol Ryrie. *Caddie Woodlawn*. 1935. New York: Collier Books, 1970.
- Bronte, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. 1847. New York: Harper, 1899.
- Brown, Joe David. *Addie Pray*. New York: Signet, 1971.
- Brown, Rita Mae. *Rubyfruit Jungle*. New York: Bantam, 1973.
- Burn, Shawn Meghan, A. Kathleen O'Neil and Shirley Nederend. "Childhood Tomboyism and Adult Androgyny." *Sex Roles*. 34.5/6 (1996): 419 – 28.
- Burroughs, Edgar Rice. *Jungle Tales of Tarzan*. 1915. New York: Ballatine, 1963.
- *The Return of Tarzan*. 1913. New York: Ballatine, 1963.
- *The Son of Tarzan*. 1915. New York: Ballatine, 1963.
- *Tarzan and the Ant Men*. 1924. New York: Ballatine, 1963.
- *Tarzan and the City of Gold*. 1932. New York: Ballatine, 1964.

- , *Tarzan and the Golden Lion*. 1922. New York: Ballantine, 1963.
- , *Tarzan and the Jewels of Opar*. 1916. New York: Ballantine, 1963.
- , *Tarzan, Lord of the Jungle*. 1927. New York: Ballantine, 1963.
- , *Tarzan of the Apes*. 1912. New York: Ballantine, 1963.
- , *Tarzan the Invincible*. 1930. New York: Ballantine, 1964.
- , *Tarzan the Terrible*. 1921. New York: Ballantine, 1963.
- , *Tarzan the Tamed*. 1919. New York: Ballantine, 1963.
- , *Tarzan Triumphant*. 1931. New York: Ballantine, 1964.
- , *Tarzan's Quest*. 1935. New York: Ballantine, 1964.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Buell, Lawrence. *New England Literary Culture: From Revolution Through Renaissance*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986.
- Cadogan, Mary and Patricia Craig. *You're a Brick, Angela!: A New Look at Girls' Fiction from 1839 to 1975*. London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1976.
- Cameron, Julia. "Tomboys: Can 'Bad' Girls Be 'Good' Women?" *Mademoiselle*. 90 (May 1984): 168 – 9+.
- Carby, Hazel. *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist*. New York: Oxford UP, 1987.
- Carpenter, Lynne. "Double Talk: The Power and Glory of Paradox in E. D. E. N. Southworth's *The Hidden Hand*." *Legacy*. 10.1 (1993): 17 – 30.
- Carr, Virginia Spencer. *The Lonely Hunter: A Biography of Carson McCullers*. Garden City, NJ: Doubleday & Co., 1975.
- , *Understanding Carson McCullers*. Columbia, SC: U of South Carolina, 1990.
- Cary, Richard. Introduction. *Sarah Orne Jewett Letters*. rev. ed. Waterville, ME: Colby College Press, 1967.
- , "The Literary Rubrics of Sarah Orne Jewett." *Critical Essays on Sarah Orne Jewett*. Ed. Gwen L. Nagel. Boston: Hall, 1984. 198 – 211.
- , *Sarah Orne Jewett*. New Haven, CT: College and University Press, 1962.
- , *Sarah Orne Jewett Letters*. rev. ed. Waterville, ME: Colby College Press, 1967.
- Cassidy, Patrick. "Honolulu Tomboy." *The Sun and the Rain*. Boston: Ruth Hill, 1934.

- Castle, Terry. *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture*. New York. Columbia UP, 1993.
- Cather, Katherine Dunlap. "Tomboy of Bordeaux." *Boyhood Stories of Famous Men*. New York: The Century Co., 1917.
- Cather, Willa. *Alexander's Bridge*. 1912. Lincoln: U of Nebraska, 1977.
- . *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. 1927. New York: Vintage, 1990.
- . "The Enchanted Bluff." *Early Stories of Willa Cather*. Ed. Mildred R. Bennett. New York: Dodd, Mead, 1957.
- . *A Lost Lady*. 1923. New York: Vintage, 1990.
- . *My Antonia*. 1918. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1988.
- . "The Namesake." *April Twilights*. 1903. Lincoln: U of Nebraska, 1962. 25 – 6.
- . *O Pioneers!* 1913. New York: Penguin, 1989.
- . "The Poor Minstrel." *April Twilights*. 1903. Lincoln: U of Nebraska, 1962. 47 – 8.
- . *The Professor's House*. 1925. New York: Vintage, 1990.
- . *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*. 1940. New York: Vintage, 1968.
- . "Tommy, The Unsentimental." *Jo's Girls: Tomboy Tales of High Adventure, True Grit and Real Life*. Edited by Christian McEwan. Boston: Beacon, 1997. 174 – 81.
- . "The Treasure of Far Island." *Early Stories of Willa Cather*. Ed. Mildred Bennett. New York: Dodd, Mead, 1957.
- . "Sleep, Minstrel, Sleep." *April Twilights*. 1903. Lincoln: U of Nebraska, 1962. 14.
- . *The Song of the Lark*. 1915. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1988.
- Cheney, Edna D., ed. *Louisa May Alcott: Her Life, Letters and Journals*. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1892.
- Christian, Paula. *The Edge of Twilight*. 1959. New York: Belmont Books, 1966.
- . *Love is Where You Find It*. New York: Avon, 1961.
- . *The Other Side of Desire*. New York: Paperback Library, 1965.
- . *This Side of Love*. 1963. New York: Belmont Books, 1966.

- Church, Joseph. "Fathers, Daughters, Slaves: The Haunted Scene of Writing in Jewett's 'In Dark New England Days.'" *American Transcendental Quarterly*. 5.3 (September 1993): 205 – 224.
- Cisneros, Sandra. *The House on Mango Street*. New York: Vintage, 1984.
- Cockrell, Dale. *Demons of Disorder: Early Blackface Minstrels and their World*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997.
- Cogan, Frances B. *All-American Girl: The Ideal of Real Womanhood in Mid-Nineteenth Century America*. Athens, GA: U of Georgia, 1989.
- Coleman, Dorothy S., Elizabeth A Coleman and Evelyn J. Coleman. *The Encyclopedia of Dolls*. Vol. 2. New York: Crown Publishers Inc., 1986.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990.
- "contraband." *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1989.
- Cook, Richard M. *Carson McCullers*. New York: Fredrick Ungar, 1975.
- Coolidge, Susan. *What Katy Did*. 1872. Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1938.
- Cott, Nancy. *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Women's Sphere" in New England, 1780 – 1835*. New Haven: Yale, 1977.
- Coultrap-McQuinn, Susan. *Doing Literary Business: American Women Writers in the Nineteenth Century*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina, 1990.
- Crèvecoeur, Hector St. John de. "Letters from an American Farmer." *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*. Ed. Paul Lauter. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998. 851 – 81.
- Croly, David Goodman & George Wakeman. *Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races, Applied to the American White Man and Negro*. New York: H. Dexter, Hamilton & Co., 1863.
- Creed, Barbara. "Lesbian Bodies: Tribades, Tomboys and Tarts." *Sexy Bodies: The Strange Carnalities of Feminism*. Ed. Elizabeth Grosz and Elspeth Probyn. London: Routledge, 1995. 86 – 103.
- Curtin, William M., ed. *The World and the Parish: Willa Cather's Articles and Reviews, 1893 – 1902*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska, 1970.
- Curtis, L. Perry. *Ape and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature*. Washington,

- D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1971.
- Darwin, Charles. *The Origin of Species*. 1859. New York: Oxford UP, 1996.
- Davis, Anne Pence. *Mimi at Camp: The Adventures of a Tomboy*. Chicago: Goldsmith Publishing Company, 1935.
- Davis, Kenneth C. *Two-Bit Culture: The Paperbacking of America*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984.
- Davis, Thadious. "Erasing the 'We of Me' and Rewriting the Racial Script: Carson McCullers' *Two Member(s) of the Wedding*." *Critical Essays on Carson McCullers*. Ed. Beverly Lyon Clark and Melvin J. Friedman. New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1996. 206 – 19.
- Dennett, Andrea Stulman. *Weird and Wonderful: The Dime Museum in America*. New York: New York U, 1997.
- Denning, Michael. *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America*. London, New York: Verso, 1987.
- Desert Hearts*. Dir. Donna Deitch. Perf. Helen Shaver, Patricia Charbonneau, Audra Lindley, Andrea Akers, Dean Butler. Samuel Goldwyn, 1986.
- Dinesen, Isak. "The Monkey." *Seven Gothic Tales*. New York: Harrison Smith and Robert Haas, 1934. 107 – 63.
- Dobson, Joanne. Introduction. *The Hidden Hand*. By E. D. E. N. Southworth. 1859. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1988. xi – xli.
- , "The Hidden Hand: Subversion of Cultural Ideology in Three Mid-Nineteenth-Century American Women's Novels." *American Quarterly*. 38.2 (Summer 1986): 223 – 242.
- Donovan, Josephine. "Nan Prince and the Golden Apples." *Colby Library Quarterly*. 22.1 (March 1986): 17 – 27.
- , *New England Literary Local Color Literature: A Woman's Tradition*. New York: F. Ungar Publishing Co., 1983.
- , *Sarah Orne Jewett*. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1980.
- Doskow, Minna. Introduction. *Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Utopian Novels: Moving the*



- Mountain, Herland, With Her in Ourland*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickson UP, 1999. 9 – 29.
- Douglas, Ann. *The Feminization of American Culture*. New York: Knopf, 1978.
- , *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1995.
- Dreiser, Theodore. *Sister Carrie*. 1900. New York: W. W. Norton, 1991.
- DuBois, W. E. B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. 1903. New York, Viking, 1989.
- Duganne, Phyllis and Harriet Gersman. "Tomboy." *The American Girl*. 11.5 (May 1928): 7-9, 45-9.
- Dyer, Richard. *White*. London: Routledge, 1997.
- Dziemianowicz, Stefan. Foreword. *A Whisper in the Dark: Twelve Thrilling Tales by Louisa May Alcott*. Ed. Stefan Dziemianowicz. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1996. vii – viii.
- Elbert, Sarah. *A Hunger for Home: Louisa May Alcott and Little Women*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1984.
- , Introduction. *Louisa May Alcott: On Race, Sex, and Slavery*. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1997. ix - lix.
- Eliot, George. *The Mill on the Floss*. 1860. New York: Penguin, 1985.
- Elliott, Mary. "The Closet of the Heart: Legacies of Domesticity in Tomboy Narratives and Lesbian Pulp Fiction, 1850 – 1965." Diss. U of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1999.
- , "When Girls Will Be Boys: 'Bad' Endings and Subversive Middles in Nineteenth-Century Tomboy Narratives and Twentieth-Century Lesbian Pulp Novels." *Legacy*. 15.1 (1998): 92 – 7.
- Ellison, Ralph. "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke." *Shadow and Act*. New York: Vintage International, 1995. 45 – 59.
- Ellson, Hal. *Tomboy*. New York: Bantam Books, 1951.
- Ely, Melvin Patrick. *The Adventures of Amos 'n' Andy: A Social History of An American Phenomenon*. New York: Free Press, 1991.
- Estes, Angela M. and Kathleen Margaret Lant. "Dismembering the Text: The Horror of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*." *Children's Literature*. 17 (1989): 98 – 123.

- Evans, Oliver. *Carson McCullers: Her Life and Work*. London: Peter Owen, 1965.
- Faderman, Lillian. *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America*. New York: Columbia UP, 1991.
- . *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendships and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present*. New York: Morrow, 1981.
- Far, Sui Sin. "A Chinese Boy-Girl." *Mrs. Spring Fragrance and other Stories*. 1912. Urbana: U of Illinois, 1995. 155 - 59.
- . "The Smuggling of Tie Co." *Mrs. Spring Fragrance and other Stories*. 1912. Urbana: U of Illinois, 1995. 104 - 8.
- . "Tian Shan's Kindred Spirit." *Mrs. Spring Fragrance and other Stories*. 1912. Urbana: U of Illinois, 1995. 119 - 24.
- Faulkner, William. *Absalom, Absalom!* 1936. New York: Vintage, 1990.
- . *Light in August*. 1932. New York: Vintage, 1990.
- Feinberg, Leslie. *Stone Butch Blues*. Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books, 1993.
- Felski, Rita. *The Gender of Modernity*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1995.
- Fern, Fanny. *Caper-Sauce: A Volume of Chit-Chat about Men, Women, and Things*. New York: Carleton, 1872.
- Fetterly, Judith. "Impersonating 'Little Women': The Radicalism of Alcott's 'Behind a Mask.'" *Journal of Women's Studies*. 10 (1983): 1 - 14.
- . "Little Women: Alcott's Civil War." *Feminist Studies*. 5 (1979): 369 - 83.
- Fields, Annie. *Letters of Sarah Orne Jewett*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1911.
- Fielder, Leslie. "Adolescence and Maturity in the American Novel." *An End to Innocence: Essays on Culture and Politics*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Stein and Day, 1972. 191 - 210.
- . "Come Back to the Raft Ag'in, Huck Honey!" *An End to Innocence: Essays on Culture and Politics*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Stein and Day, 1972. 142 - 51.
- . *Love and Death in the American Novel*. 1966. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Dell Publishing, 1969.
- . *No! in Thunder*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Stein and Day, 1972.
- . *Waiting for the End*. 1966. New York: Stein & Day, 1972.

- Fischer, Mike. "Pastoralism and Its Discontents: Willa Cather and the Burden of Imperialism." *Mosaic*. 23.1 (Winter 1990): 31 – 44.
- Fish, Cheryl. "Going Mobile: The Body at Work in Black and White Women's Travel Narratives, 1841 – 1857." Diss. CUNY, 1996.
- , "Voices of Restless (Dis)Continuity." *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*. 26.5 (1997): 475 – 95.
- Fishkin, Shelley Fisher. "Interrogating 'Whiteness,' Complicating 'Blackness': Remapping American Culture." *American Quarterly*. 47.3 (September 1993): 428 – 66.
- Fitzburgh, Louise. *Harriet the Spy*. New York: Random House, 1964.
- Flagg, Fannie. *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistlestop Café*. New York: Doubleday, 1987.
- Foster, Frances Smith. *Written By Herself: Literary Production by African American Women, 1746 – 1892*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993.
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. 1978. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage, 1990.
- Foxes*. Dir. Adrian Lynne. Perf. Jodie Foster, Cherie Currie, Marilyn Kagan, Kandace Stroh, Scott Baio, Sally Kellerman. MGM, 1980.
- Frankenberg, Ruth. *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 1993.
- Frater, Graham. "'A Brave Happiness': Rites and Celebrations in Jewett's Ordered Past." *Jewett and Her Contemporaries: Reshaping the Canon*. Gainesville, FL: UP of Florida, 1999. 251 – 64.
- Frederickson, George. *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817 – 1914*. New York: Harper and Row, 1971.
- Freeman, Mary E. Wilkins. "Louisa." *A New England Nun and Other Stories*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1891.
- Fried Green Tomatoes*. Dir. Jon Avnet. Perf. Kathy Bates, Jessica Tandy, Mary Stuart Masterson, Mary-Louise Parker, Cicely Tyson, Chris O'Donnell. Universal, 1991.

- Friedman, Lawrence J. *The White Savage: Racial Fantasies in the Postbellum South*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1970.
- Freud, Sigmund. "Femininity." *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*. Ed. James Strachey. New York: W. W. Norton, 1965. 112 - 35.
- Frost, John Eldridge. *Sarah Orne Jewett*. Kittery Point, ME: Gundalow Club, 1960.
- Fryer, Judith. *The Faces of Eve: Women in the Nineteenth Century American Novel*. New York: Oxford UP, 1976.
- , *Felicitous Space: The Imaginative Structures of Edith Wharton and Willa Cather*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina, 1986.
- Fuchs, Lawrence. *The American Kaleidoscope: Race, Ethnicity, and the Civic Culture*. Hanover, NH: Wesleyan UP, 1990.
- Fuller, Anna. "The Tomboy." *Later Pratt Portraits*. New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1911. 39 - 75.
- Fulton, Valerie. "Rewriting the Necessary Woman: Marriage and Professionalism in James, Jewett, and Phelps." *Henry James Review*. 15 (1994): 242 - 56.
- Gabler-Hover, Janet. *Dreaming Black/Writing White: The Hagar Myth in American Cultural History*. Lexington, KY: U of Kentucky, 2000.
- Gaines, Francis Pendleton. *The Southern Plantation: A Study in the Development and Accuracy of a Tradition*. New York: Columbia UP, 1924.
- Garber, Marjorie. *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Garis, Lillian. *A Girl Called Ted*. New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1929.
- , *Ted and Tony: Two Girls of Today*. New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1929.
- Gates, Jr., Henry Louis. "Introduction: Writing 'Race' and the Difference It Makes." *"Race," Writing and Difference*. Edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr.. Chicago: U of Chicago, 1986. 1 - 20.
- , *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism*. New York: Oxford, 1988.
- Gelfant, Blanche H. Introduction. *O Pioneers!* By Willa Cather. 1912. New York: Penguin, 1994. ix - xxxvi.
- The Book of Genesis. *The New American Bible*. New York: Catholic Book Publishing

- Co., 1970. 1 - 50.
- George, Charles. *My Tomboy Girl: A Musical Comedy in Three Acts*. Boston: Bakers Plays, 1936.
- Gilbert, Sandra and Susan Gubar. *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century*. Vol. 1: *The War of the Words*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1988.
- *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century*. Vol. 2: *Sexchanges*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1989.
- *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century*. Vol. 3: *Letters from the Front*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1994.
- Gilder, Jeannette L. *The Autobiography of a Tomboy*. New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1901.
- *The Tom-Boy at Work*. New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1904.
- Gillman, Susan. "Regionalism and Nationalism in Jewett's *Country of the Pointed Firs*." *New Essays on The Country of the Pointed Firs*. Ed. June Howard. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994. 101 – 117.
- Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. *Herland*. 1915. New York: Signet, 1992.
- *His Religion and Hers: A Study of the Faith and Our Fathers and the Work of Our Mothers*. New York: Century Company, 1923.
- *The Home: Its Work and Influence*. New York: McClure, Phillips and Company, 1903.
- *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman: An Autobiography*. 1935. Madison: U of Wisconsin, 1990.
- *The Man-Made World; or, Our Androcentric Culture*. New York: Co-Operative Press, 1911.
- "Moving the Mountain." 1911. *Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Utopian Novels: Moving the Mountain, Herland, With Her in Ourland*. Ed. Minna Doskow. Madison: Fairleigh Dickson UP, 1999. 37 – 149.
- "Race Pride." *The Forerunner*. April 1913. 89 – 90.
- "A Suggestion on the Negro Problem." *American Journal of Sociology*. 14.1 (July 1908): 78 – 85.

- . *Unpunished: A Mystery*. wr. 1929. New York: The Feminist Press, 1997.
- . "The Yellow Wall-Paper." *New England Magazine*. Jan. 1892. 647 – 659.
- . *What Diantha Did*. New York: Charlton Company, 1910.
- . "With Her in Ourland." 1916. *Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Utopian Novels: Moving the Mountain, Herland, With Her in Ourland*. Ed. Minna Dosek. Madison: Fairleigh Dickson UP, 1999. 270 – 387.
- . *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution*. 1898. Mineola, NY: Dover, 1998.
- Gilman, Sander. "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature." *"Race," Writing and Difference*. Edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Chicago: U of Chicago, 1986. 223 – 61.
- . *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985.
- . *The Jew's Body*. New York: Routledge, 1991.
- . "Sexology, Psychoanalysis, and Degeneration: From a Theory of Race to a Race to Theory." *Degeneration: The Dark Side of Progress*. Edited by J. Edward Chamberlain and Sander Gilman. New York: Columbia UP, 1985. 73 – 96.
- Gilman, Weona. *Val, the Tomboy*. Cleveland, OH: A. Westbrook, 1891.
- Go Fish*. Dir. Rose Troche. Perf. V. S. Brodie, Guinevere Turner, T. Wendy McMillan, Anastasia Sharp. Samuel Goldwyn, 1994.
- Golden, Catherine J. and Joanne Schneider Zangrando, eds. *The Mixed Legacy of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*. Newark: U of Delaware, 2000.
- Gone With the Wind*. Dir. Victor Fleming. Perf. Clark Gable, Vivien Leigh, Leslie Howard. MGM, 1939.
- Gossett, Thomas. *Race: The History of an Idea in America*. (1963). Rev. ed. New York: Oxford UP, 1997.
- . *Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture*. Dallas: Southern Methodist UP, 1985.
- Gould, Stephen Jay. *The Mismeasure of Man*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1981.
- Graver, Lawrence. *Carson McCullers*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 1969.
- Gubar, Susan. *Racechanges: White Skin, Black Face in American Culture*. New York:

- Oxford UP, 1997.
- , "She and Herland: Feminism as Fantasy." *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: The Woman and Her Work*. Ed. Sheryl L. Meyering. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1989. 191 – 202.
- Guptill, Elizabeth Frances. *Brave Little Tomboy: A Play of the Revolution*. Franklin, OH: Eldridge, 1912.
- Haardt, Sara. "Tomboy." *Southern Album*. Garden City, NJ: Doubleday Doran, 1936.
- Habegger, Alfred. "Funny Tomboys." *Gender, Fantasy, and Realism in American Literature*. New York: Columbia UP, 1982. 172 - 83
- , "A Well Hidden Hand." *Novel*. 14.3 (Spring 1981): 197 – 212.
- Hackett, Robin. "Sapphic Primitivism in Modern Fiction: Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Summer Will Show*, and Willa Cather's *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*." Diss. CUNY, 2000.
- Haggard, H. Rider. *She*. 1887. New York: Oxford UP, 1998.
- Halberstam, Judith. *Female Masculinity*. Durham: Duke UP, 1998.
- , "Oh Bondage Up Yours!: Female Masculinity and the Tomboy." *Sissies and Tomboys: Gender Nonconformity and Homosexual Childhood*. Ed. Matthew Rottnek. New York: NYU, 1999. 153 – 79.
- Halttunen, Karen. *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830 – 1870*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1982.
- , "The Domestic Drama of Louisa May Alcott." *Feminist Studies*. 10.2 (Summer 1984): 233 – 54.
- Hamblen, Abigail Ann. "Louisa May Alcott and the Racial Question." *University Review – Kansas City*. 37 (1971): 307 – 13.
- Hand, William. *Fair City – The Tomboy*. Dublin: Claymore and Reynolds, 1946.
- Hannon, Charles. "'The Ballad of the Sad Café' and Other Stories of Women's Wartime Labor." *Bodies of Writing, Bodies in Performance*. Ed. Thomas Foster, Carol Siegel, and Ellen E. Berry. New York: NYU, 1996. 97 – 119.
- Harris, Neil. *Humbug: The Art of P. T. Barnum*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973.
- Harris, Susan. "Extending and Subverting: The Iconography of Houses in *The Deserted*

- Wife." *Nineteenth-Century American Women's Novels: Interpretive Strategies*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990. 128 – 51.
- Hart, Jane. "Carson McCullers, Pilgrim of Loneliness." *Georgia Review*. 11 (Spring 1957): 53 – 58.
- Hasaan, Ihab. *Radical Innocence: The Contemporary American Novel*. Princeton, Princeton UP, 1961.
- Haywood, Charles. *Negro Minstrelsy and Shakespearean Burlesque*. Hatboror, PA: Folklore Associates, 1966.
- Heller, Dana. "The White Negress and the Heavy-Duty Dyke." *Cross-Purposes: Lesbians, Feminists and the Limits of Alliance*. Ed. Dana Heller. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1997.
- Hemingway, Ernest. *The Garden of Eden*. wr. 1946 – 61. New York: Scribner, 1986.
- Hill, Mary A. *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: The Making of a Radical Feminist, 1860 – 1896*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1980.
- . *A Journey from Within: The Love Letters of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, 1897 – 1900*. Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1995.
- Hilton, John T. "Reminiscences." *The Woman's Era*. August 1894. 4 – 5.
- Hogan, Steve and Lee Hudson. "Tomboy." *Completely Queer: The Gay and Lesbian Encyclopedia*. New York: Henry Holt Company, 1998. 542 – 3.
- Holmes, Mary J. *Lena Rivers*. New York: G. W. Dillingham Co., 1856.
- hooks, bell. *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Boston: South End Press, 1992.
- Howard, June. "Introduction: Sarah Orne Jewett and the Traffic in Words." *New Essays on The Country of the Pointed Firs*. Ed. June Howard. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994. 1 – 37.
- Howells, William Dean. *Doctor Breen's Practice*. Boston: J. R. Osgood and Company, 1881.
- "hoyden." *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1989.
- Hudock, Amy. "Challenging the Definition of Heroism in E. D. E. N. Southworth's *The Hidden Hand*." *American Transcendental Quarterly*. 9.1 (March 1995): 5 – 20.
- Huggins, Nathan Irvin. *Harlem Renaissance*. New York: Oxford UP,



1971.

Hyde, J. S., B. G. Rosenberg and J. T. Dehrman. "Tomboyism." *Psychology of Women Quarterly*. 2 (1977): 73 – 75.

*Incredibly True Adventures of Two Girls in Love*. Dir. Maria Maggenti. Perf. Laurel Holloman, Nicole Parker, Maggie Moore, Kate Stafford, Sabrina Artel. Fine Line, 1995.

Ingram, Ann M. "Melodrama and the Moral Economy of E. D. E. N. Southworth's *The Deserted Wife*." *American Transcendental Quarterly*. 13.4 (December 1999): 269 – 85.

Ings, Katharine Nicholson. "Blackness and the Literary Imagination: Uncovering *The Hidden Hand*." *Passing and the Fictions of Identity*. Edited by Elaine K. Ginsberg. Durham: Duke UP, 1996. 131 – 50.

Innes, Sherrie. "Girls Will Be Boys and Boys Will Be Girls: Cross-Dressing in Popular Turn-of-the-Century College Fiction." *Journal of American Culture*. 18.2 (Summer 1995): 15 – 23.

Innes, Sherrie, ed. *Nancy Drew and Company: Gender, Culture and Girls' Series*. Bowling Green State UP, 1997.

James, Judith Giblin. *Wunderkind: The Reputation of Carson McCullers, 1940 – 1990*. Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1995.

Janeway, Elizabeth. "Meg, Jo, Beth, Amy and Louisa." *Critical Essays on Louisa May Alcott*. Ed. Madeleine B. Stern. Boston: G. K. Hall, 1984. 97 – 8.

*The Jazz Singer*. Dir. Alan Crosland. Perf. Al Jolson, May McAvoy, Warner Oland. Warner Brothers, 1927.

Jenkins, McKay. *The South in Black and White: Race, Sex, and Literature in the 1940s*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina, 1999.

Jewett, Sarah Orne. *A Country Doctor*. 1884. *Novels and Stories*. New York: Library of America, 1994. 143 – 370.

----- *The Country of the Pointed Firs*. 1896. *Novels and Stories*. New York: Library of America, 1994. 371 – 487.

----- "Decoration Day." *Novels and Stories*. New York: Library of America, 1994. 773 – 86.

- "The Foreigner." *Novels and Stories*. New York: Library of America, 1994. 530 – 55.
- "From a Mournful Village." *Country By-Ways*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1881.
- "The Green Bowl." *The Uncollected Stories of Sarah Orne Jewett*. Ed. Richard Cary. Waterville, ME: Colby College Press, 1971. 345 – 56.
- "In Dark New England Days." *Strangers and Wayfarers*. Boston: Houghton, 1891.
- "Looking Back on Girlhood." *Youth's Companion*. 65. 7 January 1892.
- "The Mistress of Sydenham Plantation." *Strangers and Wayfarers*. New York: Garrett Press, 1969. 18 – 35.
- "My School Days." *Berwick Scholar*. Vol. 1. October 1887.
- "River Driftwood." *Deephaven and other Stories*. Ed. Richard Cary. New Haven: New College and UP, 1966.
- *The Story of the Normans, Told Chiefly in Relation to Their Conquest of England*. G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1887.
- *The Tory Lover*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1901.
- "A War Debt." *The Life of Nancy*. London: Constable & Co., 1890. 60 – 96.
- Johnny Guitar*. Dir. Nicholas Ray. Perf. Joan Crawford, Sterling Hayden, Scott Brady, Mercedes McCambridge, Ward Bond, Ben Cooper. Republic, 1954.
- Johns, Barbara A. "'Mateless and Appealing': Growing into Spinsterhood in Sarah Orne Jewett." *Critical Essays on Sarah Orne Jewett*. Ed. Gwen L. Nagel. Boston: Hall, 1984. 147 – 65.
- Jones, Anne Woodwyn. "Displacing Dixie: The Southern Subtext in *My Antonia*." *New Essays on My Antonia*. Ed. Sharon O'Brien. Cambridge UP, 1999. 85 – 109.
- Jones, Libby Falk and Sarah Webster Goodwin, eds. *Feminism, Utopia, and Narrative*. Knoxville: U of Tennessee Press, 1990.
- Kasson, John F. *Houdini, Tarzan and the Perfect Man: The White Male Body and the Challenge of Modernity in America*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001.
- Kelley, Mary. *Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993.
- Kenschaft, Lori J. "Homoerotics and Human Connections: Reading Carson McCullers

- 'As a Lesbian.' " *Critical Essays on Carson McCullers*. Ed. Beverly Lyon Clark and Melvin J. Friedman. New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1996. 220 – 33.
- Kessler, Carol Farley. *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: her Progress Toward Utopia With Selected Writings*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 1995.
- Keyser, Elizabeth Lennox. *Little Women: A Family Romance*. New York: Twayne, 1999.
- Kincaid, Jamaica. *Annie John*. New York: Girrar, Straus and Giroux, 1983.
- Kingston, Maxine Hong. *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*. New York: Random House, 1975.
- Kinney, James. *Amalgamation: Race, Sex and Rhetoric in the Nineteenth-Century American Novel*. London: Greenwood Press, 1985.
- Klein, Norma. *Tomboy*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978.
- Klimasmith, Betsy. "Slave, Master, Mistress, Slave: Genre and Interracial Desire in Louisa May Alcott's Fiction." *American Transcendental Quarterly*. 11.2 (June 1997): 115 – 35.
- Knight, Denise D. *The Abridged Diaries of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1998.
- Kolodny, Annette. *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630 – 1860*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina, 1984.
- . *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina, 1975.
- Kunhardt, Phillip B., Jr., Phillip B. Kunhardt III, & Peter W. Kunhardt. *P. T. Barnum: America's Oldest Showman*. New York: Knopf, 1995.
- Lane, Ann J. "Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the Rights of Women: Her Legacy for the 1990s." *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Optimist Reformer*. Ed. Val Gough. Iowa City: U of Iowa, 1999. 3 – 15.
- . *To Herland and Beyond: The Life and Work of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*. New York: Pantheon, 1990.
- Lears, T. J. Jackson. *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880 – 1920*. Chicago: U of Chicago, 1981.
- Lebow, Richard Ned. *White Britain and Black Ireland: The Influence of Stereotypes on*

- Colonial Policy*. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1976.
- Lee, Harper. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. New York: Popular Library, 1960.
- Lenski, Lois. *Texas Tomboy*. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1950.
- Leonard, William T. *Masquerade in Black*. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1986.
- Lerner, Michael. "Jews Are Not White." *Village Voice*. 18 May 1993: 33 – 4.
- Lewis, Edith. *Willa Cather, Living*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953.
- Lhamon, W. T., Jr. *Deliberate Speed: The Origins of Cultural Style in the American 1950s*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990.
- , "Ebery Time I Wheel About I Jump Jim Crow: Cycles of Minstrel Transgression from Cool White to Vanilla Ice." *Inside the Minstrel Mask: Readings in Nineteenth-Century Blackface Minstrelsy*. Edited by Annemarie Bean, James V. Hatch and Brooks McNamara. Hanover: Wesleyan UP, 1996. 275 – 84.
- , *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1998.
- Limerick, Patricia Nelson. *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1987.
- Lindemann, Marilee. *Willa Cather: Queering America*. New York: Columbia UP, 1999.
- Lipsitz, George. "The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: Racialized Social Democracy and the 'White' Problem in American Studies." *American Quarterly*. 47.3 (September 1995): 369 – 87.
- Little Darlings*. Dir. Ronald F. Maxwell. Perf. Tatum O'Neal, Kristy McNichol, Armand Assante, Matt Dillon, Maggie Blye. Paramount, 1980.
- Lott, Eric. "Blackface and Blackness: The Minstrel Show in American Culture." *Inside the Minstrel Mask: Readings in Nineteenth-Century Blackface Minstrelsy*. Edited by Annemarie Bean, James V. Hatch and Brooks McNamara. Hanover: Wesleyan UP, 1996. 3 – 31.
- , *Love and Theft: Blackface and the American Working Class*. New York: Oxford UP, 1993.
- MacDonald, Ruth K. *Louisa May Alcott*. Boston: Twayne, 1983.
- Machor, James L., ed. *Readers in History: Nineteenth-Century American Literature and*

- the Contexts of Response*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins U, 1993.
- MacLeod, Anne Scott. *American Childhood: Essays on Children's Literature of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. Athens: U of Georgia, 1994.
- , "The Caddie Woodlawn Syndrome: American Girlhood in Nineteenth-Century America." *A Century of Girlhood, 1820 – 1920*. Edited by Mary Lynne Stevens Heininger, Karin Calvert, Barbara Finkelstein, Kathy Vandell, Anne Scott MacLeod, and Harvey Green. Rochester, NY: Margaret Woodbury Strong Museum, 1984.
- , *A Moral Tale: Children's Fiction and American Culture, 1820 – 1860*. Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1975.
- Mahar, William J. *Behind the Burnt Mask: Early Blackface Minstrelsy and Antebellum American Culture*. Urbana: U of Illinois, 1999.
- , "Ethiopian Skits and Sketches: Contents and Contexts of Blackface Minstrelsy, 1840 – 1890." *Inside the Minstrel Mask: Readings in Nineteenth-Century Blackface Minstrelsy*. Edited by Annemarie Bean, James V. Hatch and Brooks McNamara. Hanover: Wesleyan UP, 1996. 179 – 220.
- Mailer, Norman. *The White Negro*. San Francisco: City Lights, 1957.
- Manring, M. M. *Slave in a Box: The Strange Career of Aunt Jemima*. Charlottesville: U of Virginia, 1998.
- Marks, Patricia. *Bicycles, Bangs, and Bloomers: The New Woman in the Popular Press*. Lexington, KY: UP of Kentucky, 1990.
- Masteller, Jean Carwile. "The Women Doctors of Howells, Phelps, and Jewett: The Conflict of Marriage and Career." *Critical Essays on Sarah Orne Jewett*. Ed. Gwen L. Nagel. Boston: Hall, 1984. 135 – 46.
- Matthiessen, F. O. *Sarah Orne Jewett*. Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1965.
- McClintock, Anne. *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest*. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- McCullers, Carson. *The Ballad of the Sad Café and Other Stories*. 1951. New York: Bantam, 1991.
- , "Brooklyn is My Neighborhood." *The Mortgaged Heart*. Ed. Margarita G. Smith. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971. 216 – 20.

- . *Clock Without Hands*. 1961. New York: Bantam, 1967.
- . "Court in the West Eighties." *Carson McCullers: Collected Stories*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987. 11 – 19.
- . "The Flowering Dream: Notes on Writing." *The Mortgaged Heart*. Ed. Margarita G. Smith. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971. 274 – 82.
- . *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*. 1940. New York: Bantam, 1967.
- . "Isak Dinesen: In Praise of Radiance." *The Mortgaged Heart*. Ed. Margarita G. Smith. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971. 259 – 73.
- . *The Member of the Wedding*. 1946. New York: Bantam, 1973.
- . "The Mute." *The Mortgaged Heart*. Ed. Margarita G. Smith. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971.
- . "The Orphanage." *Carson McCullers: Collected Stories*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987. 36 – 39.
- . *Reflections in a Golden Eye*. 1941. New York: Bantam, 1953.
- . "Untitled Piece." *Carson McCullers: Collected Stories*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987. 80 - 103.
- McDonald, Joyce. *The Stuff of Our Forebears: Willa Cather's Southern Heritage*. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama, 1998.
- McDowell, Margaret B. *Carson McCullers*. Boston: Twayne, 1980.
- McEwan, Christian, ed. *Jo's Girls: Tomboy Tales of High Adventure, True Grit and Real Adventure*. Boston: Beacon, 1997.
- McKinley, Robin. *The Blue Sword*. New York: Greenwillow Books, 1982.
- McPherson, James M. *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era*. New York: Ballantine, 1988.
- Meet Me in St. Louis*. Dir. Vincente Minelli. Perf. Judy Garland, Margaret O'Brien, Lucille Bremer, Tom Drake, Mary Astor. MGM, 1944.
- Mellinkoff, Ruth. *The Mark of Cain*. Berkeley: U of California, 1981.
- Michaels, Walter Benn. *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism*. Durham: Duke UP, 1995.
- Miller, Isabel. *Patience and Sarah*. Greenwich, Ct: Fawcett Crest, 1969.
- Mitchell, Sally. "To Be a Boy." *The New Girl: Girls' Culture in England, 1880 –*

1915. New York: Columbia UP, 1995. 103 – 138.
- Mobley, Marilyn Sanders. *Folk Roots and Mythic Wings in Sarah Orne Jewett and Toni Morrison*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1991.
- Modleski, Tania. "The White Negress and the Heavy-Duty Dyke." *Cross-Purposes: Lesbians, Feminists, and the Limits of Alliance*. Edited by Dana Heller. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1997. 64 – 82.
- Moon, Michael. "Nineteenth-Century Discourses on Childhood Gender Training: The Case of Louisa May Alcott's Little Men and Jo's Boys." *Queer Representations: Reading Lives, Reading Cultures*. Edited by Martin Duberman. New York: NYU, 1997. 209 – 15.
- Morgan, Claire. *The Price of Salt*. 1952. Tallahassee, FL: Naiad Press, 1993.
- Morrison, Toni. *The Bluest Eye*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984.
- , *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. New York: Random House, 1992.
- "mulatta." *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1989.
- "mulatto." *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1989.
- Myerson, Joel and Daniel Shealy, eds. *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*. Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1989.
- , *The Selected Letters of Louisa May Alcott*. Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1987.
- Nathan, Hans. "The Performance of the Virginia Minstrels." *Inside the Minstrel Mask: Readings in Nineteenth-Century Blackface Minstrelsy*. Edited by Annemarie Bean, James V. Hatch and Brooks McNamara. Hanover: Wesleyan UP, 1996. 35 – 42.
- National Velvet*. Dir. Clarence Brown. Perf. Mickey Rooney, Elizabeth Taylor, Donald Crisp, and Angela Lansbury. MGM, 1944.
- Niditch, Susan. "Genesis." *The Women's Bible Commentary*. Ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992. 10 – 25.
- O'Brien, Sharon. "Tomboyism and Adolescent Conflict: Three Nineteenth-Century Case Studies." *Woman's Being, Woman's Place: Female Identity and Vocation in American History*. Edited by Mary Kelley. Boston: G. K. Hall and Co., 1979, 351 – 72.

- , *Willa Cather: The Emerging Voice*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987.
- O'Connor, Flannery. "The Artificial Nigger." *Collected Works*. New York: Library of America, 1988. 210 – 231.
- Okker, Patricia and Jeffrey R. Williams. "'Reassuring Sounds': Minstrelsy and *The Hidden Hand*." *American Transcendental Quarterly*. 12.2 (June 1998): 133 – 44.
- Omi, Michael and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s*. (1986). 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Orvell, Miles. "Time, Change, and the Burden of Revision in *My Antonia*." *New Essays on My Antonia*. Ed. Sharon O'Brien. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999. 31 – 55.
- Paper Moon*. Dir. Peter Bogdanovich. Perf. Ryan O'Neal, Tatum O'Neal, Madeline Kahn, John Hillerman, P.J. Johnson, Randy Quaid. Paramount, 1973.
- Paskman, Dailey. "*Gentlemen, be seated!*": *A Parade of the Old-Time Minstrels*. 1928. New York: C. N. Potter, 1976.
- Pat and Mike*. Dir. George Cukor. Perf. Spencer Tracy, Katharine Hepburn, Aldo Ray, and Carl Switzer. MGM, 1952.
- Peck, Demaree. "'Possession Granted by a Different Lease': Alexandra Bergson's Imaginative Conquest of Cather's Nebraska." *Modern Fiction Studies*. 36.1 (Spring 1990): 5 – 22.
- Pellegrini, Ann. "Women on Top, Boys on the Wide, But Some of Us Are Brave: Blackness, Lesbianism and the Visible." *College Literature*. 24.1 (February 1997): 83 – 97.
- Pells, Richard H. *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age: American Intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1985.
- Peterson, Carla. "*Doers of the Word*": *African-American Women Speakers and Writers in the North, 1830 – 1880*. New York: Oxford UP, 1995.
- Peyser, Thomas. *Utopia and Cosmopolis: Globalization in the Era of American Literary Realism*. Durham: Duke UP, 1998.
- Phelps, Elizabeth Stuart. *Doctor Zay*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1882.
- , *Gypsy Breyton*. 1866. New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1894.



- . *Gypsy's Cousin Joy*. 1866. New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1895.
- . *Gypsy's Sowing and Reaping*. 1866. New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1876.
- . *Gypsy's Year at the Golden Crescent*. 1867. New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1897.
- Phillips, Robert S. "Dinesen's 'Monkey' and McCullers' 'Ballad.'" *Studies in Short Fiction*. vol. 1 (1964): 184 – 190.
- Poirier, Richard. *A World Elsewhere: The Place of Style in American Literature*. New York: Oxford UP, 1966.
- Polk, Noel. Introduction. *Faulkner and Race*. Ed. Doreen Fowler and Ann. J. Abadie. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1987.
- Presley, Delma Eugene. "The Moral Function of Distortion in Southern Grotesque." *South Atlantic Bulletin*. 37.2 (May 1972): 37 – 46.
- Prince, Nancy. *A Black Woman's Odyssey through Russia and Jamaica. A Narrative of Nancy Prince*. Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1990.
- . *The West Indies, Being a Description of the Islands, Progress of Christianity, Education and Liberty Among the Colored Population Generally*. Boston: Dow and Jackson, 1841.
- "queer." *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1989.
- Renza, Louis A. "*A White Heron*" and the Question of Minor Literature. Madison: U of Wisconsin, 1984.
- Reynolds, David S. *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Oxford UP, 1992.
- Reynolds, Guy. *Willa Cather in Context: Progress, Race, Empire*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996.
- Rich, Adrienne. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence (1980)." 1978. *Blood, Bread and Poetry: Selected Prose, 1979 – 1985*. New York: Norton, 1986. 23 – 75.
- Robertson, Roland. *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*. London: Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1992.
- Robinson, Phyllis C. *Willa: The Life of Willa Cather*. Garden City, NJ: Doubleday and

- Company, 1983.
- Roediger, David. *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*. New York: Verso, 1991.
- Rogin, Michael. *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants and the Hollywood Melting Pot*. Berkeley: U of California, 1995.
- Roman, Margaret. *Sarah Orne Jewett: Reconstructing Gender*. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama, 1992.
- Root, Harvey W. *The Unknown Barnum*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1927.
- Rose, Peter I. *The Subject is Race*. New York: Oxford UP, 1968.
- Rosenberg, Leona and Madeline B. Stern. "Five Letters that Changed an Image." *Louisa May Alcott: From Blood and Thunder to Hearth and Home*. Ed. Madeline B. Stern. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1998. 83 – 92.
- Rosowski, Susan. *Birthing a Nation: Gender, Creativity and the West in American Literature*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska, 1999.
- , *The Voyage Perilous: Willa Cather's Romanticism*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska, 1986.
- Rottnek, Matthew, ed. *Sissies and Tomboys: Gender Nonconformity and Homosexual Childhood*. New York: NYU, 1999.
- Rowson, Susanna. *Charlotte Temple*. 1794, 1797. New York: Oxford UP, 1986.
- Rubin, Louis D., Jr. "Carson McCullers: The Aesthetics of Pain." *Critical Essays on Carson McCullers*. Ed. Beverly Lyon Clark and Melvin J. Friedman. New York: G. K. Hall and Co., 1996. 111 – 23.
- Rule, Jane. *Desert of the Heart*. 1964. Tallahassee, FL: Naiad, 1984.
- Sahli, Nancy. "Smashing: Women's Relationships Before the Fall." *Chrysalis*. 7 (1979): 17 – 27.
- Samuels, Shirley, ed. *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Oxford UP, 1992.
- Sanchez-Eppler, Karen. *Touching Liberty: Abolition, Feminism, and the Politics of the Body*. Berkeley: U of California, 1993.
- Sawyer, Ruth. *Roller Skates*. 1936. New York: Puffin, 1986.
- Saxon, A. H., ed. *Selected Letters of P. T. Barnum*. New York: Columbia U, 1983.

- Saxton, Alexander. "Blackface Minstrelsy." *Inside the Minstrel Mask: Readings in Nineteenth-Century Blackface Minstrelsy*. Edited by Annemarie Bean, James V. Hatch and Brooks McNamara. Hanover: Wesleyan UP, 1996. 67 – 85.
- , *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in the Nineteenth-Century*. New York: Verso, 1990.
- Saxton, Marth. *Louisa May: A Modern Biography of Louisa May Alcott*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1977.
- Scharnhorst, Gary. *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: A Bibliography*. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1985.
- Schick, Frank L. *The Paperbound Book in America: The History of Paperbacks and Their European Background*. New York: R. R. Bowker Co., 1958.
- Schrag, Mitzi. "'Whiteness' as Loss in Sarah Orne Jewett's 'The Foreigner.'" *Jewett and Her Contemporaries: Reshaping the Canon*. Gainesville, FL: UP of Florida, 1999. 185 – 206.
- Schwind, Jean. "The Benda Illustrations to *My Antonia*: Cather's 'Silent' Supplement to Jim Burden's Narrative." *PMLA*. 100.1 (January 1985): 51 – 67.
- Sedgwick, Catharine Maria. *Hope Leslie*. 1827. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1987.
- , *The Linwoods*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1835.
- Segel, Elizabeth. "The Gypsy Breynton Series: Setting the Pattern for American Tomboy Heroines." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*. 14.2 (Summer 1989): 67 – 71.
- , "Tomboy Taming and Gender Role Socialization: The Evidence of Children's Books." *Gender Roles Through the Life Span: A Multidisciplinary Perspective*. Ed. Michael R. Stevenson. Muncie, Indiana: Ball State UP, 1994. 47 – 61.
- Set It Off*. Dir. Gary Gray. Perf. Jada Pinkett, Queen Latifah, Vivica A. Fox, Kimberly Elise, Blair Underwood. New Line, 1996.
- Shepard, Odell, ed. *The Journals of Bronson Alcott*. Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1938.
- Sherman, Sarah Way. *Sarah Orne Jewett, An American Persephone*. Hanover: UP of New England, 1989.

- Showalter, Elaine. "Feminist Criticism, 'The Yellow Wall-Paper,' and the Politics of Color in America." *Feminist Studies*. 15.3 (Fall 1989): 415 – 41.
- Introduction. *Alternative Alcott*. Ed. Elaine Showalter. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1988. ix – xliii.
- *Sister's Choice: Tradition and Change in American Women's Writing*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1991.
- Shumway, David R. "Watching Elvis: The Male Rock Star as Object of the Gaze." *The Other Fifties: Interrogating Midcentury American Icons*. Ed. Joel Foreman. Urbana: U of Illinois, 1997. 124 – 43.
- Sicherman, Barbara. "Reading and Ambition: M. Carey Thomas and Female Heroism." *American Quarterly*. 45 (1993): 73 – 103.
- Siegel, Deborah L. "The Gypsy Breyton Series: Setting the Pattern for American Tomboy Heroines." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*. 14.2 (Summer 1989): 67 – 71.
- Silverthorne, Elizabeth. *Sarah Orne Jewett: A Writer's Life*. New York: Overlook Press, 1993.
- Slote, Bernice, ed. *The Kingdom of Art: Willa Cather's First Principles and Critical Statements, 1893 – 1896*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska, 1966.
- Snow, Malinda. "'That One Talent': The Vocation as Theme in Sarah Orne Jewett's *A Country Doctor*." *Colby Library Quarterly*. 16.3 (September 1980): 138 – 47.
- Sollors, Werner. *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture*. New York: Oxford UP, 1986.
- *Neither Black, Nor White, Yet Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997.
- "'Never Was Born': The Mulatto, An American Tragedy." *The Massachusetts Review*. 27 (1986): 293 – 316.
- Some Kind of Wonderful*. Dir. Howard Deutch. Perf. Eric Stolz, Lea Thompson, Mary Stuart Masterson, Craig Sheffer, John Ashton. Paramount, 1987.
- Somerville, Siobhan B. *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture*. Durham: Duke UP, 2000.
- Southworth, E. D. E. N. *Cruel as the Grave*. Philadelphia: T. B. Peterson and

- Brothers, 1871.
- . *The Deserted Wife*. 1849. Philadelphia: T. B. Peterson and Brothers, 1875.
- . *The Discarded Daughter*. Philadelphia: A. Hart, 1852.
- . "Eveline Murray; or, The Fine Figure." *The Wife's Victory and other Nouvellettes*. Philadelphia: T. B. Peterson and Brothers, 1854. 193 - 206
- . *The Fatal Marriage*. Philadelphia: T. B. Peterson and Brothers, 1863.
- . *The Hidden Hand*. 1889. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1988.
- . *How He Won Her*. Philadelphia: T. B. Peterson and Brothers, 1869.
- . *A Leap in the Dark*. New York: Robert Bonner's Sons, 1889.
- . *The Lost Heiress*. Philadelphia: T. B. Peterson and Brothers, 1853.
- . *The Missing Bride*. Philadelphia: T. B. Peterson and Brothers, 1854.
- . *Retribution*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1849.
- . *The Three Beauties*. Philadelphia: T. B. Peterson and Brothers, 1858.
- . *Vivia; or, The Secret of Power*. Philadelphia: T. B. Peterson and Brothers, 1857.
- . "Winny: A Child's Story." *The Wife's Victory and other Nouvellettes*. Philadelphia: T. B. Peterson and Brothers, 1854. 327 - 42
- Stanton, Elizabeth Cady. *The Woman's Bible*. 1895. New York: Arno, 1972.
- Stepin, Nancy. "Biological Degeneration: Races and Proper Places." *Degeneration: The Dark Side of Progress*. Edited by J. Edward Chamberlain and Sander Gilman. New York: Columbia UP, 1985. 97 - 120.
- . "Race and Gender: The Role of Analogy in Science." *Isis*. 77 (June 1986): 261 - 77.
- Stern, Madeleine B. and Kent Bicknell. Afterword. *Behind a Mask: The Unknown Thrillers of Louisa May Alcott*. Ed. Madeleine Stern. 1975. New York: Quill, 1995. 279 - 281.
- . "Behind a Mask: The Story of a Book." *Louisa May Alcott: From Blood and Thunder to Hearth and Home*. Ed. Madeline B. Stern. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1998. 93 - 103.
- . An Early Alcott Sensation Story: 'Marion Earle; or, Only an Actress!.' " *Louisa May Alcott: From Blood and Thunder to Hearth and Home*. Ed. Madeline B. Stern. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1998. 63 - 9.

- Introduction. *Behind a Mask: The Unknown Thrillers of Louisa May Alcott*. Ed. Madeleine Stern. New York: Quill, 1975. vii – xxxiii.
- Introduction. *Critical Essays on Louisa May Alcott*. Boston: G. K. Hall, 1984. 1 – 19.
- Introduction. *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*. Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1989. 3 – 39.
- Introduction. *Louisa May Alcott: Selected Fiction*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1990. xi – xlv.
- Introduction. *Louisa May Alcott Unmasked: Collected Thrillers*. Ed. Madeleine Stern. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1995. xi – xxix.
- Introduction. *Plots and Counterplots: More Unknown Thrillers of Louisa May Alcott*. Ed. Madeleine Stern. New York: William Morrow and Company, 1976. 7 – 29.
- Introduction. *The Selected Letters of Louisa May Alcott*. Edited by Joel Myerson and Daniel Shealy. Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1987. xvii – xlii.
- *Louisa May Alcott*. Norman: U of Oklahoma, 1950.
- “Louisa May Alcott Had Her Head Examined.” *Louisa May Alcott: From Blood and Thunder to Hearth and Home*. Ed. Madeline B. Stern. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1998. 239 – 245.
- “Louisa May Alcott’s Self-Criticism.” *Louisa May Alcott: From Blood and Thunder to Hearth and Home*. Ed. Madeline B. Stern. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1998. 175 – 238.
- “Louisa May Alcott, Trouper: Experiences in Theatricals.” *Louisa May Alcott: From Blood and Thunder to Hearth and Home*. Ed. Madeline B. Stern. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1998. 13 – 31.
- Stevens, Dinah. *Tomboy*. New York: Appleton and Company, 1930.
- Stoddard, Lothrop. *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World Supremacy*. New York: Scribner, 1921.
- Stouck, David. *Willa Cather’s Imagination*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska, 1975.
- Stout, Janis. *Willa Cather: The Writer and Her World*. Charlottesville: U of Virginia, 2000.

- Stowe, Harriet Beecher. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. 1852. New York: Signet, 1966.
- Sundquist, Eric J. *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1993.
- "swarthinness." *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1989.
- "swarthy." *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1989.
- Thorp, Margaret Farrand. *Sarah Orne Jewett*. Minneapolis: U of Minneapolis, 1966.
- Times Square*. Dir. Alan Moyle. Perf. Tim Curry, Trini Alvarado, Robin Johnson, Peter Coffield, Herbert Bergof, Miguel Pinero, Elizabeth Pena. Associated Films, 1980.
- Toll, Robert C. *Blackening Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Oxford UP, 1974.
- , "Social Commentary in Late-Nineteenth-Century White Minstrelsy." *Inside the Minstrel Mask: Readings in Nineteenth-Century Blackface Minstrelsy*. Edited by Annemarie Bean, James V. Hatch and Brooks McNamara. Hanover: Wesleyan UP, 1996. 86 – 109.
- "Tom." *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1989.
- "tom." *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1989.
- "tomboy." *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1989.
- "tom cat." *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1989.
- "tom' foolery." *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1989.
- "Tommy." *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1989.
- "tom-tit." *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1989.
- "tom-turkey." *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1989.
- Tompkins, Jane. *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790 – 1860*. New York: Oxford UP, 1984.
- "Topsy." *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1989.
- "topsy-turvy." *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1989.
- Torgovnick, Marianna. *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives*. Chicago: U of Chicago, 1990.
- , *Primitive Passions: Men, Women, and the Quest for Ecstasy*. New York: Alfred

- A. Knopf, 1997.
- Torres, Tereska. *Women's Barracks*. New York: Fawcett Gold Medal, 1950.
- Trible, Phyllis. *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984.
- Turner, Frederick Jackson. "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." *The Turner Thesis: Concerning the Role of the Frontier in American History*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Ed. By George Rogers Taylor. Lexington, Mass: D. C. Heath and Company, 1972. 3 – 28.
- Twain, Mark. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. 1885. New York: W. W. Norton, 1977.
- , "Hellfire Hotchkiss." *Mark Twain's Satires and Burlesques*. Edited by Franklin R. Rogers. Berkeley: UP of California, 1967. 172 – 203.
- , *Mark Twain's Autobiography*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1924.
- Urgo, Joseph R. *Willa Cather and the Myth of American Migration*. Urbana: U of Illinois, 1995.
- Voight, Cynthia. *Jackaroo*. New York: Scholastic, Inc., 1995.
- Wagenknecht, Edward. *Willa Cather*. New York: Continuum, 1994.
- Walden, William. *Tomboy Wonder, A Comedy in Three Acts*. New York: French, 1958.
- Walker, Lisa. *Looking Like What You Are: Sexual Style, Race, and Lesbian Identity*. New York: NYU, 2001.
- Wallace, Michele. *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*. New York: Verso, 1990.
- Walsh, Margaret. "Carson McCullers' Anti-Fairy Tale: 'The Ballad of the Sad Café.'" *Pembroke Magazine*. 20 (1988): 43 – 8.
- Walters, Ronald G. Introduction. *A Black Woman's Odyssey through Russia and Jamaica*. Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1990. ix – xxiii.
- Walters, Suzanna Danuta. "As Her Hand Crept Slowly Up Her Thigh: Ann Bannon and the Politics of Pulp." *Social Text*. (Fall-Winter 1989): 23, 83 – 101.
- Warner, Susan. *The Wide, Wide World*. 1850. New York: The Feminist Press, 1987.
- Waters, Sarah. *Tipping the Velvet*. New York: Riverhead, 1998.
- Watkins, Mel. Foreword. *Inside the Minstrel Mask: Readings in Nineteenth-Century*



- Blackface Minstrelsy*. Edited by Annemarie Bean, James V. Hatch and Brooks McNamara. Hanover: Wesleyan UP, 1996. ix – x.
- Watson, H. B. Marriott. *The Tomboy and Others*. London: Lane Company, 1912.
- Werner, M. R. *Barnum*. New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1923.
- Wesselhoft, Lily F. *Torpeanuts the Tomboy*. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1898.
- Westbrook, Perry D. *Acres of Flint: Sarah Orne Jewett and Her Contemporaries*. rev. ed. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1981.
- Westling, Louise. “Carson McCullers’s Amazon Nightmare.” *Modern Critical Views: Carson McCullers*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House, 1986. 109 – 16.
- , *Sacred Groves and Ravaged Gardens: The Fiction of Eudora Wetly, Carson McCullers, and Flannery O’Connor*. Athens: U of Georgia, 1985.
- , “Tomboys and Revolting Femininity.” *Critical Essays on Carson McCullers*. Ed. Beverly Lyon Clark & Melvin J. Friedman. New York: G. K. Hall and Co., 1996. 155 – 65.
- When Night is Falling*. Dir. Patricia Rozema. Perf. Pascale Bussières, Rachel Crawford, Henry Czerny. October Films, 1995.
- White, Barbara. *Growing Up Female: Adolescent Girlhood in American Fiction*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1985.
- White, Gwen. *European and American Dolls, and Their Marks and Patents*. London: B. T. Batsford Ltd., 1966.
- Wikborg, Eleanor. *Carson McCullers’ The Member of the Wedding: Aspects of Structure and Style*. Goteborg, Sweden: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1975.
- Wilder, Laura Ingalls. *By the Shores of Silver Lake*. 1939. New York: Harper Trophy, 1971.
- , *Farmer Boy*. 1933. New York: Harper Trophy, 1971.
- , *The First Four Years*. New York: Harper Trophy, 1972.
- , *Little House in the Big Woods*. 1932. New York: Harper Trophy, 1971.
- , *Little House on the Prairie*. 1935. New York: Harper Trophy, 1971.
- , *Little Town on the Prairie*. 1941. New York: Harper Trophy, 1971.
- , *The Long Winter*. 1940. New York: Harper Trophy, 1971.

- . *On the Banks of Plum Creek*. 1937. New York: Harper Trophy, 1971.
- . *These Happy Golden Years*. 1943. New York: Harper Trophy, 1971.
- Williamson, Joel. *The Crucible of Race: Black/White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation*. New York: Oxford UP, 1984.
- . *New People: Miscegenation and Mulattoes in the United States*. New York: Free Press, 1980.
- . *A Rage for Order: Black/White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation*. New York: Oxford UP, 1986.
- Wilson, Harriet E. *Our Nig; or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black*. 1859. New York: Vintage, 1983.
- Wolf, Naomi. "The Racism of Well-Meaning White People." *Skin Deep: Black Women and White Women Write About Race*. Ed. Marita Golden and Susan Richards Shreve. New York: Anchor, 1995. 37 – 46.
- Wood, Ann Douglas. "The Literature of Impoverishment: The Women Local Colorists in America, 1865 – 1914." *Women's Studies*. vol. 1 (1972): 3 – 45.
- Woodward, C. Vann. *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*. 1955. New York: Oxford UP, 1966.
- Welty, Eudora. *Delta Wedding*. 1945. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1974.
- Westbrook, Perry D. *A Literary History of New England*. London: Association UP, 1988.
- White, Deborah Gray. *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1985.
- Wister, Owen. *The Virginian*. 1902. New York: Oxford UP, 1998.
- Woodress, James. *Willa Cather: A Literary Life*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska, 1987.
- Wright, Richard. "Inner Landscape." *New Republic*. 5 August 1940. 1945.
- Yamaguchi, Lynne and Karen Barber. Introduction. *Tomboys!: Tales of Dyke Derring-Do*. Ed. Lynne Yamaguchi and Karen Barber. Los Angeles: Alyson, 1995. 9 – 14.
- Young, Deborah Bailey. "'A Woman's Pen Presents You With a Play': The Influence of Drama and the Theater on the Life and Writings of Louisa May Alcott." Diss. Indiana U, 1998.

- Young, Margarite Young. "Metaphysical Fiction." *Modern Critical Views: Carson McCullers*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House, 1986. 7 – 10.
- Zagarell, Sandra A. "Country's Portrayal of Community and Exclusion of Difference." *New Essays on The Country of the Pointed Firs*. Ed. June Howard. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994. 39 – 60.
- Zehr, Janet. "The Response of Nineteenth-Century Audiences to Louisa May Alcott's Fiction." *American Transcendental Quarterly*. 1.4 (1987): 323 – 42.
- Zevy, Lee. "Sexing the Tomboy." *Sissies and Tomboys: Gender Nonconformity and Homosexual Childhood*. Ed. Matthew Rottnek. New York: NYU, 1999. 180 – 95.
- Zitkala-Sa. "A Warrior's Daughter." *American Indian Stories*. 1921. Lincoln: U of Nebraska, 1985. 137 - 54.