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**THE NOVEL OF AWAKENING IN AMERICAN WOMEN'S FICTION, 1860-1940**

by

**NINA R. BANNETT**

**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**

2002

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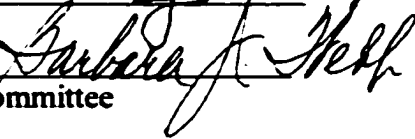
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Executive Officer

William Kelly   
Barbara Webb   
Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

**Abstract****The Novel of Awakening in American Women's Fiction, 1860-1940**

by

**Nina R. Bannett****Advisor: Professor Neal Tolchin**

This dissertation examines the growing field of late nineteenth/early twentieth century American women's fiction by exploring what I call the *novel of awakening* in seven novels published between 1860 and 1940. I relocate these texts (Stowe's *The Pearl of Orr's Island*, Alcott's *Moods*, Stoddard's *The Morgesons*, Chopin's *The Awakening*, Wharton's *Summer*, Larsen's *Quicksand* and Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*), within a critical tradition that extends from the sentimental or domestic novel popular in mid-nineteenth century America. Reworking sentimental motifs, often in covert ways, these novelists move towards a more subversive and, ultimately, anti-romantic approach to the themes of female identity, sexuality, and autonomy. These writers often use *transactional imagery* of promises and gifts in ways that expand the dimensions of the sentimental genre itself.

I define an awakening as a transitional state which allows a female character a means of acknowledging desires which fall out of the range of the marriage plot. An awakening is connected to an excited state of desire, be it a desire to understand or sympathize with another woman (as I discuss in Chapter 1, with Stowe and Alcott's texts) or a desire for space (as in Chapter 2, with Stoddard and Chopin's novels). This desire for emotional and psychic affiliation is not always realized in these novels; as I argue in Chapters 3 and 4, where interpersonal exchanges are not possible, emotions become conflated with inanimate

objects or even external landscapes. The final chapter of this dissertation focuses on the limits of contract law exposed by Hurston's novel, particularly for African-American women. My examination of contract law, along with psychoanalytic feminist theory, provides a theoretical framework for this project, as I assert the importance of promising and gift-giving as specific alternatives to the marriage contract, prominent in each of these novels.

## Acknowledgments

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## Introduction

### **The Novel of Awakening in American Women's Fiction, 1860-1940: Locating the Novel of Awakening Within American Literature**

"A gift that has the power to change us awakens a part of the soul" -Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property*.

This dissertation examines the growing field of late nineteenth/early twentieth century American women's fiction by exploring what I call the *novel of awakening*. The narrative and thematic pattern I trace is found in seven American novels published between 1860 and 1940. In exploring these texts, I relocate them within a tradition that steadily moves away from the sentimental or domestic novel popular in mid-nineteenth century America and instead moves towards a more subversive and, ultimately, anti-romantic approach to the themes of female identity, sexuality, and autonomy. I seek not only to promote a new way of reading these novels individually, but also a new way of seeing these texts in relation to one another. By stressing the relationship between these works, I apply Carol Gilligan's pioneering image of the web as metaphor for the emotional bonds which confine a woman's sense of self to her attachment to others. Through her work as a psychologist, she has noticed that historically, "changes in women's rights change women's moral judgments [. . .] by enabling women to consider it moral to care not only for others but for themselves" (149). Gilligan's suggestion that autonomy, as symbolized through the individual quest, may not have to be sacrificed to a woman's sense of interconnectedness to other persons continues to have startling implications for this new, transitional body of literature.

My choice of the word "transitional" above is a deliberate one. The novels I

examine, by writers not usually grouped together (Harriet Beecher Stowe, Louisa May Alcott, Elizabeth Stoddard, Kate Chopin, Edith Wharton, Nella Larsen and Zora Neale Hurston), bridge the dividing line of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, forming a web of their own from which the *novel of awakening* has emerged. These texts move away from a simple affirmation of what many feminist theorists call either the romance or marriage plot. Rather than relying on romantic declarations of love between men and women, the earliest of these novels hint at declarations of self that other writers later develop more fully. In doing so, these women writers rely, to varying degrees, upon conventions usually associated with the sentimental novel.

As my project has moved forward and taken shape, I have found myself increasingly needing to re(define) the novel of awakening in relation to the genre of the nineteenth-century American sentimental novel. Sentimentalism is far more than a one-dimensional attempt at tear-jerking (the cynical way in which the term has come down to twenty-first century readers); it is a genre of keepsakes, sympathies, emotional exchanges, and closed spaces. These motifs are reworked, often in covert ways, by the American women novelists I have chosen to discuss. Each posits a man's tale (a heterosexual romance) against a woman's tale (anti-romance, awakening), either explicitly, as in Stowe's novel, or implicitly (for example, through the legal imagery in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.) The *novel of awakening* is a novel which simultaneously explores female friendships, physical landscapes (as they relate to social spaces) and the relativity of female sexual desire through a female protagonist.

However, a *novel of awakening* differs significantly from the sentimental novel in that authorial imposition of moral judgment upon a female protagonist is, at best,

ambiguous when she deviates from the proscribed path toward domestic happiness, which Nina Baym has described as the following: “[s]he must learn to strike a balance between total submission, which means self-denial to the point of death, and an equally suicidal defiance. She has to learn how to comply as a practical necessity” (37). But rather than learning this moral lesson of the primacy of “compliance and inner independence” (37), as heroines of sentimental novels typically do, female protagonists in *novels of awakening* combat its rigidity through both inner consciousness and external actions. Often their alleged transgressions are presented via lyrical narrative by the author, which serves to offset negative judgments other characters pronounce against these protagonists.

Instead of proceeding seamlessly into romance as a sentimental heroine would, these women react to this process, sometimes with unexpected consequences for themselves and others. Thus, as I argue, to consider any of these protagonists as “heroines” is somewhat problematic for both readers and critics, since often what remains most discussed about these novels is not strength or nobility of character, typical heroic traits, but their unusual endings.<sup>1</sup>

In almost all of the texts which I have (re)identified as *novels of awakening*, awakenings are themselves short-lived. The transitional nature of an awakening is expressed either explicitly through the deaths of these female protagonists (Mara Lincoln, Sylvia Yule, Edna Pontellier) or implicitly through endings which seemingly allow them to remain suspended within a web of patriarchy, usually signified by a marriage that seems somehow wrong, ill-fitting (Cassandra Morgeson, Charity Royall, Helga Crane). Is it possible, then, to look at this body of literature and conclude that an awakening is in

fact an important experience for American women?

In each case, a female character's awakening is intrinsically connected to the excited state of desire, be it a desire for self, a desire for space, a desire to understand another woman. Defining desire itself is at best a difficult task. For example, for narrative theorist Peter Brooks, desire is "[a] narrative thematic, [. . .] [a] narrative motor, [. . .] the very intention of narrative language and the act of telling," each category redoubling upon itself (*Reading* 54). For the critic Claudia Tate, desire is "wistful longing, reflective dream, emotional displacement, sanctioned aspiration, and practical ambition, conscious and unconscious, rational and irrational, potentially real or exclusively imaginary" (*Allegories* 95).

Emotional exchanges between women, however minute, become a means of acknowledging desires which fall outside of the range of the romance plot; where such exchanges are not possible (in Larsen's *Quicksand*, Helga Crane is without close female friends), emotions become conflated with inanimate objects or even external landscapes, and, thus with these desires. At its crudest level, an awakening is a realization, however transient, of the value of non-patriarchal emotional or psychic affiliation.

#### Text or Context?

As increasing numbers of nineteenth century novels by American women have become more widely circulated, so the struggle over how best to integrate them into a discussion of American literature has inevitably become more complicated. Historically, the tendency has been to read nineteenth-century women's texts as either distinct examples of or deviations from sentimental or domestic fiction. Thus, relatively little work has been done on establishing the intertextuality among these texts which bridge the

dividing line of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the ways in which fictions reinvent standard sentimental tropes.

And also, too often, the American literature canon has had the tendency to separate writing by race, instead of exploring the connections between the writing of women of color and white women. Early twentieth-century African-American women's fiction wrestles with female sexuality, marriage, and the strengths and weaknesses of community, moving in new directions from nineteenth-century predecessors. A *novel of awakening* is transformed by many of these writers into a narrative of liberation. While writers like Chopin struggle for their characters to find a voice, twentieth-century African-American women novelists have not only found it, but use it as a tool to discuss social confinement yielding to both narrative and textual freedom. Indeed, I see novels by contemporary African-American authors like Paule Marshall and Toni Morrison as ones which extend the narrative work begun by women like Stowe, Stoddard and Chopin.

What makes this growing field of late-nineteenth/early twentieth-century fiction unique is that its organizing principles of investigative methodology are still in flux, as new texts are recovered and so-called canonical ones re-examined. Therefore, in examining the novel of awakening, I not only work from a feminist perspective (using Second Wave theorists and psychoanalytic feminist theory), but from a historical one as well. Thus, I reassert the cultural as well as literary value of late nineteenth/early twentieth texts without necessarily privileging one over the other.

In situating this dissertation within the existing scholarship, I seek to move past the cultural/literary debate mentioned above, which has been typified by Judith Fetterley, who has been instrumental in the textual recovery effort, and Jane Tompkins, whose

*Sensational Designs* called for a reading of nineteenth century texts based on their historical contexts rather than their aesthetic merits. I fully believe that the selected novels can still have thematic, as well as cultural resonance, for modern readers. In this regard, I ally myself with scholars such as Susan Harris and Elizabeth Ammons. In her groundbreaking work *Conflicting Stories: Women Writers at the Turn into the Twentieth Century*, Ammons makes a compelling argument for erasing the dividing line which separates American women's fiction by century and finds the web of intersecting themes that connects the work of seventeen American women, black and white, who at first glance would seem to have little in common. Her purpose is "to contribute to the unfolding, complex, but nonetheless connected story now being recovered of American women writers as a whole" (18). Ammons's consciousness of her efforts to reshape the process of American literary canon formation is highlighted by her choice of epigraphs, both of which revolve around awakenings : "'Fearful as the awakening was, it was better than to have slept through life'" - *Iola Leroy* (1892); "'Perhaps it is better to wake up after all, than to remain a dupe to illusions all of one's life'" - *The Awakening* (1899) . These references suggest a link between the thematic awakenings within the novels themselves and the awakening Ammons wants scholars to undergo when thinking about this period of American literature. In this, I share her vision.

Certainly, neither American women nor even American novelists are the only writers to explore the implications of love and marriage. Joseph Boone, in his 1987 study *Tradition Counter Tradition: Love and the Form of Fiction*, analyzes the ways in which English and American novelists, both male and female, create texts "whose dismantling of the patriarchal implication of marriage and marriage plots have gradually opened up

the closed field of romantic representation, and which have constituted a vital counter-tradition in Anglo-American fiction" (19). His study is diverse, encompassing both male and female writers, among them Henry James, Virginia Woolf, Jane Austen, Mark Twain, the Brontës, Herman Melville and Sarah Orne Jewett. His exhaustive examination of this wide array of authors leads him to the conclusion that "although men may and do critique marriage with acuity and sensitivity [. . .] , because women stand to benefit most immediately from the demystification of a system-and a story- that has worked to the benefit of men at their expense, it also makes sense that more women than men have actively engaged in a revision of the marriage plot" (224).

The genre of sentimentalist literature, so prominent in the nineteenth century and so derided today (and then), offers these authors a means of exploring these desires without fully acknowledging or repudiating them. Sentimentalism takes as its focal point the psychological dynamics of emotional affiliation, and its accompanying trope of gift-giving. In Lewis Hyde's analysis of gifts, *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property* (1979), he reminds us that

[t]he mythology of a market society reverses the picture: *getting* rather than *giving* is the mark of a substantial person, and the hero is "self-possessed," "self-made." So long as these assumptions rule, a disquieting sense of triviality, or worthlessness even, will nag the man or woman who labors in the service of a gift and whose products are not adequately described as commodities. (xiv-emphasis added)

Hyde's use of the terms "trivial" and "worthless" hearken back to judgments often imposed on nineteenth-century sentimentalist fiction. Yet gift-giving can be seen as a

viable alternative to (marriage) contracts, and to the marriage plot. An awakening, in these novels, revolves around the notion of exchange, an awareness, however limited, to the value of giving between women.<sup>2</sup>

*The Oxford English Dictionary* cites the first known usage of the word “awakening” in Shakespeare’s romantic tragedy *Romeo and Juliet* (1592). It is significant that it first appears in a work of this genre, because it suggests connections between awakening and tragedy, awakening and death, and awakening and romantic love. These connotations have problematic associations when we seek to apply the term awakening consistently to novels either in terms of plot or theme. Susan Rosowski argues in her article “The Novel of Awakening” that such a work is essentially thematic, and rooted in a female protagonist’s discovery of the limitations of “a world defined by love and marriage” (Rosowski 49). However, I would argue that these two terms, love and marriage, actually operate at cross purposes with one another, throwing a definition of awakening based on limitations alone into disarray.

Contract law reminds us of the inherent paradox of combining love and marriage, the ways in which contractual relationships function as reinforcements of patriarchy, as (female) obedience is exchanged for (male) protection (Pateman 7). My examination of contract law provides a theoretical framework for this project, as I assert the importance of promising and gift-giving as specific alternatives to the marriage contract (also referred to by Carole Pateman as the sexual contract) which plays a prominent role in each of these novels. The marriage contract serves to codify the romance plot; the exchange of promises and gifts by women in these novels undermines the function of that contract.

Rachel Blau DuPlessis defines “the romance plot” as the way in which individuals become couples and homosocial ties become subordinate to a kinship system which endorses marriage as the motif of a successful narrative (Du Plessis 5). Thus, as feminists like Germaine Greer have asserted, the romance plot offers a textual means of maintaining patriarchal control over women by compelling them to internalize a myth that offers the allure of an “omnipotent understanding of the heroine’s emotional needs” (Greer 171). Analysts of the romance myth have implicitly made the connection between its simple narrative strategy and its function within a complex patriarchal system.<sup>3</sup> DuPlessis’s argument comes directly from the work of socialist feminist Gayle Rubin. In her influential essay “The Traffic in Women” (1976), she emphasizes the role male-female social relationships play in continuing the oppression of women. Rubin maintains that the power of the term patriarchy “lies in its implication that, in fact there are alternatives to [it]” (81) “and calls for “a revolution in kinship” (99), through which the sex/gender system would be reorganized.<sup>4</sup>

#### Alternatives to Romance

If, as I argue in this dissertation, women novelists from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have begun to cast the romance plot aside, the questions next become twofold: to what extent, if at all, is the romance myth passed on in these texts, and what are the subversive alternatives suggested by the authors of these novels of awakening?

I explore the value of female friendships as presented by the seven writers I discuss. Close friendships between women are subversive in that they are non-binding, extralegal relationships not governed by a patriarchal system. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg’s

pivotal investigation into “The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth-Century America” (1975) revealed a world hitherto unknown to scholars, largely because it was undocumented via official writing. Smith-Rosenberg’s work uncovers the cultural and symbolic value of close friendships among women during a historical period previously held to be conservative. Similarly, Adrienne Rich’s concept of the lesbian continuum as “woman-identified experience” may prompt a means of destabilizing texts that ostensibly revolve around heterosexual relationships (156).

In addition, I undertake an examination of spatial metaphors in the novel of awakening in order to discuss relationships between women’s inner desire and the exterior landscape. As Annette Kolodny has established, men and women have historically interpreted the American landscape quite distinctly. For men, the American exterior landscape was equated with a fantasy of conquest and expansion; for women, domestic confinement became represented in the image of the cultivated garden. Fantasy then, may serve as a point of mediation between probability and “imaginative possibility,” and as yet another way of preserving the social bond of female friendship, which enjoys no inherent legal protection (10).

Other reconceptualizations of space provide a means of redefining women’s sexual desire itself. Jessica Benjamin’s discussion of desire moves away from the symbolic mode typically investigated by psychoanalytic feminists and towards spatial representation. The metaphor of open space offers a provocative and paradoxical way of understanding female sexuality, since it reverses the Freudian imagery of interiority and penetration (Benjamin 129). In particular, Benjamin explores the transitional space created in the relationship between analysand and analyst. It is within this space that

“either subject [can] recognize the difference of the other,” a state known as *intersubjectivity* (*Shadow of the Other* xii).

“Intersubjectivity,” according to Benjamin, “thus requires that each subject own and enjoy her or his own desire as well as the activity which realizes it” (*Shadow* xvi). In both Stoddard and Chopin’s novels, particular spaces can only be fully understood as transitional spaces whose importance depends upon their ability to function as a site of exchange. Cassandra Morgeson and Edna Pontellier each find themselves in excited states of desire, “the maternal form of activity, the recognition and holding of emotional states, excitement in particular” (*Shadow of the Other* xvii). Their desires can only be fully grasped through a full exploration of interior and exterior spaces. Interior spaces become valuable as representations that correspond to emotional activities; exterior spaces, such as the sea in *The Morgesons*, resonate as areas where visibility and voice may connect. Edna Pontellier’s transitory state of awakening also becomes affiliated with spatial, as well as emotional, intersubjectivity. Even minute spatial movements hint at spatial and sexual possibilities, embodied by the dual motifs of the female flâneur and mosquitoes. Benjamin’s theory of intersubjectivity and gender provides a way of discussing the motif of spatial exchange between a protagonist and her surroundings, rather than the modes of interpersonal exchange signified by promises and gifts.

The authors I examine in this dissertation seem to understand the necessity of recognizing and holding emotional excitement, even as their protagonists struggle in their transitional state of awakening. As Patricia Williams brilliantly articulates in her book *The Alchemy of Race and Rights*, “[c]ontract law reduces life to fairy tale [. . .] passivity is valued as good contract-socialized behavior [. . .] activity is caged in retrospective

hypotheses about states of mind at the magic moment of contracting” (224). The novel of awakening is one which rattles the cage, unsettles the reader, evokes the fairy tale of marriage and contract, but eludes it in very specific ways.

I have chosen to use a comparative model for the novels I discuss in chapters 1 and 2 but to make subsequent chapters ones which essentially focus on only a single novel. In so doing, I am seeking to reorient the ways in which the more canonical texts within the dissertation are analyzed by placing them within the context of a pattern of a novel of awakening. To establish this pattern, I believe comparisons between early texts are indispensable. And while chapters 3 through 5 each revolve around one primary text, I draw connections between them, and others, where appropriate.

My first chapter, *The Sphinx and the Coquette: “The Interchange of Affection”* in Stowe’s *The Pearl of Orr’s Island* and Alcott’s *Moods*, examines two less familiar works by nineteenth-century canonical writers: Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *The Pearl of Orr’s Island* (1862) and Louisa May Alcott’s *Moods* (1864, revised 1882). Both Stowe and Alcott’s novels reposition the marriage plot through an examination of the connection between moral law and romantic love. For both authors, moral law comes to be mediated by the ties of female friendship. In this chapter I argue that the intense relationship between Mara (the sphinx) and Sally (the coquette) is ultimately the heart of *The Pearl of Orr’s Island* since it is through their “interchange of affection” (231) that the reader can predict the unraveling of the traditional romantic relationship between Mara and Moses. Mara’s death becomes equated with the moral and patriarchal authority of God, and helps provide the final impetus towards binding Sally and Moses together. These same themes figure prominently in *Moods* as Alcott’s protagonist Sylvia, unlike Mara,

realizes the limitations of romantic love only *after* she has married the wrong man.

Sylvia's desire to go to sleep on her wedding day, rather than be awakened to the "sudden summer" of her sexual desires foreshadows her eventual death (79). Sylvia dies because she is not allowed to fulfill her illicit sexual desires (she cannot be a coquette) and because she has internalized the complicated words of her friend Faith, who tells her, "it is necessary to be just, it is not necessary to be happy" but also "[y]ou shall be a law unto yourself" (182), contradictory messages to be sure.

In my second chapter, "'Can You Give Up *Yourself*?': Landscaping Marriage in Stoddard's *The Morgesons* and Chopin's *The Awakening*," I argue that Stoddard's 1862 novel can be seen as a precursor, both in themes and imagery, to Chopin's pivotal 1899 novel. In *The Morgesons*, Cassandra wrestles with herself (as well as the reader and other characters) over how much voice she is allowed to possess and under what circumstances she is allowed to give way to it. Like Edna Pontellier, the seascape provides a metaphorical means of expressing this voice, but unlike Edna, Cassandra is enfolded into the protective arms of marriage, rather than the sea, by the novel's end. Through the other women of *The Morgesons* (her sister Veronica, cousin Alice, mother, Aunt Mercy and friend Helen) Stoddard explores the viability of marriage when it is presented as a way of "giv[ing] up *yourself*" (215). By looking at these texts in tandem, a central question emerges. Which is presented in more romantic terms: to be married or to forgo this state? Here, I argue not that Chopin was necessarily familiar with Stoddard's work, but that both authors explore moments of sexual and emotional awakening using different languagescapes. Stoddard studies the sea; Chopin maneuvers mosquitoes, each using landscape to depict a woman's inner consciousness as she awakens.

In both my third chapter, "'Furtive Malice' or 'Piercing Sympathy?': 'Ally'ing Edith Wharton's *Summer* against Sentimental Fiction," and my fourth chapter, "Displacing Sentimental Longings in Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*," I juxtapose early twentieth-century novels against sentimental predecessors. Both Wharton and Larsen try to envision how a young woman's independent sexuality can best be plotted. Both novels first come to resolutions, which are paradoxically not resolutions. These endings feel rather bleak to a reader expecting a sexual awakening, and then, a happy ending. I argue that both authors use sentimental motifs to suggest that an awakening is not about heterosexual desire, but a desire for female power, usually through female friendship, which can only be given through some sort of exchange. In *Summer*, Charity is surrounded by a trio of crippled women, one of whom, Ally Hawes, symbolizes creative production rather than erotic activity, female power rather than male sexuality. Yet her influence is circumscribed. I examine *Quicksand* against Susan Warner's wildly popular novel *The Wide, Wide World* in order to examine Helga Crane's sentimental relationships with material objects and landscapes. In *Summer* and *Quicksand*, last-minute marriages transform the texts, almost squelching our ability to interpret their narrative centers.

My last chapter, "'Ah Give You the Understanding': Contract Law and Giving Voice in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," focuses on the limits of contract law exposed by Hurston in her novel. My examination of contract law, along with psychoanalytic feminist theory, provides a theoretical framework for the entire dissertation, as I assert the importance of promising and gift-giving as specific alternatives to the marriage contract itself, prominent in each of these novels. In awakening to the limitations of contract law and the power of giving voice, romantic love and marriage are superseded

by the bonds of female friendship: Janie asserts a power accessible to black women. Unlike the female protagonists in the other novels I examine throughout this dissertation, Janie ends up cognizant of her journey and willing to continue it. Through Janie, Zora Neale Hurston is willing to answer the question she poses in *Dust Tracks on a Road*: “what happens when you wake a black gal up?”

\* \* \*

Peter Brooks asserts that “plot is a kind of arabesque or squiggle towards the end” (104). Fundamentally, a novel of awakening is a text whose ending is so unexpected that it almost obscures the arabesque. Almost. These seven novels do in fact call our attention to the existence of new, subversive desires. They extend the confines of a sentimentalist tradition to do so, but in so doing, subvert its dependence on the romance plot. A novel of awakening takes a middle ground, takes small steps, and yet these steps themselves, the transition from a sleeping to a wakening female consciousness, are what are themselves so fascinating. The sentimentalist motifs which are incorporated into these novels shape themselves by means of images and exchanges, and no two are exactly alike.

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<sup>1</sup> Here, I am thinking in particular of Edna Pontellier's suicide, perhaps the most (re)interpreted ending of any work of American fiction, the final image of childbirth which haunts Larsen's *Quicksand*, and Charity Royall's subdued honeymoon in *Summer*. However, it should also be noted that even within the novels which feature somewhat "happier" endings, such as *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, there are destabilizing events which render such a uncomplicated assessment of these women as "heroines" (with its accompanying connotation of total triumph within the confines of marriage) uncomfortable for me to accept.

<sup>2</sup> In a footnote, Hyde describes gift exchange as "an 'erotic' commerce, opposing *eros* (the principle of attraction, union, involvement which binds together) to *logos* (reason and logic in general, the principle of differentiation in particular). A market economy is an emanation of *logos*" (xiv).

<sup>3</sup> For further elucidation, see Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature* (1984). Radway views the contemporary romance as a form that is conservative and serves to legitimize patriarchy and control female sexual desire within a permanent heterosexual relationship.

<sup>4</sup> Rubin also draws attention to the romanticized language used by both Freud and Levi-Strauss in their descriptions of the traffic in women. "Why is [Levi-Strauss] not, at this point, denouncing what kinship systems do to women, instead of presenting one of the greatest rip-offs of all time as the root of romance?" (100)

**Chapter 1: The Sphinx and the Coquette:  
“The Interchange of Affection” in Stowe’s *The Pearl of Orr’s Island*  
and Alcott’s *Moods***

Over the past twenty years, scholars of American literature have begun to recover a variety of texts by women who were either unknown to contemporary scholars such as Lillie Devereux Blake, Sui Sin Far, Mary Austin, or who had been firmly established within the American canon but defined primarily on the basis of one widely influential work. Such is the case with two prominent nineteenth-century writers: Harriet Beecher Stowe, revered as the author of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1851-1853) and Louisa May Alcott, who enjoyed remarkable popularity for her novel *Little Women* (1869). These immensely popular works are often cited as classic examples of the sentimental novel genre, one which Cathy Davidson has noted, “[is] generically suited to addressing in detail the range of ideological assessments of the family and the implications *for women* of different visions of what the family should be” (125- emphasis original).

Ironically, Stowe and Alcott’s critical reputations have historically remained limited due to the vast popularity of these two texts, even despite the recent examination of more varied material, ranging from Stowe’s domestic essays to Alcott’s sensationalist fiction. Yet Stowe and Alcott each set forth a self-effacing public persona, protecting this image at the expense of producing or promoting her more mature texts. As a result, Stowe’s so-called New England novel, *The Pearl of Orr’s Island* (1862) and Alcott’s first adult novel, *Moods* (1864, revised 1882), have remained undervalued by scholars, both individually and certainly in relation to one another.

Both of these novels reposition the marriage plot through an examination of the connection between moral law and romantic love. For both authors, moral law and

romantic love come to be mediated by the ties of female friendship, relocating the emotional center of female desire. It is in this context that Stowe and Alcott each explores, in the guise of a sentimental text, the theme of female awakening. In *The Pearl of Orr's Island*, a young woman moves from courtship into marriage; *Moods* underscores the limitations of romantic love within marital boundaries.

While *The Pearl of Orr's Island* has often been characterized as a romance, with a union between Mara Lincoln and Moses Pennel as a foregone conclusion, it is the intense relationship between Mara ("the sphinx") and Sally Kittridge ("the coquette") which is ultimately the heart of the novel since it is through their "interchange of affection" (231) that the reader can predict the unraveling of the *traditional* romantic relationship between Mara and Moses.

Major critical emphasis on *The Pearl of Orr's Island* has tended to focus on Mara's status as a moral exemplar, the ways in which she embodies the motif of "the angel in the house" (392). However, a closer examination reveals that Mara has an alternate identity, one no less important to an understanding of this text: she is a sphinx. "one of those intense, quiet, soft-seeming women whose whole life is inward" (271). While she is not explicitly identified as such until well into the novel (chapter XXVIII), numerous references are made to Mara's capacity and propensity for silence. Rather than admit to having feelings for Moses which extend beyond sisterhood (the two essentially having been raised as siblings together by Mara's maternal grandparents), Mara resolves to admit to nothing. Throughout much of the text, Stowe characterizes her not as some vaguely supernatural sprite (as some critics claim), but as a young lady who simply has trouble finding her voice, particularly as it pertains to romance and marriage with the

adventurous Moses. In this respect, she resembles protagonists like Ellen Montgomery in Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World*, whose awakening to the world at large is linked to her silence.<sup>1</sup>

Yet the other major female character in *The Pearl of Orr's Island* has received hardly any critical attention: Sally Kittridge. Sally is discussed only peripherally, treated as a minor character when she is considered at all. For all of Stowe's reinforcement of the characterization of Sally as a coquette, a woman who thrives on personal communication, she has in effect been silenced twice: first, by her marriage to Moses, and second, by contemporary critics who have not acknowledged the important role she plays in both facilitating and undermining Stowe's competing plots.

Sally plays an integral part of the novel, for it is her intense friendship with Mara which subverts the Mara/Moses romance plot, and ultimately, silences it. By agreeing to take care of Moses upon Mara's death, Sally abides by an unwritten, yet morally binding contract which takes the form of an oral promise, (in a sense similar to a marriage contract). This act is foreshadowed by Mara and Sally's participation in an unusual series of exchanges, ones which point to a radical (re)interpretation of this novel. These women exchange complicated feelings, unlike Mara and Moses, whose relationship depends entirely on silence. In shifting Moses's affections to Sally, Mara and Sally have significantly undermined the "traffic in women" whereby women exist as gifts to be exchanged, items to be transferred from one man to another (Rubin 85-86). In this novel, it is the man who is traded among women, offering a fascinating alternative to the images of smuggling we come to associate with Moses Pennel. Gifts constitute an important means of exchange for female characters not just within nineteenth-century American

novels, but for those which extend into the twentieth-century as well, such as in the work of Edith Wharton. *Transactional imagery*, images of exchange, employed by these authors, serves as a unifying force within novels of the period.

The reputation and reevaluation of much nineteenth-century women's fiction has come to rest on the various nuances or connotations involved with providing a (denotative) definition of what constitutes the sentimental novel. As I shall show, elements of sentimental fiction figure into far more novels of the period than may be first evident. In order to discuss the particular shadings of *The Pearl of Orr's Island*, the ways in which it both conforms to and subverts this genre, it becomes necessary to delve into this complicated discussion.

One way to begin is to examine Susan Harris's *Nineteenth-Century American Women's Novels: Interpretative Strategies* (1990). Harris does an excellent job tracing the path of twentieth-century criticism of nineteenth-century texts, noting the shift away from looking at these works as belonging to the "despicable genre" of sentimentalist fiction and instead as part of a body of work that needs to be examined on its own terms (9). However, significant time has passed since Harris's book was published, necessitating a fresh look at this old problem.

Harris's introduction contains references to the pioneering works of scholarship on nineteenth-century American women's fiction, most notably Nina Baym's *Women's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820-1870*, Mary Kelley's *Public Woman, Private Stage*, and Ann Douglas's *The Feminization of American Culture*. Harris highlights some key elements of each, tracing how the genre of the sentimental novel has come to be defined. These elements, in turn, hint at the ways in which Stowe's

*The Pearl of Orr's Island* has come to be understood by those few critics who have chosen to interpret it.

As Harris points out, Nina Baym's discussion of the sentimental (or as she calls it, domestic) novel, relies on similar plot characteristics as a means of defining the genre.<sup>2</sup> Among these characteristics is the partnering of two heroines, or contrasting a heroine with a villainess (35). When there are two heroines, as there are in *The Pearl of Orr's Island*, Baym distinguishes between them by denoting them as "flawless" and "flawed." Baym goes on to note that "[t]he idea of what is, and what is not, a flaw varies according to the perspective of the individual author, yet all agree that some degree of self-control is a moral and practical necessity while total self-abnegation is suicidal" (36). Using Baym's methodology, one might conclude that Mara corresponds to the flawless heroine, and Sally, the flawed. And yet, as Harris astutely reminds us, none of Stowe's novels is included in *Women's Fiction*. This act of exclusion means that this methodology is, as far as Stowe's text is concerned, untested. Perhaps relying on such a dichotomy is too simple.

Unlike Nina Baym, Mary Kelley relies heavily on Stowe's novels to form her argument regarding the connections between the private women of the nineteenth century and the literary domestic fiction they created. Kelley interprets sentimental fiction as a way for these women authors to assert control over a text when to do so in their own personal lives proved impossible, "the fantasy of power [. . .], the creation of the powerless" (309). In her brief analysis of *The Pearl of Orr's Island*, she emphasizes the primacy of the "social parable" over Mara and Moses's courtship. Kelly reads the novel as a struggle between the superego, symbolized by Mara, and the ego, embodied by

Moses. No discussion of Sally Kittridge's role in the novel is offered; it is Mara's role as a facilitator in Moses's transformation into adulthood that is accentuated.

Finally, and perhaps, ironically, among Baym, Kelley and Douglas it is the last who gives this novel of Stowe's the most attention. Unfortunately, the attention is overwhelmingly negative. Douglas views woman's sentimental novels as "ludicrous and painful," examining them as vehicles for the rationalization of capitalist consumption, dismissing them as aesthetically inadequate (63). She focuses most of her attention on Mara's death, its significance as an act of self-sacrifice, and, somewhat mysteriously, on Mara's enjoyment of material possessions: "she is absolutely addicted to pretty things" (29). Of course, this so-called "addiction" that Douglas observes, it should be noted, is found in a three-year-old toddler. Stowe's decision to marry Sally to Moses and not to Mara is, according to Douglas, made "reluctantly," but Douglas offers no direct evidence to support this contention (65).

Even with only this brief examination of these two critics' views of *The Pearl of Orr's Island*, it seems clear that no consensus has emerged concerning how sentimentality functions. While it seems apparent that Stowe's work contains plot elements that would place it within this tradition, it appears that it may be difficult for some scholars to separate Stowe's reputation for sentimental writing (as based on the phenomenal success of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*), or her private life (which I will focus on in more detail a bit later), from what actually appears on the pages of *The Pearl of Orr's Island*.

The need to re-center a definition of the sentimental is still requisite. Perhaps a better way of proceeding is to look at a later essay which Harris does not discuss. Joanne

Dobson's "Reclaiming Sentimental Literature" (1997) provides a somewhat newer lens through which to examine the genre. Not relying on critical analyses that depend heavily on historical or cultural methodology, Dobson reorients an examination of women's sentimentalist fiction by advocating formalist methodology as a means of revalidating nineteenth-century American women's texts.

Dobson identifies sentimentalist fiction as "an imaginative orientation characterized by certain themes, stylistic features, and figurative conventions" (266). Among these themes, the most prominent is the need for human connection which, Dobson argues, is embodied by the trope of the sentimental keepsake (273). Her use of the keepsake symbol provides a way of extracting the emotional power from a type of image that is derided by critics like Douglas as insipid. Dobson uses little Eva's lock of hair to demonstrate how Stowe, in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, employs keepsake imagery, using it as a metaphor for the complex combination of memory, separation, and human connection. In effect, Dobson has moved the discussion away from static character types like the moral exemplar (of which Stowe's little Eva is usually cited as the most memorable and to whom Mara Lincoln is often compared) to an example of what I will refer to throughout this dissertation as *transactional imagery*.

Lynn Wardley alludes to the emotional power of keepsakes in her article "Relic, Fetish, Femmage: The Aesthetics of Sentiment in the Work of Stowe," in which she argues that sentimental keepsakes in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* possess "prescient strategies for disrupting dominant emotions" (220). In *The Pearl of Orr's Island*, keepsake imagery comes to disrupt the emotions connected to the marriage plot and replaces them with the emotional act of the promise (a more subtle subversion of the patriarchal act of the

contract). In *The Pearl of Orr's Island* it is the transactional imagery of promises between Mara (the sphinx) and Sally (the coquette), not the static death of the angel Mara, which take center stage and move the plot both forwards and back.

As mentioned earlier, most scholars who have looked at the novel are in agreement that the romance between Mara and Moss is not viable, though their reasons for believing so differ widely. Judith Fetterley, in her article "Only a Story, Not a Romance: Harriet Beecher Stowe's *The Pearl of Orr's Island*", recognizes that Mara and Moses's differences go beyond degrees of Christian piety. Fetterley cites "the moral dubiousness of the attempt to bring difference together" as the reason that the two young lovers are, ultimately, separated forever (115). Here, the difference that is referred to is that of how young men and women are educated, not the threat of difference that Mara and Sally's friendship comes to represent. And while I believe Fetterley offers tremendous insight into the novel, she does not address the symbolism inherent within the novel, in which Mara's continued insistence upon silence with Moses (but not Sally) leads to Stowe's tantalizing comparison of Mara to the complex figure of the Sphinx.

Silence is foregrounded within the opening chapter of *The Pearl of Orr's Island*. While the tragedy of the shipwreck which immediately claims the life of Mara's father and, upon its heels, that of her mother, is presented quite dramatically, the inherent (and, in a sense, inherited) theme of silence, is conveyed through the eyewitness to the tragedy: Mara's mother Naomi. A direct line of emotional inheritance is then established between mother and daughter, the former being "one of the sort that never start, and never exclaim, but with all deeper emotion grow still", and the latter an unborn infant who cannot yet speak at all (3).

Naomi's silent reaction to the shipwreck foreshadows many of the novel's major themes, most notably, the implications of a woman's fate within marriage. As she and her father watch from the shore, the ship begins her flirtation with disaster. The ship's violent struggle against the wind is contrasted sharply with Naomi's quiet internalization of the horror that has befallen her husband; outward actions are set against inward distress, both in the guise of a woman. The unpredictability of the ship's movements makes Naomi's silence that much more acute, particularly when set against her father's frantic gestures to the ship. Not only is the ship unable to return to shore, she fails to communicate her own direction to the onlookers.

In a sense, then, the opening chapter foretells not just the development of Mara's silent nature as Naomi's daughter, but also points to the symbolic failure of the marriage contract itself via a lack of communication. The ship, as we are reminded, was "home-bound," sailing towards a reunion with "sisters, wives, and mothers"(4). Marriage equals death, for Naomi fatally succumbs to her grief by evening, leaving her newborn daughter behind. The legacy of her daughter's name, Mara, is a testament to the bitterness left behind in place of the marriage contract between her parents.

Prior to her marriage, Naomi had been compared by her father to a "tropical bird," a delightfully communicative girl who would whisper strange bits of language into his ears (11). But Naomi's coquettish nature had been muted; she was "nursed and brooded into a beautiful womanhood," with marriage coming on the heels of this change (12). In fact, no specific details of Naomi's married life are offered in the text whatsoever, so that what remains of this woman are her sparse dying words, themselves culled from the Bible, and the reminder that she was a woman who "lifted up no voice" (4). This is Mara's

legacy, the predilection for silence, for being a sphinx. Indeed, Aunts Roxy and Ruey do find in Naomi's dying words a riddle of sorts, misinterpreting her wish to name her daughter Mara, instead assuming that the woman meant to name her after her own mother, Mary (8).

While Stowe does not use the term sphinx repeatedly to describe Mara (ironically, it occurs in the chapter entitled "A Coquette"), it is a fitting metaphor nonetheless. As Mara grows up, raised by her maternal grandparents, she exhibits a marked tendency towards silence. Hesitating to ask Moses, the young orphan boy who is also being brought up by the Pennels, whether or not he believes in the world of fairies and mermaids she's been reading about, she turns to her neighbor Captain Kittridge, whose own "apocrypha" of sea stories marks him as an imperfect filter for moral law (130). Except for the Captain, young Mara's early dreams are "never mentioned to anybody" (133). When Moses rebukes Mara for believing in the Captain's tales, she decides to conceal her distress: "But it was not the little maiden's way to speak when anything thwarted or hurt her, but rather to fold all her feelings and thoughts inward [. . .]" (147).

The *Oxford English Dictionary* cites the etymology of the word *sphinx* from the Greek meaning "to draw tight" and certainly this image fits the actions of Mara Lincoln. While more developed intellectually than Moses, Mara "never thought of asserting herself a woman; in fact, she seldom thought of herself at all" (161). This curious description given by Stowe may have added significance, given the fact that the mythological Sphinx is in fact a hybrid form, having the head of a woman, and the body of a winged lion (*OED*). In modern usage, the sphinx has come to refer not just to a female monster but instead to "one who propounds or presents a difficult question or problem" (*OED*).<sup>3</sup>

Interestingly, the connotation of the Sphinx as monster is highlighted through the perceptions of Moses Pennel in discussing Miss Roxy Toothacre, who, along with Miss Ruey is one of the community's self-appointed aunts, a caretaker, healer, and known as "a sort of priestess and sibyl" (19). Resenting Miss Roxy's influence over Mara, Moses calls her "that confounded old sphinx of a Miss Roxy there." Then, ominously, he goes on: " 'Why don't she die? ' " (267).

Given this act of misinterpretation and defamation, Stowe is clearly relaying the message that Moses is not meant to be with Mara. After all, it is Miss Roxy who, earlier in the novel, begins the tricky process of transforming Mara from a human being into a voice for moral law, rebutting Mrs. Kittridge's belief that Mara will grow up to be a vain young woman, for " 'if she says she's pretty now, what'll it be when she's fifteen?' " (50). Miss Roxy's response of " '[t]he child *is* pretty, and the truth comes uppermost with her now' " not only puts Mrs. Kittridge in her place, but reconstructs Mara's vanity into moral truth.

Moses does not understand the hidden passion within Miss Roxy, for later on in the novel he also refers to her as a "harpy," implying that Miss Roxy is somehow complicit in Mara's impending death by simply being her devoted caretaker (373). Thus, it is evident that he cannot fathom Mara's true self as well. By connecting Miss Roxy and Mara as sphinxes, Stowe not only connects this mythological figure to the theme of silence but seemingly establishes its moral legitimacy. This is further evidenced by Stowe's initial characterization of Reverend Sewall, for he is described as "drinking his tea with the air of a sphinx" (90). The Reverend is the highest legal authority on the island, and "most of the deeds and legal conveyances in his parish were in his handwriting [...]"

(86). Moses dislikes Sewall as well, imagining him as " 'an old granny in a white wig' " (194). In linking Reverend Sewall, Miss Roxy, and Mara through the image of the sphinx, Stowe has created a continuum of moral authority, in which Mara, in death, will reign supreme. Through the sphinx, silence (but not emotional detachment or indifference) is given the highest compliment.

As *The Pearl of Orr's Island* progresses, Mara's sphinx-like behavior begins to interfere with the rituals of heterosexual courtship, thwarting the budding romantic relationship between her and Moses. Even though Mara, now eighteen, has had deep feelings for Moses throughout their childhood, she makes the decision to "never [. . .] by word or look, give him reason to think she cared" (228). As a result, Moses's attentions move towards Captain Kittridge's daughter Sally, who is described in markedly different terms from her friend Mara. For Sally, by her words, her looks, gives Moses every reason to believe that she has romantic feelings for him. Her flirtatious behavior leads Stowe to brand Sally Kittridge as a coquette, particularly when compared to the silent Mara.

Contrary to Reverend Sewall's remark that " '[women] are all alike' ", Sally Kittridge is a very different creature from Mara Lincoln (153).<sup>4</sup> As narrator, Stowe takes pains to show just how little Sally resembles her friend. Three years older than Mara, Sally is the daughter of the powerful storyteller Captain Kittridge, a man who "hopped over all moral boundaries with a cheerful alertness of conscience that was quite discouraging," weaving a spell of enchantment every bit as powerful as one of Miss Roxy's home remedies (62). "Sally valued herself no little on the score of the Captain's talent as a romancer" (116). She is affiliated with communication via paternal inheritance, much as Mara is affiliated with silence via her maternal inheritance.

In the first half of the novel, Sally seems to be defined in relation to the Captain; in the second, her role as Mara's counterpart and rival comes to the forefront. Perhaps what accounts for this fluctuation is the fact that Stowe wrote the novel in serial form for publication, with a gap in the writing process of some ten years, from 1852 to 1862 (Hedrick 296). The first half of the book, up to chapter XVII, encompasses Mara, Sally and Moses's childhoods, the second their lives as young women and men. While many critics have declared the first half of the novel to be the better one aesthetically, I would argue that the second half is no less important to our understanding of the novel as a whole, providing a fuller understanding of Sally Kittridge. It is significant that Stowe picks up her story with chapter XVIII, entitled "Sally." Our grasp of Sally is crucial to our comprehension of Mara, particularly in the novel's second half.

Stowe as narrator seems to take great delight in describing Sally Kittridge as a "born coquette" (222). What are the characteristics that mark her as such? "Sally Kittridge does all that talking! So she does,- so she always will- for it is her nature to be bright, noisy, and restless [. . .]" (221-222). She is the antithesis of Mara; where Mara remains silent, Sally does not hesitate to speak her mind. Sally directs her restlessness outwardly, toward other people, while Mara internalizes her dreams.

But while Stowe as narrator emphasizes Sally's flirtatious nature, she also makes a number of statements that seem to indicate that Sally is more than one-dimensional. Rather than being cool and calculating, Sally "never did know what she [herself] was about- had no plan or purpose [. . .]" (224). In chapter XXVIII, "A Coquette," we learn that she certainly has no intention of being married: "She was going to have her liberty for one while yet to come, etc., etc, [. . .]" (274). While the insertion of the two *et ceteras*

may indicate that this statement is being made sarcastically (we are told subsequently that Mara, along with the rest of the town, does not believe Sally's declaration), this announcement has radical implications if taken seriously.<sup>5</sup>

It is important to remember that the chapter "A Coquette" not only provides a comprehensive description of Sally but of Mara as well. The two are defined *in relation* to one another. As noted earlier, it is in this chapter that Stowe uses the sphinx metaphor to characterize Mara. And, in a fascinating twist, it is within this chapter that images of awakening are put forth most expressly:

[. . .] deep down in the breast of every slippery, frothy, elfish Undine sleeps the germ of an unawakened soul, which, suddenly, in the course of some such trafficking with the outward shows and seemings of affection, may wake up and make of the teasing, tricky elf a sad and earnest woman- a creature of loves and self-denials and faithfulness unto death- in short, something altogether too good, too sacred to be trifled with [. . .] (278)

What is compelling about this passage is that it is not about the ostensible heroine of the novel at all: it is about Sally Kittridge. Is Stowe implying that women should be more like Mara, a young woman who is often described as too frail to be human? Or, is she, as I believe, implicitly endorsing a female character of compromise? Issues of authorial intention arise from an attempt to interpret this passage, as Stowe seems also to be issuing a warning that coquetry can inadvertently lead to the awakening of real romantic feelings.

Yet, a very different sort of awakening occurs through the friendship of Mara and Sally, particularly as presented in three scenes of exchange: "Night Talks," "Friends" and "The Meeting." In these chapters, the intensity of feelings exchanged offers an alternative

to the romance myth, offering instead a friendship based on mutual communication and mutual instruction. Their talks offer another form of transactional imagery, a means of exchange.

"Night Talks" centers around Mara's invitation for Sally to "stay and sleep with her [. . .] [they] had no means of excitement or dissipation beyond this occasional sleeping together, by which is meant, of course, lying *awake* all night *talking*" (283- emphasis added). The language invoked in this passage, is, I submit, highly provocative. Not only does it formulate a female awakening based on the relevance of the intersection of personal communication, but it highlights the emotional excitement of such an activity. Mara and Sally enjoy the experience of exchanging their opinions on the topic of love and marriage. Cultural historian Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, through her landmark essay "The Female World of Love and Ritual," has done much to establish the centrality such emotional friendships had for American women in the nineteenth century. Smith-Rosenberg asserts that intense female friendships did not pose a threat to the system of courtship which was practiced: "[young women] sought marriage and domesticity" (68). Female friendships allowed for a more spontaneous form of social interaction (68).

Linda W. Rosenzweig extends Smith-Rosenberg's discussion by providing an historical study of the wide range of emotions which figure into female friendships. Rosenzweig posits that "[f]riendship is not a single emotion, but rather an affectional experience incorporating various emotions- love, anger, jealousy, guilt, sadness, grief, for example" (358). Thus, it becomes possible to analyze this phenomenon not as one of stasis, but rather, as one of process. Similarly, any discussion of nineteenth-century female friendship must be contextualized historically, for, as Rosenzweig has noted, it is

of lesser importance to categorize these intense friendships as lesbian or homosexual than it is to "recognize [their] pertinence in the framework of Victorian emotional culture [in America]" (360).

The interaction of Mara and Sally in "Night Talks" also de-emphasizes the romantic (and political) myth of conquest. Feminists like Germaine Greer have asserted that the romance plot offers a textual means of maintaining patriarchal control over women by compelling them to internalize a myth that offers the allure of an "omnipotent understanding of the heroine's emotional needs" (Greer 171). Sally signals her consciousness of Moses's views of romance by informing her friend: " 'He only wants to make a conquest of me, and I'm just the same. I want to make a conquest of him' " (285). Thus, at this juncture, Sally and Moses are positioned as equals.

Keepsakes also play their own role in perpetuating the romance myth, since they emphasize emotional connection. While not identifying them as such, Greer points out that "[that] prominence [is] given to fetish objects. Romance appears to hinge on records, books, knick-knacks [. . .]" (170). In *The Pearl of Orr's Island*, traditional keepsake images are unable to reinforce the romance myth; this is made evident by Sally's remark that although she and Moses have exchanged locks of hair and rings, " 'I don't believe he cares for them a bit' " (286). The emblems of romance, of possession, are not functioning properly.

The conversation Mara and Sally share in "Night Talks" paves the way for the continuation of the Mara-Moses romance plot. Soon after, Mara and Moses resolve their misunderstanding, one which formed from "a reserve that neither explores" (303). While the latter possesses some of the characteristics Greer identifies in a romantic hero, such as

authoritativeness, sternness and possessiveness, Moses demonstrates an inability to understand Mara at all, let alone anticipate her emotional demands. This excerpt of their conversation, taken from chapter XXXII "The Betrothal", illustrates this point clearly:

"I am not your brother, Mara," said Moses, rising and going toward her, "and that is why I ask you. I feel I have a right to ask you."

"I do not understand you," she said, faintly. (318-319)

Mara, unlike the modern-day romantic heroines Greer focuses on in *The Female Eunuch*, is not willing to sacrifice her own powers of "moral judgment" (Greer 177).

Images of awakening recur subsequently, and become equated with silence, marriage and with being sphinx-like against a male presence. While talking with Moses, we are told that "the whole force of [Mara's] being was *awake, glowing and watchful*, to guard passage, door, and window of her soul, that no treacherous hint might escape" (306-emphasis added). What, we may wonder, is meant by the word treachery in this context? Is the threat one from within Mara's own psyche or does it stem from the loyalty that has already been cemented between Mara and Sally? Male-female communication is considered dangerous, while interaction among women is not. We see competing images of awakening offered in the text, highlighting different types of emotional transactions.

Sally and Mara's relationship is also emphasized in Chapter XXXIV, "Friends," which takes place after Mara and Moses's engagement has become a *fait accompli*, and opens with Mrs. Kittridge's pointed remark that "'[t]here's no sense in girls talking all night'" (329). But from the turn their conversation takes, it becomes clear that Sally and Mara's intimacy has not diminished. If anything, it has become heightened. Even though we are told that Mara and Moses now communicate better than ever, it is significant to

note that as readers, we are not given ready access to those conversations, only to those of the two women, whose talk ranges from "the region of the sentimental to the practical" (333). Here, Sally tries to imagine life after Mara's marriage and jokingly reaches the conclusion that Moses must allow Sally to live with them. She then proceeds to take her imagination a step further:

"If I were only a young fellow now, Mara, I'd have you myself and that would be just the thing; and I'd shoot Moses if he said a word; and I'd have money, and I'd have honors, and I'd carry you off to Europe, and take you to Paris and Rome, and nobody knows where; and we'd live in peace, as the story-books say." (334)

How impractical this late-night proposal is is quickly made manifest by Mara's response of " 'Come, Sally, how wild you are talking'" (334).

But Sally's proposal cannot be so easily dismissed; although buried deeply within *The Pearl of Orr's Island*, it proposes a startling and radical alternative to traditional heterosexual marriage. It emphasizes the primacy of homosocial bonds, and reinforces Smith-Rosenberg's contention that for nineteenth-century American women, "[a]n undeniably romantic and even sensual note frequently marked female relationships" (71). She notes that female family and friends often traveled with newlyweds after marriage, perhaps to remind the bride that new bonds do not destroy old ones (70).

But Sally's proposal seems to go beyond this practice. It suggests a type of awakening in which the fairy tale of romance, female silence and capture is, if not replaced, then significantly revised. Tantalizingly, immediately after this conversation, we are given a snapshot of life with Aunts Roxy and Ruey at their cottage, suggesting that

the two sisters may offer a model for this different type of interpersonal relationship. And, soon after Sally's proposal is extended, Mara is stricken with tuberculosis, her condition deemed too severe for any marriage to occur; Moses is still away at sea.

Presented in sentimental language, Chapter XL, "The Meeting," emphasizes Mara's strengthening Christian faith. Ostensibly the meeting in question is that of Mara and Moses, in which she breaks the news of her impending demise to her fiancé. But there is another meeting which takes place in this chapter, one which has far more textual and emotional significance. Here, Mara asks Sally to promise to care for Moses after her death. This promise transforms the motif of the sentimental keepsake, for if Moses is a treasure given to Mara by God to protect, as has been implied throughout much of the novel, then Mara has the moral authority to transfer his care to another.

Sally's promise to Mara thus becomes the most significant contract of the novel, although it is certainly extralegal, falling outside the jurisdiction of one like Reverend Sewall. In defining this promise as a contract, I am relying on Brook Thomas's definition of a contract as "a mode of social organization" which implies an equity of opportunity (1-2). Thomas links the contract with the act of promising, arguing that "[t]he association between promising and contract gives a contractual society a moral foundation that results not from preconceived notions of status but from the duties and obligations that individuals impose on themselves in their dealings with other members of society" (3). Thus, a contract, legal, or extralegal, as Mara and Sally's, may be seen as a mode of individual development as well as of social organization. Thomas, whose work intersects literature and law, points to the value of a contract as a means of what he describes as "intersubjective promise" (16). However, he distinguishes between a gift and a promise,

because "unlike a gift, a promise implies a future obligation" (30).<sup>6</sup> The intersubjective nature of a promise has important implications for Stowe's novel. It implies that within the transaction of promising, a new means of individual development is born. Rather than being a static moral exemplar trapped within silences, Mara's value lies in relation to Sally's and in the processes of promising within their friendship.

One may argue that this proposal of Mara's functions as a counterproposal to Sally's from Chapter XXXIV. In a sense, Mara's proposal (and Sally's acceptance) is presented more dramatically and overtly than the marriage proposal from Moses to Sally four years after Mara's death. Their conversation contains no words of love, just an acknowledgement of mutual loss, of having "been trained in another life,- educated by a great sorrow [. . .]" (401). Moses's question to Sally is, " 'Must I go?' " and the reader is told that "Sally's answer is not on record, but one infers what it was from the fact that they sat there very late [. . .]" (401). This omission signals the beginning of Sally's erasure from the text, and another skillful subversion of the romance plot. Again, the most conventionally romantic moments are missing, made silent. The last words Sally utters in the novel are literally " 'Yes, father' " (401), and no dialogue from the actual wedding ceremony is supplied. Without Mara as a partner, wed to Moses, Sally ceases to exist as a fully-realized character.

It is Mara, silent as a sphinx throughout much of the novel, whose spirit is literally given the last word during Sally and Moses's wedding ceremony: " 'He turneth the shadow of death into morning'" (402). It should be noted, of course, that Mara's last words are not original, but a reference to Amos 5: 8, seemingly repudiating female agency in favor of God's authority. Is Stowe's implication that finding a voice within marriage is ultimately

impossible? If, as she asserted earlier in the text, novels give "false views of life," is that not what a Moses-Sally union implies (309)?

Within *The Pearl of Orr's Island*, it appears, at first glance, as if to awaken is to become silenced within the confines of heterosexual marriage. In this sense, the novel would seem to validate Rachel Blau DuPlessis's belief that "[o]nce upon a time, the end, the rightful end of women in novels was social- successful courtship, marriage- or judgmental of her sexual and social failure-death [. . .] both resolutions of romance" (1). DuPlessis's argument comes directly from the work of Gayle Rubin. In conceptualizing the notion of the sex-gender system, Rubin focuses her argument upon the ways in which marriage embodies this system of oppression in which women function as the objects within the transaction of marriage.

Stowe's novel, with its series of proposals and counterproposals, offers an alternative to the repetition of this mode of kinship organization and production. The emotional center of this novel is not Mara's death or Sally's marriage, but the series of proposals that Mara and Sally extend to one another. Through these counterproposals to conventional marriage, the sex-gender system, through which women are the objects of transaction held among men, is reversed. The transactions that take place make Mara and Sally the exchange partners and Moses the gift.

Stowe has laid the groundwork for viewing Moses as a gift to be exchanged early on in the novel. Through a series of dreams, Mara has come to view Moses as hers, entrusted to her by his late mother, Dolores. He is often referred to as a treasure, not to be plundered, but to be cherished. After all, "[God] sent you and gave you to me. . . to be mine in time and eternity ' " (322). Mara's conception of treasure differs vastly from

Moses's, as is witnessed by his initial willingness to embrace the opportunity to participate in a smuggling operation run by some locals. Indeed, Moses's acceptance of smuggling extends into the emotional realm, for he sees Mara's heart as "a sort of inexhaustible, uncounted treasure that was his own peculiar right and property" (213). Mara uncovers his propensity for smuggling by overhearing a secret conversation and breaks her usual habit of silence to stop it. By going to Captain Kittridge, she plays a part in securing Moses a position on a three-year voyage and keeping him away from her own heart. Smuggling, taking what is not rightfully one's own, is then an uneven exchange. Plundering is not behavior to be emulated on the seas, nor on land. Without securing any proper agreement, there is no contract: "Was [Moses] to assume a right to [Mara] in this way without ever asking?" (224-225). By contrast, Mara and Sally form an unwritten contract by exchanging concrete words, creating a transaction of their own.

Thus, embedded within the novel are other, covert indications of what a female awakening might be if the supremacy of the marriage plot is questioned. How Stowe came to write such a revised text, one which uses the sentimental mode to revive the extralegal value of female friendship, is an open question. The basic love triangle of *The Pearl of Orr's Island* has been identified by some, including Stowe's lead biographer Joan Hedrick, as autobiographical. Harriet Beecher's marriage to Calvin Stowe took place on January 6, 1836, less than a year after the death of his first wife Eliza, a close friend of Beecher's, from cholera (Hedrick 97). That the pair bonded emotionally after Eliza's death is not in dispute, and certainly the fact that in 1837 Calvin Stowe insisted on naming their twins daughters Eliza and Harriet reinforces the idea that the past had a life, or two of its own, not removed from memory (Hedrick 112). In writing about *The Pearl of Orr's*

*Island*, Hedrick points to "Stowe's personal investment in her heroine," noting physical resemblances between the author and Mara Lincoln, most particularly, "[. . .] they are silent, repressing the reservoirs of emotion that wash over them" (297).

In addition to Hedrick, Laurie Crumpacker recognizes Stowe within Mara, focusing instead on her hidden anger. Crumpacker sees Mara as a way for Stowe's repressed rage to take flight, reading Mara's death as an act of vengeance. Crumpacker argues that Mara "achieves power and ultimately her revenge through traditional women's means," dying "before [she and Moses] have even exchanged a kiss!" (91).

While this analysis is certainly original, how to interpret Mara's death becomes more complicated when viewed in light of the conclusion of the legend of the Sphinx. Once the original Sphinx's riddle is solved, she commits suicide, facilitating Oedipus's marriage to his own mother, Jocasta. Can this suicide be seen an act of revenge? Or is it an inevitable act, since this marriage had already been prophesized? Or, is it a sign that male-female communication is always destined to be enigmatic? Mara's death is due to illness, an act of God, not from a personal death wish.

Both Hedrick and Crumpacker identify Stowe with Mara, but they overlook a key fact in making this autobiographical association. In marrying Calvin Stowe after Eliza Tyler Stowe's death, Stowe would logically be identified not with Mara, the sphinx of the novel, but with Sally Kittridge, the coquette. Clearly this throws an autobiographical interpretation into disarray. It is possible to argue that Mara and Sally represent two different parts of Stowe herself, and that their series of emotional transactions provides an unconscious means of reconciling them. However, rather than analyzing the novel in such purely psychological (and reductive) terms, I would instead turn to another, earlier part of

Stowe's life for explanation: her time spent as both a student and teacher at her sister Catharine Beecher's female seminary. Catharine Beecher's educational principles are rooted in the principle of "mutual instruction" (qtd. in Hedrick 33), and center around a series of such transactions, much as *The Pearl of Orr's Island* does.

Stowe's time as a student at the Hartford Female Seminary spanned from 1824 to 1827. Her stay provided her not only with a strong academic education, previously available only to boys, but enabled her to establish strong bonds with other female classmates, "weaving a web of relationships that [they] treasured for the rest of their lives" (Hedrick 39). Catharine Beecher fostered a non-competitive educational environment, wherein young ladies governed themselves (62).

Stowe returned to her sister's seminary to teach at a particularly rocky moment in her life. When she had left, she was a young woman of fifteen, unmarried and unfocused. Hedrick describes Stowe as being "tossed by waves of feeling, excruciatingly self-conscious, and uncertain of her purpose and direction" (45). Awakened via a rigorous education, what awaited Stowe was far from clear. By returning to the seminary, Stowe enmeshed herself in the transaction of "mutual instruction," and found a new identity as an educator. Stowe's experiences at the Hartford Female Seminary may be seen as an example of Adrienne Rich's "lesbian continuum," what Rich identifies as "woman-identified experience," a means of resisting marriage as the only alternative for women (156).

*The Pearl of Orr's Island* uses transactional imagery to combat the novel's so-called sentimental ending of marriage, situating intense emotional activity in the act of promising. Stowe may then be endorsing a female character of compromise, one in which

a sphinx and a coquette can work in tandem, but she seems to stop short of calling for full-fledged female autonomy from patriarchy. She does awaken her readers to a sense of narrative possibility. The degree to which this potentiality is cut short by Sally and Moses's marriage only serves to underscore how extralegal transactions among women work uneasily alongside the traditional romance plot.

Competing plots and motifs exist in *The Pearl of Orr's Island*, but rather than diminishing it, they enhance our sense of tension as we discover that Stowe's novel is very much a transitional and anti-romantic text, joining those written by her contemporaries Louisa May Alcott and Elizabeth Stoddard, as well as those written by later American women writers such as Kate Chopin. Alcott's *Moods*, Stoddard's *The Morgesons*, and Chopin's *The Awakening* continue to utilize transactional imagery as a means of exchanging the silences of patriarchy for the open communication implied in awakening.

\* \* \* \*

## II. "Unrighteous Compact": Moral Law, Romantic Love, and Promises in *Moods*

Tantalizing connections exist between Harriet Beecher Stowe's *The Pearl of Orr's Island* and Louisa May Alcott's *Moods*. Like Stowe's novel, *Moods* has traditionally been considered of lesser aesthetic value than her sentimental classic *Little Women*. The more recent discovery of so many of Alcott's sensationalist tales has led to a welcome resurgence of critical interest in Alcott by critics who try to reconcile the author of "blood and thunder tales" with the celebrated writer of novels for children. However, in so doing, Alcott's first adult novel, published four years before *Little Women*, has, for the most part, fallen by the wayside, discussed mainly in relation to the redrawn Alcott

canon, and rarely compared to works by Alcott's contemporaries.<sup>7</sup> Yet *Moods*, published only two years after *The Pearl of Orr's Island*, shares not only a central plot device with Stowe's novel- the ostensible "love triangle", but an arduous writing process. Each novel was labored on a good deal; in fact, Stowe and Alcott spent years working on texts about which they would later express deep ambivalence.<sup>8</sup>

Alcott began *Moods* in August 1860, writing feverishly for one month. Her one month of work was extended, first through the editorial demands of her publisher, to four years, culminating with the novel's publication in December 1864, and later, through her own critical eye, through its dramatic revision in 1882. In later years, Alcott came close to disavowing authorship of her first adult novel altogether. Alcott's journals express her cynicism; an entry from October 1864, written two months before the novel's initial publication and after shortening the book by ten chapters, reads "[. . .] I let every thing else go & hoped the book would be better for it" (*Journals* 132). An addition to this entry, inserted three years later in 1867, reads wryly: "It was n't [sic]" (*Journals* 137). Years later, upon seeing several copies of *Moods* in Europe in 1870, she went so far as to reveal to her mother Abba May Alcott that "I could'nt [sic] read the story and try to forget that I ever wrote it" (*Selected Letters* 138).

Yet the 1864 edition of *Moods*, despite Alcott's misgivings, should be seen as an important work, one which attempts to reposition the marriage plot through an examination of the connection between moral law and romantic love by presenting a series of oral promises, made by friends as well as romantic partners. Thus, moral law and romantic love come to be mediated here by both the presence and absence of female friendships. Alcott's novel further underscores the limitations of romantic love within

marital boundaries through myriad images of sleeping and awakening. In so doing, Alcott begins to create a new, antiromantic text wherein her protagonist, Sylvia Yule, attempts to fuse the qualities of Stowe's sphinx and the coquette, an undertaking which ultimately ends in her death.<sup>9</sup> In *Moods*, Alcott creates a female character whose silences and sexual desires exist within an uneasy proximity to one another. And Alcott, like Stowe, uses the transactional imagery of promising as a means of exploring her protagonists.

Like *The Pearl of Orr's Island*, *Moods* has often been characterized as a *romance*. Certainly, the novel does deal with romantic love, but is that in and of itself enough to justify this categorization? In a letter to publisher James Redpath from February 1864, Alcott describes her novel as "a big thing, thirty chapters long - rather odd, sentimental, & tragical [ . . . ]" (*Selected Letters* 103). The word *romance* is notably absent. But in another letter, this one written after its publication as a reply to a stranger who has read *Moods* and apparently "misunderstood [it]". Alcott attempts to explain the novel by writing:

Others beside yourself have made the same mistakes regarding my purpose, & perhaps it is well for me that they have as it will teach me that *even a little romance* has some influence for good or evil & make me careful in what I write hereafter. (*Selected Letters* 110- emphasis added)

From reading this excerpt a question emerges: to what exactly is Alcott referring to as "a little romance"? In her preface to the revised *Moods* from 1882, Alcott notes that in reworking the novel, she has tried to revise "without destroying the youthful spirit of the little romance" (225). She goes on to write that "[here,] my heroine meets a wiser if less romantic fate than in the former edition" (225). These remarks would seem to indicate

that Alcott affiliates romance with both genre and character, a conflation that becomes problematic for modern critics, as they seek to situate the novel within the Alcott canon.

For example, Madeleine Stern, in her introduction to Alcott's journals, declares that "[Alcott's] preference was for thoughtful romances, moral but lively narratives," clearly a reference to genre (13). But in an essay from her 1998 collection *Louisa May Alcott: From Blood and Thunder to Hearth and Home*, Stern notes that "Sylvia discovers a solution to her romantic problems only in death, that ever-convenient ending for melodramatic heroines who find themselves at odds with convention" (122). Here, the term romance is applied to Sylvia's character, not necessarily to the novel as a whole. In her introduction to the Rutgers University Press edition of *Moods*, Sarah Elbert describes the novel as "an important bridge between Gothic and domestic realism" (xvi). Ruth K. MacDonald also analyzes the relationship between the novel and Alcott's sensationalist fiction, some of which Alcott was writing concurrently with *Moods*. No mention is made of the novel as romance.

What complicates any discussion of *Moods* is not only the uncertainty of the text itself (i.e. its two versions), but the uncertainty of its protagonist. Sylvia declares " 'I should like a [male] friend' ", and explicitly resolves against romantic love (25). But only a few pages later, in arguing for her inclusion in her brother's river trip, she remarks that " 'this would not be an ordinary picnic; it would be like a little romance to me, and I had rather have it than any birthday present you could give me' " (29). Sylvia's use of the term *romance* points to a conflation of the romance genre with romantic love, a confusion that will have important implications throughout the text.

Transactional imagery first appears in the opening chapter of the 1864 edition of

*Moods*. Here Alcott introduces the reader not to Sylvia but to another woman, the Cuban beauty Ottila, to whom the principled Adam Warwick is engaged. In focusing initial attention on Ottila and not yet on Sylvia, Alcott is able to explore the power (and danger) of female sexuality more overtly early on, and yet still draw attention to transactional imagery as symbolized by their engagement. Ruth MacDonald claims that "[o]pening the novel with Warwick as the focus also misleads the reader, for the real protagonist is Sylvia Yule, not her lover" (76). MacDonald fails to note the complexity of this first chapter; it is through Ottila, along with Adam Warwick, that Alcott is able to introduce the "implied parallel between Sylvia and Ottila" (Keyser 26).

Ottila, with her "passionate yet haughty mouth [. . .] shaped alike for caresses and commands," possesses the qualities of a coquette, and, to some degree, expands upon them, complicates them (6). Ottila is a charming woman, one whom Adam admits " [. . .] allured my eye with loveliness, my ear with music; piqued curiosity, pampered pride, and subdued [my] will by flatteries subtly administered ' " (9). Adam's fiancée certainly conforms to the first section of the *Oxford English Dictionary's* definition of a coquette: "A woman (more or less young) who uses arts to gain the admiration and affection of men, merely for the gratification of vanity or from a desire of conquest [. . .] ". Yet, in agreeing to the engagement, Ottila has gone beyond the confines of coquetry, since her behavior runs against the remainder of the definition: "[ a woman who is] without any intention of responding to the feelings aroused". Thus, Ottila is doubly transgressive, not only for acting the part of the coquette, but in violating its directives and expecting marriage.

By the chapter's end, Adam and Ottila have formed a new pact, agreeing to spend

a year apart to test their relationship. Adam's new promise is to return to see Ottila, no matter what. Ottila's response is a provocative one: "Your promise is a man's vow, made only to be broken" (13). Thus, early on, Alcott alerts her reader to the centrality of promising in the text. Rather than simply seeing this opening as a "literary curiosity," as Henry James does in his infamous review of the novel (221), this chapter may best be understood as a theoretical frame for the novel, introducing the idea of the promise and its implications within courtship rituals. Thus, the style of the dialogue, which James describes as "bad," plays an essential role in highlighting not the characters themselves, but the emotional transactions at hand (220).

What unravels the emotional fabric of Adam's engagement to Ottila (although not his sense of moral obligation) is "the truth as plain as words can make it" (7). To combat Ottila's coquetry, Adam seeks to expose the "unrighteous compact" between them as one based on sexual desire, not romantic love or moral law (7). In making this determination, Adam relies on the nineteenth-century belief that "the essential act of romantic love [. . .] was free and open communication of the self to another" (Lystra 7). In an ironic sense, the conversation which Adam and Ottila engage in here in Chapter One seems to conform to nineteenth-century courtship rituals, since these two lovers "[come] to understand each other's perspectives on the world" (Lystra 9). However, these perspectives are revealed to be incompatible with one another. And, if we compare Ottila with Sylvia, it appears that Ottila possesses a maturity that Sylvia lacks. When *Moods* opens, it is the cusp of Sylvia's eighteenth birthday. By contrast, Ottila, we are told, is twenty-five, a more suitable age for a woman to be considering marriage, according to many nineteenth-century advice manuals (Cogan 106). Yet the "reciprocal

understanding" which Karen Lystra cites as the goal of romantic courtship serves only to complicate Adam and Ottila's relationship, making them aware of their incompatibility (8). Although hidden from Sylvia, Adam's promise to Ottila lingers, providing a subtext, (not a subplot) for the promises which ensue throughout the novel.

A close examination of *Moods* finds that there are no fewer than eight key scenes in which images of promising come to the forefront. This series of emotional exchanges includes not only the engagement between Ottila and Adam, and the marriage contract Sylvia enters into with Geoffrey Moor, Adam Warwick's good friend. It also encompasses promises made between Sylvia and her brother, Sylvia and Adam, as well as Sylvia and her sister Prudence. In *Moods*, promises have a way of intermingling and unraveling.

Sylvia's first experience with forming a contract occurs when she and her brother Mark (Max in the 1882 edition) reach an agreement so that she may accompany him, Adam, and Geoffrey on their river holiday. This scene, not typically focused on by scholars, also foregrounds the importance promising holds in the novel. Sylvia and Mark reach an agreement based on three conditions: Sylvia's father and sister must agree to the trip; Sylvia's costume must be suitable for the outing; she must not carry any extra baggage. Mark imposes these conditions only after giving what he thinks of as "a rash consent," deciding to add them in order to both "enhance [the trip's] value and try his sister's mettle"(30). In abiding by these three conditions, Sylvia shows that she has a rudimentary understanding of how a contract works.

A different sort of contract is highlighted in the chapter entitled "A Golden Wedding." Having embarked on their holiday, Sylvia and the others come to find

themselves caught in a violent rainshower. This leads to their arrival at a country home which is playing host to a golden anniversary celebration. Throughout this chapter, images of promising recur, providing a crucial subtext for the novel's only sustained dramatization of domestic happiness. The initial description of the house affirms that it has "a patriarchal air which *promised* hospitable treatment and good cheer. *A promise* speedily fulfilled by the lively old woman, who appeared with an energetic 'Shoo' for the speckled hens [. . .] and a hearty welcome for the weather-beaten strangers" (63- emphasis added). Here, the dual meanings of the word *promise* are accentuated. On the one hand, a promise can be defined as "a declaration or assurance made to another person with respect to the future, stating that one will do, or refrain from some specified act, or that one will give or bestow some specified thing" (*OED*). On the other hand, when used figuratively, promise can mean "that which affords a strong or reasonable ground of expectation of something to come, especially of future good" (*OED*).

Thus, while this idyllic gathering works its magic upon Sylvia, providing "a sight the girl never forgot, because just then she was ready to receive it," it also points to the elusiveness of Sylvia recreating such an assemblage (67). After all, promise does not necessarily equal success. Alcott uses the word promise even more cryptically in the chapter by applying it to Sylvia herself: "*Half-promising what she wholly desired*, Sylvia put on Phebe's second best blue gingham gown [. . . and] went down to find her party and reveal the state of affairs" (63-64- emphasis added). Although the syntax of this passage would seem to indicate that what Sylvia desires is the chance to enmesh herself in this family romance, perhaps she desires something more. The anniversary celebration does not offer any glimpse into the inner emotional workings of a marital promise fulfilled,

only a look at its outer trappings: singing, dancing, and a flurry of food.

Soon after attending the golden wedding, Sylvia and Adam have a conversation through which they explore the concept of the promise. Adam asks Sylvia whether " ' a rash promise [should] be considered binding when it threatens to destroy one's peace? ' " Upon hearing her answer of " '[i]f the promise was freely given, no sin committed in its keeping, and no peace troubled but one's own, I should say yes, ' " Adam cautions Sylvia to " 'beware how you bind yourself with such verbal bonds' " (77). Adam's warning has multiple meanings. Not only does it foreshadow the disastrous marriage between Sylvia and Geoffrey, a man she does not love romantically, it hints at the "mute betrothal" she enters into with Adam (123). The "mute betrothal" between them is described thusly:

Sylvia had quite forgotten herself, when suddenly Warwick's eyes were fixed full open upon her own. What spell lay in them she could not tell, for human eye had never shed such sudden summer over her [ . . . ] It lasted but a moment; yet in that moment, each saw the other's heart [ . . . ]

(79-80)

Sylvia and Adam have acknowledged their feelings for one another, but have done so nonverbally, acting against the need for "self-revelation" which Karen Lystra identifies as "the primary symbol of intimacy, closeness, and sometimes even truth in nineteenth-century middle-class American culture". In fact, "[n]ineteenth-century middle-class couples, under the influence of romantic love, were obsessed with eliminating any barriers of communication between themselves" (33). Not so for Adam and Sylvia; Adam leaves Sylvia with no words, only a handshake, a distinctly masculine promise symbol, and one which seems an inappropriate, antiromantic gesture (80).

Sylvia and Adam's "mute betrothal" contrasts with the exchanges which occur between Sylvia and Geoffrey Moor in chapters ten and eleven, entitled "No" and "Yes". In proposing marriage to Sylvia (Adam having left for reasons unknown), Geoffrey employs relatively little romantic language. Geoffrey has based his hopes of an acceptance upon Sylvia's freedom in communicating with him. When her answer is "no", he responds with the following: "Did you not see that I loved you? Can you have been trifling with me? Sylvia, I thought you too simple and sincere for heartless coquetry" (89). Sylvia views this comment as a serious insult, saying "[y]ou shall not suspect me of that, though I deserve all other reproaches" (89). This exchange of words serves to remind the reader that Sylvia cannot take on the transgressive role of the coquette. A coquette doesn't make men any promises, and if she does, she quickly breaks them. In Alcott's novel, a coquette is not only presumed to be sexually available, but to have a lust for power, masquerade, and deceit.

Sylvia's inability to function as a coquette is exemplified most directly through her one brief encounter with Otilia, Adam's Cuban fiancée. Rather than feeling any sort of affinity towards this woman, we are told that she "hated her immediately" (99). Alcott as narrator goes on to remark that "Otilia [was] one whom *no woman* would love, however much she might admire" (99-emphasis added). Thus, it is unsurprising that the two women exchange no words whatsoever, only glances that reveal their basic incompatibility.

If the role of the transgressive, promise-breaking coquette is unavailable to Sylvia, what about that of the silent and moral Sphinx? In *The Pearl of Orr's Island*, Stowe sets up the roles of sphinx and coquette as relational opposites through Mara

Lincoln and Sally Kittridge. Geoffrey's accusation against Sylvia of employing coquetry against him is clearly false, but does that necessarily mean that Sylvia possesses the innate moral sagacity of a sphinx? True, she is quiet, but does that quiet translate into wisdom? Sylvia's propensity towards silence is emphasized by Alcott throughout the narrative. Her tranquility during the first segment of their river adventure is rooted in her contentment with her surroundings: "never had she felt so truly her happiest self" (33). Here, floating on the river, she is even described as "a smiling Silence for their figure-head" (33). At this point in the novel, Sylvia's silence does not indicate an inability to communicate, as it does later, once she is confined to her role as Geoffrey's wife. Early on, silence is linked with tranquility, although not necessarily with any sort of moral authority.

With the awakening of her sexual desires, Sylvia's silences become more sinister. On her first night away, Sylvia becomes conscious of an unfamiliar presence while sleeping out in the barn. "She felt this hot tingle through blood and nerves, and stared about her thinking of fire" (39). Despite her anxiety, she is determined to say nothing to Mark, Adam, or Geoffrey, who are sleeping nearby: "' I'll not call if my hair turns gray with fright . . . . I won't be found wanting at the first alarm' " (40). Yet Alcott as narrator overrides Sylvia's concerns, proclaiming "[s]he would have been wise to have screamed her scream and had the rout over . . ." (40). At this juncture, silence is clearly linked to sexual self-control. In holding in her desire to scream, Sylvia sets a precedent of self-denial. She continues this pattern by failing to tell Geoffrey of her true feelings for Adam prior to their marriage.

Sylvia's reliance on silence is usually imputed to Alcott's insistence that her

protagonist is prone to inexplicable moods. As Nancy Schnog points out, "[a]s this novel sees it, it is lovely and charming to be a moody tomboyish girl, but it is dangerous, even deadly, to enter womanhood lacking emotional stability, constancy, and self-control" (97). Sylvia does exercise self-control, as her silences prove. But as the novel progresses, sexual silence (being a sphinx) becomes as problematic as sexual availability (being a coquette), leaving Sylvia with few alternatives other than death.

In order to understand why Sylvia is unable to function as either a sphinx or a coquette, we need to examine the role of female friendships within *Moods*. What is striking about this text is that female friendships are, for the most part, underdeveloped. This seems significant, given that Alcott's literary success has historically rested upon her ability to depict close bonds among women in texts like *Little Women*. Strikingly, Sylvia's primary desire is for a male friend, and as we first encounter her, she remarks that "[i]f I can find no one of my own sex who can give me the help and happiness that I want, why may I not look for it anywhere and accept it in whatever shape it comes?" (38).

Here, Alcott raises an important question: if Sylvia had had strong female friendships before engaging in any courtship rituals, before entwining (and strangling) herself in a ribbon of romance, would she have made the same choices? Is her thwarted desire for a female friend what actually facilitates the poor promises that Sylvia makes? In marrying Geoffrey, Sylvia mistakes love for friendship; she further complicates matters by telling her husband, "' you have the intuitions of a woman in many things . . . '", suggesting that emotional intuitiveness is what has been lacking in her life (212).

One of the most complicated transactional images of the novel is Geoffrey's

bestowing his deceased sister's ring upon his wife for her to use as a ring guard. Ostensibly, the point of this scene is to emphasize Geoffrey's sense of ownership over his wife: " 'let Marion's cipher signify that you are *mine*' " (135- emphasis original). Yet I believe Geoffrey's choice of rings also hints at another alternative to heterosexual marriage. In effect, Geoffrey subverts his own marriage by offering Sylvia a ring that for him, has symbolized sisterhood. In giving it to his wife, he is indirectly promoting the supremacy of female friendship over romantic love.

Thus, direct emotional transactions among women, where they do occur, become even more significant in this particular novel of Alcott's. Scholars have tended to focus upon the ways in which Sylvia's sister Prudence and Adam's friend Faith Dane function as maternal figures within the text. Having grown up motherless (like Mara Lincoln in *The Pearl of Orr's Island*), Sylvia possesses a "ceaseless craving for affection" (85). Sylvia's need for both a mother and close female friends (whether the latter is explicitly acknowledged by Sylvia or not), leads to a certain textual confusion, for just as Sylvia has difficulty in distinguishing love from friendship, she also struggles to differentiate between mother figures and friends.

Alcott's text reflects this ambivalence throughout scenes where Prudence and Faith appear. As Sarah Elbert observes in her introduction to *Moods*, Prudence and Sylvia, while sisters, "have entirely different temperaments and principles despite their both being women and members of the same family" (xxvii). Sylvia and Prue's differences are highlighted from the first, given that Prue views sleep as "a necessary evil, to be endured and gotten over as soon as possible," unlike her sister, for whom sleeping and awakening become such charged emotional activities (15). Alcott has also described the two women being "hitched

along together,” an arrangement that has been less than mutually satisfactory (84). Her use of this phrase, with its marital connotations, necessarily complicates a reader’s view of Prue and Sylvia’s relationship.

Intriguingly, on the morning of her wedding to Geoffrey, Sylvia is literally awakened by her sister. She hears “a curious choking sound, and starting up found Prue crying over here as if her heart were broken” (115). While Sylvia has slept soundly, in fact, almost too soundly, Prudence has been the one up all night, anticipating the wedding and its emotional consequences. As she goes on to tell Sylvia, “ ‘I’ve been awake all night, thinking of you and all you’ve been to me since I took you in my arms nineteen years ago, and said you should be mine’ ” (115).

It is within this scene that the two sisters share their most emotionally intimate moment, as Sylvia goes on to promise Prue that she will not forget her; “ ‘for you never shall be forsaken; and very soon I shall be back, almost as much your Sylvia as ever’ ” (116). Emotional bonds between women are given overt verbal expression. This promise, coming as it does on the verge of her wedding to Geoffrey, can be seen as an alternative to Sylvia’s marriage vows. In fact, as with *The Pearl of Orr’s Island*, the marriage vows themselves remain hidden from the reader, suggesting their supremacy is less than assured.

Having made this promise to Prue, Sylvia inadvertently proceeds to break it. Once Sylvia’s relationship with her husband has deteriorated, she moves back into her father’s house, and usurps Prudence’s position as caretaker within their home. This action leads directly to Prudence’s decision to marry the Reverend Bliss, who, with his nine children, will insure that she will be needed unceasingly. In effect, Sylvia edges her sister towards this choice. The explanation that Prudence offers for her decision: “ ‘[I]t is

my duty to marry him; I shall do it, and put an end to this fearful state of things' ” (193). For Sylvia Yule, the fearful state is her own sexual awakening; for Prudence it is a fear of not being needed in the roles of mother, daughter or substitute friend.

An even more complex relationship exists between Sylvia and Faith Dane. Faith can be seen as more fully embodying the role of a morally authoritative sphinx in Alcott's novel than any other female character. She is older than Sylvia, and she has the ability to “[act] as a touchstone to all who approached” (144). Sylvia comes to rely on her in solving the riddle that plagues her throughout the novel: what does it mean to become a sexually awakened woman? She is also something of an enigma, for “when [Sylvia] had thought that she had found the innermost that each of us seek for in our friend, she felt that Faith drew back, and a reserve as delicate as inflexible barred her approach with chilly gentleness” (151). Sylvia assigns moral authority to these silences of Faith, making her advice, when it is given, more powerful. This reserve also renders Faith a bit too formidable to function solely as a female friend; her voice, we are told, also has “motherly tones in it” (144).

Faith's advice to Sylvia is “ ‘be a law to yourself. . . Put your hands in mine and hold fast to the friend who loves and honors you for this’ ” (182). She counsels Sylvia to be with neither Geoffrey, nor Adam. This advice, coming as it does from “the oracle she had invoked,” seems enigmatic to Sylvia (178). Faith responds with the following reply: “ ‘The ancient theology of two contending spirits in one body, is strangely exemplified in you, for each rules by turns, and each helps or hinders as moods and circumstances lead’ ” (179). In her role as Sphinx, Faith holds the highest moral authority in the novel, and thus, cannot be fully considered Sylvia's equal, nor hence, a

friend. Additionally, their scenes of emotional exchange, while powerful, are fairly brief, with little sustained contact between them over time. Unlike *The Pearl's* Mara and Sally, who grow up together, Faith and Sylvia are separated by age and upbringing. Here, the intimacy between the two is spontaneous, but not borne of longevity.

In her book *A Hunger for Home: Louisa May Alcott and Little Women*, Elbert calls "Sylvia's conversion by 'Faith'[. . .] the moral heart of *Moods*" (112). While I agree that this chapter, entitled "What's Next," may be seen the transactional center of the novel, Elbert's use of the term "conversion" is problematic. Faith gives Sylvia back to herself, offering her an alternative to the moral law which Adam Warwick represents. As Faith reminds Sylvia during their conversation, Adam believes that "[i]t is necessary to be just, it is not necessary to be happy" (182).

When Sylvia tells Faith, "[. . .] you shall be the law by which I will abide," she rejects the role of minister, then announcing that Sylvia must be a law to herself (182). Faith locates power not within herself, but within Sylvia. What takes place within this chapter is not so much a process of conversion, but one of exchange. More than words are exchanged by these women; what comes next after a renunciation of the value of heterosexual marriage is

the motherly embrace, the silent shower, the blessed balm of sympathy which soothed the wounds it could not heal. Leaning against each other the two hearts talked together in the silence, feeling the beauty of the tie kind Nature weaves between the hearts that should be knit. Faith often turned her lips to Sylvia's forehead, brushed back her hair with a lingering touch and drew her nearer as if it was very pleasant to see and

feel the little creature in her arms. Sylvia lay there, tearless and tranquil;  
 thinking thoughts for which she had no words [. . .]. (183)

The physical intimacy the two women share in this scene is not at all like the sexuality embodied by the wildfire Sylvia witnesses with Adam. Nevertheless, it hints at a different kind of awakening, one in which silence is not dangerous, and open communication is possible, an anti-romantic possibility which does not have to lead into death. What is foregrounded here is the power of sympathy and understanding between women.<sup>10</sup>

As mentioned earlier, images of sleeping and awakening recur throughout *Moods*. Sylvia is awakened by different things: her sister's voice, a mysterious presence in the woods, to the rhythm of the Wedding March. In fact, this last incident is presented as one of the earliest images of awakening in the novel, and is not usually discussed in analyses of it. Having refused to get up when Prue tried to rouse her, saying, " 'I shall not get up for any Geoffrey Moor, so that bait fails,' " she re-immerses herself in "sleeping and waking dreams, forgetful of the world about her, till her brother played the Wedding March upon her door on his way to lunch. The desire to avenge the sudden downfall of a lovely castle in the air roused Sylvia . . ." (17-18). What can be inferred from this description is that Sylvia's sleeping and waking dreams did not revolve around marriage. If they had, she would not have viewed Mark's actions as interfering in her dreams, but rather, corresponding to them. Similarly, on her actual wedding day, Sylvia spends her time "wishing she could go to sleep," a feeling quite antithetical for a young bride (117).

Images of sleeping and awakening are brought even more to the forefront in

chapter 17, "Asleep and Awake." This chapter, along with chapter one of the 1864 edition, is often cited as evidence of Alcott's sensationalist fiction permeating the boundaries of her serious fiction. "Death, sleepwalking, shipwreck," writes Madeleine Stern in her 1998 work *Louisa May Alcott: From Blood and Thunder to Hearth and Home*, are among the plot devices which evoke Alcott's familiarity with melodrama (122). The image of Sylvia Moor, sleepwalking through her home while her horrified husband looks on, with its implied parallels to Shakespeare's *Lady Macbeth*, certainly fits this bill. However, it also reinforces Alcott's ambivalence with Sylvia's declaration of independence.

What is especially compelling about this scene is that not only has Sylvia fallen prey to somnambulism, but that her transitional state is witnessed by her husband. As a sleepwalker, Sylvia exhibits "the blind obedience of the body to the soul that ruled it" (162). In essence, she is both asleep and awake simultaneously, a state which Geoffrey believes leaves her looking "lost" and "wild" (163). Sylvia's behavior confuses Geoffrey, as she acts somewhat coquettishly -kissing an object that the reader knows to be Adam's glove. As a married woman, this type of behavior would be neither acceptable, nor understandable, had Sylvia been fully awake. Rather than viewing this scene as a peephole through which to view a guilty woman, we may instead see it as a window into Sylvia's true self, the one which she has been concealing, rather than revealing, to her husband. When Sylvia expresses feelings of romantic love towards another man, ironically, we are able to see that indeed, as Karen Lystra has intimated, romantic love is a lawless force (221).

In a sense, Sylvia is able to act as a law unto herself in this scene; it is she, not

her husband, who awakens herself, for “[h]er own cry awoke her” (163). Awakening Sylvia is not a duty which her husband can perform for her; she must do so *on her own*. The shock that she feels upon seeing Geoffrey, not Adam, in front of her, precipitates Sylvia’s decision to tell her husband everything, to dissolve the silences between them. Confessing all to him, Geoffrey’s embittered declaration is that “ ‘[w]e are as much divorced as if judge and jury had decided the righteous but hard separation for us’ ” (170). But Geoffrey’s declaration is not meant to be the final word on their marriage. It is for Sylvia to fully awaken herself to the fact that “[b]y her own will she had put her liberty into another’s keeping; law confirmed the act, gospel sanctioned the vow [ . . . ]” (174). This thought is the one which keeps Sylvia “too excited to sleep” and segues into her important meeting with Faith Dane (174).

How to reconcile Sylvia’s fate in the 1864 edition of *Moods* remains difficult, even had Alcott not chosen to revise the ending and reconcile husband and wife. While Faith functions as a sphinx within the text, and her words seem wise, they nonetheless propel Sylvia towards her own death, consumed. we are to presume, by consumption, the same fate that claims Mara Lincoln in *The Pearl of Orr’s Island*. Like Mara, Alcott’s protagonist dreams a strange dream. Sylvia’s revolves around the ocean too; standing among throngs of people, she watches as the word Amen breaks across the sky. As the ocean’s waves roll in, she feels “only the deepest awe,” but no fear, as she awakens to the realization that her death is near (210). From this dream, she realizes that “ ‘I owe my sudden awakening to the truth’ ” (210).

Thus, Alcott equates Sylvia’s awakening to the anti-romanticism of marriage and the lack of sustainable alternatives, such as a female world of love and ritual, to death.

The possibility of a viable narrative alternative, in which Sylvia can exist independently from Adam and Geoffrey, is foreclosed not by Adam's heroic death, but through her own inability to internally fuse the qualities embodied by Ottila, the novel's coquette, and Faith Dane, its sphinx. Had Sylvia been able to do this, she would have been able to make the most unconventional promise of all, to herself. She might have found a way to live independently, for example, and to gain her moral authority from within her own self. Instead, Alcott re-inserts Sylvia and Faith back into a more sentimental narrative as Faith Dane, like Miss Roxy in *The Pearl of Orr's Island*, eases a consumptive young woman into death. Transactional imagery has been abandoned for mourning rituals.

That both these novels end in deaths by consumption may not be entirely coincidental. Stowe and Alcott each engaged in writing these transitional texts while working on other projects. Both were used to functioning as "dutiful daughter[s] of the Transcendental fathers [. . .]" (Showalter 35). Perhaps it was this sense of duty that compelled Stowe to overextend herself while working on *The Pearl of Orr's Island*, writing *Agnes of Sorrento* simultaneously (Hedrick 299). Alcott wrote *Moods* alongside her "blood and thunder tale" "V.V., or Plots and Counterplots" (Saxton 274). By composing these novels simultaneously with others, each may have found it easier to write scenes of death rather than scenes that explore a world of female possibilities. Awakening to the subversive role female friendships might play in the lives of women is not enough to sustain Mara Lincoln or Sylvia Yule.

Stowe and Alcott's texts center around love triangles that are presumed to be somewhat autobiographical. Alcott's admiration of Margaret Fuller finds its way into *Moods* in the character of Faith Dane and Henry David Thoreau is presumed to be the

model for Adam Warwick (Elbert xxx). However, Alcott is able to escape the suspicion which plagues Stowe's novel, that the protagonist is meant as a stand in for the author. In her own life, Alcott remained unmarried. Her only familiarity with making contracts would be within the world of publishing.

In entering into publishing contracts, Stowe and Alcott found themselves in situations in which "the female world of love and ritual" was offset by the demands of acceding to specific legal constraints demanded by the publishing world. Stowe's professional relationship with James Fields during the 1860s is well documented by Susan Coultrap-McQuin in *Doing Literary Business: American Women Writers in the Nineteenth Century*. Coultrap-McQuin traces Stowe's evolution from novice negotiator to expert. Yet the constraints of the times are startling: for one thing, as a married woman, Stowe was unable to sign her own publishing contracts (Coultrap-McQuin 86). By entering into a marriage contract, Stowe was forced to cede her own legal authority to her husband.

For Alcott, an unmarried woman, this would not pose a problem. But her dealings with publishers would have implications for *Moods*. In a letter to James Redpath, Alcott makes the following declaration: "I think the literary laws *are* just & shall abide [by] them, hoping that our 'faith in my ability' may be rewarded, & future books may prove a good investment for us both" (*Selected Letters* 102-emphasis original). Her faith in these laws was tested, however, by what followed. To insure publication in 1864, Alcott made a number of changes to her novel, ones that she felt compromised it.<sup>11</sup> In subsequent years, Alcott bemoaned this, and finally was able to reclaim the copyright to the novel in 1881, revising it (Elbert xv). In a letter to Moncure

Daniel Conway from February 1865, Alcott writes: "Self abnegation is a noble thing but I think there is a limit to it; & though in a few rare cases it may work well yet half the misery of the world seems to come from unmated pairs trying to live their lie decorously to the end, & bringing children into the world to inherit the unhappiness & discord out of which they were born" (*Selected Letters* 108).

While Alcott is actually referring to the plot of *Moods* in this letter, implicitly she points to its publication history as well. In her preface to the 1882 edition, she would describe the novel as her "first-born" (Alcott 226). The "unmated pair" thus becomes Alcott and her publisher, Loring, and from an unhappy contract unhappy children are born. In a sense, reclaiming the copyright afforded Alcott a means of being a law to herself, the same advice Faith Dane gives to Sylvia. After all, "a work cannot be imaginatively possessed without being made available to the public through some form of publication, which brings it into the realm of copyright law" (Thomas 86). The irony is that in revising *Moods*, the ending is flattened, enabling it to conform to a middle-class morality that had become expected of the author of *Little Women* (Showalter 55).

In *Searching the Heart*, Karen Lystra pinpoints the dilemma of American marriage. "The root of the problem," she writes, "lies in how to conceptualize the limits of autonomy of the 'free' individual who chooses to enter into a romantically inspired contract" (226). This dilemma implied by promising, and extended to other legal contracts, is multiplied twofold for Harriet Beecher Stowe and Louisa May Alcott, who wrestle with this problem in these transitional texts as they themselves struggle to come to terms with their place in the literary marketplace. Their battle would be echoed sixty years later by Zora Neale Hurston, who would find her confining contract with Charlotte

Mason afforded her a salary, but not enough literary freedom. The self-effacing image both Stowe and Alcott project serves to undercut the subversive strategies in *The Pearl of Orr's Island* and *Moods*. Each explores the connection between moral law and romantic love as mediated by female friendships. Both employ the transactional imagery of promises. Stowe and Alcott each awaken to the limitations of the marriage plot while not yet forgoing it altogether.

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<sup>1</sup> In her afterward to *The Wide, Wide World*, Jane Tompkins describes Ellen's transformation: "she undergoes repeated trials in the course of mastering the principles of her vocation-which is to forget self" (NY: Feminist Press, 1987: 598). As the novel progresses, the few outlets which remain for Ellen to express her voice are tears and religious hymns. See chapter 4 of this dissertation for a more thorough discussion of Warner's novel in relation to Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*.

<sup>2</sup> Baym does make some distinction among genres, between the "the moral fable. . . the romance, and in between the novel proper. . . a story of probability in a recognizably realistic setting" (33). However, she goes on to declare that "[s]ome exemplary organizing principle is at work in all this woman's fiction" (35).

<sup>3</sup> For a brief discussion of the sphinx motif in 19<sup>th</sup> century American literature, see Sandra Morris's excellent article "The Threshold Poem: Emerson, and 'The Sphinx'" (*American Literature* 69:3 1997) 547-570. Morris points out the appeal the Sphinx image had for Emerson and later, for Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, as a means of dramatizing the themes of self-expression, art and gender (550). There does seem to exist the possibility of Stowe having read Emerson's poem "The Sphinx" prior to writing *The Pearl of Orr's Island*. In her selection of essays *Household Papers and Stories* (1865-1867) she praises Emerson, along with several other male American Renaissance authors, suggesting she was familiar with his work (89). However, no direct evidence exists to prove direct influence. Alice Crozier also sees Emersonian influence in Stowe, declaring that they "are far closer to each other than Mrs. Stowe's rather contemptuous allusions to Emerson would imply. Both make passion, feeling, intuitive piety central" (130).

<sup>4</sup> This remark, made by the official moral authority in the novel, becomes all the more ironic. As Judith Fetterley has noted, he is the one who tells the most romantic tale of all: the tragic story of Moses's mother Dolores, a story which "defines what is wrong with romance" (113). Thus, the comment he makes here must be looked at in the light of his shortcomings.

<sup>5</sup> Stowe's use of the term "coquette" has particular historical resonance since it suggests a link between *The Pearl of Orr's Island* and Hannah Webster Foster's 1797 sentimental novel *The Coquette; or, The History of Eliza Wharton; A Novel; Founded on Fact* (NY: Oxford UP, 1986). Foster's text also focuses on the themes of courtship and silence, with the protagonist undergoing a similar, although not identical, process of silencing. For Eliza, "[m]arriage is the tomb of friendship. It appears to me a very selfish state" (24). Friendship is prescriptive, not emotive. Cathy Davidson, in her introduction to the novel, notes the hybrid state of the text, with a "shift in genre from sermon to novel" (xiii). With Stowe's novel, the reverse occurs, with the text moving away from a plot-based

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narrative to a reliance on sermonizing once Mara's illness is revealed. Stowe's use of the term *coquette* also draws attention to the implicitly political nature of her text. For two discussions of the political aspects of *The Coquette*, see Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's essay "Domesticating 'Virtue': Coquettes and Revolutionaries in Young America" in *Literature and the Body: Essays on Populations and Persons*. Ed. Elaine Scarry. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1988.160-184 and "Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette*: Critiquing Franklin's America." in *Redefining the Political Novel: American Women Writers, 1797-1901*. Ed. Sharon Harris. Knoxville, TN: U of Tennessee P, 1995. 1-22.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas analyzes a variety of texts, overwhelmingly by nineteenth-century American male writers, with the exceptions of Elizabeth Stuart Phelps and Kate Chopin. In his discussion of the promise, for example, he focuses on the motif of the handshake, a masculine representation.

<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth Keyser, for one, makes note of the similarities between episodes in *Moods* and Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*; Sarah Elbert compares the 1882 edition of *Moods* to Bronte's *Jane Eyre* in *A Hunger for Home: Louisa May Alcott and Little Women*.

<sup>8</sup> It is interesting to note that in a January 1872 letter from Stowe to Alcott, Stowe places their writing in the same generic category: "[. . .] in these days when so much seductive and dangerous literature is pushed forward, the success of your domestic works has been to me most comforting. It shows that after all our people are *all right* and that they love the right kind of thing" (qtd. in Saxton 314).

<sup>9</sup> In my discussion I will be focusing primarily on the 1864 edition of *Moods*, with occasional references to changes made by Alcott in her 1882 version. The Rutgers University edition of 1988 contains the early text, with revisions of the 1882 text (referred to as *Moods 2*). Among the most substantive changes is that Sylvia's death is averted in *Moods 2*; she and Geoffrey Moor reconcile, and resume their lives as husband and wife. Also, all references to Adam's prior engagement to Ottila have been excised.

<sup>10</sup> A more thorough discussion of this topic will ensue in Chapter 3 of this dissertation. In the article "The Limits of Sympathy: Louisa May Alcott and the Sentimental Novel," (*American Literary History* 685-706.) Glenn Hendler reminds us that in a sentimental novel "the voluntary affinities of sympathy prove stronger than the ties of kinship" (687). This is significant given that Faith Dane is not family, but rather, a close family friend.

<sup>11</sup> In her introduction to the Rutgers UP edition of *Moods*, Sarah Elbert points to the fact that it cannot be known to a certainty whether the ending of the novel was one such change Alcott made to satisfy her publisher. While Alcott would imply this, it seems

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likely that the novel's mixed reviews and the advent of her success played a role in her decision to revise the ending in the 1882 edition.

**Chapter 2: " 'Can You Give Up Yourself? '":  
Landscaping Marriage in Elizabeth Stoddard's *The Morgesons*  
and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening***

*That was precisely the experience of this awakening: receding waves of half-caught swirling vision, memories of home, the steamer, the boat, the airship, the forest- at last all sinking away one after another, till my eyes were wide open, my brain clear, and I realized what had happened - Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Herland*

In this quotation taken from Gilman's 1915 feminist utopian novel, Gilman hints at the vital role spatial metaphors play in arousing the transitory state of awakening. Packed into Gilman's description are images of home, transportation, and nature, as well as a profound awareness of an awakened sense of inner consciousness, an impression of excitement. The "half-caught swirling vision" implies an elusiveness, an inability to fully grasp what surrounds one's senses.<sup>1</sup> Gilman's conception of an awakening strikes a chord, and takes its cue from novels of awakening written by American women in the later half of the nineteenth century, in particular Elizabeth Stoddard and Kate Chopin. For Stowe and Alcott, female friendships represent extralegal alternatives to the marriage plot. However, for Stoddard and Chopin, landscapes offer spatial alternatives for their female protagonists, since close bonds between women seem unrealizable as an emotional alternative to the marriage plot. In effect, landscapes become another form of transactional imagery in these novels, offering spatial sites for the process of sexual and emotional awakening.

Spatial metaphors in Elizabeth Stoddard's *The Morgesons* (1862) and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) provide a means of discussing relationships between inner desires and exterior landscapes. Both novels, while written decades apart,

explore moments of sexual and emotional awakening in strikingly different ways using somewhat similar imagery, moving the thematic current along, to be (re)articulated by later writers such as Edith Wharton, Nella Larsen, and Zora Neale Hurston.

In these two novels, awakening becomes affiliated with spatial, as well as emotional, movements. While most scholars have examined these texts through the movements of their protagonists, I shall examine them via the interaction of these women (Cassandra Morgeson and Edna Pontellier) with their respective landscapes. Both texts explore not only exterior spaces, but also what Judith Fryer describes as “the indistinctly mapped and terribly difficult space of the self” (44). *The Morgesons* does so in part through its gothic imagery, *The Awakening* through lyric descriptions. Stoddard's text is enveloped by the sea; Chopin's is surrounded by mosquitoes. However, before beginning any in-depth discussion of these nineteenth-century texts, it would be wise to probe into the various shadings of the term *landscape* as it has come to be defined in contemporary discourse.

Defining what the term landscape has come to signify becomes a tricky endeavor. Feminists, reacting to psychoanalysts like Freud and Erikson, have long wrestled with the relationship which spaces, both exterior and interior, have with female identity or subjectivity. Erikson, in his famous 1968 essay “Womanhood and the Inner Space,” comes to the conclusion that for children engaged in play, “girls emphasized *inner* and the boys *outer* space” (270- emphasis original). While Erikson is careful to point out that “[n]othing in our interpretation [. . .] is meant to claim that either sex is doomed to one spatial mode or another,” he does link the inner space

created by these girls in play to the “inner productive space” symbolized by the female reproductive organs, the vagina and uterus (273, 277).

Erikson connects this inner space with female subjectivity, arguing that “womanhood arrives when attractiveness and experience have succeeded in selecting what is to be admitted to the welcome of the inner space ‘for keeps’ ” (283).

Erikson’s phrase “for keeps” implies that women orient themselves spatially as well as emotionally towards marriage.

Feminist psychoanalysts such as Nancy Chodorow and Jessica Benjamin have (re)constructed a definition of landscape (although they may resist using the word, *per se*) that relies upon the confluence of what Chodorow terms “psychic reality” and “external reality,” that is, between the inner space of the mind, and the exterior space of the world. <sup>2</sup>

Chodorow, in her 1999 work *The Power of Feelings: Personal Meaning in Psychoanalytic Gender and Culture*, asserts that psychoanalysis is “precisely the theory that describes in detail how the individual mediates and creates inner and outer at the same time” (8). However, Jessica Benjamin’s discussion of desire moves away from the symbolic mode typically investigated by psychoanalytic feminists and towards spatial representation. The metaphor of open space offers a provocative and paradoxical way of understanding female sexuality, since it reverses the Freudian imagery of interiority and penetration (*The Bonds of Love* 129). By equating open space with a woman’s desire for the sexual discovery process, a link is forged between the personal and the social, and a woman becomes a more active being. She is

engaged in the process, beginning to “own and enjoy [. . .] her own desire as well as the activity which realizes it” (*Shadow of the Other* xvi).

As Benjamin points out in *The Bonds of Love*, “[t]he gender division that now exists does not allow for reconciliation of agency and desire with femininity” (123), much as the sentimental novel of the nineteenth century (as a reflection of the cult of domesticity) did not. The full extent of a woman's agency within these texts is under continual debate. Benjamin's theory also affords a means of analyzing the various shifts protagonists in novels of awakening undergo as they develop a dual role as object and subject of desire through narrative. In pointing out the significance of a woman owning her own desire, Benjamin restores the psychological prominence of “the maternal form of activity, the recognition and holding of emotional states, excitement in particular” (*Shadow of the Other* xvii).

Benjamin relies upon intersubjective theory in seeking to re-insert “the pleasure in mutuality between two subjects” (*Like Subjects* 33). Benjamin's definition of *subject* is a distinctly psychoanalytic one; a subject possesses both conscious and unconscious capacities, and has a “locus of experience, one that need not be centrally organized, coherent, or unified. Yet it can still allow continuity and awareness of different states of mind, can still feel more or less real or alive, can be more or less capable of recognizing or feeling the impact of the other” (*Like Subjects* 12-13).<sup>3</sup>

Subjectivity thus involves “the active search to find emotional resonance in the other [. . .]” (*Like Subjects* 14). For Benjamin, as a psychoanalyst, this search often revolves around the transitional space within traditional analysis, in which there

is room for “creative exploration” (*Like Subjects* 47). In literature, this sort of creative exploration may be related through a narrative space, specifically through the third person narration of *The Awakening* or the first person narration of Cassandra Morgeson in the *Morgesons*.

As Sandra Zagarell points out, “Stoddard’s place in American literature has remained negligible primarily because readers have never known how to *place her*” (“Repossession” 45-emphasis added). Significantly, a common refrain from critics when discussing Stoddard’s novel is how its “elliptical language, scantily cued dialogue, and fractured chronology” helped contribute to its obscurity after its initial publication in 1862 (“Contextual Evaluation” 11). Stoddard’s narrative itself revolves around multiple variations of place (or space) and time. Interior spaces become valuable as representations that correspond to emotional activities; exterior spaces, particularly the sea, resonate as areas where visibility and voice may connect.

In her groundbreaking work *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development*, Carol Gilligan defines voice as “an intensely relational act,” one which is “composed of breath and sound, words, rhythm and language[. . .] a powerful psychological instrument and channel, connecting inner and outer worlds” (xvi). Gilligan’s definition links voice to landscape, to the interior and the exterior. Like landscape itself, voice should not be perceived as a static instrument, since its importance hinges upon not only speaking, but being heard and responded to. Voice then takes its place as part of a given landscape, becoming less important for its ability to function denotatively, and more relevant as a locus of connotative meaning.

Stoddard emphasizes the link between visual and aural imagery through the complex relationship between Cassandra and her younger sister Veronica. For the former, the visual dimension is the one in which she is the most comfortable. Veronica Morgeson, in contrast, recognizes the importance of sounds: she plays the piano purely by instinct, and of the two, it is she who comes to realize the existence of their new baby brother Arthur when she becomes attuned to his cries as they ring through the house. Cassandra describes one of her first acts of insubordination in this revealing sentence: "I put my hands over my ears and looked defiantly around the room" (6).

By blocking out sound, Cassandra not only decreases her initial receptivity to voice, but limits her ability to express it. To rely only on the visual insures an inability to become a three-dimensional being. As Susan Harris has noted, "at ten [. . .] [Cassandra] has the blind subjectivity of the child, engaged in the moment and oblivious to her environment" (*Interpretative Strategies* 161). But Cassandra's early obliviousness does not extend to the sights around her, only to sounds.

Whose, then, are the voices that Cassandra seeks to shut out? One set of voices that she divorces herself from is one which preaches Calvinist ideology. Two early encounters with religious orthodoxy leave Cassandra feeling isolated. In the first, a neighbor, Mr. Park, begins to quote scripture and sing, leaving the young girl "lonesome; the life within me seemed a black cave" (21). Sounds become transmuted into a visual representation with which Cassandra can identify. In comparing Cassandra's inner self with a black cave, Stoddard seems to foreshadow later references to small spaces which pervade the later part of the novel.

In the second incident, Cassandra is forced to listen to her maternal grandfather's reading from the Bible. "His voice was like opium," a foreign substance which leads to her being "drugged with a monotony which served but to deepen the sleep of youth and health" (33). Listening cannot lead to an awakening.

Similarly, neither does singing serve to loosen Cassandra's voice; her music teacher, Mrs. Lane, undertakes to teach her only "[a]fter her [Mrs. Lane's] own feelings were composed" (78). Mrs. Lane, unlike the male figures who preach religion at Cassandra, is depicted somewhat comically, as "an amiable woman, with theatrical manners," the victim of a bad marriage (78). And while she believes that Cassandra has "a voice that can be made effective," singing sentimental standards may not be the best vehicle for honing it. The authenticity of Cassandra's speaking voice is diminished by its being forced into this overtly feminine role (78). Music, it seems, is not for her. A bit later in the novel, when Cassandra is at a ball in Rosville (the town in which she has been sent to live with her cousin Charles and his wife Alice), we are told that music "played so loudly that we had to talk at the top of our voices to be heard. Mine soon gave out [. . .]" (104).

Receptivity to voice becomes of primary importance when Cassandra, now a teenager, demands of her mother, Mary: "'Tell me [. . .] tell me how to *feel and act*'" (63- emphasis added). She and her mother do not share a close relationship, but here, Cassandra is ready to listen to her mother's response. None is forthcoming. When she rephrases the question, it has become "'Say, mother, what shall I *do*'" (64- emphasis added). Feeling, both literally, and figuratively, has evaporated from this exchange. Her mother's inadequate reply of "'read the Bible and sew more'" is given visual

representation when she sends Cassandra to Rosville with a Bible and workbox, emblems that expressly deny an individual voice (64). This symbolism is further emphasized by Cassandra's comment to the reader that "I composed my feelings by putting [the Bible] away carefully and unpacking my trunk" (73). The dual meaning of the word *composed* is heightened here; it may mean composed as in controlled, or it may denote an act of composition. Cassandra apparently recognizes that her mother's gifts may not work their magic on her, so she unpacks her own things, composing her own identity in the process. Here, gift-giving between women is not presented as particularly valuable, foreclosing rather than opening a narrative space. Significantly, mother and daughter do not interact during the exchange process; Cassandra is on her own.

Cassandra's own work consists of "mapping out" her share of "the world of emotions" (187). Her choice of words is a telling one. On one hand, it reveals Cassandra to be an active participant in shaping her inner landscape. On the other, it reminds the reader of the limited dimensions involved in an act of map-making. One important marker on Cassandra's map is the sea which surrounds her New England village.

The sea is by far the most prominent exterior space in *The Morgesons*. It has been described as a locus of sexuality (Alaimo 49), and, perhaps even more reductively, as "the novel's symbol of life" ("Repossession" 51). Rather than viewing the sea as merely one or the other, or even both, I feel its ultimate importance lies in its ability to function as a *languagescape*, a term coined by Annette Kolodny in her

1980 essay "Honing a Habitable Languagescape: Woman's Images for the New World Frontiers".

Kolodny differentiates between a concrete exterior space and a *languagescape*, " 'a landscape of mind in which the movement in physical space corresponds to a movement in consciousness' " (qtd. in Kolodny 200). A *languagescape* may be seen then, as a different form of transactional imagery, here occurring not between two people (like the promises shared between women in Stowe's novel), but between one person's imagination and the metaphysical space that may or may not correspond to the concrete space in front of her. For Cassandra, the sea is such a space.

From the opening chapters of the novel, Cassandra has been attuned to the sounds of the sea: "its roar," "its long unbroken wail," "its whimper" (8). It is striking that she chooses to record these sounds for her reader, since, as we have just seen, she is typically far more oriented towards the visual elements of landscape, leaving the aural dimension to her "weather-wise" sister Veronica (60). This early description of the sea's cries, while slight, raises the possibility that Cassandra is not as ignorant of the sea's ability to provoke emotions as she claims several years later to her cousin Charles. The brief discussion Cassandra and Charles have about the sea is often analyzed by critics, and is worth quoting in full:

He asked me if I knew whether the sea had any influence upon me; I replied that I had not thought of it. "There are so many things you have not thought of," he answered, "that this is not strange."

(62)

Sybil Weir, in her article "*The Morgesons: A Neglected Feminist Bildungsroman*," notes the association between the sea and the couple's growing sexual attraction, an attraction complicated by their family connections, and of course, by Charles's marriage to Alice (432). But only a few paragraphs later, as Cassandra looks outward at the sea, she *does* see something in it; "it was murmuring softly, creeping along the shore, licking the rocks and sand as if recognizing a master. And I saw and felt its steady, resistless heaving, insidious and terrible" (63).

Is it really possible that Cassandra has developed this capacity for understanding the sea almost instantaneously? While this conversation is linked to a developing sexuality, it is difficult to believe that Charles's words could have such an immediate effect. Thus, it would seem that either Cassandra is not being truthful in her answer to Charles, or that her thought process has developed without her being conscious of it. The latter is hinted at by an earlier conversation she has with her father, in which "he had perceived something in me which I was not aware of" (54). This remark puzzles her, for "I resolved to think seriously over it; in the morning I found I had not thought of it at all" (54). The gap between thinking and waking is foreclosed by Cassandra's last statement. Nevertheless, the narrative space between these two activities, while not discussed, still exists. In effect, there is indeed a small space for an awakening to take place. And while Cassandra belies this possibility by what she says in her narrative, there may be an undercurrent of emotional activity resting below the surface. Like the process of traditional psychoanalysis, the analysand's unconscious may be at work even when she believes it is inactive.

Cassandra does begin to notice inner changes as she continues her stay in Rosville, and her attraction to Charles ripens:

I found that I was more elastic than before, and more susceptible to sudden impressions; I was conscious of the ebb and flow of blood through my heart, felt it when it eddied up into my face, and touched my brain with its flame-colored wave. I loved life again. The stuff of which each day was woven was covered with an arabesque which suited my fancy. I missed nothing that the present unrolled for me, but looked neither to the past nor to the future. In truth there was little that was elevated in me. Could I have perceived it if there had been?

Whichever way the circumstances of my life vacillated, I was not yet reached to the quick; whether spiritual or material influences made sinuous the current of being, it still flowed toward an undiscovered ocean. (77)

Here, Cassandra relates her own burgeoning sense of subjectivity to an oceanic landscape. Her life is oceanic in its patterns, disorganized but not chaotic. In effect, the sea has become a languagescape, a metaphysical space interacting with Cassandra's imagination. After all, Rosville, with its "weekly market day and an annual cattle show" is, in fact, far away from the concrete sea of her hometown which she is re-creating (73).

Cassandra develops an even greater awareness of the sea once she has returned home from Rosville after her failed romance with Charles (the latter having been killed in a carriage accident): "It was as if I saw [it] for the first time. A vague sense

of its power surprised me; it seemed to express my melancholy. As we approached the house [. . .] other feelings moved me. Not because I saw familiar objects, nor because I was going home- it was the relation in which *I* stood to them, that I felt" (127- emphasis original). What might have been presented as a scene of great sentimentality- a young woman returning home after a horrible tragedy- is not. Stoddard's stylistic choice of de-emphasizing sentimentality (as depicted by the way in which the gift of the Bible and sewing kit from Cassandra's mother are received, for example) reasserts itself at later points in the novel. Sentimental tensions in Stoddard, like in many other American women writers, is striking.

Cassandra's return home to Surrey fuels her growing ability to link interior with exterior, emotional resonance with legal inheritance. While she describes her bedroom as "a summary of my wants," it also affords her "a comfortable sense of property, when I took possession of [it]" (131,129). Cassandra's time in Rosville has made her more conscious of legal principles, since Rosville is indeed a town of lawyers (73). Thus, Cassandra's choice of words has distinct legal implications. "Even the sea might be mine. I asked father the next morning, at breakfast, how far out at sea his property extended" (129). Strikingly, his reply is not recorded. Perhaps this is because it is more important that Cassandra has been able to pose the question, use her voice. As Sabina Matter-Seibel has noted, in *The Morgesons*, "[q]uestions are not answered, sentences are elliptical [. . .]" (28). The elliptical nature of the novel in a sense corresponds to the complicated image of the sea that Stoddard represents: a reminder of the demands, constraints, and opportunities of a given space. The fantasy

of owning the sea is metaphoric; Chopin's *The Awakening* exposes a woman's inability to thrive within it.

The sea plays a pivotal role in the novel's final chapters, as its voice becomes overwhelming, as Cassandra's swells and then diminishes. Boundaries are blurred. In Chapter 35, Cassandra makes a pilgrimage to the shore. "When I set my foot on the ground, the intolerable light of the brilliant day blazed through me; I was luminously dark, for it blinded me" (213). The implications inherent even in this one sentence are startling. By positioning herself as a medium through which only visual elements intersect, Cassandra reveals to the reader that her sense of her own subjectivity is still very much dependent on the visual. It is somewhat disturbing that she defines herself as "luminously dark" in the face of daylight. And yet, the description provided here, as with others elsewhere in the novel, is striking in its blend of gothic lyricism. In fact, landscapes are frequently described more lovingly than loved ones in Cassandra's life.

Once she reaches the sea itself, however, she engages in an intense emotional experience that incorporates all of her senses:

As the tide rolled in I retreated, stepping back from rock to rock, round which the waves curled and hissed, baffled in their attempt to climb over me. I stopped on the verge of the tide-mark; the sea was seeking me and I must wait. It gave tongue as its lips touched my feet, roaring in the caves, falling on the level beaches with a mad, boundless joy!

"Have then at life!" my senses cried. "We will possess its longing silence, rifle its waiting beauty. We will rise up in its light and

warmth, and cry, ‘ Come, for we wait.’ Its roar, its beauty, its madness- we will have- *all*.” I turned and walked swiftly homeward, treading the ridges of white sand, the black drifts of seaweed, as if they had been a smooth floor.

(214)

This scene marks a zenith in the novel, but one that is short-lived. The emotional, dynamic imagery of the sea is quickly transmuted into “a smooth floor” upon which Cassandra will tread. She is flattening this languagescape even after she has just reveled in its very complexity.

For immediately upon her return home from her walk, she must come to terms with what lies ahead: taking her mother’s place as the head of the household. When Aunt Mercy asks, “ ‘Oh, Cassandra, *can* you give up *yourself*?’ ” it is a question which, unlike those posed by Cassandra to others, is actually answerable (215- emphasis original). “ ‘I must, I suppose. Confound the spray; it is flying against the windows’ ” (215). As the scene continues, her reply shifts from the serious to the dimly comical: “ ‘I shall never have any more colds [ . . . ] never mean to have anything to myself-entirely, you know’ ” (215).

What is it, then, that Cassandra has actually had to herself in the novel? Which of her experiences are unique to her alone? We need look no further than the three pivotal scenes of awakening, each of which is situated within a particular concrete space or *languagescape*. While several of these incidents do expressly revolve around Cassandra’s growing sense of her own sexuality, they are in fact, inherently connected

to a central question of Stoddard's: which is presented as more romantic, to be married, or to forgo this state entirely?

The first of these three scenes occurs as Cassandra lies alone in her room, unable to sleep. She senses a presence that cannot be confirmed visually or aurally:

At last I fell asleep, but starting violently from its obvious dark, to become aware that the darkness of the room was sentient. A breath passed over my face; but I caught no sound, though I held my breath to listen for one. I moved my hands before me then, but they came in contact with nothing. My forebodings passed away, and I slept [. . .]

(99)

Cassandra notices that "[n]o change had taken place" within the physical space of the room. Returning to the room later, "[. . .] was like meeting a confidential friend" (100).

The space itself has become connected to a particular sort of emotional and sexual excitement. Subsequently, Cassandra declares during a conversation with her father and Alice Morgeson that she will never marry:

"She will marry." [Locke Morgeson]

"Not early." [Alice Morgeson]

"Never, I believe," I said. (101).

Cassandra's declaration is ambiguous. The most obvious interpretation of her remark at this point in the narrative is that she means never to marry because her cousin Charles, with whom she is in love, is already married. On the other hand, it may be an indication, however slight, that she does not believe in the institution of marriage itself. This would constitute a subversive element buried within the text. Cassandra,

in awakening to the potential of her own sexuality, may not be inclined to link it with marriage.

The second scene of awakening is one of the novel's most powerful, as we witness the aftermath of the carriage accident that has claimed Charles's life and left Cassandra clinging to consciousness:

Dr. White was in my room, washing my face. There was a smell of camphor about the bed. "You crawled out of a small hole, my child," he said, as I opened my eyes. (121)

The small hole Dr. White alludes to is an ambiguous spatial metaphor. It has been taken by some critics to signify that Cassandra has been reborn (Weir 434). The small hole may indeed be a metaphor for the birth canal, but, if looked at as a metaphor for narrative space, it also suggests that Cassandra has not only been reborn, but escaped (albeit temporarily) from the confines of the marriage plot itself.

The metaphysical implications of concrete spaces have intrigued feminist theorists since the 1970s. In *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her*, Susan Griffin offers up perhaps the most comprehensive alternative to the world of patriarchal spaces. As her prose poem moves from a denotative epistemology (signified by a detached, objective voice) to a connotative epistemology (signified by its collective, female voice), Griffin moves women through a series of transitional images, which include the Labyrinth and the Cave. Like Stoddard, Griffin identifies these specific spatial metaphors as key to a woman's sexual and emotional awakening:

*The shape of the labyrinth. The shape of the cave. Space divided and not divided. Space mutable, we say, separation becoming union. Space changing. The new shape. Melting and transformation [ . . . ]*

(161-emphasis original)

Griffin sees the cave as a transitional space, one which is given shape by the sea:

*"The way of the water we follow, which has made this space, and hollowed the earth here, because the shape of this cave is a history* (160-emphasis original).

The second scene of awakening is shared by Cassandra and Charles's widow Alice Morgeson. After regaining consciousness after the carriage accident, Cassandra goes to find Charles's body, laid out in state in the house. The two women share an arresting conversation in which Cassandra announces her love for Charles: " 'Alice!' I whispered, 'you may or may not forgive me, but I was strangely bound to him. And I must tell you that I hunger now for the kiss he never gave me' " (123). In effect, Cassandra's affair with Charles is consummated through this conversation with Alice. By voicing her sexual feelings to his widow, she awakens Alice to what she herself is already all too aware of: the limitations of the marriage plot itself.

For Alice too, does not fully come alive until after Charles's death. She comes to realize that " 'I am changed. When perhaps I should feel that I have done with life, I am eager to begin it' " (125). Freed from the constraints of marriage, Alice's sense of her own perceptions has multiplied. " 'I look for a reason in every action' " (125). She takes over her husband's business, and frees herself from the confines of the small nursery, moving into a wider landscape.

Yet Alice's growth, seemingly such a powerful transformation, is quickly diminished as she chooses to remarry Cassandra's father, Locke Morgeson. Alice's remarriage is fraught with legal and emotional complications, as not only does it indirectly provide the funds Locke needs to return the family estate to Cassandra, but it re-asserts the ascendancy of the marriage plot over both women.

By becoming her stepmother, Alice erases any potential closeness between her and Cassandra. At the end of the novel, Cassandra refuses her gift of a sea-green carpet and curtains, even though "[h]ad [Alice] sought the world over, she could have found nothing to suit me so well" (249). Again, gift-giving between two women is resoundingly rejected by Stoddard as a means of provoking or sustaining an emotional awakening. However, Stoddard establishes through antithesis what Edith Wharton will establish through ambiguity in *Summer*, the potential that gift-giving has as an alternative to the transaction of marriage.

The third and final scene of awakening revolves around Cassandra's uneasy relationship with her mother. While many relatives tell Cassandra that she resembles her father, Locke Morgeson, whose shipping business depends on the sea, it is her mother who she looks to for guidance. Mary Morgeson's "eyes [rove] over [the sea] whenever she wanted a little out-of-doors life," a description that may hint at Cassandra's own static perception of the sea once she is married by the novel's end (24). Mary has hardly flourished following her marriage, as evidenced by a young Cassandra's description of her mother, her hair "long, lusterless, brown," "[h]er face colorless [. . .]" (17). And, as we have already observed, her advice to Cassandra has not been particularly helpful. In one brutally honest exchange, Cassandra announces,

“ ‘[i]f you hadn’t been my mother, I dare say we might have helped each other, my friendship and sympathy might have sustained you’ ” (133). But with the absence of such traits, Cassandra is in no position to effect change for her mother. Cassandra’s failure to awaken her mother, both literally and figuratively, may be seen as the central angst of the novel, the real thwarted love.

In this third scene of awakening, Cassandra returns home to Surrey from a visit to the family home of Desmond Somers (the man she eventually marries), only to discover her mother’s dead body. While Cassandra’s circulation is diagnosed as being “too rapid” on her stagecoach ride home, in another sense, it is not swift enough. Alone in the exterior landscape of Surrey, she “perceived no movement in it, heard no hum of life” (205). The static quality of the landscape is a signal of warning; the lack of sounds deathly: “I was arrested on the threshold by a silence which rushed upon me, clutching me in a suffocating embrace” (205). The synesthesia employed by Stoddard here is particularly compelling, as images normally associated with sound become tangible. Silence is given flesh.

Ironically, Cassandra is finally able to perceive both her own receptivity to voice and the emotional resonances of silence, but this ability comes at the expense of her mother’s life. The paragraph which recounts Cassandra’s discovery of her mother’s body is one of the longest sustained sections in the novel. She reaches over to wake her mother, sitting by the fire:

“She is ill, and has dropped asleep,” I thought, thrusting my hands out, through this terrible silence, to break her slumber, and looked at the

clock; it was near seven. A door slammed, somewhere upstairs, so loud  
it made me jump; but she did not wake. (205-206)

As with the younger Cassandra, sounds are not the proper vehicle for this awakening. Stoddard's metaphoric choices emphasize "a sudden, incomprehensible and above all silent death" (Matter-Seibel 34). The fire has gone out for her mother, hearkening back to an earlier warning sounded in the text by one of the servants that " '[f]ires are not wholesome to sleep by' " (144).

With her mother's death, "[. . .] she would never know how I valued her" (206). As with Charles, death has undercut any romantic (re)union. Sybil Weir asserts that the death of Mary Morgeson is necessary to Cassandra's own development: "[it] is as if she cannot finally become a woman in her own right until her mother is dead (437). Here, Weir seems to conflate being a woman with being a married woman. However, I would argue that by having this death occur as Cassandra mediates between the exterior and interior landscape, groping her way into the heart of the home, Stoddard offers a strong indication that any ending for Cassandra that revolves around only an interior landscape will be an unsatisfactory one.

And yet, a series of final plot twists (three marriages occur in succession) leads to a shared domestic space of the Somers brothers and their Morgeson brides as quickly, Veronica and Ben Somers (Desmond's brother), Alice and Locke Morgeson, and Cassandra and Desmond are each wed. As Sybil Weir has noted, the pacing of the novel picks up considerably at the end: the last fifty pages of the novel cover three years, about one third the number used to depict Cassandra's time in Rosville (436).

A parade of silent images pervade the text's final section as Cassandra's marriage to Desmond effectively brings the narrative to its close. Veronica and Ben's baby likely suffers from some form of retardation, as it "never cries, never moves, except when it is moved" (252). The use of the impersonal pronoun "it" when referring to this child seems to indicate that this is a child whose time on Earth may be limited. Veronica herself is now a widow, Ben having died from the effects of his addiction to alcohol. And "[. . .] [Veronica's] eyes go no more in quest of something beyond" (252). Compared to her sister, it appears as if Cassandra has fared somewhat better in her own marriage, but she is silent as to her own emotional state, as evidenced by the last two paragraphs of the novel:

Ben has been dead six months. Only Desmond and I were with him in his last moments. When he sprang from the bed, staggered backwards, and fell dead, we clung together with faint hearts, and mutely questioned each other.

"God is the Ruler," he said at last. "Otherwise let this mad world crush us now." (252-253)

Susan Harris correctly points out that Desmond's appeal to God is "a cry of anguish rather than an affirmation of belief" (*Interpretative Strategies* 170). Desmond and Cassandra are united in their mutual silence, but it is Desmond who gets to utter the novel's final lines; Cassandra ends her narrative with someone else's words. Thus it would seem that despite the images of awakening that occur and recur throughout the text, Cassandra's awakening is, at best, only a transitional state.

This is illustrated by the final glimpse of the sea in the novel, which is rendered through Cassandra's gaze: "Before its windows rolls the blue summer sea. Its beauty wears a relentless aspect to me now; its eternal monotone expresses no pity, no compassion" (252). Susan Harris feels this passage demonstrates how much progress Cassandra has made in her own development or what she refers to as "self-possession": "whereas before she had previously projected the sea as a reflection of her moods, now she describes it as simply a natural element, without relevance to her life or to the lives of others" (*Interpretative Strategies* 170). She offers an extended version of her argument in an earlier article by saying that "*The Morgesons's* radicalism begins [. . .] in its determination not to nullify its thematic development by its ending" ("Contextual Evaluation" 12).

Yet this last glimpse of the sea is flattened and static, just like the human relationships Cassandra discusses for the last time. Time itself has shifted from the cyclical sense which pervades much of the novel and instead is reflected as "eternal" and essentially monotonous. This last image of the sea, then, cannot be easily dismissed. The sea is now devoid of any emotional resonance; it has been transmuted from a *languagescape* back into a simple landscape; it no longer has connotative powers. Like Cassandra, it simply exists.

So it is that Cassandra becomes enfolded into the protective arms of marriage, rather than the sea. "While novelistic endings usually convey a surface sense of conclusion, often confuted subtextually, *The Morgesons* blatantly raises more questions than it answers" ("Repossession" 53). Despite the prevalence of anti-

romantic imagery throughout the text, marriage is presented as a quasi-happy ending. However, it is necessary to look at the text's beginnings, its anti-romantic imagery, in order to account for its unsettling finale. Cassandra's sexual and emotional awakening may then be seen as a transitional experience, situated between romance and marriage.

Looking anew at the beginning of the novel, we see that Cassandra's first brush with romance, at sixteen, is hardly a memorable one. Renewing an old acquaintance once again with Joe Bacon, Cassandra realizes that she has changed over time: "the suspicion that he had a serious liking for me was disgusting" (55). As quickly as Joe is inserted into the narrative, he disappears, dying of the measles on the text's next page. Cassandra's response: "Poor Joe! That night ended my first sentiment" (56).

The next time the issue of a "serious liking" occurs, it is with Charles Morgeson, her married cousin. On the heels of his declaration of love for her, Cassandra asks her friend Helen if she thinks she is susceptible to consumption (110). The question is raised only once and not repeated, and no answer is given. Yet this remark is significant. Participating in an illicit romance would, under the pen of many other nineteenth-century American writers, have marked Cassandra for death.<sup>4</sup> Thus, a more conventional and sentimental ending is hinted at here, one which does not actually develop. In a similar episode, upon Cassandra's return to Surrey following the carriage accident, a minister holding a revival meeting questions Cassandra as to whether "my escape from sudden death in Rosville was an indication from Providence that I was reserved for some especial work?" (149). After all, she has not only thwarted death, but the perils of illicit love and, at this juncture, the marriage plot.

“I held out my hand, and he put on my third finger a diamond ring, which was like a star” (103). This description sound suspiciously like an engagement ring, but it is not. First, Cassandra's ring is from her cousin Charles, who is already married, and two, the ring is given in front of his wife, thus further undercutting the romanticism of what would normally be considered a highly charged visual symbol. The narrative hints at a conventional courtship, but it does not deliver. This incident is somewhat reminiscent of the way Geoffrey proposes to Sylvia Moor in *Moods*; a ring is given whose symbolism is highly problematic.

“It was an offer[ . . . ] My first! I was crestfallen!” (117). Cassandra’s words echo the reader’s reaction upon learning that they actually refer to a marriage proposal from Alice’s cousin Bill, and not to Charles Morgeson, the Byronic hero. The emotional investment made in the gesture of the diamond ring is again lost, its romanticism thwarted. Cassandra, it would seem, never considered the ring a symbol of a concrete proposal. A different ring becomes prominent a bit later on, when Cassandra notices a woman’s ruby ring on Desmond Somers’s watch-ribbon (200). For Desmond, the ring is a symbol of a ruin that is “ ‘mutual’ ”(199). Again, anti-romantic imagery continues to dominate the novel.

The field of vision continues to narrow for Cassandra, as she finally finds a romantic partner. As she discovers her love for Desmond Somers, she employs specific spatial imagery to express it:

I was glad, for I was in love with Desmond. I had known it from the night of Miss Munster's party. The morning after I woke to know my soul had built itself a lordly pleasure-house, its dome and towers were

firm and finished, glowing in the light that 'never was on land or sea.'

How elate I grew in this atmosphere!

(187)

Cassandra's adaptation of Tennyson foreshadows a house of cards being built (259, note). The dome hints at impending doom; the light that cannot reside within an interior or via an exterior is a fantasy. Another languagescape has been created, this one without any physical counterpart, unlike the sea.

Cassandra composes another languagescape as she writes to Desmond, who plans to go abroad to prove himself worthy of her: "Intoxicated with the liberty my pen offered me, I roamed over a wide field of paper. The next morning I burnt it" (227). This is a chilling detail. It is an additional hint that Cassandra's field of vision is becoming constrained by the rituals of romantic love as she moves toward marriage. She creates, then destroys, this languagescape.

Cassandra becomes further contained by the watch Desmond sends her in return for her new, smaller letter. "I was to wear it from the second of July. It was small and plain, but there were a few words scratched inside the case with the point of a knife, which I read every day" (228). This exchange (space in the form of paper for time concretized by a watch) underscores the ways in which Stoddard, through Cassandra Morgeson, seeks to comprehend various forms of time. The watch, rather than a ring, becomes symbolic of impending marriage.

As other scholars who have examined this novel of Stoddard's have observed, from the first pages of the text, Cassandra perceives not only space(s), but time. The Morgeson family itself is one that "does not feel a connection with a past that will root

it in time” (“Contextual Evaluation 15). How aware Cassandra is of time depends upon which space she feels tied to. As a young girl staying with her maternal grandfather for a year in Barmouth, she comments that, “[. . .] the rest of my life seemed more like a dream of the future than a realization of the present” (38). Time serves as a reminder of her current unhappiness in Grandfather Warren’s house, where rooms are interconnected to the point where they smother her. “Some of the ceilings slanted suddenly, and some so gradually that where I could stand erect, and where I could stoop, I never remembered, until my head was unpleasantly grazed, or my eyes filled with flakes of ancient lime-dust” (29).

“You think nothing of time; have nothing to do, I suppose” (132). This is one of the more ironic remarks directed at Cassandra in the novel, made by the Morgesons’s servant Fanny. In fact, Cassandra thinks of time *all* the time, with her observations and perceptions often operating at cross purposes with one another. I would argue, however, that rather than being overtly confused by time, Cassandra is able to distinguish between varying forms of time. She is, in fact, trying as hard as she can to reconcile them with one another. This struggle constitutes another fundamental aspect of her awakening, as she attempts to reconcile her own place within the interior and exterior spaces she encounters.

It is useful to view Cassandra's struggle through the lens Kristeva's 1981 essay “Le Temps de Femmes” (“Women's Time”) offers. Kristeva identifies three distinct metaphoric categories of time: cyclical time (repetitious time), monumental time (eternal time), and linear time (political and historical). Of the three, Kristeva links the first two with female subjectivity (191). On the other hand, she characterizes linear

time as "departure, progression and arrival-in other words, the time of history" (192).

All three forms of time make their appearance in *The Morgesons*.

As a young teen, Cassandra describes time thusly: "[. . .] the days flew by[. . . .] I shifted the hours, as one shifts the kaleidoscope, with an eye only to their movement. Neither the remembrance of yesterday nor the hope of to-morrow stimulated me" (58). Even though Cassandra wishes she could manipulate time, she is unable to do so; time is beyond her control. She seems to note the potential time may have as an instrument of excitement, but at this point in the narrative, it has yet to function as such for her. Cassandra's understanding of time hearkens back to Nancy Chodorow's belief that "[w]hen we attempt to untangle the relation of past to present, it is important to remember that psychological agency is always in the present, where memory, subjectivity, and personal meaning are not simply reproduced or determined but are revised and shaped" (Chodorow 63).

But Desmond's gift of the watch overtly reconfigures Cassandra's own notion of time, as Cassandra is pulled back into linear time, playing the waiting game while Desmond is abroad in Europe.<sup>5</sup> She has become like the Somers family, with their expectation that time will facilitate their inheritance; she is now dependent on Desmond's arrival to deliver her from her fate as caretaker and substitute for her deceased mother.

Strikingly, much of the novel's final section is written in the present tense. Thus, while linear time has been conflated (two years have gone by in the span of a paragraph), the reader is left with a confusing sense that time has both elapsed at a rapid pace and yet stands still in the present moment. Again, this may be because "[at]

issue here is not an absolute truth but a sense of a coherent and plausible storyline that makes sense of life history and memories and a person's current senses of self" (Chodorow 249). In seeking to reconcile the various forms of time she recognizes, Cassandra Morgeson is also revising her own subjectivity in the process. She is unwilling to choose one form of time over the other, to give into the narrative constraints of linear time that marriage requires.

\* \* \*

As we have seen, anti-romantic images do not disappear, but actually continue, once Cassandra meets Desmond Somers, the man she marries at the end of the novel. One final example is the strange encounter she has with Desmond's mother prior to declaring her love for him to him. While staying in the Somers home, Cassandra has a need to look in the mirror, to reassess herself, for which she will need another lit candle. She comes across Desmond, who offers to light it for her, the candle being a clear sexual metaphor. But instead of doing so with ease and insuring an emotional scene between the couple, Stoddard has Mrs. Somers intrude upon them, angry and threatened by the mutual attraction she perceives. Rather than backing down and cowering, Cassandra makes the following remark to her: " 'You tender, true-hearted creature, full of womanly impulses, allow me to light my candle by yours' "(186). While her comment is meant sarcastically (the reader is told she is in fact full of rage at the interruption), there may be an underlying seriousness here, a willingness on Stoddard's part to recognize the ability another woman may have in awakening a female sexuality. The women meet again, and physical contact between them occurs.

Cassandra's choice of words here is a provocative one: " 'If you touch me it will *rouse* me' " (193-emphasis added).

The mutual anger in the air is reminiscent of the twisted scenes Cassandra shares with her sister Veronica, ones which blend an intense love with hate and interweave the standard marriage plot with subversive elements. As Cassandra points out again and again, "I loved [Veronica] in an unsatisfactory way. What could we be to each other?" (64).

The sense of mutual misunderstanding and unease which Cassandra shares with practically every woman in the novel is noteworthy. Critics have struggled to interpret these female-female relationships, particularly Cassandra/Veronica, Cassandra/Alice and Cassandra and her mother, usually citing Stoddard's own personality: "[s]he was a difficult correspondent- demanding, touchy, erratic, egocentric, imperious, and blunt" (Buell and Zagarell xix). These relationships may each represent an aspect of thwarted love; Cassandra's associations with other women are juxtaposed against more traditional heterosexual relationships.

" 'I have indeed been in a long sleep, as far as *you* are concerned; this means something ' " (240-emphasis original). Veronica's pronouncement upon being awakened by her sister on her wedding day to Ben is a powerful one. Cassandra too realizes that "[s]he divined my feelings for the first time in her life" (240). So much of Cassandra's awakening to the value of her own subjectivity comes at the expense of her connections to the women around her. Perhaps this is not surprising, given that Jessica Benjamin, in *Like Subjects, Love Objects*, reminds us that for women writers, "the conflict between mothering and finding one's own desire/subjectivity became

acute [. . .] . the conflict has been formulated in terms of the desire for the inner, not the outer, world" (109). "The difficult task," according to Benjamin, is "to imagine how a woman, as daughter or mother, can transform the space of inevitable separation and loss into a space of creation and play" (111).

Consequently, in many ways, Stoddard's work seems prescient, foreshadowing texts of second- wave feminists. In her 1971 essay "When We Dead Awaken," Adrienne Rich asserts that "[t]he awakening of consciousness is not like the crossing of a frontier-one step and you are in another country" (176). Indeed, Cassandra's steps are numerous, and complex, taking her through a range of landscapes. Rich also notes that "[. . .] for women writers in particular, there is the challenge and promise of a whole new psychic geography to be explored. But there is also a difficult and dangerous walking on the ice, as we try to find language and images for a consciousness we are just coming into[. . .] . (168).

Stoddard, in *The Morgesons*, explores the terrain of the female psyche by employing a variety of complex spatial metaphors to discuss the relationships between a woman's inner desires and the exterior landscapes she is surrounded by. Here, awakening is very much a transitional state, carrying with it the corresponding emotion of excitement, and the belief in spatial possibilities. Even fantasy then, may serve as a point of mediation between probability and "imaginative possibility" (*The Land Before Her* 10), and as yet another way of preserving social bonds among women not inherently protected legally, in this case, primarily between Cassandra, her mother, and sister. Closeness among them is ephemeral, and the state of marriage itself forecloses anything but the most limited and uneven interpersonal contact.

Once spatial possibilities are foreclosed, what to do with the emotions that remain? And how are women to relate with one another? According to Susan Griffin, " 'When the water approaches me, the shape of the wave is changed. And when the tide ebbs, you will see, I too, have changed' " (161).

\* \* \*

## II. The Languagescape of Mosquitoes in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*

Kate Chopin's lyrical 1899 novel *The Awakening* is one which also explores moments of sexual and emotional awakening via specific spatial imagery. Spaces intersect in a wide variety of images which Chopin employs throughout the text. And like Cassandra Morgeson, Edna Pontellier's transitory state of awakening becomes affiliated with spatial, as well as emotional, subjectivity. While many scholars have identified the sea as the overarching metaphor of the text, even minute spatial movements hint at spatial and sexual possibilities, as embodied by the dual motifs of the female flâneur, and the mosquitoes who hover elliptically throughout Chopin's novel.

Chopin's understanding of space(s) has undergone relatively little critical examination during the last twenty-five years. Critics have tended, as is understandable, to focus on the text's main character, Edna Pontellier, alternately described as a sinner and a saint, an Aphrodite figure, and an existentialist. What has gone unnoticed in *The Awakening* is the way in which Chopin employs a variety of spaces, not just the interior (home) / exterior (the sea) dichotomy, but the represented spaces of drawings and photographs (produced and reproduced space), the

remembered spaces of memory, and perhaps most importantly, the liminal spaces of wandering, as signified by the mosquito.

Judith Fryer's notion of "the indistinctly mapped and terribly difficult space of the self," is, in Chopin's text, embodied by two liminal and at first, apparently dissimilar beings: the wandering woman [female flâneur] and the mosquito (44). Like a wandering woman [female flâneur], a mosquito is a liminal being, able to cross gendered and racialized boundaries, much as Edna Pontellier (whose last name means "bridge-builder") begins to traverse borders, walking, first to the sea, then throughout New Orleans, and back to the sea once again.

Mosquitoes, prior to the twentieth century, had not been connected to urban disease by science; instead, they appear in *The Awakening* as liminal beings whose ability to bite or sting anyone, may be closely identified with the notion of the promiscuous woman. Both the former and the latter could be found in Kate Chopin's New Orleans. By examining the metaphoric role of the mosquito in the text and linking it to the female flâneur, Edna Pontellier's relationships with several characters, among them Mademoiselle Reisz and Doctor Mandelet, come into clearer focus. As a liminal being of sexual exchange, Edna obtains the freedom to travel between many open spaces; as a metaphoric mosquito, her time on Earth is fleeting.

How aware would Kate Chopin have been of mosquitoes in her own life? As a resident of New Orleans, they were all around her. And as was mentioned earlier, prior to Walter Reed's work in the early 1900s, no direct link was suspected between mosquitoes and airborne diseases like yellow fever. Christopher Benfey, in his 1997 book *Degas in New Orleans: Encounters in the Creole World of Kate Chopin and*

*George Washington Cable*, discusses the transatlantic intersection of the painter Edward Degas and Kate Chopin during the 1870s (Benfey 5). He suggests that “[the] works [of Kate Chopin] often help us to decipher the underlying meanings in Degas’s paintings and letters” (16). Conversely, it may be that Degas’s stay in New Orleans may help to decode the mystery of the mosquito imagery found in *The Awakening*.

In chapter 10 of Benfey’s book, he discusses the origins of Mardi Gras, and the role that Degas’s brother René played in the Mardi Gras of 1873. Specifically, Benfey discusses René’s interest in importing insect costumes from Paris for the celebration, whose theme was “ ‘The Missing Links to Darwin’s Origin of Species’ ” (174). In a letter René wrote to his wife, he believed that “a coup [is] to be made in buying the costumes in Paris [. . .] They are all ravishing, from the lady bug to the roach” (qtd. in Benfey 171). René’s investment was a success in this case; the costumes were donned for the parade, and the insect brigade, as Benfey refers to it, recited a poem whose lyrics hint at sexual exchange, as “promiscuous flies and grasshoppers dallied amorously with mates of other species” (178).

Benfey’s description of this Mardi Gras celebration with its Darwinist theme is intriguing. The influence of Charles Darwin on Kate Chopin has been discussed at length by Bert Bender in his study *The Descent of Love: Darwin and the Theory of Sexual Selection in American Fiction, 1871-1926*. According to Bender, Chopin was quite familiar with Darwinism but resisted its implications for women, “especially his views on the inferiority of women, and most emphatically, his theory of the female’s modesty: her passivity in the sex drama as a creature without desire” (198). Bender sees *The Awakening’s* protagonist as a “post-Darwinian woman-animal who had

evolved from the sea in a world without gods" (220).<sup>6</sup> In examining *The Awakening* as a novel which comments on sexual selection, Bender emphasizes the biological over the metaphorical.<sup>7</sup> However, I would argue that the biological process of sexual selection is not entirely analogous to the more metaphorical process of sexual exchange I chart here. In Chopin's text, Edna's awakening is inextricably linked to the relationship between spaces. Sexual exchange is posited in liminal spaces, even in the represented spaces of drawings and photographs. The lyricism of the novel undercuts any scientific intent; the text is a work of visual art that re-inscribes the spaces of femininity.

Emily Toth's updated biography of Kate Chopin (1999) unearthed a significant piece of information regarding a possible real-life inspiration for the character of Edna Pontellier. Through her acquaintance with the painter Edgar Degas in the 1870s, Chopin came to hear of a female painter whose decision to marry ultimately foreclosed her artistic career. This woman was Berthe Morisot's sister. "Her name was Edma Pontillion- a name so much like *The Awakening's* Edna Pontellier that it cannot possibly be coincidental" (*Unveiling* 74). This tantalizing revelation further underscores the relevance nineteenth-century painting has in understanding Chopin's text.

According to Jane Tompkins, *The Awakening* is a text which "presents a dense configuration of images that echo, reinforce, contradict, and enrich one another with tantalizing suggestiveness and an unparalleled economy of means" (26). Nevertheless, despite this seemingly laudatory description, Tompkins finds that the novel is "not great art" (22). Ironically, her conclusion stems from the fact that

Chopin employs a "glancing, touch-and-go technique" to represent the world; for her, Chopin's impressionism limits the novel's emotional power and an understanding of Edna's actions (27).

However, I would argue that is this very multiplicity of images that is present in the novel which sustains the narrative as a work of verbal art. Represented spaces, reproduced spaces and liminal spaces signify the transitory nature of the act of awakening. In significant ways, the novel may be comparable to a nineteenth-century impressionistic painting, offering a visual panorama of spatial possibilities. Understanding Chopin's usage of time and space becomes as elusive as pinning down a mosquito. Time is not revealed instantaneously by the narrator, but instead is revealed rather subtly, transmuted through the spaces of memory.

The first scene of awakening in the text coincides with the first description of mosquitoes. As Edna sits outside, "just having a good cry all to herself," we are alerted to the fact that "[t]he mosquitoes made merry over her, biting her firm, round arms and nipping at her bare insteps[. . .] The little stinging, buzzing imps succeeded in dispelling a mood which might have held her there in the darkness half a night longer" (Ch.III).<sup>8</sup>

Rather than being an added cause of distress for Edna, the mosquitoes delight her by their actions, wandering over her body. They have accomplished what her husband has been unable to do: sustain her attention and excitement. Earlier in the evening, Leonce awakened a sleeping Edna in order to have her listen to his "anecdotes and bits of news and gossip that he had gathered during the day". This exchange evoked little interest from Edna. "She was overcome with sleep and

answered him with little half utterances” (III). Edna’s interaction with the mosquitoes is more satisfactory than her interaction with her own husband.

The scene of burgeoning awakening ends once the mosquitoes have finished their business of stinging. Significantly, the time is given as midnight. Chopin's naming of a specific time is a relatively rare occurrence within the narrative, implying that when it does occur, a reader should take notice. Time then shifts to the following morning, when instead of giving Edna any sort of sexual affection, her husband Leonce instead gives her “half of the money [. . .] from Klein’s hotel the night before” (III). A few days later, he sends his wife a gift box of sweets, a different, but no more adequate substitute for sexual affection.

Mosquitoes appear in another early scene of awakening in Chapter XI. Flush with triumph from having swum out into the sea for the first time, Edna is not yet ready to come to bed. Instead, she lingers outside the Pontelliers’ cottage, swinging in the hammock. When Leonce advises her to return inside, into the closed, protective, domestic space which he believes he can control, he notes that “ [t]he mosquitoes will devour you.’ ”. Edna’s answer to Leonce is “ ‘There are no mosquitoes’ ” (XI). Yet it is around one o’clock in the morning, almost exactly the same time as the mosquitoes made their initial appearance in Chapter III. So it is probably the case that there are indeed mosquitoes in the air. The question then becomes, why does Edna choose to give this answer to her husband? Chopin as narrator doesn’t contradict her. Perhaps Edna’s response points to the fact that mosquitoes are covert messengers who appear in many guises, implicit within the remainder of the text. Edna, as we shall see, begins to

internalize the languagescape of mosquitoes.

Concrete images of mosquitoes are rare as the narrative continues,. Yet they are under the surface, embedded within the text as characters make reference to them and take pains to avoid them. Chopin as narrator of *The Awakening* uses these implicit references as a means of connecting mosquitoes and their associations to Edna Pontellier.

Much critical attention has been given to Chopin's depiction of the other women at Grand Isle, summering with Edna, specifically Adele Ratignolle. "The mother-women" are the opposite of Mrs. Pontellier, "fluttering about with extended, protecting wings when any harm, real or imaginary, threatened their precious brood" (IV). In conjuring up this image of fluttering, Chopin seems to want the reader to contrast these women with the mosquitoes Edna has come in contact with only a few scant pages earlier. The mother-women, unlike Edna's mosquitoes, here connote emotional protection, not sexual danger. These women aspire to "grow wings as ministering angels," not the small and slight wings of insects(IV).

Edna develops a growing sexual appetite and a desire to move about freely. And in her wanderings, she proves to have mosquito-like wings, not angelic ones. Like a mosquito who is easily brushed aside, Edna's importance within the exterior landscape goes unrecognized at Grand Isle. After all, in comparing Edna to the mother-woman Adele Ratignolle, we are told that "[a] casual and indiscriminating observer in passing, might not cast a second glance upon [Edna's] figure" (VII). Edna's face is sunburnt, of little interest to a Creole culture that prizes delicate skin.

“Madame Ratignolle, more careful of her complexion, had turned a gauze veil about her head” (VII).

Adele Ratignolle is also able to ward off any itinerant mosquitoes, just as later on, in her own cottage, she uses a curtain to guard her open door (VIII). Adele, an expectant mother, continually strives toward self-protection and domestic perfection. Eventually, Edna realizes that the “little glimpse of domestic tranquility which had been offered her gave her no regret, no longing; Madame Ratignolle will never experience “life’s delirium” (XVIII). “Edna vaguely wondered what she meant by ‘life’s delirium.’ It had crossed her thought like some unsought, extraneous impression,” much like the mosquitoes whose paths cross hers (XVIII). Adele has been successful in keeping wandering impulses at bay. Suggestively, she is an expert sewer, adept at taking open swathes of fabric and transforming them into small, protective garments. When Adele shows Edna the pattern of the baby’s night drawers, she expects Edna to duplicate it, to enclose the open spaces of fabric via her own hands. Yet Edna knows that she is not interested in foreclosing this space, in trapping herself within the confines of domesticity.

In contrast to Adele, Edna invites wandering impulses in. In Chapter XII, Edna and Robert Lebrun journey to the Chènière in the early morning. Riding on the boat out to the island, Edna notices that “[t]he sun was high up and beginning *to bite*. The swift breeze seemed to Edna to bury *the sting* of it into the pores of her hands and face” (XII- emphasis added). This imagery of biting and stinging is analogous to the description of the mosquitoes given in Chapter III. Thus, without even mentioning them by name, Chopin is nonetheless able to re-inscribe mosquitoes into the text.

Images of awakening intersect with the (re)appearance of mosquitoes.

Following the church service that Sunday morning, Edna rests at Madame Antoine's house. Several hours later, she awakens, "with the conviction that she had slept long and soundly" (XIII). Upon arising she notices that "[t]he mosquito bar was drawn over her; the old woman had come in while she slept and let down the bar" (XIII). Here too, mosquitoes are unseen but presumably active; it may be that they have been biting and stinging Edna while she is asleep, awakening her to her own sense of sexual ecstasy; after all, "[h]er eyes were bright and wide awake and her face glowed" (XIII).

In contrast to her dynamic interaction with the mosquitoes, Edna realizes that what she feels for Robert Lebrun are the same static symptoms of infatuation from her youth. Nevertheless,

[t]he past was nothing to her; offered no lesson which she was willing to heed. The future was a mystery which she never attempted to penetrate. The present alone was significant; was hers; to torture as it was doing then with *the biting* which her impassioned, newly awakened being demanded.

(XV-emphasis added)

The link between Edna and the mosquito is a strong one. As with the use of the word *devour* earlier in the text, the image of biting can be seen as having an overt sexual connotation. But rather than viewing this biting as only sexual, it appears that the mosquito's bite is meant to be understood as a transitory experience rooted in the present time. In other words, sexual satisfaction not an illusion, but is not enough in and of itself to maintain Edna's own subjectivity.

Mosquitoes infuse the Grand Isle section of the novel up to the last conversation Edna has with the pianist Mademoiselle Reisz, shortly before they each leave the island:

“When do you leave?” asked Edna.

“Next Monday; and you?”

“The following week,” answered Edna, adding, “It has been a pleasant summer, hasn’t it, Mademoiselle?”

“Well,” agreed Mademoiselle Reisz, with a shrug, “rather pleasant if it hadn’t been for the mosquitoes and the Farival twins.” (XVI)

Here, mosquitoes have not only reappeared as a topic of conversation, but comprise part of the final image the reader is given access to of Grand Isle. On the surface, Mademoiselle Reisz’s remark about the mosquitoes may be taken as yet another example of her disagreeable nature. But underneath, her superficial comment hints at the relevance mosquitoes have within the Grand Isle chapters of the novel.

Mosquitoes have played a pivotal role in Edna’s awakening, connoting not just sexuality, but even more importantly, an ability to wander. Yet by linking the mosquitoes to the Farival twins, young women who are minor characters in the narrative, Chopin undercuts the notion of wandering. After all, it is the Farival twins who won’t wander away from each other to dance with a man, who are not artists (their repetitious piano playing grates on the nerves of all the Grand Isle guests), who are not risk takers. And, like mosquitoes, the two girls seem to be interchangeable, lacking distinctive identities. Thus, in leaving the reader with this unsteady final image of Grand Isle, Chopin makes the magic of Grand Isle less definite. Edna has

begun to discover lost facets of herself, to uncover and uncloak herself, but she does so at the risk of the biting and stinging of the mosquitoes, creatures she has had to deny the existence of to her husband.

Edna can no longer deny her own existence as the novel's action unfolds. Once the narrative shifts to New Orleans, Edna becomes a wandering woman, moving away from enclosed, domestic spaces and into the world beyond. In an act of gender reversal, it is “Mr. Pontellier [who is] very fond of walking about his house examining its various appointments and details, to see that nothing [is] amiss” (XVII). In Chapter XVII, the first of the New Orleans sections, Edna can only travel from the dining room to her own room, to the garden and back to her own room again: “[She] began to walk to and fro down its own length, without stopping, without resting” (XVII). She is trying to reposition herself, but her movements themselves contain no forward motion. Edna’s walk parallels her unsuccessful attempt to crush her wedding ring; the ornament refuses to break under her footstep.

“ ‘[She goes] *tramping about* by herself’ ” (XXII-emphasis added). Such is Leonce Pontellier’s description of Edna’s activities once they return to Esplanade Street. Scorning her duties as hostess, Edna goes outdoors in search of fulfillment. Leonce’s choice of words to depict his wife’s behavior is a compelling one. The employment of the phrase *tramping about* resonates with several overlapping meanings. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines the word *tramp* as a “sexually promiscuous woman” but dates this usage of the term to the 1920s, some twenty years before *The Awakening* was published.<sup>9</sup> The related verb *trample* appears in

Chopin's novel several times, the majority of which surface in conjunction with Mademoiselle Reisz.

“[Mademoiselle Reisz is] a disagreeable little woman [. . .] owing to a temper which was self-assertive and a disposition *to trample* upon the rights of others” (IX-emphasis added). Our first glimpse of Mlle. Reisz is of her “[. . .] dragging a chair in and out of her room” (IX). Edna tramps about the city in order to maintain contact with Mademoiselle Reisz, and, much later in the narrative, uses the verb *trample* when speaking to Dr. Mandelet as they walk through the New Orleans streets: “ ‘But I don't want anything but my own way. That is wanting a good deal, of course, when you have *to trample* upon the lives, the hearts, the prejudices of others-but no matter-still I shouldn't want *to trample* upon the little lives’ ”(XXXVIII-emphasis added). Edna's remarks link her back to Mademoiselle Reisz.

“[Edna] began to do as she liked and feel as she liked,” in effect, transforming herself into a liminal being (XIX).

She liked then to wander alone into strange and unfamiliar places. She discovered many a sunny, sleepy corner to dream in. And she found it good to dream and to be alone and unmolested. (XIX)

In so doing, Edna begins to blur her own prescribed role within the confines of urban New Orleans. As she re-defines own relationship to the city through her walks, Chopin is able to re-inscribe the spaces of femininity through the text as visual art.

In her book *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art*, art historian Griselda Pollock discusses the complex relationship between visually represented spaces within nineteenth-century (modernist) paintings and

femininity. In analyzing paintings of Mary Cassatt, and Berthe Morisot, Pollock investigates the link between the “spaces of modernity” and the spaces of femininity” (66). She comes to see that “[o]ne of the major means by which femininity is thus reworked [by Cassatt and Morisot] is by the rearticulation of traditional space so that it ceases to function primarily as the space of sight for a mastering gaze, but becomes the *locus of relationships*” (87-emphasis added).

Pollock redefines the spaces of modernity not as ones in which “leisure, consumption, the spectacle and money” are paramount, but instead as the following:

The spaces of modernity are where class and gender interface in critical ways, in that they are *the spaces of sexual exchange*. The significant spaces of modernity are neither simply those of masculinity, nor are they those of femininity which are as much the spaces of modernity for being the negative of the streets and bars. They are [. . .] the marginal or interstitial spaces where the fields of the masculine and feminine intersect and structure sexuality within a classed order. (70-emphasis added)

The class order Pollock alludes to encompasses gender as well, for “[women] could enter and represent selected locations in the public sphere-those of entertainment and display. But a line demarcates not the end of the public/private divide but the frontier of the spaces of femininity” (79).

Edna Pontellier challenges these frontiers by her willingness to walk to see Mademoiselle Reisz, to go to the racetrack and gamble with her father, the former Confederate colonel, to absent herself from the space of her sister’s wedding, to act

“devoid of ambition, and striving not toward accomplishment [. . .]” (XXV).

Chopin as narrator even takes Edna a step further in having her not only elude linear or concrete space but also linear time.

In an early discussion of the treatment of time in the novel, Emily Toth describes *The Awakening* as “lyrical, epiphanic, concerned with moments of consciousness rather than with upward striving” (“Timely and Timeless” 271). Time is represented impressionistically, rather than concretely. “Time is punctuated by the arrival and departure of husbands from New Orleans for weekends, but the women in the novel, who are its central figures, simply enjoy the summer ‘languor’”(273). Toth’s statement is a compelling one, as it establishes the existence of the three forms of time Julia Kristeva discusses in her 1981 essay “Les Temps de Femmes” (“Women’s Time”). Under Kristeva, linear time is characterized by “departure, progression, and arrival” and, unlike cyclical or monumental time, is not associated with female subjectivity (192).

In affiliating Edna with mosquitoes, Chopin suggests that walking through the city is a way for her protagonist to more fully encounter the spaces of sexual exchange. Such a reading of *The Awakening* de-emphasizes the three main spatial demarcations of the novel: Grand Isle, New Orleans, and the sea, and demands that more attention be paid to Edna’s movements through interstitial spaces, the transient spaces within these main exterior landscapes.

Helen Taylor’s recent article “Walking Through New Orleans: Kate Chopin and the Female Flâneur” examines the role of a walking woman in nineteenth-century urban space, noting that “[t]he nineteenth-century city was defined and organized

around male mobility, work, pleasure and sexuality” (22). Thus a woman “could rarely enjoy the easy, relaxed, marginal role of flâneur as detached spectator of the urban experience without being defined in sexual terms,” for to be outside and unattached, without a male companion would be to define oneself as sexually promiscuous (22).

In analyzing *The Awakening*, Taylor observes that urban New Orleans possessed certain dangers for all, including “streets overflowing with raw sewage and Mississippi waters, infested with yellow fever and other epidemics, oppressive heat and stench, crime and prostitution” (23). Yet, in Chopin’s text, “the city as diseased and unhealthy is absent” (25). As Thomas Bonner points out, Chopin lived in New Orleans during the 1870s, during “the worst of Reconstruction,” and yet, “she rarely includes any direct images of this turmoil . . .” (53). Therefore, Chopin’s descriptions of New Orleans are themselves remarkably atemporal. Strikingly, as Bonner also notes, “[l]andscapes and cityscapes painted in oil were at their peak of popularity before the early twentieth-century rise of photography as the dominant medium of popular visual representation” (55). Likewise, the city is never represented by Chopin as one mired in disease, or filth. Chopin is not a textual photographer; her work in *The Awakening* is more like that of a nineteenth-century painter like Degas or Morisot.

The general lack of association between urban space and disease in the nineteenth-century is of particular importance when looking at the metaphorical significance of mosquitoes in *The Awakening*. Prior to the early twentieth century, no link was made by the medical profession between mosquitoes and airborne diseases

such as malaria and yellow fever. The latter found itself at the center of life in New Orleans. Jo Ann Carrigan's study *The Saffron Scourge: A History of Yellow Fever in Louisiana, 1796-1905* provides an excellent window into the effect yellow fever had on New Orleans residents of all races and classes.<sup>10</sup> As Carrigan asserts, "[t]he slow season (May through October) coincided with the sickly season when many New Orleanians left town for healthier and more comfortable locations elsewhere" (241). In a sense, the inhabitants who leave their main residences come to comprise what Carrigan calls "the floating population" since they have the money to be transients of a sort (241).

Indeed, many New Orleanians subscribed to a belief in Creole immunity from yellow fever, a myth which may provide the subtext for Leonce Pontellier's assertion to Dr. Mandelet that "I'm never sick [. . .] You know that I come of tough fiber, of that old Creole race of Pontelliers that dry up and finally blow away" (XXII). His wife, of course, is not a Pontellier by blood, coming from "old sound Presbyterian Kentucky stock" (XXII). As a transplant to New Orleans, Edna would be among the inhabitants assumed to be at greater risk for contracting the disease, particularly since she begins defying the convention which assumed that "[. . .] women were confined largely to their households [while] men had greater exposure to the harsh elements of the weather and more opportunities for encountering yellow fever as they moved about the city and came in contact with a variety of persons and places" (256).

But, in equating Edna with a mosquito, Chopin identifies her not with disease, but with the activity of sexual wandering. After all, " '[t]he city atmosphere has improved her. Some way she doesn't seem like the same woman.' " (XX). The city

as a metaphor for female self-improvement is far from the norm. In this context, wandering is, in a twist of dramatic irony, presented as beneficial. Wandering puts Edna on the path towards sexual adventures. Indeed, *The Awakening* finds Edna coming in contact with a variety of men: Robert Lebrun, with whom readers expect her to enter into an extra-marital affair, Alcée Arobin, a rake with whom Edna actually does commit adultery, Robert's younger brother Victor, whose presence at both the dinner party and at Grand Isle, has become a point of contention among scholars, and Doctor Mandelet, whose advice Edna fails to heed. What are we to make of Edna's ambiguous relationships with each man?

Edna's mosquito-like qualities are emphasized throughout her relationship with Alcée Arobin. "The fever of the game flamed into her cheeks and eyes, and *it got into her blood, and into her brain like an intoxicant*" (XXV-emphasis added). The image of infection alluded to in this passage hints at the role Edna herself will play in the affair itself. It is Edna who initiates physical contact while Arobin is over, simultaneously attracted to and repulsed by the sight of the scar Arobin obtained during a duel some years ago:

She touched his hand as she scanned the red cicatrice on the inside of his white wrist. A quick impulse that was somewhat spasmodic impelled her fingers to close in sort of a clutch upon his hand. He felt the pressure of her pointed nails in the flesh of his palm.

She arose hastily and walked toward the mantel.

"The sight of a wound or a scar always agitates and sickens me," she said. "I shouldn't have looked at it." (XXV)

Edna's fascination with Arobin's wound leads her to try to superimpose one of her own creation on top of it, in effect, to re-scar him. Arobin's saber wound may be seen in some sense as analogous to a mosquito bite, a mark of identification that Edna recognizes as one of sexual performance. In initiating their kiss, Arobin draws Edna into "the first kiss of her life to which her nature had really responded. It was a flaming torch that kindled desire" (XXVII). But "[. . .] it was not the kiss of love that inflamed her, because it was not love that held this cup of life to her lips" (XXVII). Instead, it is a simple, seemingly uncomplicated act of sexual exchange.

Her relationship with Arobin seems to supercede linear time, as symbolized textually by the brevity of Chapter XXVIII. Chapter XXVIII is the shortest chapter of the novel, as it is only a paragraph. In this chapter, space and time are not made concrete, but are implied, much like the sexual act between Edna and Arobin which is assumed to have occurred between chapters XXVII and XXVIII but never mentioned directly. While Edna's affair with Arobin continues, she is unable to forget about her romantic attraction to Robert Lebrun.

By contrast, her connection to Robert seems to be rooted in linear time, as Robert's departure for Mexico and his return appear to be narrative focal points. In fact, as Edna begins her affair with Arobin, Robert's arrival is imminent, a fact which Edna is well aware of. Chapters XXVI and XXVII (and thus, Chapter XXVIII as well) take place during a single day and it is during Chapter XXVI that Edna asks Mademoiselle Reisz about Robert's return. " 'But when, when?' cried Edna impatiently, " ' He does not say when.' " (XXVI). As her conversation with her pianist friend progresses, Edna undergoes a physical transformation as "a glow

overspread her face, *blotching it with red spots*" (XXVI-emphasis added). While fleeting, these red spots may be seen as metaphorical mosquito bites, symbols of her awakening ability to recognize the possibility of sexual exchange.

Edna's eagerness for Robert's return, her emphasis on time, becomes perplexing, as she decides to have her gala birthday party before Robert has come back to New Orleans. Why does she not decide to wait for him? Perhaps it is because the concept of a birthday is one which is not simply rooted in linear time, but one which is also tied to cyclical time. In initiating her birthday celebration, Edna is emphasizing her own female subjectivity, and de-emphasizing the role linear time has had in her life.

Why, critics have asked, is Robert's younger brother Victor invited in his stead, garlanded with red and yellow roses? "The touch of [Victor's] lips was like a pleasing sting to her hand" (XXX). Harriet Kramer Linkin views Victor as a figure representing an unclaimed possibility. "[. . .] Victor's will might have been strong enough to go against the patriarchal order of exchange before which Robert had faltered, had Edna pursued the opportunity he extends at her dinner" (Linkin 140). If, as Linkin suggests, "Chopin stings us with the possibility [. . .] Victor [represents]," why doesn't Edna pursue it (Linkin 140)?

In other words, how strong a possibility would an Edna-Victor liaison pose? This is a question that can best be answered in the context of what a mosquito represents. Since a mosquito represents transitional space and sexual exchange, then any such liaison would, as with the others Edna pursues in the text, be at best fleeting. A mosquito does not linger around a particular individual for long. It must wander.

As Margit Stange asserts: “[the] dinner marks [Edna’s] entrance into the public market, in which she circulates as the owner of her own sexual exchange value” (Stange 32). In drawing attention to Edna’s position as a circulating being, we are again reminded of the link between her and the mosquito. As such, Edna is able to move between linear and cyclical time. Edna’s birthday party serves as a reminder of this.

Again, Robert Lebrun is depicted as a static figure whose trip to Mexico is more important as a topic of shared conversation among the Grand Isle guests, an area of imagined space for Edna to wander through, than as an actual event in linear time that affects her. In fact, when Robert does return to New Orleans, the reader is informed of it several days after the event has occurred. In chapter XXXIII, Edna discovers that he had returned the day before yesterday, a phrase that subsequently repeats three times. The initial conversation that she and Robert share is one in which their descriptions of their activities correspond fairly identically:

“I’ve been seeing the waves and the white beach of Grand Isle, the quiet, grassy street of the Cheniere, the old fort at Grande Terre. I’ve been working like a machine, and feeling like a lost soul. There was nothing interesting.” (XXXIII)

Robert’s images, cited above, are altered only slightly by Edna in her reply:

“I’ve been seeing the waves and the white beach of Grand Isle, the quiet, grassy street of the Cheniere Caminada, the old sunny fort at Grande Terre. I’ve been working with a little more comprehension

than a machine, and still feeling like a lost soul. There was nothing interesting.”

(XXXIII)

Thus, Robert and Edna’s recollections of their time apart from one another places an emphasis on remembered time, a static time (and space) which does not hint at a joined future. Similarly, Robert’s decision to tell Edna the ending of the book she’s been reading, “to save her the trouble of wading through it,” suggests that a future rooted in linear time will be shortly be foreclosed (XXXVI).

Robert’s presence during the summer in Grand Isle seemed pivotal in moving Edna beyond her limitations, but back in New Orleans the following winter, Edna recalls only “the same glance which had penetrated to the sleeping places of her soul and awakened them” (XXXIII). In exchange, she gives him “a soft, cool, delicate kiss, *whose voluptuous sting* penetrated his whole being” (XXXVI-emphasis added). Now, Edna is a mosquito herself, engaging in the subjectivity of her own desire. But Robert the man is a static figure; Edna wanders beyond his reach, both figuratively and literally, when she leaves his side to go to Madame Ratignolle’s delivery. It is she who would rouse Robert. “She would awaken him with a kiss” (XXXVIII). And having been stung once, Robert decides against continuing to be with Edna, leaving behind his clichéd remark of “Good-by-because I love you” as her only comfort (XXXVIII). Robert’s words inhabit the same static space as the photograph of the tragedian Edna had treasured in her youth. There is no room for free play, for sexual exchange. Having chosen to wander into cyclical time (as symbolized by Madame

Ratignolle's childbirth scene), Edna has effectively abandoned linear time. She has refused to participate in a linear romance, abandoning its figurehead, Robert Lebrun.

Doctor Mandelet's relationship with Edna is also a meandering one. We first encounter him indirectly, through his conversations with her husband, Leonce. Chapter XXII, Leonce's meeting with the doctor, is juxtaposed against Edna's meeting with Mademoiselle Reisz, which takes place in the preceding chapter. Both the pianist and the doctor have the vision afforded to them by open windows; however, each revolves around a different notion of time. Within Mademoiselle Reisz's apartment, time seems to stand still, frozen within the music which she plays, Fredric Chopin's Impromptu. "[She] did not know when the Impromptu began or ended" (XXI). When Edna asks when she may pay another visit, Mademoiselle Reisz's reply is " 'Come whenever you feel like it' " (XXI). Within Doctor Mandelet's lodgings, linear time comes to the forefront, as Leonce refuses to leave until the doctor names a specific time when he will come and visit Edna: " 'What evening will you come? Say Thursday. Will you come Thursday?' " (XXII). But, as Edna has just told Mademoiselle Reisz, " 'Time doesn't concern me' " (XXI). Thus, Chopin plants some doubt as to whether this planned meeting will even take place.

When the appointed day and time arrives, there is no direct exchange of personal conversation between the doctor and Edna. Instead, there is an exchange of stories, as Leonce, the doctor, the Colonel, and Edna relate tales ranging from the realistic (Leonce's hunting stories) to the sober (the Colonel's war stories) to the "little human document" (the doctor's story of a wife's renewal) to the completely imaginary (Edna's tale of the runaway lovers) (XXIII). From this exchange, Doctor

Mandelet deduces that Edna is sexually involved with another man, a deduction that is at this point, technically untrue.

After this dinner, the doctor “doubled his old-fashioned cloak across his breast as he strode home through the darkness” (XXIII). Chopin’s reference to the doctor’s cloak is strikingly reminiscent of the now-famous phrase used earlier to describe Edna, who is “daily casting aside that fictitious self which we assume like a garment with which to appear before the world” (XIX). Does Doctor Mandelet also have a fictitious self, and is it his own sense of recognition which might also (as with Victor Lebrun), have endowed Edna with the sting of possibility had she chosen to listen to him? Does Doctor Mandelet fit comfortably into the trajectory of linear (masculine) time posited in the novel? It is the unexplored potential of a friendship between Edna and the doctor, rather than either of the women in *The Awakening*, that suggests just how complex the act of awakening is in the late nineteenth century.

Edna and Doctor Mandelet are only alone together once in the novel. Following Adele Ratignolle’s labour, which he attends as her physician, they accompany one another through the streets of New Orleans. “They walked slowly, the Doctor with a heavy, measured tread and his hands behind him; Edna, in an absent-minded way, as she had walked one night at Grand Isle, as if her thoughts had gone on ahead of her and she was striving to overtake them” (XXVIII). His offer to be a listener is gently rebuffed by Edna, who articulates her desire for her own way.

Doctor Mandelet is the only man in the novel (excluding the two related to her by blood or marriage) who neither stings Edna nor is stung himself. Perhaps his lack of participation in the activity of sexual exchange is, paradoxically enough, why Edna

cannot confide in him, cannot ground herself in his counsel. Emotional affiliation may not be easily recognized by Edna; the lack of an overt sexual dynamic between them may confuse her. Edna's relationship with Doctor Mandelet assumes an open-ended stance that she cannot achieve with the other men in her life- her husband, Robert Lebrun, Alcée Arobin- simply because it is not rooted in any sexual experience. And yet, he is the last person whom Edna walks with. After leaving him, she walks alone, to Grand Isle, and into the sea.

Sandra Gilbert, in examining Edna's relationships with others, has noted, "none of [them] succeed in yielding what we might call an open space in the plot that encloses Edna" (Gilbert 56). By extension, Gilbert has asserted, Edna's final swim out to sea affords her the only means of obtaining such a space. "[Edna's] motion," Gilbert argues, "[. . .] is toward the mythic, the pagan, the aphrodisiac" (58). While the argument she advances, that Edna may not be dead at the end of the novel, is persuasive, it may be somewhat oversimplified. For it seems to me that there are indeed open spaces within this text; in fact, there are far more open ones than closed ones.

Perhaps Edna is more than an Aphrodite figure, "mov[ing] with ease and grace between the natural and the super-natural, the human and the inhuman, nature and culture" (Gilbert 62). If Edna's liminality is embodied within her symbolic role as a mosquito, her assumed death becomes less a triumphant attempt at mythic resurrection, and instead a small creature's movement away from a world made up of many open spaces to a world with only one.

“The voice of the sea is seductive, never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander in abysses of solitude” (XXXIX). As a mosquito, Edna must wander. But without the ability to come in contact with other people, Edna’s future is cloudy.

In setting forth the link between Edna and the mosquito in *The Awakening*, I do not mean to suggest that this is the only context in which the reader can see Edna. The novel abounds with symbolism. Kathleen Wheeler remarks that Chopin has a dazzling facility for “[creating] an astounding network of interwoven symbols, images, and metaphors” (52). The mosquito is only one symbol, but is one which re-emphasizes the transitory nature of Edna’s awakening, the ways in which it is connected to spatial and temporal movements which are themselves linked to moments of sexual exchange.

Both Stoddard and Chopin’s novels are rooted in spatial imagery which functions as transactional imagery. Where Stowe and Alcott envision friendships between women as extralegal alternatives to the marriage contract, Cassandra Morgeson and Edna Pontellier are both exploring languagescapes rather than concrete interpersonal relationships as a vehicle for awakening to their own subjectivity. *The Morgesons* and *The Awakening* are in certain ways far less sentimental than Stowe and Alcott’s texts. Free from overt sentimentalism, neither protagonist is able to free herself from marriage long enough to find another way of sustaining herself. However, as we shall see, Edith Wharton and Nella Larsen each create characters whose awakenings are even more thwarted, and who are even less aware of the effect of sentimentalism upon them.

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that this passage is recounted by a male narrator, who has been cast into a feminist utopian society. Nevertheless, I do not find the gender reversal to be problematic; indeed, the narrative choice functions ironically, since it is usually a woman who finds herself captured and contained within a patriarchal society. Gilman's use of a male narrator may be somewhat analogous to Willa Cather's choice in *My Antonia*, where Jim Burden tells a young woman's story through a male voice, and in *A Lost Lady*, where Marian Forrester's story is recounted through Niel Herbert.

<sup>2</sup> Where Chodorow uses these terms, Benjamin uses "intrapsychic theory" versus "intersubjective theory".

<sup>3</sup> Benjamin is careful to differentiate between her definition of subject and what she describes as the "epistemological, thinking subject" usually formulated by those in the discipline of philosophy (12).

<sup>4</sup> We need look no further than Sylvia Moor in Louisa May Alcott's *Moods* as an example of this.

<sup>5</sup> Michel Bakhtin, in *The Dialogic Imagination* (U. Texas P: 1981), notes that "Time as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, become artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged or responsive to the movements of time, plot and history" (84). In this sense, time and space in *The Morgesons* adapts to the linear confines of the marriage plot, as symbolized by Desmond's arrival in Surrey. In defining his term *chronotope*, he asserts that "[chronotopes] are the organizing centers for the fundamental narrative events of the novel. The chronotope is the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied" (250). Bakhtin's motif of knotting may also serve as a metaphor for 'tying the knot,' as it were. However, Bakhtin's notion that "novelistic time is thoroughly cut off from nature and from natural and mythological cycles" seems to run counter to Kristeva's system of time classification (128).

<sup>6</sup> Bender's description of Edna is in direct opposition to Sandra Gilbert's analysis of Edna as an Aphrodite figure. Bender feels this particular reading contradicts Chopin's interest in "the larger question of the female (and male) self in *life*" (221).

<sup>7</sup> While Bender connects many of the major symbols in the novel (the parrot, music) to Chopin's interest in Darwin, he fails to discuss the role of the mosquito.

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<sup>8</sup> Due to the wide array of editions of *The Awakening*, I have decided to forgo using page numbers when quoting from the text; instead only chapter numbers will appear parenthetically.

<sup>9</sup> The OED cites Eugene O'Neill's drama *Anna Christie* (1922) as the first use of the word tramp.

<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that infectious diseases played a significant role in Chopin's life; her husband Oscar died of swamp fever in January of 1883.

**Chapter 3: “Furtive Malice” or “Piercing Sympathy?” :  
“Ally”ing Edith Wharton’s *Summer* against Sentimental Fiction**

In chapter 2 of this dissertation, I explored the ways in which two late nineteenth-century white American women writers, Elizabeth Stoddard and Kate Chopin, construct their narratives around spaces and times. In these novels, awakening becomes affiliated with spatial, as well as emotional, movements. For Stoddard and Chopin, an awakening is very much a transitional state, carrying with it the corresponding emotion of excitement, and a belief in spatial possibilities. But for two twentieth-century authors, Edith Wharton and Nella Larsen, the excitement and possibility of awakening are foreclosed as the protagonists of their novels find themselves contained within marriage. In both *Summer* and *Quicksand*, we find examples of incomplete or failed awakenings. Sentimentalist themes are embedded within each novel, but for Charity Royall and Helga Crane, an awakening to the power of emotional affiliation (a power implied by sentimentalism) never entirely reaches a level of complete consciousness.

Edith Wharton’s so-called New England novel *Summer* (1917) has usually been given somewhat less critical attention than her texts which focus on the hypocrisy of Old New York (i.e. *The Custom of the Country*, *The Age of Innocence*, *The House of Mirth*). *Summer* has been seen to varying degrees as a regional text, an escapist exercise for Wharton, (who wrote the novel against the horrific backdrop of World War I France), and a novel about incest. Thus, the novel has tended not to figure prominently into many full-length book discussions on Wharton. Books by Susan Goodman, Gloria Ehrlich, and Carol Wershoven barely touch on *Summer*.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps this is because the novel itself is an anomaly; it is Wharton’s fullest and most paradoxical exploration of a young woman’s

sexual awakening.

The ending of the text, in which Charity Royall, pregnant by her lover the architect Lucius Harney, enters into a marriage with her guardian, Lawyer Royall, has prompted several contradictory readings. Elizabeth Ammons describes *Summer* as “Wharton’s bluntest criticism of the patriarchal sexual economy,” viewing the marriage between Charity and Royall as “not merely depressing; [but] sick,” the culmination of Wharton’s exploration of the theme of incest (133). Taking a more positive view, Cynthia Griffin Woolf, while admitting that “the ending of *Summer* is far from idyllic,” (243) finds that the text “offers a suggestion for attainable happiness—paradoxically, a happiness thoroughly colored by imperfection” (232).

Both Ammons’s and Woolf’s readings of *Summer* center around its male figures. Lawyer Royall and Lucius Harney, as representatives of the world of patriarchy, are generally looked at in tandem, as Charity moves beyond the threshold of sexual passion and into the confines of motherhood and marriage. The two men serve as catalysts for Charity’s behavior, or so the standard interpretations imply.

The alternatives posited by Royall and Harney may not, however, be so distinct after all. A fresh reading of *Summer* locates an anti-romantic alternative within the character of Ally Hawes. As a young woman who is physically crippled, Ally is juxtaposed against the two other invalid women in *Summer*: Miss Hatchard and Verena Marsh, each of whom Charity feels little sympathy for and against whom she situates herself, both physically and emotionally. It is Ally, friend and seamstress, whose capacity for sympathy Charity tends to reject in favor of her own developing capacity for sexual passion, in whom Wharton implicitly relocates the threads of a sentimentalist

discourse she explicitly rejected in discussions of her novels.

Wharton, as is well known, identified herself as writing from a male, mainly European tradition. She confirms this allegiance to a masculine tradition in both her autobiography *A Backward Glance* (1933) and her work *On the Writing of Fiction* (1924). Indeed, in the latter, Wharton's allegiance to a male canon goes well beyond her overt praise of Balzac, Thackeray, Proust and Henry James. Even her style of writing itself demonstrates a commitment to a male European aesthetic, as she employs third person masculine pronouns throughout her text.<sup>2</sup> In *A Backward Glance*, Wharton famously remarks that “[f]or years I had wanted to draw life as it really was in the derelict mountain villages of New England, a life even in my time, and a thousandfold more a generation earlier, utterly unlike that seen through the rose-coloured spectacles of my predecessors, Mary Wilkins and Sarah Orne Jewett” (1002). More recently, however, scholars such as Candace Waid have sought to retract the distance that Wharton so diligently forged between her own work and that of the so-called New England regionalists.<sup>3</sup>

As I mentioned in my opening chapter, trying to establish a uniform definition of what is meant by *sentimental literature* has become increasingly complex, as authors like June Howard have indicated in the last few years. In trying to answer her own question “What is Sentimentality?”, she concludes by recognizing that “[. . . no single] account of the form [can] end discussion and produce a consensus for a single definition of sentimentality” (76). In my discussion of Stowe and Alcott in chapter 1 of this dissertation, I relied upon Joanne Dobson's “reclaiming” of sentimental literature in her 1997 article, in which she asserts that “in the sentimental vision, the greatest threat is the

tragedy of separation, of severed human ties: the death of a child, lost love, failed or disrupted family connections, distorted or unsympathetic community, or the loss of the hope of reunion and/or reconciliation in the hereafter” (267). Dobson uses the motif of keepsakes as a means of illustrating this vision, a motif that Wharton herself will adapt and subvert in *Summer* by means of the blue brooch that Harney buys for Charity during the Independence Day celebration. This piece of jewelry and the circumstances of its purchase and (re)circulation offers another opportunity for Wharton to reframe nineteenth-century sentimental aesthetics within her own, more realistic style .<sup>4</sup>

Another dimension of sentimentalism moves beyond the themes outlined above and concentrates on the psychological dynamics of emotional affiliation. Howard asserts that in defining “an artifact or gesture sentimental, [. . .] we mark a moment when the discursive processes that construct emotion become visible. Most commonly- we are recognizing that a trope from the immense repertory of sympathy and domesticity has been deployed [. . .]” (76). In Joyce W. Warren’s introduction to the essay collection *The (Other) American Traditions: Nineteenth-Century Women Writers* (1993), she reminds us that “[s]entimentality requires an awareness of other people, a mental dialogue or displacement. The person who observes the sentiment-provoking situation must identify with or at least sympathize with the unfortunate person(s) whom he/she observes” (11).

Warren’s remark indirectly leads us to an examination of the distinctions between *sympathy* and *empathy*. A comparison of the two terms via *The Oxford English Dictionary* reveals that *empathy*, as we use it today, is a word derived from the twentieth century, specifically from German psychology (*Einfühlung*). The *OED* cites its first

official usage as late as 1904, and defines *empathy* as “[t]he power of projecting one’s personality into (and fully comprehending) the object of contemplation”. However, the word *sympathy* predates *empathy* by several centuries, with its first known usage given in 1662. Definition 3b. of *sympathy* is given as “[t]he quality or state of being affected by the condition of another with a feeling similar or corresponding to that of the other; the fact or capacity for entering into or sharing the feelings of another or others; fellow feeling. Also, a feeling or frame of mind evoked by and responsive to some external influence.” This last definition seems to indicate that *sympathy* is the generative term, from which the concept of *empathy* evolved. Thus, *empathy*, as we know it today, was not a term authors of sentimental novels would have been acquainted with or used.

It appears to me to be appropriate, then, when discussing a novel against the backdrop/tradition of the sentimental novel, to conflate the terms *sympathy* and *empathy*. In so doing, I certainly do not mean to suggest that actual differences do not exist between them in contemporary psychoanalytic discourse. But it is the case that *sympathy* stems from compassion, and *empathy* from *sympathy*, rendering *sympathy* the more significant term of the two.<sup>5</sup>

Adam Smith, in his non-fiction text *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, first published in 1759, distinguishes between compassion (which he equates with pity) and sympathy. In describing *sympathy*, Smith notes that “[i]n every passion of which the mind of man is susceptible, the emotions of the by-stander always correspond to what, by bringing the case home to himself, he imagines, should be the sentiments of the sufferer” (4). To us, as readers in the early twenty-first century, Smith’s definition of sympathy sounds surprisingly similar to the *OED*’s description of empathy. From this evidence, it

seems clear that late nineteenth and early-twentieth century readers of fiction would not have made a distinction between the capacity for sympathy and the capacity for empathy. Both conditions imply a connection between sufferer and reader, an affiliation of compassion.

The connection between sympathy and suffering is made even more manifest by Marianne Noble in her book *The Masochistic Pleasures of Sentimental Literature*. Noble states that “[i]n that it brings people together through sympathetic extensions into each others’ experiences, the sentimental project is one of unification” (64). Noble goes on to say that “[s]entimentalism does not simply idealize the compassionate observation of another; it offers an intuitive and visceral understanding of the other’s fear and anguish. A state of union, then, is achieved through suffering, which is the mechanism enabling one to ‘enter into’ another person, as it were” (65).

The ability to be sympathetic is not only an important characteristic of women’s sentimental fiction, but also an ability which is given particular prominence in psychoanalytic feminist theory. In the 1991 collection *Women’s Growth in Connection: Writings from the Stone Center*, various psychologists explore the relevance of sympathy and empathy in women’s psychological lives. Here again, the psychological dynamics of emotional affiliation are given emphasis. In her discussion of empathy, Judith V. Jordan asserts that

For empathy to be effective, there must be a balance of affective and cognitive, subjective and objective, active and passive. Self boundary flexibility is important, since there is an ‘as if’ quality to the experience, whereby one places one’s self in the other’s shoes or looks through the

other's eyes. There is a momentary overlap between self and other representations as distinctions between self and other blur experientially.

(69-70)

Within *Summer*, the capacity for sympathy/empathy is a crucial emotional strategy for Charity to learn. As her sexual awakening becomes yoked to her affinity with the exterior landscape, her ability to sympathize alternately expands and contracts. Charity's capacity for sympathy is most polarized during her trip to the Mountain to reconnect with the mother she does not remember; nevertheless, she is unable to sustain this ability for long. Instead, she traps herself within a marriage that may prove her undoing. Rather than being a giver of sympathy (the metaphoric reader of a sentimental text), Charity becomes the receiver of sympathy, enmeshed within the text, ensnared within the very lace of sentimentality she tries to create.

Thus it become essential to examine the ways in which Charity does, or does not, sympathize with the people around her, not only Lucius Harney and Lawyer Royall, but particularly, I would argue, with the other women within the text about whom Charity is distinctly ambivalent. While Ally Hawes is her closest friend, she is nonetheless viewed by Charity as, at best, an uneasy ally and sympathizer.

Charity's budding romance with Harney serves to foreclose what little capacity for sympathy Charity is able to forge throughout the text. By the end of the novel, it is Charity herself who generates a reader's sympathy, moving from active single young woman to a passive, married, pregnant one. Thus I would argue that Wharton, in creating this young woman who only begins to awaken not only to her own sexuality but also to her own capacity for sympathy, is engaged in an act of *sentimental decentralization*,

(*Summer 115*), wherein the essential structure of a sentimental novel is both embraced, and yet, subverted. This is accomplished not just through the marriage of Charity to Royall, but through the tension that punctuates Charity and Ally's encounters, and, to a lesser degree, the anxiety provoked by Lucius's elderly cousin Miss Hatchard and the domestic worker Verena Marsh. By positioning Charity against this trio of crippled women, Wharton subtly re-doubles the trio of landscapes (North Dormer, the Mountain and Nettleton). These women represent three psychological (as opposed to spatial) alternatives to Charity's own path, none of them particularly attractive to her.

In a move that clearly links *Summer* to the conventions of sentimental fiction, Wharton uses the motif of treasure as a means of comparing Ally (the most fully developed female character after Charity herself) to Harney: the "treasures" (keepsakes) that Ally creates (and which Charity compensates her for) versus the treasures which Harney gives her (but for which there is an unspoken price). And Wharton, as we shall see, was also comfortable in using the image of treasure to describe her own burgeoning sexuality in her letters to her lover Morton Fullerton.

By threading her narrative around these sentimental figures (i.e. the secretive lover, the overbearing father figure, the crippled young spinster, the lame elderly spinster, the deaf pauper), Wharton actually allies her text against them. Charity's wavering capacity for sympathy must be measured against these figures, particularly against the female trio of Ally Hawes, Miss Hatchard, and Verena Marsh. As Diane Prince Herndl writes in her introduction to *Figuring Feminine Illness in American Fiction and Culture, 1840-1940*,

[. . .] each new appearance [of the invalid woman] carries with it the 'ghosts' of the others. Studying the figure of the invalid therefore involves considering not just the particular case but that case in the context of other appearances of the figure. Like a musical figure that structures the composition and is repeated with variations, the literary figure becomes recognizable and effective through its repetitions. (1-2)

As crippled figures repeat throughout *Summer*, attention must be paid to them, especially to the most visible of these three women, Ally Hawes.

Ally is the one female friend Charity has, and her work as a seamstress provides the only role model of a woman earning an honest living in North Dorset. However, Ally's work is sewing garments that are ultimately used within the patriarchal system, aiding and abetting heterosexual relationships via aesthetic decoration.

Wharton's introduction of the mode of decoration has important implications for discussing *Summer*. Candace Waid, in her book *Edith Wharton's Letters from the Underworld: Fictions of Women and Writing*, has noted that "[w]hat becomes increasingly apparent throughout Wharton's writings is her tendency to stress structure and plot as the formal requirements of the real while denouncing a feminine aesthetic that focuses on surfaces" (9). This feminine aesthetic, notes Waid, "is one of decoration and ornamentation that substitutes description for structure" (9). This dichotomy, structure versus decoration, becomes emblematic of the ways in which Lucius Harney, the architect, and Ally Hawes, the seamstress, function in *Summer*. On the surface, it is Harney who provides the structure of the plot; as Carol Wershoven discusses in her study of Wharton, he is the male intruder who positions himself within the small town of North

Dormer. Ally's role in the text upon an initial reading seems minor, decorative, indeed, so small that in fact she is barely alluded to in most discussions of the text. As a seamstress, she uses her hands to redesign small spaces of fabric; Harney's architectural abilities lie within a larger realm.

Ally's decorative function in the text should by no means minimize her importance. After all, Wharton relies on notions of decoration and structure as motifs in her writing throughout her career. Her first important publication, *The Decoration of Houses*, written in conjunction with Ogden Codman Jr., sought in its own way to break down the dichotomy between these two terms:

[A building's] decoration must harmonize with the structural limitations (which is by no means the same thing as saying that all decoration must be structural) and from this harmony of the general scheme of decoration with the building, and of the details of the decoration from each other, springs the rhythm that distinguishes architecture from mere construction. Thus all good architecture and good decoration (which, it must never be forgotten, *is only interior architecture*) must be based on rhythm and logic. A house, or room, must be planned as it is because it could not, in reason, be otherwise; must be decorated as it is because no other decoration would harmonize as well with the plan. (10-emphasis original)

As Amy Kaplan has pointed out, this fusion of decoration and structure "transforms the definition of woman's work from that of conspicuous consumption into the activity of construction. Rather than simply reject the traditionally female realm of domesticity, Wharton appropriates the traditionally male discourse of architecture and

brings it into the interior space which had consigned women to decorating themselves as one among many ornaments” (78).

In constructing the characters of Lucius Harney and Ally Hawes, Wharton may be committing yet another act of constructive appropriation. After all, “[t]he architect and the decorator are often aware that they are regarded by their clients as the possessors of some strange craft like black magic or astrology” (*Decoration of Houses* 19). Ally’s “pale face” is identified with “the ghost of wasted opportunities,” and she tends to make an appearance just prior to or directly after romantic encounters between Lucius and Charity, “looking over [Charity’s] shoulder” (84). In fact, Charity is often observed running away from this ghost, moving instead towards a sexual awakening.

Reading *Summer* against the backdrop of Wharton’s architectural treatise necessitates a fresh look at the connection between Charity Royall and Ally Hawes, and also , at the relationship between Wharton’s protagonist and all her surroundings. The town of North Dormer is “*abandoned of men*, left apart by railway, trolley, telegraph and all the forces that link life to life in modern communities” (5- emphasis added). What remains then, is a community linked together by less modern (and masculine) means.

North Dormer, it is implied then, is a town comprised mostly of women who are “indoors, engaged in languid household drudgery,” whose only remaining utilitarian institutions are the church and the library (4). The church in North Dormer functions in Charity’s life not as a center of religious worship, per se, but rather as a site of gossip, a place to be seen, and to be measured; after all, “since Ally Hawes, the poorest girl in the village, had shown herself in church with enviable transparencies about the shoulders, Charity’s hook had travelled faster” (8).

Already, before we have even met Ally Hawes, we begin to see the ragged nature of this uneasy friendship. It is Ally's talent for lace-making that inspires Charity to attempt to crochet lace of her own, to try her hand at this sort of domestic artistry, but not because of any sense of sympathy with Ally. Envy is the driving force at work here, an observation coupled with a sense of inadequacy.

After all, if Ally, the "poorest girl" can make such strides, shouldn't Charity? The image of Charity crocheting her lace is also significant as it offers the first glimpse of her to Lucius Harney, who has invaded Charity's workplace, the library owned by Miss Hatchard. "She was not an expert workman and it had taken her many weeks to make the half-yard of narrow lace which she kept wound around the buckram back of a disintegrated copy of 'The Lamplighter' "(8). Charity has chosen to wind her work around one of the most popular sentimental novels of the nineteenth century. Significantly, it is a novel which goes uncirculated in North Dormer and apparently unread by Charity herself. As Barbara A. White has observed, Charity's lack of interest in reading fiction signals Wharton's violation of a "sacred convention" of sentimental novels (227). However, it should be noted that Charity's "thirst for information," developed shortly after a trip to Nettleton is stifled by the musty atmosphere of the Hatchard Library; "she found it easier to take North Dormer as the norm of the universe than to go on reading" (5). These dual roles of lace-maker and librarian are juxtaposed as antithetical to Charity's true nature, and thus insufficient as means of psychological and social development.

Threaded through Charity and Harney's initial conversation in the Hatchard library is a series of antiromantic images that highlight the implied contrast between

creative and erotic energy. For example, we are told that Harney's eyes are "short-sighted" and that, upon first glance, he appears not to see Charity as something apart from the furnishings of the library itself (8). This raises the question as to how transparent Harney's own vision really is. Harney's inability to see far afield is one which has profound implications for the resolution of his and Charity's romance, as they each see the exterior world very differently. This is exemplified by the following observation: "The fact that, in discovering her, he lost the thread of their conversation, did not escape her attention, and she looked down and smiled. He smiled also" (9). Charity has forgotten the threads of her lace, the decoration; Harney has forgotten the thread of their talk, its structure. Harney, despite his professional position as an architect, is short-sighted. Thus, he would have little interest in Charity's lace-making, an act of construction that is essentially feminine, and hence, of little stature. Perhaps the most profound statement that Harney makes in the entire novel comes in its opening chapter, when he says to Charity, " 'You don't seem strong on architecture,' " a remark that Charity finds mystifying (10). While the reader is conditioned to assume that he is referring to books on architecture, it may well be that Wharton here refers to Charity's interior self. As readers, we are given access to the architecture of Charity's world, the narrow confines of North Dormer, with "lawyer Royall's faded red house at one end to the white church at the other" (4). As Harney's guide through the adjacent towns, Charity proves to be an excellent guide through the landscape and thoroughly in command as she moves him from site to site. Perhaps this is because she circulates in a narrow field of vision herself, trapped between the promising world of Nettleton, and the lawlessness of the Mountain.

But as the novel's plot unfolds, what becomes more difficult for a reader to construct is Charity's sense of herself. It is also difficult to determine to what degree this construction depends not only on the existence of her lover Harney or her guardian, later husband Royall, but on the degree to which Charity generates sympathy for them. If, as Hildegard Hoeller has maintained, "sentimental fiction's central concern [is] with passion: emotional as well as sexual passion," it stands to reason that Charity's fluctuating ability to generate sympathy for others (and to receive it) is another direct result of the overwhelming nature of her awakening sexuality (31). Are sexuality and sympathy compatible emotions, and if so, for whom?

Sympathy and sexuality are paired in one of the most powerful scenes in *Summer*, which takes place at nightfall, outside the Hatchard home, with Charity standing outside Harney's window, watching him without his knowledge. The charged eroticism in this scene is exemplified through the sensual descriptions of Harney's hands. It is through his hands that Charity begins to awaken to her own powers of sympathy.

He was there, a few feet away; and while her soul was tossing on seas of woe he had been quietly sitting at his drawing-board. The sight of those two hands, moving with their usual skill and precision, woke her out of her dream. (69)

Charity notices Harney's hands are "sunburnt [. . .] one holding a pencil and the other a ruler [. . .] moving to and fro over a drawing-board" (69). The most dramatic action that occurs while she is watching is that "one hand abruptly push[es] aside the drawing-board and the other [flings] down the pencil" (69). As she watches Harney wrestle with himself, she begins to feel some sympathy for him: ". . . grief at his grief gathered in her

throat, rose to her eyes and ran over” (71-ellipsis original).<sup>6</sup> Charity’s belief (however mistaken) that she understands his thoughts and feelings at this particular moment in time enables her to contemplate the consummation of their relationship: “It was simply that she had suddenly understood what would happen if she went in” (71). What she imagines is “the long flame burning her from head to foot. But mixed with this feeling was another: the wondering pride in her liking for him, the startled softness that *his sympathy* had put into her heart” (72-emphasis added). Here, Charity’s sexual awakening is explicitly linked to a developing capacity for sympathy.

What is ironic about this scene, for all its erotic energy, is that while Charity is awakening sexually, Harney himself falls asleep. And in so doing, “[t]he sweet expression came back to his lips, and the haggardness faded from his face, leaving it fresh as a baby’s” (73). Harney appears to be regressing, his creative abilities falling by the wayside as he contemplates his relationship with Charity. Once she and Harney cross the threshold and become lovers, “[t]he only reality [is] the wondrous unfolding of her new self, the reaching out to the light of all her contacted tendrils” (122). Charity is blinded by the glittering warmth of this new self. However, in her fascination with her awakening sexuality, Charity’s capacity for sympathy begins to ebb. As their relationship deepens, Charity believes that she is “the only being on earth who really [knows] him [. . .] everything there was to know about him, as minutely and yet unconsciously as a child knows the walls of the room it wakes up in each morning” (120). Here, Charity’s capacity for sympathy is expressed not as a step in an adult’s development, but rather, as a trait possessed by a child. As Wharton herself stated in *The Decoration of Houses*:

[T]he child's visible surroundings form the basis of the best, because of the most unconscious, cultivation: and not of aesthetic cultivation only, since, as has been pointed out, the development of any artistic taste, if the child's general training is of the right sort, indirectly broadens the whole view of life. (183)

Thus, Charity's minute and unconscious knowledge of Harney, her sense of sympathy for him, rests on a childlike, and hence, mistaken set of guidelines. After all, when Charity tells Harney, " 'I know the way you must feel about me. . . .telling you such things. . . . ' " ". . . once more, as [Charity] spoke, she became aware that [Harney] was no longer listening" (115-ellipses original).

For Wharton's protagonist, Harney's hands function as erotic symbols which seemingly enable Charity to increase her sexual and sympathetic capacities. But they are as misleading as Harney's behavior. Instead of listening to Charity, giving her the gift of sympathy, he uses his hands to enclose her: "He was the new Harney again, the Harney abruptly revealed in that embrace, who seemed so penetrated with the joy of her presence that he was utterly careless of what she was thinking or feeling" (111-112). When he begins to discuss the possibility of marriage with Charity, it coincides with his hand touching hers. "His voice seemed like a stranger's: nothing was left in it of the vibrations she knew. Her hand lay inertly under his, and she left it there, and raised her hand, trying to answer him. But the words died in her throat" (143).

Harney's hands have a similar restraining effect on Charity during their Fourth of July trip to Nettleton. This excursion, their first as a couple, is punctuated by their first kiss that evening at Nettleton Lake. Nettleton, with its wider potential for possibilities, is

also where Harney purchases the blue brooch for Charity. This scene is, in its own way, as powerful and rich as the scene at Harney's window. Charity's desires are rendered quite lyrically:

While [Harney's] watch was being examined Charity leaned over the glass counter where, on a background of dark blue velvet, pins, rings and brooches glittered like the moon and stars. She had never seen jewellery [sic] so near by, and she longed to lift the glass lid and plunge her hand among the shining treasures. But already Harney's watch was repaired, and he laid his hand on her arm and drew her from her dream.<sup>7</sup>

(91)

Charity's affinity for jewelry is significant. Metaphorically, it points to her desire to assert herself, to plunge in. The use of the phrase "shining treasures" unites Charity with Ally Hawes, who possesses her own trunk of "mysterious treasures" (128). But, as we shall see, Charity cannot see beyond Ally's limitations in order to fully receive the gift of sympathy which Ally offers her; instead, with Harney, her potential for self-assertion is subdued, transmuted into a scene of sentimental keepsake-giving. Harney gives her *his* brooch; "she felt a little box being pressed into her hand" (91).

Here at the jewelry store is also where Wharton gives us further evidence of the dichotomy she has established regarding decoration and structure. Charity's first impulse is for the "gold lily of the valley pin with flowers" (91). This pin, when viewed through Harney's eyes becomes "mere trumpery" to Charity; he steers her towards a "small round stone, blue as a mountain lake, with little sparks of light all around it" (92). Harney's eye goes for structure; Charity's for mere decoration. The female vision (and thus, by

implication, Ally's vision) is undermined by a male gaze. Shari Benstock, in her 1994 biography of Wharton *No Gifts from Chance*, points out that Wharton received many pieces of jewelry from her mother Lucretia Rhineland Jones- one of the few ways she was able to offer her daughter a concrete display of her affection (58). Jewelry, for Wharton, was a gift given from one woman to another. But as critics are careful to point out, Wharton shared a remarkably ambivalent relationship with her mother, as evidenced by her decision when publishing *A Backward Glance* to omit any portrait of her mother. Candace Waid offers an interpretation of the blue pin as both "a sign of protected motherhood," one which links her to her future as a mother and a marker of what she believes is "the failure of female storytellers" (117).

I believe the significance of the brooch goes beyond either of these readings. The brooch is an emblem of failed romance, the promise of motherhood, but also of the unrealized potential of women's creative potential which extends past storytelling to encompass the domestic arts. Charity's own ability to choose for herself is stifled by Harney and his insistence that structure should take precedence over decoration; she is not allowed to unearth her own treasure, explore her own desires. By contrast, Ally Hawes is a creative young woman with her own treasures, but she is also a physical cripple, her sexuality subverted into her sewing. Ally's garments are for others and provide an income; Charity's brooch is a treasure that is never completely hers.

In using the word *treasure* to describe both the jewelry Charity sees in Nettleton and later, the discarded accessories which Ally stores in an old trunk, Wharton juxtaposes two distinct means of awakening. On the one hand, *treasure* functions as a metaphor for female sexuality. This is borne out not only by a careful reading of *Summer*, but by

Wharton's own use of the term in her love letters to the journalist Morton Fullerton, with whom she had an extramarital affair from 1908 to 1910. An examination of these letters reveals several passages which make reference to the notion of treasure. In a letter from early March of 1908, Wharton writes:

And I'm so afraid that the treasures I long to unpack for you, that have come to me in magic ships from enchanted islands, are only, to you, the old familiar red calico & beads of the clever trader, who has had dealings in every latitude, & knows just what to carry in the hold to please the simple native- I'm so afraid of this, that often & often I stuff my shining treasures back into their box, lest I should see you smiling at them!  
(*Letters* 135)

Clearly, the treasures Wharton refers to are her own sexual desires, awakened by Fullerton during these years.<sup>8</sup> The letter continues on, as Wharton describes with great intensity the "ripple of flame, "a great golden blur" which she experiences when she is around Fullerton.

In another letter written in August of the same year, she tells Fullerton that "whatever those months were to you, to me they were a great gift, a wonderful enrichment; & still I rejoice & give thanks for them! You woke me from a long lethargy, a dull acquiescence in conventional restrictions, a needless self-effacement. If I was awkward & inarticulate it was because, literally, all one side of me was asleep. (*Letters* 161). The "great gift," the treasure that Fullerton bestows upon Wharton is the capacity to experience her own sexuality.

But by also connecting the notion of treasures to Ally Hawes in *Summer*, Wharton

allows for another possibility, one which focuses on the creative potential of women.

Ally removes a pair of satin shoes from this treasure chest, one which completes Charity's outfit and lead to her re-design. Harney is not the only one who has treasures to give, and this is, in and of itself, a significant statement for Wharton to make.

Wharton skillfully arrests a reader's attention away from this alternate meaning of "shining treasure" by working Harney's blue brooch into a sentimental plot. Initially, Wharton uses the brooch as an emblem of Charity and Harney's failed romance; it soon develops into a metaphor for the unborn child Charity is carrying, "her only treasure" (197).

The brooch also becomes Charity's only form of collateral once she visits Dr. Merkle in Nettleton to confirm her pregnancy. She is unable to pay for her visit, despite being loaned money by Ally. Her inability to pay Dr. Merkle is paralleled by her trip to the Mountain, where Charity attempts to compensate the family she stays with overnight by leaving behind a garment sewn by Ally Hawes. "She laid the chemise on the table and stealing across the floor lifted the latch and went out. . . ." (180-ellipsis original).

In both of these cases, Charity's form of payment seems somewhat woeful, inadequate. But by leaving keepsakes behind in Nettleton and the Mountain, Charity is signaling her participation in a sentimental tradition of gift-giving and inserts herself into these alternate landscapes. Yet unlike a traditional sentimental novel, in *Summer* the gifts are recirculated. Her gift of a chemise seems singularly inappropriate when her hosts lack proper food. And Charity has not given her brooch away freely; she is coerced into doing so. Her baby will have a father, but it will be Lawyer Royall, not Lucius Harney. Charity is acutely aware of her own discomfort as a gift-giver; "She had given [Harney]

all she had- but what was it compared to the other gifts life held for him?" (135).

Charity's unease in her role as gift-giver inevitably raises comparisons with novels of Wharton's female predecessors, those women whose "rose-and-lavender pages" she publicly scorned (*Backward Glance* 1003).<sup>9</sup> Charity's relationship with Dr. Merkle, unlike the unnamed narrator's relationship with Mrs. Todd in Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, is not based on an equality of exchange. The information that Charity seeks (confirmation of her pregnancy) is not of mutual benefit. Dr. Merkle tells Charity that accepting the pin as payment " ' . . . ain't in my line and I do it only as a favour. . . .but if you're a mind to leave that brooch as a pledge, I don't say no. . . .Yes, of course you can get it back when you bring me my money. . . . ' " (155- ellipses original). Charity's choices are to leave the brooch behind, or risk written documentation of her visit being sent to Lawyer Royall. Metaphorically, her choices are to surrender "a girl's sentimental fancy" or risk being placed into the all too real world of twentieth-century illegal abortion (155).

In Jewett's novel, as in *Summer*, the ending is framed around an act of gift-giving. Mrs. Todd gives the narrator her cherished coral pin, which she herself had been given by her friend Joanna, who had refused the gift from Mrs. Todd's husband. The pin becomes a symbol of the friendship between women, and of the mutual sympathy the two have shared over the summer at Dunnet Landing. Dr. Merkle, unlike Mrs. Todd, can only feign sympathy for Charity's plight, couching it in a series of malicious grins: " Dr. Merkle, still smiling, also rose. 'Why do you run off in such a hurry? You can stretch out right here on my sofa. . . . ' " (154-ellipsis original).

Charity's desperate determination to retrieve her brooch from Dr. Merkle's evil

clutches comes about on the heels of her hasty marriage to Lawyer Royall. The way in which Charity recovers the brooch, and its implications for interpreting the ending of the novel, are significant. Charity wants it as a remembrance of her time with Harney: “She wanted it for her baby; she meant it, in some mysterious way, to be a link between Harney’s child and its unknown father” (197). Yet she is only able to reclaim it by using her new husband’s money. “Trembling and hating herself while she did it, she laid Mr. Royall’s money on the table, and catching up the brooch she fled out of the room and the house. . . .” (197-ellipsis original). Charity cannot view the money as her own; it is Royall’s. But because she has used the entire forty dollars Royall has given her to re-outfit herself, she has no alternative but to tell Royall, “ ‘Oh, I’d rather let Ally Hawes make the few things I want’ ” (199).

Reclaiming her brooch means re-allying herself with this young woman whose presence, more than Miss Hatchard’s and Verena Marsh’s (the two older women with whom Charity interacts), has tended to unnerve her. Thus, the ending of the novel is made doubly ironic. Ally has finally gotten her wish; she is a participant in the fabric of Charity’s doomed romance. She has asserted her limited power, found herself another opportunity.

Ally Hawes is “the pale ghost of wasted opportunities,” from one of the poorest families in North Dormer (84). Her older sister, Julia, escaped North Dormer only by means of prostitution. Ally’s “clever fingers” have saved her from her sister’s fate; she is a seamstress who manages to eke out a meager living (87). She is also depicted as disfigured, “walk[ing] slowly [. . .] with her uneven, limping step” (106). Ally’s deformity links her to characters usually found in nineteenth-century American

sentimental fiction. In *The Lamplighter*, the novel Charity uses to wind her lace around in *Summer*'s opening scene, one of Gerty's role models is Miss Emily Graham, a spinster who was accidentally blinded when she was 16 by her fiancé, Gerty's biological father Philip Amory.<sup>10</sup> Emily's blindness has given her a quiet dignity, a calm perspective of acceptance which Gerty seeks to emulate as she develops into an adult.

Rosemarie Garland Thomson, in her article "Crippled Girls and Lame Old Women: Sentimental Spectacles of Sympathy in Nineteenth-Century American Women's Writing," analyzes figures of physically disabled characters in sentimental fiction. "Replete with a rich traditional array of multiple significations, the physically disabled figure provides a pliable and congenial vehicle for attending to reform, feeling, religion, domesticity, and the body—the overlapping primary arenas of concern that characterize sentimentalism" (128). These figures serve as sites of anxiety and sympathy. As Garland notes, in the traditional sentimental novel, "[t]he narrator and reader witness the body which indexes the suffering to which they respond emotionally and then move to ameliorate" (133). Such is the case in *The Lamplighter*, where Emily's suffering is relieved upon being reunited with her lost love, Philip Amory. In *Summer*, Ally is portrayed less as a sufferer due to her physical disability as opposed to the suffering she endures when Charity excludes her from her confidence.

Charity excludes Ally from her innermost reflections, even though the latter is instrumental in helping Charity rendezvous with Harney. Later, she comes to her rescue by loaning her needed funds to travel to Dr. Merkle in Nettleton. It is also Ally who trims Charity's straw hat for her fourth of July excursion with Harney. Candace Waid has remarked upon the sexual connotations inherent within the description of Charity's

hat, its “white straw, with a drooping brim and cherry-coloured lining” (84). For Waid, the description of this hat is symbolic of the ripening of Charity’s sexuality (103). As its creator, Ally is a vicarious participant in Charity’s excitement, and later, in her undoing, as Charity loses the precious hat while watching the fireworks. Royall’s taunt of “ ‘You whore- you damn- bare-headed whore, you’ ” implies that being hatless is analogous to a young woman’s losing her virginity (103). But what Charity has actually lost is not her sexual purity (she and Harney are not yet lovers), but her connection to Ally through the hat she designed for her.

Yet Ally’s labor is not enough to keep Charity close to her. Upon her return to North Dormer after the Independence Day celebration, Charity cannot bear the thought of recounting her experiences (which include her first kiss) to Ally:

At the thought of having to see her, of having to meet her eyes and answer and evade her questions, the whole horror of the previous night’s adventure rushed back upon Charity. What had been a feverish nightmare became a cold and inescapable fact. Poor Ally, at that moment, represented North Dormer, with all its mean curiosities, its furtive malice, its sham unconsciousness of evil. (106-107)

Wharton’s epithet, “Poor Ally,” serves as a subversion of traditional sentimental fiction. The reader is expected to feel sympathy for her, not because of any physical deformity, but because of her sheer ignorance of the social role she represents to her friend. Charity is unable to envision Ally as an individual with her own capacity for sympathy. She never imagines that if her “tender-hearted” friend were to hear her story, that she would keep silent on her behalf (107). It is at this juncture that Charity begins her first, aborted

trip to the Mountain, the place where she spent part of her early childhood.

Charity also seeks to avoid Ally after spending the afternoon at Miss Hatchard's, preparing for the second public celebration in the novel, Old Home Week:

“Will you come over now and try on your dress?” Ally asked, looking at her with wistful admiration. “I want to be sure the sleeves don't rack up the same as they did yesterday.”

Charity looked at her with dazzled eyes. “Oh, it's lovely,” she said, and hastened away without listening to Ally's protest. (121)

Having spurned her friend, she hastens to meet Harney. When she gets back after their tryst at the little house, she is met with a surprise: “When she opened her door a wonder arrested her” (127). Ally has been by, leaving her new dress, veil and “a pair of slim white satin shoes that Ally had produced from an old trunk in which she stored mysterious treasures” (128). In so doing, Ally performs a distinctly demonstrative gesture, imparting sympathy via the clothing she has designed.

Donating the satin shoes is a significant act of gift-giving, one that Charity fails to appreciate. Finding these items on her bed reminds her of her earlier dream of being Harney's bride. “She no longer had such visions. . . . warmer splendours had displaced them. . . .but it was stupid of Ally to have paraded all those white things on her bed [. . .]” (128-ellipses 1 and 2 original). Ally has transgressed, crossed the line from “tender-hearted” to “stupid.” By re-labeling Ally, Wharton manages to assert her disdain for the overtly sentimental. Ally's silent act of sympathy earns her no emotional rewards. Instead, Charity disapproves of her lack of discretion.

Charity's mixed emotions towards Ally points to Wharton's own ambivalence

surrounding sentimental fiction and its overt concern with sympathy. “If women are to exist for others, sympathy connects women to those they are required to serve [. . .] If women are to remain in the domestic realm, sympathy prepares them for such tasks as tending to bodily needs” (Garland 130). However, in Wharton’s text, Ally’s desire to tend to Charity goes unappreciated, and in fact, Charity even goes so far as to rage against her.

Shortly after Harney leaves Charity for New York, ostensibly to extricate himself from his engagement to Miss Annabel Balch, Charity finds herself unable to escape spending time with Ally:

But the faithful Ally could not be long avoided. For the first few days of the Old Home Week festivities Charity escaped her by roaming the hills all day when she was not at her post at the library; but after that a period of rain set in, and one pouring afternoon, Ally, sure that she would find Charity indoors, came around to the red house with her sewing. (146)

Wharton positions the two young women within Charity’s bedroom in a way that is vaguely reminiscent of a typical sentimental novel. Charity has “her idle hands in her lap,” and Ally sits facing her “in a low-rushed bottom chair, her work pinned to her knee, and her thin lips pursed up as she bent above it” (146-147). Charity’s movements are static; her hands, unlike her friend’s, are unable to function, to create. Ally’s hands are mobile, and she puts her entire body into her sewing. In effect, sewing functions as a substitute for female sexuality. Ally’s mouth, her hands, her lower body, all play a part in ensuring the gratification that arises from the decorative act. It is Charity who appears crippled in this scene, her body struggling due to pregnancy and despair. With Harney’s

departure, she has lost “all spontaneity of feeling” (146). Then, from Ally, she receives confirmation of Harney’s engagement to Annabel Balch.

Charity seems to view Ally as complicit in moving the romantic relationship between Harney and Miss Balch forward; in an ironic twist, the clothing that Ally is sewing in Charity’s bedroom is for Harney’s fiancée. Once Ally verbalizes the fact of Harney’s engagement to Annabel, Charity is seized with anger and rips the lace blouse apart. She has moved from being a lace-maker to a lace-breaker. Any chance of developing a more sympathetic relationship with Ally is essentially gone. Charity tells her friend that “ ‘I hate other people’s clothes- it’s just as if they were there themselves’ ” (147). Her remark indicates an understanding of the way clothing functions as an extension of the body itself, the ability of decoration to function as interior architecture. (This also offers a means of interpreting Charity’s decision to leave one of her garments on the Mountain.) And her emotional demand to Ally: “ ‘Oh, go-go-go-or I’ll hate you too. . . .’ ” suggests that Charity is all too aware of her disappearing capacity for sympathy (149-ellipsis original). Certainly, Wharton is not the first woman author to explore a connection between outer garments and inner emotions. As we will see in Chapter 4, *Quicksand* is another novel which links clothing and interior desires.

It is Ally who gives Charity Harney’s last letter, her eyes reflecting a “piercing sympathy” (156). Once again, Charity flees her friend, here for the hope that Harney will give her a definitive sign of her “sovereign right” to be Harney’s wife (155). However, the letter’s contents demonstrate no opportunity for a future romantic reconciliation. Instead, by giving Charity Harney’s message, Ally inadvertently helps propel Charity towards the Mountain. This scene represents a point in the text in which Charity’s

awakening to the limitations of the romance plot is under-realized. In turning to the Mountain's unknown inhabitants rather than her only friend, Charity's full awakening to an alternative that includes creativity and female friendship is undercut. She cannot look past Ally's role as messenger within the romance plot to her potential as a role model of creative self-sufficiency. Perhaps this is due to Wharton's demonstrated ambivalence about endorsing overt sentimentality.

Charity's visit to the Mountain exposes her facilitating emotional capacities. She anticipates that she will be the recipient of her mother's sympathy; she will recognize the similarities in their situations: "[. . .] whatever her mother's subsequent life had been, she could hardly help remembering the past, and receiving a daughter who was facing the trouble she had known"(164). But, in a darkly ironic twist, Mary Hyatt dies just prior to Charity's trip. As a result of her death, Charity is denied yet another scene of sentimental reconciliation. Charity's "reunion" with her mother is one of Wharton's most disturbing episodes from any of her novels. Instead of sympathy, she finds ragged indifference and a poverty that chills her blood. She is forced to assist with preparations for Mary Hyatt's burial: "Charity's hands grew cold as they touched her" (171). Once more, Wharton employs hand imagery to hint at the tenuousness of human connections. For Charity, "it was impossible to imagine any link between them. She herself felt as remote from the poor creature she had seen lowered into her hastily dug grave as if the height of the heavens divided them" (177). Charity's loss is threefold: she has lost Harney, her mother, and Ally Hawes.

Wharton reverses the sentimental plot with great skill here; the minister's eulogy is interrupted by drunken outbursts by Mountain residents, and his words offer Charity no

explicitly religious consolation. “One by one the mighty words fell on Charity’s bowed head, soothing the horror, subduing the tumult, mastering her as they mastered the drink-dazed creatures at her back” (173). Reverend Miles’s sermon is centered around Judgment Day: “ ‘Behold I show you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump. . . . For this corruptible must put on incorruption and this mortal must put on immortality’ ” (173-ellipsis original). God’s love is not mentioned. Thus, Charity is not given any moral example of sympathy to pattern herself on from the only religious figure she has access to in North Dormer. This represents a deliberate distancing by Wharton from a sentimental novel like Cummins’s *The Lamplighter*. It is no wonder that Charity decides to return down from the Mountain, leaving behind one of Ally’s handmade garments as a keepsake.

As she descends from the Mountain, Charity’s pregnancy begins to debilitate her, affecting her body: “She bent her shoulders and struggled on against [the wind] for a while; but presently her breath failed, and she sat down under a ledge of rock overhung by shivering birches” (181). It is exactly at this moment where she seems most crippled that she re-encounters Lawyer Royall. He has come to find her, and bring her home. Within the appearance of incest (itself a sentimental motif), what cannot be ignored is that Charity’s capacity for sympathy is at its strongest (although that itself is relative) when she is around Royall.

Wharton has laid the groundwork for the shift in Charity and Royall’s relationship while simultaneously narrating a “poor romance” (157). The morning after her erotic nature is aroused by the sight of Harney’s hands at his window, Charity is able to explore

feelings of sympathy for her guardian:

At first, she thought [Royall] had been drinking; then she saw that he was sober, but stirred by a deep and stern emotion totally unlike his usually transient angers. And suddenly she understood that, until then, she had never really noticed him or thought about him [. . .] she had regarded him only in relation to herself, and had never speculated as to his own feelings, beyond instinctively concluding that he would not trouble her again in the same way, But now she began to wonder what he was really like. (75)

Charity begins to wonder about Royall's inner life, a significant step towards being able to sympathize with him. Her feelings of "deep hatred," initiated by Royall's unwelcome advances, have become tempered thanks to her own erotic awakening (26).

Royall's speech at the Old Home Week celebration offers Charity (and the reader) further insight into the man who, up until this point, has largely been defined by his unwanted sexual advances. His address is one filled "with pauses that seemed to invite his hearers to silent participation in his thought" (131). Royall is seeking out sympathy from his listeners, and they are able to respond in kind. His address speaks to the theme of sentimental reconciliation. Although the thread of Royall's speech is not about any two people who should reunite, but rather, the people of North Dormer and their town. " 'And to do that, you must keep on loving them while you're away from them . . . .' " (132- ellipsis original). In essence, this is what Charity will wind up doing, returning to North Dormer while having Harney's brooch as the keepsake of her love affair.

Once Royall finds Charity coming down from her night on the Mountain, he proposes marriage for a third time: " 'Do you know what you really want? I'll tell you.

You want to be took home and taken care of ”(186). Charity feebly protests that this isn’t all, that she wants more, but soon she is under Royall’s persuasive powers: ”His tone was so strong and resolute that it was like a supporting arm around her. She felt her resistance melting [. . .] ” (186). The breakdown of Charity’s resistance is directly followed by Royall expressing concern for his horse: “ ‘See here,’ he said gently, ‘old Dan’s come a long distance, and we’ve got to let him take it easy the rest of the way . . . .’ ” (186-ellipsis original). Through this subtle use of dialogue, Wharton (re)establishes Royall as a man who can not only garner sympathy, but who is also capable of giving it.

In *The Writing of Fiction*, Wharton writes that “[dialogue] should be reserved for the culminating moments, and regarded as the spray into which the great wave of narrative breaks in curving toward the watcher on the shore” (73). It should be used “as skillfully and sparingly as the drop of condiment which flavours a whole dish. . . .” (72). Wharton, in her skillful and sparing use of dialogue here, manages to legitimize the town’s faith in Royall as the secular leader of the town. Thus, Reverend Miles’s reaction to Royall’s address during Old Home Week, “ ‘That was a *man* talking,’ ” is given further power (133-emphasis original). Royall is able to give Charity the sympathy she needs, and which she had previously rejected from Ally Hawes, the seamstress depicted as physically, although not emotionally, crippled.

Wharton’s expanded use of the crippled figure, as exemplified through Ally Hawes, is made even more manifest when Ally is contrasted against the other two disabled women in *Summer*, Charity’s employer, Lucius Harney’s cousin Miss Hatchard, and the elderly Verena Marsh, who is hired by Lawyer Royall to act as a live-in buffer

between himself and Charity, who had scorned his advances. As Rosemarie Garland Thomson has noted, “[. . .] disabled figures in nineteenth-century women’s writing range from the brief rhetorical occasion, to the essential but minor instrumental character, to the central narrative figure” (138). In revising the sentimental novel, Wharton presents variations on all three.

Verena Marsh is a minor figure, but one whose presence signals Wharton’s familiarity with sentimental fiction. Verena is from the Creston Almshouse, brought in by Lawyer Royall at Charity’s request to provide her with another woman to live in their house. Verena is not only poor, but deaf. Thus, her proximity does not serve as a practical preventative, since “[. . .] her deafness would have permitted the freest interchange of confidences [between Charity and Lawyer Royall] ” (26). Verena’s value, then, lies in her body. Its existence justifies her presence in the Royall home and the meager income which she is provided with. Verena’s deafness also serves as a relief, for “[it] prevented her from being a source of news” (74). Verena is immune to the circle of gossip Charity has come to view as the “furtive malice that is North Dormer (107).

It is Charity’s conflation of Ally with “furtive malice” rather than “piercing sympathy” that thwarts the development of the emotional dimension of their friendship. Verena has no associations for Charity, but since she cannot converse, neither can play the role of listener, a key part of receiving sympathy. Thus, Verena exists only as a skeletal body in *Summer*; Charity has no access to her emotional life, and as a consequence, has little feelings of sympathy for her.

Miss Hatchard, like Verena Marsh, represents a world beyond North Dormer. Unlike older women in the typical sentimental novel, Miss Hatchard does not function as

an adequate role model or patron for Charity. She is ineffectual, and Lucius Harney, her cousin, reminds Charity that “ ‘[s]he’s excitable, and lives on trifles’ ” (116). One such “trifle” is the Hatchard Memorial Library, a tribute to her late great uncle Honorious Hatchard. The library, Miss Hatchard’s pet project, fails as a house of learning, since it is poorly ventilated, and largely forgotten about, except by the young people who use it as a romantic meeting place. Its abandonment is exemplified by the plaster bust of Minerva, the Roman goddess of wisdom, which adorns the interior and which Charity uses to hang her hat (8). While this gesture may be tongue-in-cheek on Wharton’s part, Charity’s decision to conceal Minerva points to the failure of Miss Hatchard’s design, her lack of wisdom in maintaining the library.

Miss Hatchard is described as having “a long, frail face full of puzzled wrinkles” (16). She is also disfigured, “tapping across the hall on her crutches” (116). She is not a problem-solver; this is evidenced by her reaction to Charity’s desire to be librarian:

Charity’s heart grew cold. She understood that Miss Hatchard had no help to give her and that she would have to fight her way out of her difficulty alone. A deeper sense of isolation overcame her; she felt uncalculably old. “She’s got to be talked to like a baby,” she thought, with a feeling of compassion for Miss Hatchard’s long immaturity. (20)

Miss Hatchard is an ineffectual source of female power. In her presence, Charity feels as if she is the adult in the relationship; as a result, Charity’s feels some strains of sympathy for her early on in the novel.

But as the relationship between Lucius and Charity unfolds, Miss Hatchard’s presence, and Charity’s sense of sympathy for her, fades. Her “pale prim drawing room

was the centre of constant comings and goings from Hepburn, Nettleton, Springfield and even more distant cities” but the woman herself seems fairly peripheral (116). When Charity becomes pregnant, there is absolutely no hint given in the text that Miss Hatchard could be of any help, neither in her capacity as Lucius’s cousin nor in her role as a leading figure in North Dormer. Having been compared with an infant in Charity’s mind, it stands to reason that as far as Charity is concerned, Miss Hatchard, an elderly spinster, would not possess any knowledge about either abortion or childrearing. Charity’s encounters with Miss Hatchard foreshadow the lack of communication Charity will have with her biological mother Mary Hyatt. Neither has any practical wisdom or treasure to give her. The extent of Charity’s sympathy for each woman is fairly limited, undermined by Charity’s own circumstances.

How is it then, that Wharton is able to tie so many threads together to form a coherent, even lyrical, novel such as *Summer*? And why is it that this so-called "Hot Ethan" of Wharton’s has not been fully looked at as another example of Wharton’s subversion of the sentimental novel? Perhaps it is because Wharton herself went to such lengths to distance herself from the sentimentalist tradition. The crippled women in *Summer*, Ally Hawes, Miss Hatchard, and Verena Marsh are themselves hidden figures within the text, ensconced within the domestic sphere that Charity Royall strives to escape.

In a sense, they are counterparts to Wharton’s trio of landscapes in the novel: North Dormer, the Mountain, and Nettleton. While Miss Hatchard and Verena serve as windows to a world beyond North Dormer, yet for Charity, they are women of little wisdom, weak and ineffectual when juxtaposed against the problems realized by romantic

love. Ally Hawes, with her industrious and sympathetic nature, represents a power that Charity seems to be threatened by.

*Summer's* Ally Hawes may be seen as a contrasting figure to Wharton's most famous creation, Lily Bart in her 1905 novel *The House of Mirth*. Unlike Lily, Ally is no great beauty, but she does possess much practical skill as a seamstress. Lily, having been raised to enter into a great marriage, had no need to cultivate any practical skills; Ally, a cripple, has been taught a means of eking out a living. Lily fails at being a milliner's apprentice, while Ally shines as the creator of elegant wardrobes. Lily secures her apprenticeship through a female friend, and tries to establish herself within "this creation of ever-varied settings for the face of fortunate womanhood," attempting to become a producer rather than a strict consumer of decorative objects (*House of Mirth* 282)

However, in addition to her role as an economic producer, Ally also serves as a giver and receiver of sympathy. In this regard, she may share a stronger bond with *The House of Mirth's* Gerty Farish than with the elegant Lily Bart. Gerty Farish, like Ally, has a great sense of admiration for the young woman whose friendship she treasures, an admiration which, as the narrative unfolds, transforms into open demonstrations of sympathy. Lily, like Charity Royall, is not familiar with being the object of another woman's sympathy, and she recoils from gestures which demonstrate it. Lily is unused to "the broad bosom of Gerty's sympathy [. . . and] did not propose to lie there prone [. . .]." (283).

But it is Gerty's ability to feel sympathy for Lily when she is disinherited by her aunt (and effectively disowned by New York society that has served *in loco parentis*) which marks her as the stronger of the two. This is evidenced by Lily's unexpected visit

to Gerty's apartment shortly after her rejection of Gus Trenor's sexual advances. Despite Gerty's own romantic feelings for Lawrence Seldon, she is able to respond to her own "compassionate instincts" (163). Gerty draws upon "disciplined sympathy" to help her friend, even though her own emotions are quite complicated (163). Like Ally Hawes in *Summer*, Gerty seeks to actively demonstrate her strong feelings for her friend. In *Summer*, Ally proves her sympathy for Charity by leaving behind the clothing she has designed for her. In *The House of Mirth*, Gerty takes a more restrained approach, knowing that Lily is averse to open displays of affection: "Knowing that Lily disliked to be caressed, she had long ago learned to check her demonstrative impulses toward her friend" (167).

It is only because of Lily's exceptional vulnerability at this point in *The House of Mirth* that she is able to accept Gerty's sympathetic gestures, allowing her to "[pillow] her head in its hollow as a mother makes a nest for a tossing child [. . .] Her hand still clung to Gerty's as if to ward off evil dreams, but the hold of her fingers relaxed, her head sank deeper into its shelter, and Gerty felt that she slept" (167). Thus, as in *Summer*, hand imagery is employed by Wharton in order to hint at the primacy of sympathy. Wharton's phrasing is significant here; for "Gerty felt that she slept" points not only to the physical signs of sleep, but to an emotional capacity of Gerty's to intuit Lily's state of mind as well. This scene stands out in the novel because it is one of the few times where Lily Bart encounters solace with a woman rather than competition or exclusion (for instance, with Bertha Dorset and Judy Trenor).

Unlike with *The House of Mirth*, in *Summer*, we detect no hint of any underlying sexual attraction for Lucius Harney by Ally. She merely wishes to be included, to be

seen as a part of the fabric of Charity's romance. Gerty, despite her financial and social differences from her friend, "wanted happiness-wanted it as fiercely and unscrupulously as Lily did, but without Lily's power of obtaining it" (*House of Mirth* 163). In *Summer*, we are given no direct access to Ally's own emotional experiences and only limited access to her power.

Charity's last remark to Royall, "'I'd rather have Ally Hawes make the few things that I want'" (199) serves as an indirect means of inclusion, just as Gerty Farish's presence at Lily's deathbed provides the spinster with a last, indirect opportunity to be of use to her friend. In both instances, the givers of sympathy (Ally and Gerty) are held at arm's length by Wharton, allowing the recipients of sympathy (Charity Royall and Lily Bart) to take possession of the narrative.

Hildegard Hoeller, in her recent book *Edith Wharton's Dialogue with Realism and Sentimental Fiction* reminds us, "[t]he sentimental narrative tries to pose an alternative space and tries to trigger an alternative reaction in the reader: the power of sympathy" (35-emphasis original). Hoeller goes on to remind us that "[s]pending ourselves as mothers or lovers, spending our tears, our love, our words, even our lives may be self-destructive, but it may also be seen as anarchic," when viewed against the confines of a realist (rather than sentimentalist) tradition (36). The degree to which Wharton succeeds in creating an alternative space in *Summer* depends in large measure upon how much sympathy is spent by its characters and its readers.

By moving Charity away from a sentimental role of woman as sympathizer, Wharton is able to transform *Summer* into a *novel of awakening* that focuses not only on burgeoning sexuality, but hints at the potential power of female friendship and creativity.

Female friendship is a theme rarely visited by Wharton without considerable angst (with the possible exception of her unfinished novel *The Buccaneers*) and provides a vehicle through which to explore and subvert the traditions of the sentimental novel of the nineteenth-century.

In writing on *The House of Mirth*, Elaine Orr notes that “[w]hat Lily longs for—even if she is not always conscious of her self-disclosures—is a negotiation of female friendship and male sponsorship” (31). To a degree, Charity’s wish is not all that different. Despite the text’s commitment to an exploration of heterosexual desire through Lucius Harney and Lawyer Royall, no less significant is the text’s exploration of the possibilities of female friendship, as signified by Ally Hawes. “Thus,” continues Orr, “Wharton stages the social question: what lies between resignation to marriage—full complicity with male systems—and escape from heterosexual designs—uncompromising critique of the sexual economy? At the level of writing, the question translates: what lies between the domestic plot of feminine self-sacrifice and the new plots of female resistance” (31)? I would argue that one way of approaching Orr’s question on *The House of Mirth* is to more fully examine *Summer*. Within *Summer* lies a middle ground, a transitional *novel of awakening* which both adheres to and subverts elements of sentimentalist fiction, particularly the use of sympathy.

Charity’s wavering development of her own capacity for sympathy goes hand in hand with her sexual awakening. Her fluctuating ability to generate sympathy for Lucius, Lawyer Royall, Ally, Miss Hatchard and Verena Marsh may be seen as a direct result of the overwhelming nature of her awakening sexuality and Wharton’s own ambivalence toward the romance and marriage plots she creates. Through the contrasting figures of

Ally Hawes, Miss Hatchard, and Verena Marsh, Wharton is able to place Charity within a sentimental backdrop, while still sustaining her erotic capabilities. By moving Charity into a marriage with her guardian, Wharton skillfully maneuvers Charity away from the giver of sympathy to the recipient of it, but not by other characters within the text. As Nancy A. Walker remarks, "Wharton persuades the reader to feel sympathy, not pity, for Charity [. . .]" (114). In relocating the capacity for sympathy from Charity to her readers, Wharton allows for the possibility that Charity's sexual awakening is not the only one she undergoes in the novel.

True, Charity awakens to her own sexuality through Lucius Harney, the architect whose presence structures the novel. But, there is also Ally Hawes, whose presence helps decorate the novel, and whose thwarted demonstrations of sympathy move Charity towards an awakening outside of the romance plot, where hands symbolize creative production rather than erotic activity, where treasure may symbolize female power rather than male sexuality. Wharton's subversive use of sympathy locates it within the confines of the sentimental tradition, but also removes it from those confines.

Had Charity not run into Lawyer Royall on her return from the Mountain, but Ally Hawes instead, what sort of ending would there have been to *Summer*? Would Charity have perceived more "furtive malice," or would she instead have fully awakened to Ally's "piercing sympathy?"

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Goodman's *Edith Wharton's Women: Friends and Rivals* (Hanover, NH: U.P. of New England, 1990), Gloria Ehrlich's *The Sexual Education of Edith Wharton* (Berkeley, CA: U. California P, 1992), and Carol Wershoven's *The Female Intruder in the Novels of Edith Wharton* (Rutherford, NJ: Farleigh Dickinson UP, 1982).

<sup>2</sup> For example, we can look at Wharton's description of what she terms *illuminating incidents*: "[They] are the magic casements of fiction, its vistas on infinity. They are also the most personal element in any narrative, the author's most direct contribution; and nothing gives such immediate proof of the quality of *his* imagination-and therefore of the richness of *his* temperament as *his* choice of such episodes" (*On Writing of Fiction* 109-emphasis added).

<sup>3</sup> In chapter 3 "Wharton and Wilkins: Rereading the Mother (*Summer*) in *Edith Wharton's Letters from the Underground: Fictions of Women and Writing* (Chapel Hill, NC: U. North Carolina P., 1990), Waid argues for reading *Summer* as a "revision and rewriting of Mary Wilkins's important story 'Old Woman Magoun' " (91).

<sup>4</sup> In essence, I am relying on the notion of aesthetics more than culture; certainly, sentimentalism can be looked at as "a set of cultural practices designed to evoke a certain form of emotional response, usually empathy, in the reader or viewer[. . . it] produces or reproduces spectacles that cross race, class and gender boundaries" - Shirley Samuels, "Introduction." *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender and Sentimentality in Nineteenth-Century America*. (NY: Oxford UP, 1992): 4-5. Samuels is even more explicit in asserting that "[s]entimentality in nineteenth-century America appears not so much a genre as an operation or a set of actions within discursive models of affect and identification which effects connections across gender, race, and class boundaries" (7). However, in this instance, as in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, I am more concerned with matters of textual representation.

<sup>5</sup> Norma Haft Mandel, in her dissertation entitled *Annie Fields and the Gift of Sympathy* (CUNY 1996), makes a similar conflation: "I equate sympathy with empathy, the capacity to enter into and share the feelings of others. Both ideas evolve from concepts of giving and receiving united by compassion (40).

<sup>6</sup> Wharton's distinctive use of ellipses in her own work complicates my own insertion of ellipses in this chapter. Thus, in this chapter only, I emphasize each place where an ellipsis in *Summer* is original to the text. For an in-depth look at Wharton's use of this mode of punctuation, see Jean Frantz Blackall's article "Edith Wharton's Art of Ellipses." (*Journal Of Narrative Technique* 17, 1987: 145-162) . Blackall notes that "the

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ellipsis is for Wharton a transitional device, marking a point of adjustment or realignment for characters and readers alike" (152). Wharton's ellipses indicate a transition "from thought to action, or from a thing observed to a reflection made upon it, or from dream to awakening, or from consciousness to nothingness, and so on in numerous variations" (152).

<sup>7</sup> The motif of a man with a watch is reminiscent of other novels I discuss earlier in this dissertation—for example, Stoddard's *The Morgesons*. As I see it, this pattern goes beyond an individual's obsession with time itself (a theme typified by Quentin Compson in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*), and indicates an awareness of these women authors of the ways in which linear time intersects and propels the romance/marriage plot. Here, Harney's watch is the reason for the visit to the jewelry store. Had he not needed to repair it, Charity would not have reason to dream. Linear time is de-emphasized by Stoddard and Chopin—see Chapter 2.

<sup>8</sup> In fact, Shari Benstock entitles the section of her biography of Wharton which deals with Wharton's relationship with Fullerton "Awakenings."

<sup>9</sup> Donna M. Campbell's fascinating article "Rewriting the 'Rose and Lavender Pages': *Ethan Frome* and Women's Local Color Fiction" in *Speaking the Other Self: American Women Writers*. (Ed. Jeanne Campbell Reesman Athens, GA: U Georgia P, 1997, 263-277) compares Wharton's other New England novel to Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs*. Campbell discusses the ways in which Wharton's narrator functions in the text; "What he has learned is that he must, in effect, resign his quest, relinquishing his modern interest in facts and the 'real story' in favor of a more fluid, emotion-based method of discerning truth," one that values sympathy over objectivity (268-269). Wharton referred to *Summer* as "the hot *Ethan Frome*," so it stands to reason that she would explore similar themes in both. It should also be noted that *The Country of the Pointed Firs* takes place over the course of a single summer, just as Wharton's novel does.

<sup>10</sup> The description of Emily Graham's blinding is also particularly interesting, as Cummins uses imagery of awakening to describe the incident. Emily's account of the incident: "Oh, the horror of *my awakening!* How shall I find words to tell it?- and yet I must! Listen Gertrude. He-the poor, ruined boy-sprung to help me; and maddened by injustice, he knew not what he did. Heaven is my witness, I never blamed him; and if, in my agony, I uttered words that seemed like a reproach, it was because I too was frantic, and knew not what I said!" (320-emphasis added). Also: "In the eyes of the world, I am still the unfortunate blind girl; one who, by her sad fate, is cut off from every enjoyment; but so great is the *awakening* I have experienced, that to me it is far otherwise,-and I am ready to exclaim, like him who in old time experienced his Saviour's healing power, 'Once I was blind but now I see!' " (321-emphasis added)

#### Chapter 4: Displacing Sentimental Longings in Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*

*"After all, Ellie, it is not beautiful things nor a beautiful world that make people happy- it is loving and being loved; and that is the reason why I am happy in the thought of heaven."* - Susan Warner, *The Wide, Wide World* (431)

*"When one is in love, one strives to please. . . She was, she told herself, a sentimental fool."* - Nella Larsen, *Quicksand* (64)

In chapter 3 of this dissertation, I looked at the ways in which Edith Wharton, in her 1917 novel *Summer*, uses the notion of the keepsake as a means of both adhering to and subverting a sentimentalist tradition, exposing the tensions surrounding the concept of sympathy. Like Edith Wharton, Nella Larsen experiments with sentimentalism and its corresponding pleas for sympathy. Wharton's subversive use of sympathy within *Summer* locates it within the confines of a sentimental tradition, but also frees it from those boundaries. *Quicksand*, like *Summer*, is a transitional *novel of awakening* which both adheres to and subverts elements of sentimentalist fiction, particularly the use of sympathy. Both *Summer* and *Quicksand* revolve around thwarted awakenings, circumscribed by marriage. Neither protagonist can move past the marriage plot itself, and are thus unable to come to terms with its limitations. Neither establishes a strong enough connection with another woman to engage in a process of full, emotional exchange. Thus, while an awakening is hinted at, teased with, it is not fully realized by either Wharton or Larsen.

In her pivotal study *Conflicting Stories*, Elizabeth Ammons discusses Wharton and Larsen as part of a larger group of American women writers, black and white, whose efforts to create serious artistic works set them apart from the women who preceded them in the mid nineteenth century. While not comparing Wharton and Larsen directly,

Ammons notes that for both, class was both an asset and a detriment (194). In a 1994 article "Edith Wharton's Gift to Nella Larsen: *The House of Mirth* and *Quicksand*," Meredith Goldsmith groups the two women together based on "their creation of subjects who are racialized through the experiences of both gender and class" (4). In her comparison of *The House of Mirth* to Larsen's text, she declares that "Larsen's most critical revision of the Whartonian plot is the translation of motherhood from rosy blur to painful, dulling reality" (5). Inherent in Goldsmith's analysis, then, is her recognition of the ways in which each woman, in her own way, writes against a sentimentalist tradition.

By comparing Larsen's novel with one of the most popular sentimental novels of the nineteenth century, Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* (1850), we can more fully understand the ways in which Larsen revises the sentimental tradition, exposes the limitations of both a religious and sexual awakening.<sup>1</sup> As Jane Tompkins notes, "[b]y the end of Warner's novel, Ellen does not exist for herself any more, but only for others" (*Sensational Designs* 182). Helga Crane meets much the same fate, but Larsen presents this outcome as a tragedy, not a triumph as Warner does. Larsen revises Warner's concept of sentimentalism through her sophisticated manipulation of aesthetic objects as examples of what Lori Merish has recently termed "sentimental ownership," a mode in which objects take on emotional properties for female consumers of the nineteenth century (4). Helga's love of beautiful things has been read by some as an indication of a highly narcissistic personality. Yet I posit that Helga uses her possessions as both a means of exercising emotional control and of expressing her subjectivity. Helga lavishes her emotional energy on objects, substituting them for individuals.

Furthermore, inanimate objects, with their inherent portability, act as a buffer for

Helga against the emotional strain of interaction with other people. With objects, there is simply no need to say hello or goodbye, no risk of rejection or pain. Helga has no keepsakes as such, for she is unable to separate belongings from her own misplaced sense of belonging. She displaces sentimentality from (lost) people onto (found) objects.

Helga's materialism is linked to a suppressed desire for sentimental expression, to mourn her lost family connections, to elicit sympathy from those around her. Her suppressed longings for the sentimental keep her from fully exploring her subjectivity. In this regard, Larsen's text differs significantly from Wharton's, since her protagonist suffers from an overdeveloped sense of sympathy, as opposed to Charity Royall, whose sense of sympathy is underdeveloped. Helga comes to sympathize with those who have rejected her.

While searching for one place in which to belong, Helga seems to go out of her way to create opportunities for arrival and departure, occasions to surrender to her own, ever complicated emotions and to evoke sympathy. This becomes evident when we examine scenes of welcoming and farewell in the novel, and the ways in which Helga comes to visualize exterior landscapes. Helga sentimentalizes each one (Naxos, Chicago, Harlem, Copenhagen, and Alabama) only upon her first or last glance, never while she is fully within its boundaries. In her continual wanderings, Helga constantly creates situations in which she must describe or relive the "blind surrender" which led to her own birth by a white mother and black father (56). Consequently, Helga's journeys expose the limits of sentimentalism. When Helga undergoes a religious awakening, she makes an insightful discovery: "Things, she realized, hadn't been, weren't, enough for her. She'd have to have something else besides" (116). But once Helga becomes entrenched within

rural Alabama, her escape is blocked by another set of possessions: her children.

In her recent book *Sentimental Materialism: Gender, Commodity Culture, and Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, Lori Merish examines sentimentalism's role in formulating and producing "capitalist norms of personal life," more specifically the ways in which sentimental discourse helped produce a "psychology of ownership"(5-6). In a sentimental narrative, ownership itself, according to Merish, is not just an investment of financial resources, but rather

a deeply felt psychic investment in proprietary power over, and control of, objects of love [known as] 'sentimental ownership'. Constructed as an autonomous emotional response, sentimental ownership is a fantasy of intimate possession that is in fact like the 'free market' itself-- produced and sustained by laws and economic policies. (4)

Sentimental ownership, argues Merish, performs as a substitute for female desire in the nineteenth-century. Since the Industrial Revolution, "consumerism has constituted a principal arena in which forms of female subjectivity and desire have been mapped out, articulated, and contested" (Merish 7-8).

Sentimental ownership revolves around establishing an emotional attachment to inanimate objects, thus creating a distinct psychology of ownership in which consumer consumption becomes a means of expressing female emotional subjectivity (Merish 11). Merish's thesis is a provocative one, particularly as she applies it to sentimental narratives by nineteenth-century women writers such as Foster, Stowe, and Frances Harper. For free women of color, Merish sees in sentimental consumption "an alternative, competing register of publicity and social recognition" which allows them a

means of accessing the ideals of “racial justice and female autonomy” denied to them previously (229).

Merish’s argument, it seems to me, carries added weight when looked at in tandem with the work of Hazel Carby, whose 1987 book *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* is consistently recognized as providing a groundbreaking approach to working with black women’s texts. In her introduction “ ‘Woman’s Era’ ”: Rethinking Black Feminist Theory,” Carby describes her project as one which, in part, “traces these ideologies of womanhood as they were adopted, adapted, and transformed to effectively represent the material conditions of black women” (6). Merish focuses on methods of cultural consumption, Carby on methods of cultural production. By examining *Quicksand* through both critical lenses, Helga’s desires-- sexual, cultural, and emotional-- are revealed to be products and constructs of her own suppressed need for connection. Carby’s statement that “Helga[is] a consumer, but as a woman she [is] also potentially a consumable object” is certainly meritorious, but fails to point out Helga Crane’s own emotional involvement within the process of consumerism, the ways in which she internalizes certain desires (173). As we shall see, the metaphors Helga uses to conceptualize both exterior landscapes and her inner feelings rely heavily on inanimate objects, suggesting that Larsen is revising the sentimental narrative through the prism of psychological modernism.

For Helga Crane, awakening is a fitful, uneasy, incomplete process, more so than in any of the other novels I examine in this dissertation. Helga cannot recognize that she has already internalized the most prominent facet of sentimentalism- the power and

devastation of physical and emotional separation from one's mother.<sup>2</sup> Thus Larsen's protagonist is already placed into a plot with sentimental overtones.

*Quicksand* is a demanding novel for a reader, and the narrative reveals an underlying instability in the psychological and social fabrics that make up Helga Crane. Even the narrative's style exposes this instability, as plot developments seem less a product of Helga's external environment, but more internal. In addition, embedded within the text are shreds of sentimentalist rhetoric. Karen M. Chandler has argued for a recognition of the presence of melodrama in the novel, basing her assertion partly on what she calls "urgent linguistic rhythms [which work] to engage readers emotionally with Helga's struggles with aspects of self and society" (25). I (re)identify some of these linguistic rhythms as belonging not to the genre of melodrama, but rather to a wider discourse of sentimentalism. As she arrives in Copenhagen, Helga even refers to herself as a "sentimental fool" (64). She fails to see how her sentimental feelings, if acknowledged and accepted, might lead to a more unified sense of self.

Suzanne Clark, in *Sentimental Modernism: Women Writers and the Revolution and the Word* (1991), argues for a re-evaluation of the role sentimentalism has played within a modernist canon whose values rest on rationality rather than emotional affiliation (5). In rejecting sentimental rhetoric, Clark notes that male modernist writers would look at sentimentalism with disdain, viewing its displays of emotion as narcissistic (11). Interestingly, narcissistic is a word often sometimes used to characterize Helga Crane.

In the first chapter of her novel, Larsen establishes that Helga is not resistant to the pull of sentimentalism. Its rhetoric pervades the chapter, and the theme of

sentimental ownership colors Helga's relationship with inanimate objects around her. In particular, Larsen's representation of Helga's space reveals the tension between modernism (unity) and sentimentalism (excess). The opening chapter of *Quicksand* allows a reader the first of many opportunities to study Helga alongside the objects she chooses to associate herself with. In writing about this opening scene, Pamela Barnett asserts that "[t]he portrait is visual, not psychological" (583). I believe that the portrait only *seems* visual when indeed it does provide significant psychological insight into Helga's character.

Framed within the parameters of her bedroom at Naxos, Helga remains in a state of "intentional isolation [. . .] this little time in her own attractive room with her own books" (1). Her aesthetic sense seems fully developed, as Helga has taken great care to surround herself with possessions she considers beautiful. The very first paragraph of the novel catalogues these items:

Only a single reading lamp, dimmed by a great black and red shade, made a pool of light on the blue Chinese carpet, on the bright covers of the books which she had taken down from their long shelves, on the white pages of the opened one selected, on the shining brass bowl crowded with many-colored nasturtiums beside her on the low table, and on the oriental silk which covered the stool at her slim feet. It was a comfortable room, furnished with rare and intensely personal taste [. . . .] (1)

According to Helga herself at a later point in *Quicksand*, the things that she truly wants are "not money, but the things which money could give, leisure, attention, beautiful surroundings. Things. Things. Things" (67). Yet it would seem as though Helga has all

of these in *Naxos*: a steady salary which has afforded her the means to buy beautiful surroundings, the attentions of her fiancé James Vayle, and some amount of leisure time. In fact, we learn that that “[m]ost of her earnings had gone into clothes, into books, into the furnishings of the room which held her” (6). And throughout the text, even when it defies logic, Helga shows a desperate desire to hold on to her beautiful things.

*Quicksand* goes beyond utilizing “an iconography of clothing,” a phrase co-opted by Deborah E. McDowell as a means of describing this thematic and stylistic convention found in black women’s texts (194). It becomes more than a means for outward self-assertion or of cultural manipulation; it becomes a metaphor for Helga’s internalization of sentimental attitudes, ones which counter her need for a sexual awakening.

These sentimental attitudes, in turn, have their roots in Helga's maternal longings. As Jessica Benjamin has discussed in *The Bonds of Love*, a woman's sexual desires take shape from her earliest experiences with both parents. A young child begins to become conscious of being "the one who desires" and "at this very point, where desire becomes an issue, the realizations of gender difference begin to take place in the psyche [. . .] each parent may represent one side of the mental conflict between independence and dependence" (101-102). In describing this difference, Benjamin notes that mothers with young children are more commonly involved in acts of "quieting, soothing, nursing, stabilizing, containing, and *holding the infant*" (102-103-emphasis original). Helga's need to be contained, to be sympathized with, can be associated with her attachment to clothing and to the symbolic importance it holds in Helga's thinking. It provides a concrete means of self-containment by which Helga can correct her own lack of mothering.

It is significant that our first glance at Helga Crane comes while she is attached to an inanimate object, her chair. As many astute critics of Larsen have pointed out, the opening chapter of *Quicksand* seems to identify the woman herself as a beautiful object:

A slight girl of twenty-two years, with narrow, sloping shoulders and delicate, but well-turned arms and legs, she had, none the less, an air of radiant, careless health. In vivid green and gold negligee and glistening brocaded mules, deep sunk in the big high-backed chair, against whose dark tapestry her sharply cut face, with skin like yellow satin, was distinctly outlined, she was- to use a hackneyed word- attractive (2).

What is crucial to observe here is that Helga, from our opening view, is not standing on her own. Helga's initial position is reminiscent of a work by a female artist typically associated with sentimental themes, the painter Mary Cassatt (1844-1926). Her painting "Little Girl in a Blue Armchair," (1878) depicts a young girl who is visually inseparable from the material object of the armchair.<sup>3</sup> While Cassatt's portrait focuses on a young girl, unlike the 22 year old Helga Crane, it offers its own view of womanhood in progress. At times, Helga herself is referred to by critics as childlike, and her perceptions certainly reflect the "psychological ambivalence of the space" that feminist art historian Griselda Pollock discusses in her study of Cassatt's work ( 131). Cassatt herself has traditionally been remembered as a painter of mother and children, a quintessentially sentimental subject matter. However, her paintings from the 1870s and 1880s belie this categorization (for example, her series of Parisian opera scenes). As Pollock notes, "[w]hether child or adult, figures are represented in [Cassatt's] pictures to convey a psychological interiority-a combination of thoughts and feelings that imitate an 'inner life'

[. . .]" (16-emphasis original). What is then foregrounded in the opening chapter of *Quicksand* is that Helga lacks the emotional autonomy to be seen without the comfort and emotional security of this chair. Thus an inanimate possession comes to be identified as a part of Helga herself, fixed in place.

The beginning of *Quicksand* recalls the openings of nineteenth-century sentimental novels, particularly with its emphasis on interior surfaces. Yet *Quicksand* also subverts the traditional opening of a sentimental novel. While Helga and her possessions are themselves juxtaposed against the confines of her room, we are not allowed to forget that this is not Helga's family home, (as would be the case in a traditional sentimental novel) but merely the living quarters of a salaried teacher. As Lori Merish has noted, "[i]n sentimental novels, as well as in texts such as architectural pattern books and home decorating manuals, which codified domestic ideology, 'inside' was being established as the realm of fulfillment and emotional satisfaction [. . . ] the domestic ideal of affection self-sufficiency" (141). Yet Helga is disaffected, at odds with her larger surroundings. Like Ellen Montgomery in Warner's *The Wide, Wide World*, Helga's access to the outside world is limited; she is enclosed within a small space.

Sentimentalism, as I have discussed throughout this dissertation, also recognizes the power of emotional passion. In *Sensational Designs*, Jane Tompkins reminds us that "[t]he pain of learning to conquer her own passion is the central fact of the sentimental heroine's existence" (172). Marianne Noble, in her recent book *The Masochistic Pleasures of Sentimental Literature*, takes Tompkins's words a step further in identifying Warner's novel as a "text which revels in its own masochism" (113). In her analysis of *The Wide, Wide World*, Noble discovers that Ellen Montgomery takes pleasure in the

pain of learning how to repress her emotions. And early on in *Quicksand*, Helga Crane identifies "[e]nthusiasm [and] spontaneity" as qualities she possesses and which are in danger of being suppressed the longer she remains in Naxos (4). Naxos, the rigid school for African-Americans which Larsen is believed to have based on Fisk University, regards such traits as "unladylike or ungentlemanly qualities" (4). By contrast, Helga gives into what is described as a "peculiar characteristic trait, slowly accumulated unreason in which all values were distorted or else ceased to exist". This is exemplified as she throws her teaching materials into the wastebasket (4). She is transgressing, moving away from the ladylike image being promoted in the name of racial uplift at Naxos.

Thus Larsen exposes the tensions which exist not only between Helga and Naxos, but between Helga and her own divided sense of self. In throwing away her teaching materials, Helga seems to be implicitly re-endorsing her own sense of connection to her other, more aesthetically pleasing possessions. They alone are worth preserving. As Carby notes, "she experienced no emotional or intellectual sustenance from her teaching" (170). As a result, she is willing to throw away both the products (her students) and her own methods of production (her materials). But the peculiar personality trait of "slowly accumulated unreason," one which Helga is unable to dispose of, may serve as a subtle means of reminding the reader of sentimentalism itself, the genre concerned with the boundaries of emotional passion.

Helga's feelings of dissatisfaction and longing become embedded within sentimentalist rhetoric. As Chapter 1 continues, Helga suddenly begins to realize her distaste for the Naxos community and the degree to which she has had her own limited

power for change undermined by it. As a result, she experiences a sudden longing for an instantaneous exit:

Now she faced *with determination* that other truth which she had refused to formulate in her thoughts, the fact that she was *utterly unfitted* for teaching, even for *mere existence* in Naxos. She was a failure here. She had, she conceded now, been *silly, obstinate*, to persist for so long. A failure. Therefore, *no need, no use*, to stay longer. Suddenly she longed for *immediate* departure. *How good*, she thought, *to go now, tonight!*-and she frowned to remember *how impossible* that would be. “The dignitaries,” said, “are not in their offices, and there will be yards and yards of red tape to unwind, *gigantic, impressive* spools of it.”

(5-6-emphasis added)

Linguistically, sentimentality is typically represented as excess, an overabundance of emotion that is expressed through a language overflowing with emotional adjectives, repetition and rhetorical questions. In *Sentimental Modernism*, Suzanne Clark describes the rhetorical conventions of sentimentality as follows:

Tropes of sympathy argue through embodiment and an appeal to experience: the sentimental locates moral values in the (feminized) heart and denies the importance of external differences. Thus the sentimental also grounds the moral appeal to respect individual differences. The terms are hyperbolic and abstract: *benevolence, virtue, esteem, delicacy, transport, weakness, sweet, delicate, grateful, base, unkind, ungenerous, unfeeling*. Furthermore, phrasing itself is predictable. There is both

extreme conventionality and extreme fragmentation. All the resources of the page are summoned to heighten-by punctuation marks, typographical devices, and gaps and breaks in the text-the often declared insufficiency of words to express the feeling described. (22-emphasis original)

Thus, for Clark, "[the] sentimental is the representation of an abject struggle over female emotion" (11). The paragraph in which Helga ponders leaving Naxos shows some of these same rhetorical devices described by Clark, ones which are typically used to construct a sentimental text. Helga engages in hyperbole; repeating the word *failure* over and over as adjectives describing character form the heart of this passage.

Strikingly, Helga's relationship with her fiancé is *not* described in such sentimental terms. In order for Helga to make an immediate departure, the bond between her and her fiancé James Vayle must be broken. His name is put forth suddenly, and it is a shock to learn that Helga is, in fact, engaged at all. Helga has seemed more attached to the objects in her room than to James; in her desire to leave, Helga identifies money, not emotional connection, as the major factor to consider.

In reflecting on her relationship with James, she is disturbed by two things: her own sexuality, and the "revealing picture of her past striving," her desire to belong (7). "It was as if she had deliberately planned to steal an ugly thing, for which she had no desire, and had been found out" (7). This remark is a revealing one. It suggests that Helga's conception of the exterior world is rooted in *things*. How to value something, *even an emotion*, is based on two factors: how aesthetically pleasing it is (its beauty), and secondly, how much desire for ownership is present. Emotions, like inanimate objects, must come into Helga's possession honestly, through a clear, delineated exchange. The

alternative is emotional chaos. Helga's system of metaphors, as we shall see, continues the pattern begun in chapter 1. Thoughts of *things* dominate. The marriage plot is couched not in terms of emotions, but as a material object itself.

"No family. That was the crux of the whole matter. It accounted for everything" (8). Helga's lack of family, especially her "beautiful, unhappy mother" is described in chapter 1 in particularly consumerist terms (7). Similarly, Helga imagines what it will be like "[t]o relinquish James Vayle," another choice of words which is revealing. Unable to come to terms with the sexual aspects of their relationship, Helga instead examines him as yet another object for which she has no real desire. And as she does so, "[f]amiliar objects seemed suddenly unhappily distant. Faintness closed around her like a vise. She swayed, her small, slender hands gripping the chair arms for support" (8). Again, as in the novel's opening frame, Helga cannot separate herself from her chair. It has become her means of emotional support.<sup>4</sup>

Helga equates unhappiness with distance not between individuals, but between herself and the things she owns. The unhappy distance that Helga notices between herself and her possessions may serve as a way for Helga to understand the unimaginable: her lack of close family. Instead she focuses on "[. . .] getting the things she had wanted. Still wanted" (11).

But just what did she want? Barring a desire for material security, gracious ways of living, a profusion of lovely clothes, and a goodly share of envious admiration, Helga Crane didn't know, couldn't tell. But there was, she knew, something else. Happiness, she supposed. Whatever that might be. What exactly, she wondered, was happiness. Very positively

she wanted it. Yet her conception of it had no tangibility. She couldn't define it, isolate it, and contemplate it as she could some other abstract things. Hatred, for instance. Or kindness. (11)

Helga's thoughts on happiness, supplied early on in chapter 2, are quite intriguing. As we have seen, in chapter 1, Helga does have a means of conceptualizing happiness. While it does not relate to happiness between individuals, it does deal with tangible objects, those possessions upon whose close familiarity she depends. The other emotions Helga considers, hatred or kindness, depend on having the participation of another person. People express hatred for, or are kind to, one another. Linguistically, as verbs, "to hate" or "to be kind to" take a direct or indirect object. There is no such verb as "to happy." Again, Helga cannot acknowledge the psychological importance of emotional exchange; her chance to awaken depends it.

By the time Helga gets to Copenhagen, she begins to formulate a tangible definition of happiness: "She long lay awake reviewing the events of the crowded day. She was happy again. Happiness covered her like the lovely quilts under which she rested" (72). Her choice of similes indicates that Helga continues to equate emotions with inanimate objects. If happiness can only be conceptualized by Helga as a quilt, what does that mean for her future?

"[Helga] was no longer concerned with what anyone in Naxos would think of her, for *she was now in love with the piquancy of leaving* [ . . . ] Her mind was busy with plans for departure [ . . . ]" (14-15-emphasis added). Like her love of beautiful objects, Helga's love for leavetaking may be seen as another substitute for interpersonal connections. Indeed, her colleague Margaret Creighton tells her that her reasons for

leaving indicate "ridiculous sentiment" (13). Helga's sentimentality burgeons while she walks along the Naxos campus, on her way to resign.

As she went slowly across the empty campus she was conscious of a vague tenderness for the scene spread out before her. It was so incredibly lovely, so appealing and so facile. The trees in their spring beauty sent through her restive mind a sharp thrill of pleasure. Seductive, charming, and beckoning as cities were, they had not this uneasy human loveliness.

(16)

Here, Helga transfers her own feelings onto the exterior landscape. It is acceptable for Helga to feel tenderness towards trees precisely because they are not human, and thus incapable of giving forth any reciprocating emotions. In contrast to our first glimpse of Helga in her room in Naxos, here the trees are not framed, but "tamed, held prisoners in a surrounding maze of human beings," free. "It was human beings who were prisoners" (17). In Helga's mind, the aesthetic beauty of the trees depends on being given freedom from people.

But what works for the exterior landscape will not work for Helga Crane. Her love for unhuman loveliness will, paradoxically, bring her right back into the thick of unsettling emotions. For now, knowing that she is leaving allows Helga to "sit calmly, looking out of the window onto the smooth lawn [. . .]"(17). She cannot consistently recognize her secret longing for the sentimental. Thus she is still able to speak calmly and directly to Dr. Anderson, Naxos's principal: "Naxos, the place? Yes, I like it. Who wouldn't like it? It's so beautiful" (19). Her answer is unremittingly unsentimental and straightforward. Helga's habit of speaking in short, staccato sentences masks the threads

of her underlying need for connection, her desire for sympathy. It is no coincidence that while in Anderson's office she finds her eyes straying to "[t]he intricate pattern of the rug [. . .]" (21). It provides the perfect contrast to the outward image of straightforwardness she is seeking to project.

Helga's sentimental yearnings come to the surface briefly during her conversation with Dr. Anderson, leaving her undone. Strikingly, as Dr. Anderson characterizes Helga as a woman "with a sense of values, and proportion, an appreciation of the rarer things of life," she begins to lose her sense of proportion, to unravel like the pattern of the rug she is studying throughout their talk. She winds up retelling him a highly unsentimentalized version of the story of her origins: "The joke is on you, Dr. Anderson. My father was a gambler who deserted my mother, a white immigrant. It is even uncertain that they were married. As I said at first, I don't belong here'" (21). In insisting on seeing Dr. Anderson, she has managed to do exactly what she did not consciously want, to attempt to illicit sympathy from those around her. This first encounter with Robert Anderson, like later ones, is set off against Helga's needs for containment and sympathy. Their meetings fall apart when Anderson refuses to play his part within the sentimental narrative Helga is unconsciously designing for herself. He will not be her sympathizer.

Had she chosen to stay in Naxos, there would have been no talk with Dr. Anderson; she would have stayed silent. In moving away from Naxos, Helga puts herself in contact with scores of new people of both races, thus unconsciously giving herself new opportunities to retell her personal history. From this point on, she is unable to get away from "the flying landscape of her thoughts [. . . ] The ugly thing pressed down on her, held her" (22). Larsen's use of language to describe Helga is telling. It suggests a link

Larsen is trying to forge between Helga's internal and external landscapes.

Alone, reflecting on her mother's life, Helga sentimentalizes it. On the train ride away from Naxos and Dr. Anderson, she now recreates her mother as "[a] fair Scandinavian girl in love with life, with love, with passion, dreaming and risking all in one blind surrender. A cruel sacrifice" (23). She views her mother's second marriage, "to a man of her own race," as a "*grievous* necessity. Even *foolish, despised* women must have food and clothing; even *unloved* little Negro girls must somehow be provided for" (23-emphasis added). Again, large amounts of sentimental adjectives creep into the narrative. Love and material possessions enter into a mutually exclusive relationship; if the former is not possible to obtain, there is always the latter. As she remembers it, her first happiness occurs when, at fifteen, her uncle Peter sends her to Naxos. But this happiness stems from familial rejection. And our awareness as readers has already been heightened to the fact that Helga's own memory may not be trustworthy. In her secret longing for the sentimental, Helga colors the truth.

On this train ride, Helga continues to analyze her meeting with Dr. Anderson, wondering to herself why it is that she stopped retelling the story of her mother: "Why, if she said so much, hadn't she said more about herself and her mother? [Dr. Anderson] would, she was sure, have understood, even sympathized. Why had she lost her temper [. . .]?" (26). Helga's struggle with an uncontrollable temper is reminiscent of Ellen Montgomery's fight against her own anger in Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* (1850). While Ellen is considerably younger than Helga Crane, she too fights against violent outbursts of emotion. In chapter 1 of Warner's novel, Ellen's emotional upheaval, as articulated by her "deep sobs at length" serve as physical embodiments of

emotional passion (12). Ellen cries often; her expression of feeling is interpreted as inappropriate by her mother, whose love “had power enough now to move her as nothing else could have done; and exerting all her self-command, of which she had sometimes a good deal, she *did* calm herself [. . .]” (13-emphasis original).

Helga, unlike Ellen Montgomery, has only her mother’s story. Ellen is placed with family and stays in limited contact with her mother until far into the novel; Helga is separated by death. Helga wants to preserve the sentimentalized version of her past, to illicit sympathy from others, and in so doing, stay connected to her lost mother. Unconsciously, Helga cannot believe that without her, she is a sustainable individual. In retelling her story to Dr. Anderson, she allows herself to relive the pain of her family’s rejection. But in order to retell her story, she has had to set up a scenario of departure that causes her more anguish.

Larsen's protagonist, unlike Ellen Montgomery, does not consciously seek to learn how to repress her feelings, since she barely acknowledges their existence to begin with. On a less conscious level, however, Helga does seem to revel in the pain associated with separation and reunion, a pain she endures alone, apart from any communal experience that would promote a much-needed sense of unity. As Marianne Noble describes, “[the] moment of separation, while painful, offers a rich consolation: the extremity of agony enables those who are being separated to experience a wonderfully complete union” (106). However, the reader is denied access to Helga’s first experience of separation from her family; the action of *Quicksand* takes place years after Helga’s initial separation from her immediate family. Thus, for the reader, as for Helga, there is no consolation, only pain, as the moment of maternal separation is suppressed.

“Gray Chicago seethed, surged, and scurried about her” (27). Helga arrives in Chicago unsure of her welcome, but motivated by her need for money. Her encounter with her uncle Peter’s new wife severs her last family connection. The new Mrs. Nilssen denigrates Helga’s relationship with the family, questioning whether Helga is really her niece: “ ‘*Well*, he isn’t exactly your uncle, is he? Your mother wasn’t married, was she? I mean, to your father?’ ” (28) Mrs. Nilssen’s argument is not one born out of logic, for it is blood, not marriage, that is the basis of Helga’s relationship to the Nilssens. The denial of family is based on an unwillingness to acknowledge race. Like the city of Chicago itself, Helga’s family passes her by.

Helga has gotten no money from her trip, the supposed “unaccomplished object of her visit” (29). Yet it seems obvious that Helga had another, more unconscious goal: to elicit sympathy from her relatives. But what happens instead is that it is she who comes to feel sympathy towards them. “She saw herself for an obscene sore in all their lives, at all costs to be hidden. She understood, even while she resented. It would have been easier if she had not” (29). Her own powers of sympathy work against her own emotional development, a pattern which continues throughout the novel. She is not conscious of her sentimental longings; instead, she is able to displace her real emotional needs.

It is far easier for Helga to look at money as the cause of her fear, when it is the lack of family which is the real source. Her decision to spend money on “things which she wanted, but did not need and certainly could not afford” is a telling one (32). Her choices of merchandise are just as significant, a book and a tapestry purse. Owning a book implies having the leisure time to read it; having a purse implies having money to

put into it. A purse may also signify that Helga is in need of self-containment. By contrast, a loving family is not something which Helga can go out and buy. It is easier for Helga to seek out inanimate objects than it is to come to terms with familial rejection. It is easier for her to economize on food, rather than to be without objects. Food implies nurturance; a book and a purse do not.

Through her painful job search, Helga is made aware of the “smallness of her commercial value” (35). Even when she finds work as a companion to the opinionated Mrs. Hayes-Rore, she functions as an editor, for her employer tells her “ ‘I don’t really need ideas’ ” (36). Having a reference, a connection to someone from her past, will enable her to get another job. In taking this assignment, Helga realizes that “[s]he couldn’t afford anger” (35). This statement has far broader implications for Helga than is first apparent. Helga’s conception of anger, like her formulation of happiness, is based on an inability to recognize that expressing anger depends upon recognizing the existence of another person. This becomes difficult because Helga keeps coming back to the fact that “ ‘I haven’t any people’ ” (38). Mrs. Hayes-Rore’s response to Helga’s pronouncement is “ ‘If you didn’t have people you wouldn’t be living. Everybody has people, Miss Crane. Everybody’ ” (38).

Helga’s formal reply to Mrs. Hayes-Rore’s comment is an indirect one; she retells to her employer the story of her past. While we are given no direct access to her words, we are told that she begins “mockingly” (39). However, this veneer of Helga’s melts away, for while she is speaking, she has “had that sensation of revolt, and again the torment which she had gone through loomed before her as something brutal and undeserved. *Passionately, tearfully, incoherently, the final words tumbled from her*

*quivering petulant lips*" (39-emphasis added). Helga's narrative has undergone a significant transformation, from sarcasm to sentimentalism. Unable to express her anger, it becomes transmuted into sentimentalist rhetoric. She has become a sentimental fool, telling her life story to a virtual stranger.

Helga's need for sentimental connection is directly at odds with her desire for a sexual awakening. Dr. Anderson's fitful presence in the text exposes the existence of these two contradictory desires. Helga's first meeting with him in New York and their trip to a Harlem nightclub reveals this ongoing battle. Upon seeing him in New York for the first time, Helga experiences a "particularly, not wholly disagreeable quiver [. . . ] down her spine. She felt an odd little faintness. The blood rushed to her face" (49). Likewise, in the nightclub, she feels "drugged, lifted, sustained, by the extraordinary music, blown out, ripped out, beaten out by the joyous, wild, murky orchestra. The essence of life seemed bodily motion" (59). These burgeoning sexual impulses run up against an equally forceful need for sympathy. While she cannot bring herself to admit that she has sexual feelings for Dr. Anderson, she does see that she wants a reconciliation with him. "A thousand indefinite longings beset her. Eagerly she desired to see him again to right herself in his thoughts. Far into the night she lay planning speeches for their next meeting [. . . ]" (51). And yet, because such a reconciliation would be fraught with contradictions, she runs away, into "[t]he warmth of the sun, [which] though gentle on that afternoon, had nevertheless kissed the street into marvelous light and color" (51).

Through her projection onto the exterior landscape, we can see what it is that Helga desires: a gentle kiss from a loved one. This sentimentalized description suggests Helga's deeply held wish for reunion. The sun kisses the street, and the street is reborn.

Light and color become marvelous; they symbolize reunion, not disinheritance. But in fleeing Dr. Anderson, she gives her friend Anne Grey the opportunity to get closer to him, and they eventually marry. Thus, Helga loses her only female friend and her only potential lover in one plot twist. She is separated from more loved ones.

"Life became for her only a hateful place where one lived in intimacy with people one would not have chosen had one been given choice" (53). This description, whether Helga is aware of it or not, is one about family. Family is exactly this, closeness to those we are bound to without choice. Yet Helga is living with friends in New York when she comes to this conclusion, not family. Ironically, her desire to be freed from Harlem leads her directly into the path of family. The letter and money she receives from her Uncle Peter gives her the means to travel to Copenhagen, where she stays with her mother's sister Aunt Katrina and her husband, Uncle Poul. In Denmark, Helga feels confident that she will escape from feeling "cold, unhappy, misunderstood, and forlorn" (62).

Helga's departure from America and arrival in Copenhagen furthers her sentimental fantasies. As she watches the United States recede from her view, she claims to feel no regrets. "The sight thrilled her as beauty, grandeur, of any kind always did, but that was all" (63). Yet the next image which Helga takes notice of is of the "small seething ripples on the water's surface" (63). The use of the word "seething" is reminiscent of Helga's earlier description of Chicago; it hints at Helga's underlying, unexpressed anger. Looking back, Helga tells herself that in leaving America, she has escaped a profound sense of "dullness" (63). Yet I would argue that the reverse is true; she has fled powerful feelings of anger, sexuality, and sentimental yearning. During her time on the ship, Helga fools herself into thinking that "she had put the past behind her

with an ease which astonished even herself" (64). In fact, she hasn't. She is moving toward her past, especially her mother. She is revisiting a land she hasn't seen since she was a young girl.

When the idea of being in love with Dr. Anderson crosses her mind, she decides that it is "a thought too humiliating, and so quickly dismissed [. . .] When one is in love, one strives to please" (64). This proverb represents a highly sentimentalized notion of love, one which Susan Warner's novel *The Wide, Wide World* exemplifies through its heroine Ellen Montgomery. Ellen's journey also crosses continents, as she travels to Scotland to stay with relatives. Once there, her sense of self is continually compromised as she is instructed to give up her surname and become Ellen Lindsay, to drink wine, and to accept relatives she has never seen as her guardians and absolute protectors (510). Ellen's devotion to what Jane Tompkins calls an "ethic of submission" represents the antithesis of modern feminist precepts (Afterward 585). Helga's stay in Copenhagen, in some respects, echoes Ellen's trials in Scotland, and her life as Mrs. Reverend Green reflects the limits of the ethic of submission.

Helga's arrival in Denmark is presented in highly sentimentalized terms. She is acutely aware of the other travelers, of their impending reunion with loved ones:

A few other passengers, also early risen, excited by the prospects of renewing old attachments, of glad homecomings after long years, paced nervously back and forth. Now, at the last moment, they were impatient, but apprehensive fear, too, had its place in their rushing emotions.

Impatient Helga Crane was not. But she was apprehensive.

(64-65)

Minutes later, Helga watches scenes of reconciliation unfold before her: "Hats were taken off, handkerchiefs were shaken out and frantically waved. Chatter. Deafening shouts. A little quiet weeping" (65). Helga's own reunion with her aunt Katrina is somewhat different. She cannot experience immediate recognition, having only the vaguest memories of her family; her aunt and uncle can identify her readily by her color. Her first feelings are one of "fervent gladness[. . .] relief" (65). The encounter is punctuated by laughter and chatter, not tears. It is not readily apparent whether Helga's time here will prove to be the panacea she expects. But it is important to note that she does have expectations of sentimental reunion, ones that she is barely conscious of.

Helga's insistence that she likes her new life is made quickly, too quickly, barely on the heels of her arrival at her aunt's house:

It was pleasant to wake up on that first afternoon, after the insisted-upon nap, with that sensation of lavish contentment and well-being [. . . .] But there was something more than mere contentment and well-being. To Helga Crane it was the realization of a dream that she had dreamed persistently ever since she was old enough to remember such vague things as day-dreams and longings. Always she had wanted, not money, but the things which money could give, leisure, attention, beautiful surroundings. Things. Things. Things. (67)

Yet Helga has barely had time in Copenhagen to experience any of these. Her assertion that "[t]his, then was where she belonged. This was her proper setting" seems based on a fervent hope rather than on any concrete experiences (67).

While in Denmark, Helga is rarely treated as a cherished family member; instead, she is exoticized, a useless commodity without the trappings which money can give. Helga's decision to buy clothes while in Europe reflects her eagerness to please. After all, when one loves, one strives to please. "But [Helga] had a deep faith in the perfection of her own taste, and no mind to be bedecked in flaunting, flashy things" (69). So why does she undergo such a total shift in attitude? Quite simply, to gain her aunt's love and approval. Her earlier thought that love implies a desire to please is a correct one, but it is not tied to a romance; her wish to be loved by her only family spurs her actions on.

Helga allows herself to be transformed into a curiosity, dependent on "[s]triking things, exotic things" (68). She adopts the philosophy of the Danes: "Enhance what [is] already in one's possession" (74). By staying in Copenhagen, Helga finally has access to what she has been denied for a large portion of her childhood: the love of a maternal figure. Surely it is no coincidence that Helga's emerging feelings of happiness correspond with her aunt Katrina's physical display of affection:

It was late, very late, when finally she climbed into the great bed after having received an auntly kiss. She lay long awake reviewing the events of the crowded day. She was happy again. Happiness covered her like the lovely quilts under which she rested.

(72)

Helga's choice of similes to describe her feelings indicates that she continues to equate emotions with inanimate objects. She conceptualizes joy as a quilt, a distinctly maternal item. Happiness is thus external, without an internal focal point. More importantly, her understanding of it is rendered passive. "She, Helga Crane, who almost all her life had

looked after herself, was she now to be looked after by Aunt Katrina and her husband? It didn't seem real" (72). Helga is ready and willing to be treated as a sentimental possession herself. As her thoughts indicate, her conceptualization of emotions is still linked to inanimate objects, a dangerous mindset given what the Dahls have in mind for her. "A decoration. A curio. A peacock" (74). Soon, Helga will be unable to separate her outer self from her inner core. Her awakening itself is ephemeral; it contains no recognition of the importance sentimentalism has already had on her life.

Helga's relationship with Axel Olsen exposes the limitations of Helga's sentimental longings. Olsen is the antithesis of sentimental. "Brilliant, bored, elegant, urbane, cynical, worldly, he was a type entirely new to Helga Crane, familiar only, and that but little, with the restricted society of American Negroes" (77). Not only does Olsen spend time with Helga in his studio, painting her, but he actually travels with her and her aunt while they go shopping for Helga's new finery (72). Thus he is linked to not just the representation of Helga as an exotic; in fact, he is partly responsible for the creation of that same image. Larsen provides us with a shocking array of apparel after their buying spree:

There were batik dresses in which mingled indigo, orange, green vermilion, and black; dresses of velvet and chiffon in screaming colors, blood-red, sulphur-yellow, sea-green; and one black and white thing in striking combination. There was a black Manila shawl strewn with scarlet and lemon flowers, a leopard-skin coat, a glittering opera-cape. There were turban-like hats of metallic silks, feathers and furs, strange jewelry, enameled or set with odd semi-precious stones, a nauseous Eastern

perfume, shoes with dangerously high heels. Gradually Helga's perturbation subsided in the unusual pleasure of having so many new and expensive clothes at one time. She began to feel a little excited, incited.

(74)

Gradually, Helga becomes the thing she has bought: "one black and white thing in striking combination" (74). Unfortunately, being a thing is not emotionally satisfying, just as tending to things cannot work as a substitute for human relationships. While Helga longs to be treated like a cherished possession, she eventually sees the limitations of her wish. "She was incited to inflame attention and admiration" (74). She does not receive attention as a full-fledged psychological being. In her article "Self-Delusion and Self-Sacrifice in Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*," Kimberly Monda rightly notes the sexual subtext of ownership at this point in the novel. However, I do not believe that sexual energy is the only subtext. Possessing things signifies a means of belonging that is also rooted in sentimentalist longings. Affection and attention coalesce in the act of ownership. Helga transforms herself at the urging of her Danish relatives, whose approval forms part of her sentimental fantasy of familial reunion and acceptance.

Helga's aunt and uncle seek to dispose of their niece by marrying her off to the urbane painter Axel Olsen. His proposal is hardly romantic; in fact, we are given no access to his exact words at the pivotal moment. However, his reaction to her refusal is provided and it is fascinating. At first he seems overly gallant, saying, " 'I make of myself a present to you. For love' " (87). A few moments later, his words are quite different: " 'You have the warm impulsive nature of the women of Africa, but my lovely, you have, I fear the soul of a prostitute. You sell yourself to the highest buyer. I should

of course be happy that is it is I. And I am' " (87). Olsen assumes that Helga is satisfied to be treated like a possession. Suddenly, she is not. Marrying Olsen would also mean leaving the Dahls and the quilt of happiness they have been covering (or smothering) her with.

One possession which Helga does not cherish is her portrait done by Olsen. Olsen's memorable comment that it represents "the true Helga Crane" is indeed ironic, since his earlier remarks clearly prove that he does not really know who the real Helga Crane is (88). She has been concretized into another sort of thing, a "disgusting sensual creature with her features." Significantly, "Herr and Fru Dahl had not exactly liked it either [. . .]" (89). This painting cannot function as a bond between Helga and her family; it emphasizes her sexuality. As an object of self-representation it cannot be as pleasing as her tapestry purse, for example. It represents her own misplaced sense of belonging and offers no safe space. We are left to assume that Helga does not take it with her.

Can Helga's complex personality even be captured within a single portrait? And can a single audience hope to understand it? As Lori Merish has asserted in her discussion of sentimentalism,

[T]hese two perspectives—emphasizing, respectively, 'inside' and 'outside' — are, through a complex series of identifications, aligned with distinct spheres: the female look, which sympathizes with objects and endows them with depth, is affiliated with the 'inside,' domestic sphere, where the nuances of subjective interiority are assessed and appreciated; and the male look, of superficiality and rational conquest, is identified

with the sphere of economic calculation and self-interest.

(160)

Olsen's attempt to conquer Helga's affections by allowing her to "sell herself" to him exposes his basic lack of sentimentalism and his lack of suitability as Helga's husband.

"She was weeping. With no effort at restraint. Charming, yes. But insufficiently civilized. Impulsive. Imprudent. Selfish" (91). When explaining to her uncle why she has refused Olsen, Helga, like many a sentimental protagonist, bursts into tears. She has gone against the wishes of her aunt and uncle, and worse yet, she reveals an "indecent exposure of the emotions" by weeping (91). Uncle Poul, we are told, has "an almost fanatic regard for reticence" (91). It is his characterization and judgment of Helga's weeping that is provided during this incident. To him, it is a "fruitless wet conversation" (91). Helga's gestures are "shaking," "frantic," "despairing," "pleading" (91). Her demeanor here stands in marked contrast to her calm stance with Olsen. Her emotions are escaping containment; an American, Helga is not civilized enough to follow the Scandinavian model of restraint. She is, to the discomfort of her Danish relatives, lapsing back into emotional expressiveness rather than exotic remoteness. Her behavior signals the limits of self-concealment; weeping is a part of the true Helga Crane.

Gradually, during her stay abroad, Helga has retreated into sentimental yearnings for America. Wandering the streets of Copenhagen, she remembers a line from a poem learned in school as a child: " 'The far-off interest of tears' " (75). After two years of living abroad, Helga suddenly imbues America with sentimental, if not nostalgic, connotations. "So she turned her back on *painful* America, *resolutely* shutting out the *griefs*, the *humiliations*, the *frustrations*, which she had *endured* there" (75-emphasis

added). The very fact that Helga uses so many adjectives to remember America is a sign that she has not truly escaped her. Copenhagen, in contrast, is described most matter-of-factly, with no emotional adjectives whatsoever. It is "placid" (76). In her two years there, Helga notices its architecture, its mothers and children, bridges and markets with equal interest. It is only once she has made the decision to leave Denmark that it becomes seen with sentimental eyes: "The running figures of friends suddenly grown very dear grew smaller, blurred into a whole, and vanished. Tears rose in Helga Crane's eyes, fear in her heart. Goodbye Denmark! Good-bye. Good-bye!" (93). Once again, Helga finds herself in a scene of departure.

Helga's experience abroad bears striking similarities to Ellen Montgomery's. While there is no issue of racial difference to contend with, Ellen is subjected to a period of tribulations as a result of her status as an American. Unfamiliar with Scottish customs in general and her maternal relatives in particular, Ellen "bends submissively to every one of [their] commands; her time, her energies her name, her nationality, her conversation, her friends are not hers to dispose of" (*Sensational Designs* 180). Ellen too is commodified: "She was petted and fondled *as a darling possession—a dear plaything—a thing to be cared for, taught, governed, disposed of*, with the greatest affection and delight [. . .]" (Warner 538-emphasis added). For Helga, however, her racial difference is what is cherished: "Why [had they] subtly indicated that she was different? And they hadn't despised it. No, they admired it, rate it as a precious thing, a thing to be enhanced, preserved. Why?" (83). Ellen's differences are to be eradicated, silenced, smoothed away. This is made easier by the fact that Ellen is a girl not yet legally of age and as such has no say in where she lives; Helga is a young woman in her early twenties who

understands (out of necessity) that she has the legal right to leave Denmark when it proves to be less than what she had imagined.

"Leaving, she would have to come back" (96). Helga departs from Denmark assuming that her stay will be temporary, that she will return to Aunt Katrina and Uncle Poul. This never happens. Instead, she finds herself (and loses herself) through a religious awakening at a black church in New York. Subsequently, she winds up married to Reverend Pleasant Green, a rural Southern housewife and mother of three. Helga recognizes that her dual impulses of arrival and departure are "unfortunate, inconvenient, expensive"(96). These desires, like the desire to cry in front of Uncle Poul, are rooted in an unconscious wish for sentimental reunion, the need to establish an emotional connection.

Back in New York, Helga's unexpected encounter with James Vayle leads her to give her opinion on whether or not she will ever marry:

"Some day, perhaps. I don't know. Marriage -- that means children to me. And why add more suffering to the world? Why add any unwanted, tortured Negroes to America? Why *do* Negroes have children? Surely it must be sinful. Think of the awfulness of being responsible for the giving of life to creatures doomed to endure such wounds to the flesh, such wounds to the spirit, as Negroes have to endure." (103-emphasis original)

James Vayle is appalled by Helga's commentary, as he finds it not only pessimistic but symbolic of Helga's unwillingness to do for her race. Helga's statements also reveal that she fears a permanent emotional connection, the bond between mother and child.

It is this very bond which sentimental literature celebrates. As Joanne Dobson

reminds us, sentimentalism foregrounds "human connection, both personal and communal, and acknowledges the shared devastation of affectional loss" (266). She goes on to say that "in the sentimental vision, the greatest threat is the tragedy of separation, of severed human ties: the death of a child, lost love, failed or disrupted family connections, distorted or unsympathetic community, or the loss of the hope of reunion and/or reconciliation in the hereafter" (267).

The idea of disrupted family connections is a horrifying one to Helga Crane, evoking the past and a fear of the future. Helga's comments on raising children exposes the power of sentimentalism, the "awfulness of being responsible for the giving of life". They also expose her own inability to acknowledge the devastation of her earlier losses. When Helga ends the conversation by telling James, "'And I'm afraid that I've really got to leave you,'" she is being more accurate than she knows (103). For Helga, leaving anyone is both a sentimental fantasy and a realistic nightmare. Her attachment to her personal possessions represents an attempt to assert control over the ungovernable forces of human nature. Female friendship seems to offer Helga no refuge; unlike Ellen Montgomery, Helga has no one who consistently stays *in loco parentis*, no one to offer the advice that Alice Humphreys gives to Ellen Montgomery, no one to reign her in.

The forces of passion take center stage when shortly after fleeing James Vayle, Helga runs right into Robert Anderson, now married to Helga's only real friend, Anne Grey. Their kiss incites "a long hidden-half-understood desire [which] welled up in her with the suddenness of a dream" (104). Helga has succumbed to her own sexuality, and but is also re-living the "blind surrender" she associates with her mother. Just as quickly, she obscures her hidden feelings within a cloud of anger and leaves Anderson too. And,

alone, back in her room, Helga takes hold of "a filmy scarf" and tries to sort out her feelings. "Even recollection brought a little onrush of emotion that made her sway a little" (105). The use of a scarf in this scene is not accidental; it represents Larsen's commitment to using inanimate objects as a substitute for the deepest human feelings.

When her hopes of a sexual liaison with Anderson are thwarted, Helga returns again to her wardrobe as a substitute, the only means left to her of expressing her subjectivity.

"I can't stay in this room any longer. I must get out or I'll choke."

Her self-knowledge had increased her anguish. Distracted, agitated, incapable of containing herself, she tore open drawers and closets trying desperately to take some interest in the selection of her apparel.

(110)

Again, her act of dressing is an attempt to assert control over her identity, not by purchasing, but through mere selection. However, Helga is at this point so undone by her own sexual awakening that she cannot make good choices. She is inadequately dressed for the rainstorm which leads her straight into the church and the arms of the Reverend Green. Wearing "foolish little satin shoes" and carrying no umbrella or boots, she unravels before the churchgoers, as vulnerable as she has ever been. Her emotional state has become as flimsy as the scarf she owns.

As she falls into the gutter outside the church, Helga becomes conscious of how much her own state resembles that of a character from a sentimental novel: "Now, she knew beyond all doubt that she had no desire to die, and certainly not there nor then. Not in such a messy wet manner. Death had lost all of its picturesque aspects to the girl lying

soaked and soiled in the flooded gutter" (110). Larsen's description of a messy, wet scene relates back to Helga's tearful scene with her uncle Poul in Copenhagen, the "fruitless wet conversation" in which he is clearly uncomfortable with his niece's weeping. For once inside, Helga cannot stop crying "with great racking sobs. Her nerves were *so torn, so aching*, her body *so wet, so cold!* It was a relief to cry *unrestrainedly*, and she gave herself *freely to soothing tears* [. . .]" (112-emphasis added).

Like Ellen Montgomery, Helga's tears provide a release from pain. However, *The Wide, Wide World* works towards making tears voiceless; Ellen learns to shed "unspeakable tears" (Warner 429). Here, Helga learns to give voice to her tears, but the long-term consequences make them dangerous. She moves from experiencing a sexual awakening directly into a religious awakening, and her tears provide the means and momentum: "Maddened, she grasped at the railing, and with no previous intention began to yell like one insane, drowning every other clamor, while torrents of tears streamed down her face" (113). Inside the storefront church, she comes up against an enthusiasm and spontaneity that far exceeds her own capacity. Larsen illustrates this by dramatizing the other women in the church helping Helga remove some of her garments, "wriggling out of her coat [. . .]" (112). Helga is divested of her outer layer, stripped of her inhibitions. But the religious awakening she experiences leads not to her ultimate happiness, but rather to her physical and emotional ruin. Expressing her tears opens the door for Helga to drown in sentimentalism.

Helga imagines a life with the Reverend Green that will allow her to concretize both God and man. In conceptualizing her marriage in these terms, Helga, whether she realizes it or not, trades in one set of things for another. Ostensibly, Helga's mindset has

shifted, from the material to the spiritual. But a closer examination of passages from chapter 20 reveals the paradox of her thought process at this point in the novel. She believes that material possessions have failed her, "[b]ecause, she thought, all I've ever had in life has been *things*- except just this one time[. . . .] *Things*, she realized, hadn't been, weren't enough for her" (116-emphasis added). "She meant [in marrying Reverend Green] to be practical. So she would make sure of *both things, God and man*" (117-emphasis added). Practically, and emotionally, Helga continues to imagine a world with things, not emotions or even people functioning as people.

"Sometimes she would smile to think how changed she was" (119). But in fact Helga is not as transformed as she would have herself believe. All she has done is allow herself to displace her suppressed longing for the sentimental. And she has done so without realizing it. In fact, she is still highly conscious of material possessions:

She meant to subdue the cleanly scrubbed ugliness of her own surroundings to soft inoffensive beauty, and to help the other women to do likewise. Too, she would help them with their clothes, tactfully point out that sunbonnets, no matter how gay, and aprons, no matter how frilly, were not quite *the proper things* for Sunday church wear.

(119-emphasis added).

Helga even judges the parishioner Clementine Richards as a "poor thing without style" (119). Yet now, her concern with material things is enfolded into her newfound mission: "She was *anxious* to be a *true helpmate*, for *in her heart* was a feeling of *obligation*, of *humble gratitude*" (119-emphasis added). The sentimental rhetoric employed here is unmistakable, as the interior of Helga's womanly heart is foregrounded here. Humility is

emphasized, along with the virtues of obligation and gratitude.

Helga's relationship to her new home is significant as well, as she relates its upkeep to her relationship with God, just as a sentimental heroine would: "And she could go on happily, inexpertly, about the humble tasks of her household, cooking, dish-washing, sweeping, dusting, mending and darning. And there was the garden. When she worked there, she felt that life was utterly filled with the glory and marvel of God" (120-121). Helga's activities, and her attitude toward them, place her squarely in a sentimentalist tradition. As Jane Tompkins points out in *Sensational Designs*, "[w]hile the ethic of submission required a stifling of aggression, a turning inward of one's energies to the task of subduing the passions, the home provided an outlet for constructive effort, for *doing* something that could bring tangible results" (168-emphasis original). Helga's efforts to improve her material surroundings ally her with God himself:

She was too busy. Every minute of the day was full. Necessarily. And to Helga this was a new experience. She was charmed by it. To be mistress in one's own house, to have a garden, and chickens, and a pig; to have a husband-and to be "right with God"-what pleasure did that other world which she had left contain that could surpass these? Here, she had found, she was sure, the intangible thing for which, indefinitely, always she had craved. It had received embodiment. (120)

The fallacy of Helga's thinking, one which is rooted in sentimentality, is that the elusive, the "intangible thing" must be concretized. In Alabama, Helga has made her implicit desires explicit: joining her pleasure in sentimental ownership with her faith in God's love. Like Ellen Montgomery, Helga links religious desire to sexual desire. "While God

may eventually take Ellen to his heavenly home, a man will first take Ellen to his own earthly home" (Noble 108). Helga Crane's actions follow this same pattern.

Once again, she fails to see that sentimental ownership, be it of her garden, her husband, or, later still, her children, cannot substitute for a true emotional connection in which both participants are active subjects. Thus, Helga fails to heed one of the basic tenets of sentimentalism put forth in *The Wide, Wide World* by Ellen's friend and mentor Alice Humphreys: "it is not beautiful things nor a beautiful world that make people happy-it is loving and being loved" (431). Helga finds either position most uncomfortable.

In describing Helga's time in Alabama, Ann E. Hostetler writes that she "relinquishes a world defined by artifacts of material culture for a world shaped by the biological imperatives of childbearing and physical suffering" (44). I see Helga's relationship to material culture quite differently. Her attachment to things is ongoing, rooted in the tenets of sentimental ownership. It is the only way she can allow herself to experience a sense of emotional connection. Claudia Tate's incisive observation that the Reverend Green "seems more present as language than as corporeal entity" becomes even more significant once we realize that language has not only religious connotations for Helga, but unspoken sentimental ones as well (244). Ironically, Helga "had done with soul-searching," just as she assumes her role as a minister's wife (121).

Helga's faith is like clothing; it beautifies what is less beautiful; it is a passive force, a cloak. "Secretly she was glad that she had not to worry about herself or anything. It was a relief to be able to put the entire responsibility on someone else" (126). As her life in Alabama grows harsher, Helga retreats not into her faith, as a sentimental heroine

would, but further into herself. Thoughts of God retreat; the "delightful borderland on the edge of unconsciousness" is merely a place of peace and quiet, not one of heavenly fulfillment as typified by a novel like *The Wide, Wide, World*(128).

The birth of Helga's three children brings disorder to her household aesthetic. Debris becomes the norm, along with "the permanent assembly of partly emptied medicine bottles on the clock-shelf, the perpetual array of drying baby-clothes on the chair-backs [. . .]., unceasing litter of half-dead flowers on the table [ . . . ] (124). Helga's hopes for creating and maintaining a cheerful home fall by the wayside as she becomes incapacitated from childbearing and childrearing. The way she sees her body changes as well. Before, it was merely passive, "something on which to hang lovely fabrics," but now it has become an overactive monster, something to be cajoled into behaving properly (123). Body and home are no longer objects of sentimental pride.

Instead, Helga's sentimental pride is transferred onto her children. They are the proud objects of her affection. Her twin boys and infant girl may have "used her up," but their mere existence also offers their mother an opportunity to transfer properties of sentimental ownership onto them. "No matter how often or how long she looked at these two small sons of hers, never did she lose a certain delicious feeling in which were mingled pride, tenderness, and exultation" (123). Staring at her daughter, she realizes that she is "still miraculously her own proud and cherished possession" (124).

In thinking of her children as possessions, Helga does not conceive of them as active individuals with their own subjectivities. Instead, they are a new sort of thing for her to possess. In discussing sentimental possession, Lori Merish notes that inanimate objects "are imagined as 'part of oneself' and that such occurrences as personal theft -and

even voluntary rituals of divestment like garage sales- can be experienced as a 'violation' (117). Helga's children are not inanimate objects in the literal sense, but they are objects that de-animate her, objects of affection which were a part of herself *in utero*. When Helga toys with leaving her children, surely a more weighty variation of the sort of divestment ritual Merish discusses, she fears hearing the sounds of their voices haunting her, fears the "roaring agony," "a rending of deepest fibers" (135). Helga's final fantasies of departure are masochistic ones, in that they cause her immense psychological pain, and they are materialistic ones as well. These fantasies, on the heels of the actual physical experience of childbirth, result in further suffering.<sup>5</sup>

Once, Helga conceived of her own happiness as a quilt to rest under; now she conceives of the agony of separation as the shredding of those same threads. She hides under her quilts for weeks after her fourth delivery. Helga's fourth child, unnamed and dead a week after birth, does not induce a wave of sentimental thoughts. "There was from her no pleased, proud smile, no loving, possessive gesture, no manifestation of interest of the important matters of sex and weight" (127). Having felt no sense of sentimental connection to this child; there is no overt agony of separation. The death of a child in *Quicksand*, unlike in a nineteenth-century sentimental narrative, does not lead its protagonist to a higher and deeper appreciation of God; instead it guides Helga to a moment of hideous self-revelation: "She had ruined her life. Made it impossible for her to do the things that she wanted, have the things that she loved, mingle with the people that she liked. She had, to put it as brutally as anyone could, been a fool. The damnedest kind of fool" (133). Years ago, en route to Copenhagen, Helga had had a similar flash of self-insight, when she recognized that she was a "sentimental fool". Now this knowledge

comes along with three children, three things who cannot easily be exchanged for those other things that she once loved. While Helga cannot fully accept her children as individuals, neither can she only look at them as sentimental objects, a main coping mechanism. Thus the thought of leaving them is agonizing. To welcome them as individuals means to stay entrapped within a life whose sentimental gloss has worn off. To embrace them as sentimental objects means to deny the pain that leaving them will cause everyone. It is no wonder, then, that "[o]f the children Helga tried not to think" (135).

Throughout *Quicksand*, Helga's flashes of self-insight have taken place in between "snatches of sleeping and waking" (135). By the last chapter of the novel, these episodes have become more concretized than ever, as Helga Crane becomes permanently entombed within this semi-somnambulant state. Larsen's novel is one of failed awakenings: sexual, sentimental and religious. Her text, especially its bleak ending, undermines the sense of excitement and possibility which a state of awakening usually provokes in a female protagonist. Helga's suppressed sentimental longings thwart her sexual development, so that she can only experience her sexuality under the sanction of religion as sentimental pride. Trapped in Alabama, Helga realizes that she had all the things she wanted back in Naxos: attention, leisure time, and most importantly, "all these agreeable, desired things" (135).

Larsen's text, with its depiction of unacknowledged sentimentalist longings, emphasizes how an awakening can fail when such sentimental yearnings are not recognized by the female protagonist who incurs them. In all of the novels I have examined thusfar, emotional exchanges between women, however minute, become a

means of acknowledging desires which fall outside of the range of the marriage plot, a way in which sentimentalism works subversively, to counter it. In *Quicksand*, emotional exchanges between female friends do not occur since Helga is without close female friends, unable to exert herself so overtly. Instead, her sentimentality becomes attached to inanimate objects or even the external landscapes around her. Helga conceptualizes her own children as sentimental objects.

If, as I have maintained throughout this dissertation, *an awakening* is a realization, however transient, of the value of non-patriarchal emotional or psychic affiliation, Helga barely awakens. However, her desolate isolation reminds us, through antithesis, the value of an awakening. Indeed, an awakening is all the more important for Helga since it never really transpires. In my final chapter, I examine the far more complete awakening of Janie Crawford, Zora Neale Hurston's focus in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Hurston's novel underscores the importance of *giving voice* as a means of exchange among African American women, and in so doing, reorients the *novel of awakening* around the concept of contract law, fraught, as we have seen in the first chapter of this dissertation, with specific implications for all women.

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<sup>1</sup> Both *The Wide, Wide World* and *Quicksand* have been described as works which depend upon psychological realism. For example, Nancy Schnog's 1989 article "Inside the Sentimental: The Psychological Work of *The Wide Wide World*" (*Genders* 4: 11-25) notes that "by making the dynamics of dependency and loss ubiquitous in the novel, Warner fashions dramatic action as psychological movement" (13).

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that practically all of the female protagonists in the novels I have discussed in this dissertation are essentially motherless. Mara Lincoln is orphaned in Chapter 1 of *The Pearl of Orr's Island*, Sylvia Yule is likewise without a mother, as is Charity Royall. Edna Pontellier's mother is absent from the text. Of all the protagonists, only Cassandra Morgeson has a significant relationship with her mother, but it is an uneasy and problematic one, as I have discussed in Chapter 2.

<sup>3</sup> Pollock describes the painting's central figure as "one of the most radical images of childhood" and notes that its "extended background is unique in Cassatt's paintings of this period" (129). Cassatt herself has traditionally been seen as a painter of mother and children, a quintessentially sentimental theme; however, her paintings from the 1870s and 1880s belie this categorization. As Pollock notes, "[w]hether child or adult, figures are represented in her pictures to convey a *psychological interiority*-a combination of thoughts and feelings that imitate an 'inner life' [. . .]" (16-emphasis original).

<sup>4</sup> Larsen is not the first novelist to use chairs as a metaphor for a young woman's emotional state. In Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900), Carrie Meeber, always searching for an indefinable happiness, is frequently depicted in a chair, so much so that the narrator's final pronouncement on Carrie, given in the first published editions of the novel, but excised from the unexpurgated edition, revolves around them. Now a famous actress, Carrie is reminded by the narrator: "Know then that for you is neither surfeit nor content. In your rocking chair by your window dreaming, shall you long alone. In your rocking chair by your window shall you dream such happiness as you may never feel" (Chapter XL). Throughout the novel, the rocking chair's idle motion serves as an appropriate metaphor for the paradox of Carrie's unceasing quest, and for her essentially passive nature: rocking affords only the illusion of control over one's fate. It is striking to note that both Carrie Meeber and Helga Crane wind up unfulfilled by the end of each novel. As Alfred Kazin notes in his introduction to the unexpurgated edition of *Sister Carrie* (NY: Penguin, 1980), "[w]e finally see Carrie in her famous rocking chair as she broods and broods of the mystery of it all, without essentially seeing anything more clearly than the day she first took off for Chicago" (xi). Similarly, Helga Crane is not any better off in Alabama than when she was sitting in her armchair at Naxos.

<sup>5</sup> Marianne Noble, in *The Masochistic Pleasures of Sentimental Literature* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000), defines masochism as fantasy, as opposed to concrete reality, an important distinction.

**Chapter 5: "Ah give you the Understandin' ":  
Contract Law and Giving Voice in  
Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God***

*Contract law reduces life to fairy tale. The four corners of the agreement become parent. Performance is the equivalent of passive obedience to the parent. Passivity is valued as good contract-socialized behavior; activity is caged in retrospective hypotheses about states of mind at the magic moment of contracting. Individuals are judged by the contract unfolding rather than by the actors acting autonomously. -Patricia J. Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights*, 1991.*

The above quotation may seem a strange way of framing a discussion of Zora Neale Hurston's magical 1937 novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and of concluding this dissertation. What, after all, has contract law to do with Janie's quest for voice, her multiple marriages, her ability to tell her remarkable story? I believe that a re-examination of the role of contract is necessary to understand *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, since Hurston provides us with several sorts of contracts, both legal and extralegal, as a means of charting Janie's progress towards subjectivity. These contracts include not only Janie's marriage contracts, but, in a larger sense, also Jody Starks's contract with the all-black community of Eatonville, Florida.

Hurston restores the value of female friendship through the exchange of affection of Janie and Pheoby, the listener around whom the narrative and its landscape evolve. This exchange constitutes an extralegal contract, one which falls outside the boundaries of established contract law. Janie's awakening takes place through a series of marriages, inherently underscoring the imperfection of the marriage contract. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the novel of awakening breaks new ground, becomes more ambitious and, simultaneously, returns to its roots. Rather than focusing on a woman who is defined or defines herself by her decision to marry, Hurston brings us one who engages in multiple

marriages, and a text which engages in what Mae Henderson has referred to as “speaking in tongues” (22). Janie transforms her first husband Logan Killock’s comment that “[y]ou ain’t got no particular place,” into a positive statement. The probability of marriage for a woman is processed into a series of possibilities (30). However, Janie’s complicity in Tea Cake’s death suggests how problematic it can be to sever love from the marriage plot.

Through the imagery of Janie’s trial, Hurston provides a visual representation of a theme hinted at by earlier women writers: what are the legal and moral consequences of awakening? Janie’s silence at this crucial narrative juncture must be weighed against the amount of voice she uses throughout the text. In denying her readers access to Janie’s direct testimony, Hurston may be signaling the complex dynamic between awakening and legal exclusion. “I learned that the best way to give voice to those whose voice had been suppressed was to argue that they had no voice” (Williams 156).

“Giving voice” has, for scholars of African-American women’s writing, particular resonance. One major aim of the scholarship undertaken has been the recovery of long-forgotten works by these women, and Zora Neale Hurston is decidedly the best-known of all. There has been a definite effort to codify these texts, to bind them together as a canon, to recover a collective set of memories. Alice Walker’s essay “Looking for Zora,” the centerpiece of her collection *In Search of Our Mothers’ Garden*, establishes the symbolic power Hurston has come to be imbued with, the foremother of twentieth-century African American’s writings.<sup>1</sup> Acts of canon formation by black feminists have tended to center on Zora, the familiarity with her signified by the use of only her given name.<sup>2</sup> In fact, Walker takes her familiarity with Hurston quite literally, as she poses as

the author's illegitimate niece in her quest to locate Zora's grave. Hurston is seen as the first in an illustrious line of black women novelists, among them Ann Petry (*The Street*), Gwendolyn Brooks (*Maud Martha*), Paule Marshall (*Brown Girl, Brownstones, Praisesong for the Widow*), Alice Walker (*The Color Purple*), Toni Cade Bambara (*The Salt Eaters*), Shirley Ann Williams (*Dessa Rose*), Gayle Jones (*Corregidora*), and Toni Morrison (*The Bluest Eye, Song of Solomon, Beloved*). Marjorie Pryse, in her introduction to the anthology *Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction and Literary Tradition*, describes the ascension of the black woman novelist:

In the 1970s and 1980s, black women novelists have become metaphysical conjure women, "mediums" like Alice Walker who make it possible for their readers and for each other to recognize their common literary ancestors (gardeners, quilt makers, grandmothers, rootworkers, and women who wrote autobiographies) and to name each other as a community of inheritors. By their combined recognition and mutual naming, based on magic, oral inheritance, and the need to struggle against oppression, black women writers enlarge our conventional assumptions about the nature and function of literary tradition. (5)

However, in including Hurston and Nella Larsen (see chapter 4) in this dissertation, which takes as its starting point 1862, with novels of Harriet Beecher Stowe and Louisa May Alcott, I tie two literary traditions together, to form a more complex fabric for narrative discussion. The role which contract law has played in both nineteenth-century white women's fiction and, to an even larger degree, twentieth-century black women's fiction, is crucial. For Harriet Beecher Stowe and Louisa May

Alcott, publishing contracts were uneasy alliances in which each was forced to cede her autonomy, in some measure, to a legal authority. However, throughout this dissertation, I have been examining one alternative to contract law: gift-giving. In “giving voice” to a (long-neglected) canon of African-American women novelists, black feminists have utilized the notion of gift-giving. The act of storytelling has become a form of gift-giving, and gift-giving a form of resistance against the fundamental hypocrisy of the doctrine of contract.

Implicitly, contract law has always had particular relevance for African-American women. After all, the foundation of slavery in America rests on contract law. Legal documentation (and domination) was part and parcel of the project to ensure the continual enslavement of African-Americans. With its legal dissolution came legal and emotional consequences. Patricia Williams’s autobiography *The Alchemy of Race and Rights* makes this particularly clear, as she writes not just about contract theory, but about her own life and work as a black female attorney. One thread running throughout Williams’s narrative is her sense of paradox, the ways in which her life is ‘colored’ by the objective discourse which the practice of law demands, and the subjectivity she wishes to express within her writing. This paradox is given concrete embodiment in the form of her great-great-grandmother’s bill of sale, a document which Williams herself now owns (17). *The Alchemy of Race and Rights* has a wonderful free-associational quality, relying on dream and metaphor in a way reminiscent of the complicated language of Hurston’s novel.<sup>3</sup> Williams is thus all too aware of the implications contract law has had on her own family history. She is an attorney, and a direct descendent of slavery. “We are all inheritors of that legacy, whether new to this world or new to this country, for

[slavery] survives as powerful and invisibly reinforcing structures of thought, language and law" (60-61).

Contract law, as one such legal structure, has thus historically had authority over both race and gender, in the forms of slavery and marriage contracts. In his incredible 1963 speech, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. reminds his audience of the "promissory note" that American blacks have yet to redeem in their favor: "This note was a promise that all men would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" (529). King's speech employs Biblical imagery as well as secular metaphors of an unfulfilled legal contract. His dream is that of a unified nation, renewing its contract for a more perfect union. Williams, perhaps unconsciously, echoes King's speech when she writes that "[the] limbo of disownedness keeps blacks beyond the pale of those who are entitled to receive the survival gifts of commerce, the life, liberty, and happiness whose fruits our culture locates in the marketplace" (71). Historically, African-American women have been held under both slavery and marriage contracts.

What is important to underscore is the degree to which both slave and marriage contracts run counter to the classic concept of a contract, in which two free individuals give their consent to enter into an agreement which will offer mutual benefit. Carole Pateman, in opening her impressive analysis *The Sexual Contract* (1988), reminds her readers that a contract provides a means of telling a story (1). Pateman draws a distinction between what she terms the "original contract," i.e. the civil contract, and "the sexual contract," arguing that the former belies, strives to erase, the existence of the latter (2). As Pateman states, "[c]ontract is far from being opposed to patriarchy; contract is the means through which modern patriarchy is constituted" (2). This is because "[c]ontract

always generates political right in the form of relations of domination and subordination” (8). Obedience, according to Patemen, is exchanged for protection (7). Such an exchange, then, belies the illusion of mutual freedom it ostensibly offers. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, with its lyrical and narrative innovations, illustrates the failure of the emancipatory promise of contract for a black woman. By using the framed narrative, wherein Janie tells Pheoby her story, Hurston subverts the notion of both civil and sexual contracts, and instead asserts the act of storytelling as a more sustainable, extralegal, alternative for black women.

Storytelling takes the form of a gift, not a contract. The exchange between the two women is made freely and equally, unlike at Janie's trial where she testifies before a group (the jury) composed of twelve white men legally assumed to be her superiors. Lewis Hyde 's fascinating study of gift exchange examines the differences between the exchange of commodities versus the exchange of gifts: "Gift exchange is the preferred interior commerce at those times when the psyche is in need of integration" (58). Thus, giving a gift involves emotions, not laws. As Hyde notes, "It is the cardinal difference between gift and commodity exchange that a gift establishes a feeling-bond between two people, while the sale of a commodity leaves no necessary connection" (56). In chapter 5 of his study, "The Gift Community," he differentiates between a *gift* and a *contract*:

Legal contract bears a vestige of the gift 'contract,' but gift exchange must be placed in a separate sphere because, while contract sanctioned by law may formalize the union of gift exchange, it does so by disengaging it from the other components of a 'total social phenomenon.' It sheds the emotional and spiritual content. Indebtedness and obligation become

simply economic and legal relationships. Contract in law is a  
rationalization of the gift bond [. . . .] (86)

Clearly, both Pateman and Hyde recognize the limitations of contract law. So too does Hurston, as she moves Janie through a series of contractual relationships: her marriages to Logan Killocks, Joe (Jody) Starks, and Vergible (Tea Cake) Woods. Within each marriage, Janie learns the limitations of both civil and sexual contract, the failure of the promise of (psychological) emancipation. Even the opening of the novel, with its framed narrative, explores competing notions of gift and contract. Janie's sexual awakening, the ostensible focus of the novel, becomes superceded by the violence that severs Janie from Tea Cake, dissolving their marriage contract.

*Their Eyes* opens with a series of metaphors, just as Janie's narrative will evolve with a series of marriages. The imagery invoked echoes the Bible, a narrative whose Old Testament explores the origins of patriarchy, that is, the contract which man enters into with God, and which man breaks, resulting in his expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Here, Janie, initially only identified as "a woman," returns having voluntarily expelled herself from the Everglades, "de muck":

So the beginning of this was a woman and she had come back from burying the dead. Not the dead of sick and ailing with friends at the pillow and the feet. She had come back from the sodden and the bloated; the sudden dead, their eyes flung wide open in judgment.

The people all saw her come because it was sundown. The sun was gone, but he had left his footprints in the sky. It was the time for sitting on porches beside the road. It was the time to hear things and talk. These

sitters had been tongueless, earless, eyeless conveniences all day long.

Mules and other brutes had occupied their skins. But now, the sun and the bossman were gone, so the skins felt powerful and human. They became lords of sounds and lesser things. They passed nations through their mouths. They sat in judgment. (1-2)

The word "judgment" is repeated in these opening pages several times. Janie, having returned from one grueling trial, is to undergo another, it would seem. The talk described here is not storytelling, not a gift to be given, but rather a way of passing judgment upon a woman. The text transitions into a series of questions which are almost prosecutorial in tone: " 'What she doin' in dem overalls? Can't she find no dress to put on? Where's dat blue satin dress? Where all dat money her husband took and died and left her? What dat forty year ole 'oman doin' wid her hair swingin' down her back lak some young gal? [. . .]' " (2). Unfortunately, the Eatonville community lacks the power to question her the way the white prosecutor or sheriff can. Thus, their questions are posed indirectly, hovering around Janie but unable to be asked directly. The civil contact Eatonville has, as an incorporated town, does not extend to such matters. Gossip, not law, is its realm.

Janie withholds her voice from the women of Eatonville, as is her choice. Janie recognizes that these women, Mrs. Sumpkins, Lulu Moss, don't want to engage in an even exchange; they simply want to judge, use any gift of voice as a confession against her. " 'She act like we done something to her [. . .] She de one been doin' wrong' " (3). These women want a voluntary confession, since they know they lack the power to force one from her. Peter Brooks's latest book *Troubling Confessions: Speaking Guilt in Law and Literature* explores the idea of confession as a form of narrative, its moral and

psychological value within both a legal and religious tradition. He characterizes confession as "fundamental to morality because it constitutes a verbal act of self-recognition as wrongdoer and hence provides the basis of rehabilitation" (2). Yet so many confessions, Brooks concludes, are hardly acts freely given. Coercion occurs through the dialogue of confessor and confessant, and Brooks is critical of the legal results that this dialogue produces, "the disturbing infinity of confession, [. . .] the kind of 'creativity [confessions] generate, and the way in which they cohabit with both truth and lie" (49). It is the voluntary confession which is legally admissible in court, yet most confessions are made under circumstances of psychological duress.

In discussing confession (a subject which we will return to a bit later), Brooks notes that "[the] law wants and needs a model of human agents as free and rational decision-makers, even in the confession of guilt" (76). Strikingly, Carole Pateman makes a similar argument in her book on contract. The law assumes individuals are free and rational beings capable of acting according to their will. Both Pateman and Brooks expose the limitations of this epistemology.

Pheoby Watson is not a confessant; she is the exception of the Eatonville women. In bringing Janie some supper, she offers her friend a gift which can be exchanged. Their encounter constitutes a series of both verbal and nonverbal exchanges: "Janie extended her hand, " " 'Give it here and have a seat,' " 'take yo 'ole plate,' " " 'Hand me dat wash rag' " (4-5). These exchanges culminate in conversation, in which Janie recounts the story of her life, culminating with her life with Tea Cake in the Everglades. Pheoby's "eager[ness] to feel and do through Janie" is no less important to the story than Janie's actual words (6). Listening is as crucial as the act of telling:

"It's hard for me to understand what you mean, de way you tell it.

And then again, Ah'm hard of understandin' at times."

"Naw, 'tain't nothin' lak you might think. So 'tain't no use in me telling you somethin' unless *Ah give you the understandin'* to go 'long wid it."

(7-emphasis added)

The gift which the two women give each other is that of understanding, and their exchange extends beyond the actual story. In choosing the circumstances in which to give voice, Janie (through Hurston's authorial decision) subverts the value of both legal testimony and legal contract. Eatonville wants her to confess, but she wants to tell her story freely. Not only is Janie telling a free story, but she is doing so to another black woman. There are no alternate vehicles other than storytelling for one black woman to tell her story to another. The two are not entitled to serve on a jury, would have few opportunities to enter into a legal contract with one another.

Black feminist theory in America has evolved with full acknowledgment of the unique position black women have occupied both legally and historically in the United States. As bell hooks reminds us in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*: "Occupying such a [low economic and social] position, we bear the brunt of sexist, racist and classist oppression. At the same time, we are the group that has not been socialized to assume the role of exploiter/oppressor in that we are allowed no institutionalized 'other' that we can exploit or oppress" (14). Or, to reiterate Nanny's famous maxim from *Their Eyes*, "[de] nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see" (14).

Images of awakening first appear as Janie moves into her teens, but are connected not just to her alone, but to Nanny, Janie's grandmother, as well:

The rose of the world was breathing out smell. It followed her through all her waking moments and caressed her in her sleep. It connected itself with other vaguely felt matters that had struck her outside observation and buried themselves in her flesh. Now they emerged and quested about her consciousness. (10)

Janie's first sexual experience of awakening at sixteen takes place without a man at all. Nestled under the pear tree, watching it bloom, these feelings constitute her first sense of sexual excitement. Her sexuality has voice: "She was seeking confirmation of the voice and vision, and everywhere she found and acknowledged answers" (11). Nanny's awakening emphasizes not sexual excitement, but the sense of danger in being a woman, in giving voice by speaking with a man:

In the last stages of Nanny's sleep she dreamed of voices. Voices far-off but persistent, and gradually coming nearer. Janie's voice. Janie talking in whispery snatches with a male voice she couldn't quite place. *That brought her wide awake.*

(11-emphasis added)

Janie's own voice awakens Nanny, and Nanny's voice declares Janie ready for marriage. " 'Janie, youse got yo' womanhood on yuh. So Ah mout ez well tell yuh whut Ah been savin' up for uh spell. Ah wants to see you married right away' " (12). Through these competing images of awakening, Hurston allows us to see a complicated connection between sexuality and voice being given between two African American women. Yet the discussion that these two women share is the antithesis of a mutual exchange. Nanny, a problematic authority figure, is not able to convince Janie of the gift value of storytelling,

but the commodity value of marriage.

Much of Nanny's conversation to Janie revolves around various types of contracts. It is Nanny who encourages Janie to enter into her first contract when she pushes her to marry Logan Killocks and his sixty acres. Having never legally married herself, Nanny wants to Janie to have the benefit of legal protection implied by the marriage contract. In re-enacting the moment of the dissolution of the slave contract for Janie, Nanny inadvertently reveals the inequality in any civil contract:

"Den de big bell ring in Atlanta and all de men in gray uniforms had to go to Moultrie, and bury their swords in de ground to show they was never to fight about slavery no mo'. So den we knowed we was free."

(18)

If we examine the language Nanny uses here carefully, we see that the dissolution of the slave contract comes without any direct participation from blacks themselves. It is only the whites who signal the end of black enslavement. Blacks themselves are silenced, even as they are 'freed' by white men. It is no wonder then, that Nanny's next words are " 'Ah wouldn't marry nobody [. . .]' " (18). Freed from one form of contract, Nanny is hesitant to enter into another. Perhaps this is because, as Carole Pateman explains, "[w]omen are property, but also persons; women are held to both possess and to lack the capacities required for contract-and contract demands that their womanhood be both affirmed and denied" (60).

Nanny's willingness to force Janie into marriage is understandable if we view it in terms of the theoretical exchange of the marriage contract: obedience in exchange for protection. Pateman is careful to delineate the ways in which marriage differs from a

standard contract. First, "[it] requires that one party gives up the right to self-protection and bodily integrity"—i.e. the wife (163). Secondly, "the marriage contract does not exist as a written document that is read and then signed by the contracting parties. Generally a contract is valid only if the parties have read and understood its terms before they commit themselves" (163-4), and finally, "A man and a woman do not become husband and wife by putting their signatures on a contract. Marriage is constituted through two different acts." i.e. the speech act of taking vows, and the sex act of consummation (164). Thus, "not until a husband has exercised his conjugal right is the marriage contract complete" (164). Janie's understanding of this dynamic is limited; incorrectly, she views love as the means of enacting the contract.

Janie's relationship with her grandmother is certainly not sentimentalized; this is illustrated early on through Hurston's treatment of Nanny's death shortly after Janie marries Logan Killocks in chapter 3. There is no painful scene of final separation between caretaker and child; in fact, no overt reaction of Janie's to Nanny's death is provided in the text. This absence of emotional response is not conspicuous, but rather expected, considering that Nanny's role in the text is far more pragmatic, as she explains the world of contract and commodity exchange to her granddaughter. Nanny's death is not nearly as significant to the narrative as the fact that "Janie's first dream [of romantic love in marriage] was dead, so she became a woman" (24). Janie misses her dream of sexual fulfillment, not her grandmother's voice. In ending chapter 3 with this pronouncement, Hurston seems to cast more doubt upon Nanny's belief that her kiss from Johnny Taylor made her a woman. Nanny was not necessarily right.

However, she is right in the legal sense; Janie does have a "lawful husband same as Mis' Washburn or anybody else," but to her granddaughter the contract is worthless, making it easy for her to dissolve it merely by running away with Joe Starks (21). Since there is no marriage, Hurston seems to imply there is no need for divorce. Janie did not make a free choice, as she does with Joe, so she is simply able to exchange husbands.

Janie's relationship with her second husband, Joe Starks, evolves in tandem with the community of Eatonville itself. Thus, Hurston offers us the opportunity to investigate the interrelated links between the sexual contract (exemplified in marriage) and the civil contract (exemplified in Jody's role as mayor of Eatonville). In her second marriage, Janie's role is to be a passive listener, just as she was with Nanny, and to be a passive citizen of Eatonville, a witness to the civil contract Jody enters into with the townspeople.

Arriving in Eatonville, Jody recognizes that the town is disorganized, lacking a legal center: " 'A whole heap uh talk and nobody doin' nothin'. I god, where's de Mayor?' " (32). Most critics have recognized Jody's desire to be a "big voice" as symptomatic of a desire to be Godlike (27). However, Jody winds taking on two distinct roles: the God who rules and the brother who enters into a civil contract with God as a means of maintaining patriarchy. His first declaration upon arriving in town is that 'us menfolks got to call people together and form a committee' " (33). Rule by committee is clearly at odds with the idea of a single, authoritarian God. Jody's presence immediately helps to solidify the town, codify it according to the law.

In seeking to enlarge the size of the town, Jody looks not to a gift of land (Captain Eaton's and Mr. Lawrence's combined gifts total fifty acres) but to a sale of land for money, an exchange of commodities:

"He ain't got no mo' land tuh give away. Yuh needs plenty money if yuh wants any mo'."

"Ah specks to pay him."

The idea was funny to them and they wanted to laugh. They tried hard to hold it in, but enough incredulous laughter burst out of their eyes and leaked from the corners of their mouths to inform anyone of their thoughts. So Joe walked off abruptly. Most of them went along to show him the way and to be there when his bluff was called.

(35)

Jody's idea of enacting a commodity transaction, rather than a gift exchange, runs counter to the Eatonville residents's sense of reality. In buying more land, Jody changes the notion of what Eatonville currently is, a place of fellowship, into a place of patriarchy which he, as landowner, will own and operate. He will sell his/the town's land to new townspeople, effectively putting himself on both sides of the civil contract, buyer and seller. Like the Biblical Moses, Jody is the vehicle through which patriarchy is established and maintained. As Carole Pateman has observed, "[m]odern patriarchy is fraternal, contractual, and structures capitalist civil society" (25). This is signaled in *Their Eyes* by the continual use of the terms *fellowship* and *Brother* by the Eatonville men.

Jody's legal papers prove he has entered into the original, civil contract. Word spreads through the town:

"Naw! He didn't buy it sho nuff?"

"He sho did. Come off wid de papers in his pocket." (36)

Jody's plans include contracting with the federal government for a postal office, officially incorporating Eatonville, and erecting a visible center of commodity exchange: the town store. As a reward, he is made mayor by acclamation. Thus, Eatonville enters into a contract whereby its residents voluntarily agree to be ruled by their brother, Jody Starks. In chapter 3 of *The Sexual Contract*, Pateman asserts that "contract theory is not the only example of a theoretical strategy that justifies subjection by presenting it as freedom but [it] is remarkable in reaching that conclusion from its particular starting point," that is, through the concept of individual freedom. After all, "[a] naturally free and equal individual must, necessarily, *agree* to be ruled by another" (40-emphasis original). Thus, it is no wonder that Jody's role as Mayor becomes blurred with a desire to be a Biblical patriarch.

We can see this blurring in the matter of the streetlights. Jody's exact words on the subject implicate his belief in himself as judge/patriarch: "'Ah'll call uh meetin' bout de dark and de roots right away. Ah'll sit on dis case first thing.'" (41). He purchases the street lamp before the town itself votes on the proposal, but since "the majority ruled," the motion is passed (41). Patriarchy and fraternity are blurred. The lamp is both Jody's and the town's simultaneously. Thus Eatonville is given light by Jody through the vehicle of a civil contract, and the grand event becomes invested with Biblical overtones, as evidenced by Jody's speech:

"Folkses, de sun is goin' down. De Sun-maker brings it up in de mornin' and de Sunmaker sends it tuh bed at night. Us poor weak humans can't do nothin' tuh hurry it up nor to slow it down. All we can do, if we want any light after de settin' or befo' de risin', is tuh make some light

ourselves[. . .]. Lift yo' eyes and gaze on it. And when Ah touch de match tuh dat lamp-wick let de light penetrate inside of yuh, and let it shine, let it shine, let it shine. Brother Davis, lead us in a word uh prayer. Ask uh blessin' on dis town in uh most particular manner.

(43)

Jody's speech exposes the contradiction in the dual roles he seeks to play, "Brother Mayor" (54). On the one hand, he is a lowly brother, incapable of effecting any civil change against the implacable hand of God. On the other, he is the Mayor, the right hand of God.

As some critics have observed, as the years pass by in Eatonville, Jody begins to assume the characteristics of a plantation owner: building "big house," selling his land, forcing the men in town to build a drainage ditch in front of his store (45,54). "No sooner was he all set as the Mayor-post master-landlord-storekeeper, than he bought a desk like Mr. Hill or Mr. Galloway over in Maitland with one of those swing-around chairs to it" (44). Once again the link between patriarchy and contract is exposed. The inequality between Jody Starks and the town's other residents cannot be proven, resentments cannot be dealt with openly. "They bowed down to him rather, because he was all of these things, and then again he was all of these things because the town bowed down" (47). Voluntary consent was given for Jody to rule over them. The men allowed Jody's role to expand through his knowledge of contract law.

" 'Yuh oughta be glad, 'cause dat makes uh big woman outa you' " (43). These are Jody's instructions to Janie upon his election as Mayor of Eatonville. However, according to the dictates of contract law they are worthless. For, as Carole Pateman

argues, contract theory is antithetical to the elevation of women as full participants in the civil contract. "Patriarchal argument [. . .] refuses any acknowledgment of the capacity and creativity that is unique to women. Men appropriate to themselves women's natural creativity, their capacity physically to give birth-but they also do more than that. Men's generative power extends into another realm; they transmute what they have appropriated into another form of generation, the ability to create new political life, or to give birth to political right" (88). And Jody and Janie's marriage in *Their Eyes* bears Pateman's argument out. It is Jody who breathes life and light into Eatonville, becomes the creative force.

Hurston's conceptualization of Eatonville demonstrates her willingness to explore and revise her own history. After all, Hurston grew up in Eatonville; her father, according to her biographer Robert Hemenway, was a three-term mayor of the town, "[a] codifier of its laws" (14). The link between the sexual contract and patriarchy is also a theme of Hurston's next novel *Moses: Man of the Mountain* (1939), in which she revises or *signifies* on the Biblical story of Moses, using folk dialect to encourage black readers to identify with the plight of the Hebrews, slaves to the Egyptians. *Signifying*, a term revived by Henry Louis Gates Jr., has become one of the most significant concepts used in African-American literary theory. "Signifyin(g)," as Gates defines it "is black double-voicedness; [. . .] it always entails formal revision and an intertextual relation" (51). Thus *signifying* is a type of rhetorical trope, similar to the notion of Bahtkin's concept of *heteroglossia* discussed by Mae Gwendolyn Henderson in her article "Speaking in Tongues," an article which explores intertextual discourse in black women's writing.

Moses's role as an emancipator and his contract with God are themes explored in

depth in this novel. The role of the law in oppressing the Hebrews is clearly delineated from the novel's opening chapter, in which the Hebrews are subject to various legal proclamations which keep them from achieving full citizenship. The most important of these is the pronouncement concerning children: "A great ruler in his newness and new in his greatness had arisen in Egypt and he had said, 'This is law. Hebrew boys shall not be born. All offenders against this law shall suffer death by drowning'" (*Moses* 1). Thus, the Hebrews' plight is grounded in the law, and in their inability to conform to it, for "the Hebrew women shuddered with terror at the indifference of their wombs to the Egyptian law" (1). These women are literally not allowed to give voice, as to do so would lead to the detection of forbidden births. The fulfillment of the sexual contract is tied to the laws which bind the Hebrews to Egyptians.

In introducing her novel, Hurston explains her fascination with revising the Moses myth: "Anyone could bring down laws that had been handed to them. But who can talk with God face to face? Who had the power to command God to go to the peak of the mountain and there demand of Him laws with which to govern a nation?" (xxiii). The themes which Hurston explores in *Their Eyes* are given new expression in *Moses*, as she uses the enslavement of the Hebrews as an historical parallel for the enslavement of American blacks.

The "big voices" of *Moses* are all male: God, the Egyptian Pharaoh, and Moses himself. In constructing his own identity, Moses relies on men as role models, among them Mentu, who tells Moses, "'All I know is what I have heard. It was told by the father of the father of my father to the father of my father and the father of my father has told it to my father'" (53). Thus, men claim narrative in *Moses* for their own, and

exclude women.<sup>4</sup>

Likewise, Janie experiences Eatonville as a place of exclusion. She is allowed to participate in commodity exchange by virtue of working in Jody's store, but forbidden to partake in the ritual of storytelling from the front porch. Janie's forced behavior represents Jody's spoken desire: "'Ah wish mah people would get mo' business in 'em and not spend so much time on foolishness' " (59). When Jody, "Brother Mayor," buys Matt's mule to save it from abuse, he also reaffirms the supremacy of commodity exchange over the gift exchange implied by storytelling. However, at the same time, he reminds Janie that his actions could have implications for her role as his wife:

"Freein' dat mule makes uh mighty big man outa you. Something like George Washington and Lincoln. Abraham Lincoln, he had de whole United States tuh rule so he freed de Negroes. You got uh town so you freed uh mule. You have tuh have power tuh free things and dat makes you lak uh king uh something." (55)

Comparing Jody to Abraham Lincoln sets up a problematic association, since Lincoln's emancipation proclamation, in practical terms, actually failed to free a single slave. Lincoln's pronouncement has long represented an example of the failure of contract for African Americans. After all, a democratic ruler possessing the power to free things (people or animals as property) is a paradox, and belies the essential nature of democracy itself, which defines itself as a state of free equality.

We receive another glimpse into the meaning of commodity exchange in *Their Eyes* through the description of Jody's encounter with a female customer, Mrs. Tony Robinson. The narration here suggests that this encounter is typical, a ritual within

Eatonville. The two battle over how much meat Jody should give to Mrs. Robinson out of pity, a pity which, according to the people in town, should be reserved for her husband. Whether or not Mrs. Robinson is really in need seems to be a point of dispute. One man, Coker, sums up the town's point of view when he says, " [I]n de fust place Ah would never spend on *no* woman whut Tony spend on *her'* " (70-emphasis original).

Nevertheless, Jody and Mrs. Robinson negotiate the meat, and in so doing, reveal a complex relationship between commodity exchange and women. Their conversation serves as another example of the signification Gates finds throughout *Their Eyes*, "rhetorical play rather than events that develop[s] the text's plot" (Gates 196).

" 'Deed Ah is' " (68). This phrase, one of the initial barrages from Mrs. Robinson, bears particular attention. Spoken by a woman, the only one of Jody's female customers we as readers are allowed to observe, this sentence has multiple connotations. On the one hand, it can mean *indeed I am*, that is, *I exist*. Or, it may mean, *I exist because of my deeds*, that is, *I exist because of my actions*. Or, it may mean, *I exist as a deed*, that is, *my existence is contingent on a deed*, a legal contract. As an opening salvo in the negotiations over meat, Mrs. Robinson's remark serves as an example of the type of speech Hurston discusses in her fine essay "Characteristics of Negro Expression" (1934). In this essay, Hurston provides an overview of the unique ways in which African Americans utilize language. "[The Negro's] interpretation of the English language is in terms of pictures. One act described in terms of another" (49).

"Language," asserts Hurston, "is like money" ("Characteristics" 49). Thus the negotiations between Jody and Mrs. Robinson represent an exchange of commodities as

well as a verbal exchange. We might summarize their exchange in terms of key phrases, as outlined below:

1. "I god, Mrs. Robbins." - Jody (opening remark)
2. "Deed Ah is." - Mrs. Robinson (opposing remark)
3. "Ah know you don't need it"- Jody (knowing remark)
4. "You'se uh King!" -Mrs. Robinson (knowing remark)<sup>5</sup>

These phrases, stripped down from the three pages of the novel devoted to the negotiations (Chapter 7, pages 68-70), highlight what a short journey it is from having a voice and asserting it, to capitulating to a bigger (male) voice. Jody's opening comment of " 'I god' " is ultimately reaffirmed by Mrs. Robinson's comment of " ' You'se uh King! ' ". Mrs. Robinson's voice represents a threat to both the sexual contract of her own marriage and the civil contract symbolized by Eatonville itself. As Pateman reminds us, "[c]ivil individuals form a fraternity because they are bound together by a bond *as men*. They share a common interest in upholding the original contract which legitimizes masculine right and allows them to gain material and psychological benefit from women's subjection" (113-emphasis original).

Mrs. Robinson is neutralized not only by Jody's language, but by the words of her fellow townspeople, who pass judgment on her just as they do Janie upon her return from the Everglades. Thus, language in this scene of *Their Eyes*, functions not only as money, but as justice as well. Jody's and Mrs. Robinson's bargaining over meat hinges on the latter giving a sort of testimony, mainly in the public arena of the store's front porch. She must appeal to the store owner's sense of compassion by admitting (at length) how needy she is: " 'Me and my chillun is hongry. Tony don't fee-eed me!' " (68). When her credibility is questioned, she must repeat her declaration in greater detail: " 'If he buy all dat you talkin' 'bout [groceries], Mist' Starks, God knows whut he do wid it. He sho don't

bring it home, and me and mah po' chillun is *so* hongry! Mist' Starks, please gimme uh lil piece uh meat fur me and mah chillun' " (68-69-emphasis original). Her testimony or confession is repeatedly characterized as suspect, and the scene is presented to us in a deliberately comic fashion. However, the scene has serious implications for voice and black women, as Janie, witnessing this incident, feels compelled to interject herself into the town's 'deliberations,' and in so doing, claims her own participation in a contract with God:

"Sometimes God gits familiar wid us womenfolks too and talks His inside business. He told me how surprised He was 'bout y'all turning out so smart after Him makin' yuh different, and how surprised y'all is goin' tuh be if you ever find out you don't know half as much 'bout us as you think you do. It's so easy to make yo'self out God Almighty when you ain't got nothin' tuh strain against but women and chickens." (70-71)

Janie's claim of possessing intimate knowledge of God's "inside business" presents a direct challenge to the relationship of fraternity and patriarchy. She suggests that she and God have formed their own contract and are allies against men's ignorance of women's motives. This testimony (confession) serves as a prelude to the speech which will, for all intents and purposes, dissolve Janie's own marriage contract with Mayor Starks, and the mayor's contract with the town.

Janie comes to view her second marriage contract as worthless as her first, since "[s]he got nothing from Jody except what money could buy, and she was giving away what she didn't value" (72). As Janie finally gives voice to her growing animosity for Jody, she insults her husband's masculinity in front of the whole town: " 'Humph! Talk'

bout *me* lookin' old! When you pull down yo' britches, you look lak de change uh life' " (75-emphasis original). With these words, Janie invalidates not just her own marriage contract with Jody, but the one he values even more, his contract with the town of Eatonville as its mayor: "When he paraded his possessions hereafter, [the men in town] would not consider the two together. They'd look with envy at the things and pity the man that owned them" (75). Jody's sense of himself as a public figure has been separated from "his illusion of his irresistible maleness," and the consequences are fatal not only for the public figure, but for the private man (75). "There was nothing to do in life anymore. Ambition was useless" (76). The civil contract that Jody cared the most about is rendered meaningless by Janie's act of giving voice. She has passed judgment upon him as a man, and, by extension, as a mayor. Jody's sense of self cannot survive this dual assault. "Jody moved his things" (77). This shift of personal property provides another metaphor for the a broken contract. Both civil and sexual contracts dissolve in this scene, with Jody's literal death a short while later providing a formal textual resolution.

Images of awakening accompany Jody's death, and accelerate once Janie and her third husband Vergible "Tea Cake" Woods establish a romantic relationship and Janie abandons her new role of widow with property. Her legal relationship to concrete things continues to be problematic. "She almost apologized to the tenants the first time she collected the rents" (87). As Jody's surviving spouse, Janie inherits Jody's store and his land, an inheritance which affords her the luxury of money in the bank. However, the daily management of Eatonville affairs is a role which reminds her of just how she has acquired her money; her inheritance is an extension of commodity exchange begun under Mayor Starks. "Then [Janie'd] lie awake in bed asking lonesomeness some questions.

She asked if she wanted to leave and go back where she had come from and try to find her mother. Maybe tend her grandmother's grave" (85). In offering this image of awakening shortly after Jody's death, Hurston explicitly rejects a sentimental ending to Janie's story. Emotional and spiritual reunions with Janie's mother and grandmother, scenes that would form the centerpiece of a typical nineteenth-century American sentimental novel, are ruled out as plot alternatives: "Digging around inside herself like that she found that she had no interest in that seldom-seen mother at all. She hated her grandmother and had hidden it from herself all these years under a cloak of pity" (85). Janie's "cloak of pity" may serve as a concrete manifestation of sentimentality itself. Hurston seems to identify sentimentality with emotional excess, a wallowing in the past, rather than a continuation towards the horizon. In awakening, Janie rejects both the sentimental dynamic of maternal separation/ reunion as well as the legal dynamic of landlord/tenant.

The arrival of Tea Cake in Eatonville would seem to indicate Hurston's full-fledged belief in the perfectibility of romantic love. Her use of the romance plot serves an obvious purpose; in general, readers celebrate the budding love story of Janie and Tea Cake. But, as bell hooks has noted, "[s]trategically, the focus on romance is a device Hurston uses to engage readers while subtly interjecting a subversive narrative" ("Zora" 245). The romance plot, according to hooks, is a way of appealing to a wide audience, while Hurston pursues a narrower aim: "a fictive manifesto on the subject of gender roles as they influence and effect the construction of the female imagination," an imagination which is explored via the art of storytelling (246). Janie's romantic daydreams, hooks asserts, point to one consequence of patriarchy, that "female imagination is most expressed initially with the realm of romantic fantasy" (248). In other words, these

daydreams are internalized at first, but then represented in her relationships with Logan, Jody and finally, Tea Cake. Yet despite Janie and Tea Cake's romance, he can only help her become a storyteller through the tale of his own death. The death of romantic love becomes Janie's vehicle for voice.

I agree with hooks that storytelling is a key component of Hurston's conception of a liberated female imagination. However, I see also active storytelling as a viable alternative to the continuing passivity which is implied in contract law, where autonomy is subjugated to the terms of the contract. It is this doctrine which infuses every aspect of Janie's life, even the part of her life shared with Tea Cake. Janie's romance, the fairy tale of her life with Tea Cake, is built around a foundation of legal contract, just as her earlier marriages are. In killing Tea Cake, Janie severs the contract in just as dramatic a fashion as when she verbally undercuts Jody Starks.

Although Tea Cake and Janie together poke fun at money, it is important to remember that their relationship begins in Jody's store when Tea Cake buys a pack of cigarettes. This first meeting revolves around dual forms of exchange: money and words. As Tea Cake points out to Janie, " 'You don't buy from yo'self, do yuh?' " (92). Tea Cake's remark highlights the value of exchange between people, and de-emphasizes the seriousness of commodity transactions.

"Evenin', Mis' Starks. Could yuh lemme have uh pound uh knuckle pudding' till Saturday? Ah'm sho tuh pay yuh then."

You needs ten pounds, Mr. Tea Cake. Ah'll let yuh have all Ah got and you needn't bother 'bout paying it back." (94)

In exchanging conversation, both Janie and Tea Cake together poke holes in the power of

buying and selling. Their playful talk in the store serves as verbal counterpoint to Jody and Mrs. Robinson's exchange in which Janie must remain silent.

As Tea Cake and Janie prepare to leave Eatonville, images of awakening become more frequent, and continue into the transitional section of the text, once they have left town but before they have become settled in the Everglades:

The next morning she awoke hearing a knocking on the front door and found Tea Cake there.

“ ‘Hello, Mis’ Janie, Ah hope Ah woke you up.” (102)

Here, the notion of awakening seems to become attached to the concept of romantic love. Janie has begun to fear that Tea Cake's "night thoughts" may not correspond to his "daytime thought" and his arrival at her door that morning indicates his insistence to prove to her that his thoughts do match (101-102). As Hurston dramatizes that same night, images of awakening persist, except that now it is Janie who appears to awaken Tea Cake, instead of the reverse: "She called him. He pretended not to hear. He snored louder. She went to the hammock to shake him and he seized and pulled her in with him" (102). Thus, a scene which might appear at first to represent a commitment to an equality of exchange is presented as a hoax. For Tea Cake has not been asleep, not even for a moment, only pretending. Janie cannot awaken him, because he has never been asleep. They cannot fully exchange awakenings.

"Janie awoke next morning by feeling Tea Cake almost kissing her breath away. Holding her and caressing her as if he feared she might escape his grasp and fly away" (103). Somewhat ironically, he then disappears for four days, a time during which Janie's awakenings are not directly represented in the text. We are told that "she plunged

into the abyss and descended to the ninth darkness where light has never been” (103). And when he returns, before declaring his love for Janie, he first takes her grocery shopping, determined to place her on the other side of commodity exchange: “ ‘You sells groceries for ordinary people. We’s e gointuh buy for *you*’ ” (104-emphasis original). By presenting us with this strange series of images of awakening, Hurston highlights the importance of reciprocity over romantic love itself. Janie’s anguished confusion over Tea Cake’s feelings undermines a sustained belief in the “fairy-tale” of their romance; awakening together proves nothing, only that they are in the same room.

Janie and Tea Cake’s actual wedding is an event which is summarized rather than presented in detail. In fact, Janie’s wedding to Tea Cake is afforded fewer words than Janie’s murder trial. The marriage begins within a narrative gap, taking place in between the sentences “And there was Tea Cake in the big old station in a new blue suit and hat, hauling her off to a preacher’s house first thing,” and “Then right on to the room he had been sleeping in for two weeks all by himself waiting for her to come” (111). Their exchange of vows, confessions of love, as it were, are not shown. There may in fact be a link, then, between instances of what Rachel Blau DuPlessis refers to as “undepicted speech”: Janie’s wedding ceremony with Tea Cake and her trial for his murder (DuPlessis 108). Both circumstances of undepicted speech revolve around legal proceedings.

Images of sleeping and awakening increase in chapter 13, during the weeks following the wedding. “*She woke up* and Tea Cake still wasn’t there [. . .]” (112-emphasis added). “Janie dozed off to sleep but *she woke up* in time to see the sun sending up spies ahead of him to mark out the road through the dark” (115-emphasis

added). Each time Janie awakens she awakens not to Tea Cake's presence, but instead, to his inexplicable absence. The use of the motif of awakening indicates not the supremacy of romantic love or marriage, but their inherent instability, particularly for a black woman.

Tea Cake finally returns to Janie with only twelve dollars out of her two hundred, but with a story to tell her. The question Hurston seems to be asking of her readers is whether his story should be considered a commodity (which would render the loss of \$188 an unfair exchange) or a gift (which makes the loss of the money irrelevant). Or, in other words, will their marriage function as a representative legal contract or will it be able to transcend it and function as something more? I would argue that until Tea Cake gives voice to Janie, telling her “ ‘[f]rom now on you'se mah wife and mah woman and everything else in the world,’ ” their marriage has not truly begun, regardless of any earlier undepicted vows (118). This is his true romantic vow, not the one that counts legally.

Thus, Janie and Tea Cake commit themselves to two sets of vows, explaining why at times they seem like two different husbands and two different wives. Critics have scrutinized, sometimes with a palpable and understandable unease, Tea Cake's willingness to beat Janie in order to reinforce his own masculinity within the black male community and Janie's unremarked acceptance of it. Also too, Tea Cake's motto of “ ‘When Ah ain't got nothin' you don't git nothin' ” goes unchallenged by Janie (122). In these instances, Janie seems to cede her own authority to a man who is supposedly her total equal. Claudia Tate, in examining *Their Eyes*, looks to answer what is for her a quintessential question: "What happens to the discourse of political desire when the

discursive authority is a black woman?" (89). Tate sees dual plots in the text: the romance plot and the female quest:

No doubt the romance plot was easier to write, given its formulaic structure and social currency, while the female quest story, with a plot external to female sexual and domestic aspirations, was a suppressed discourse and therefore obviously difficult to write. (76)

However, Tate sees Janie's quest as incomplete within the body of Hurston's novel, with a new beginning of "existential possibilities" only hinted at in the text's final passages (75).

Tate's analysis of *Their Eyes* includes Hurston's novel as one which "depict[s] marriage and individual freedom as oppositional, indeed, antithetical" (88). Tate's central thesis throughout her complex study is that black women writing at the turn into the twentieth century were seeking a vehicle for full civil participation in American political and social life. Hurston's novel, according to Tate, is inherently political and politicizes sexual desire.

But marriage is just one form of contract manifested in Hurston's novel, the most obvious one, but not the only one. And Tate's analysis precludes Janie's relationship with Pheoby as providing a concrete extralegal alternative to marriage, complete within itself. The act of giving voice, sharing a story with another black woman, is a political act which exists outside traditional political boundaries. Rather than characterizing Janie and Phoeby's interaction as another type of trial, as Rachel Blau DuPlessis does, I see their relationship functioning as an extralegal vehicle for non-judgmental verbal exchange.

Before turning to a discussion of Janie's courtroom trial, it is important, I think, to examine briefly the role contracts played in Zora Neale Hurston's life. Studies of the

Harlem Renaissance, a major political and cultural movement for African Americans in the 1920s and 1930s often discuss the complex relationships between black writers and their white patrons. David Levering Lewis, for example, in *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, notes that “[f]or [. . .] – the scores of unknown painters, sculptors, and writers pouring into Harlem there would have been no emergency loans and temporary beds, professional advice and Downtown contacts, prizes and publicity without the patient assemblage and management by a handful of Harlem notables of a substantial white patronage. The artistic migration itself would not have occurred” (120).

One significant white patron of black letters was Mrs. Charlotte Osgood Mason, a Park Avenue “dowager” who assisted not only Hurston but Langston Hughes, Alain Locke, and a number of others (Lewis 151). Lewis’s scathing description of Mrs. Mason’s reception room is worth repeating in full:

Guided by [Alain] Locke, Harlem’s striving artists, singers, and writers ascended to the Park Avenue penthouse, one after another, to be received as votive primitives by the regal husk seated in a large ornate chair that may have-so bedazzled were they, they were never sure- rested on a platform. (151)

The “high-chair” depicted in *Their Eyes* may have some added significance if we connect it to Hurston’s rocky relationship with Mrs. Mason. Hurston’s desire to give voice was, many times, at odds with the desires of her patron, the white woman on her high chair. Charlotte Mason took great pains to codify her relationships with those she served as patron to. On December 8, 1927, Zora Neale Hurston signed a contract with her patron, an act that her biographer Robert Hemenway characterizes as “one of the most important

events of her life” (105). This would be the first in a series of contracts Hurston would have with Mrs. Mason, providing her with a stipend-“approximately fifteen thousand [dollars] over the next five years” (105). Hurston could continue to collect African American folklore, in exchange for Mrs. Mason having legal control over all compiled materials. Any folklore she collected belonged to her patron. In effect, Hurston exchanged money for her full voice, as Mrs. Mason wanted her to forgo publishing. It was not until 1934 that Hurston succeeded in extricating herself from contracts to her patron, only three years before *Their Eyes* was published.

The effects of Hurston’s contractual relationship with Charlotte Mason within her fiction are difficult to evaluate. While Hemenway does note that *Their Eyes* “is much more than an outpouring of private feeling,” he also asserts that Hurston’s role as a participant-observer studying black folk culture permeates the novel and that the novel contains some autobiographical elements. A reading of *Dust Tracks on a Road*, Hurston’s autobiography, reveals Hurston’s discomfort with the contractual element of her relationship with Mrs. Mason. Hurston is careful to de-emphasize the contractual relationship between the two of them, instead calling attention to their “psychic bond,” Mrs. Mason’s “spiritual guidance,” even referring to her as Godmother (175, 309).

Nevertheless, Hurston’s unease with Mrs. Mason does come across in *Dust Tracks on a Road*, for example, as she describes her patron’s power of censorship over her:

[Godmother would] lay me by the heels for what I was *thinking*. “You have broken the law,” it would accuse sternly. “You are dissipating your powers in things that have no real meaning,” and go on to lacerate me.

**“Keep silent. Does a child in the womb speak?”**

**(176-emphasis original)**

Hurston’s carefully constructed fiction of a loving godmother is subverted by her own admissions here. Mrs. Mason has the power of law at her command through the letter of the contract Hurston had signed. Her patron’s advice is not a gift, but a legal demand.

White women rarely appear in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. The exception is of course Janie’s trial, where she must testify before a courtroom audience that includes “[e]ight or ten white women [who] had come to look at her too. They wore good clothes and had the pinky color that comes of good food. They were nobody’s poor white folks. What need had *they* to leave their richness to come look on Janie in her overalls? [. . .] It would be nice if she could make *them* know how it was instead of those menfolks” (176). Janie longs to give voice not to this group of “[t]welve strange men who did not know a thing about people like Tea Cake and her,” but instead to some white women (176). The question is: why? White women are excluded from serving on Janie’s jury by virtue of their gender, just as black men are excluded by virtue of their race. However, white women still hold more power vis-a-vis their race than black women. Perhaps Janie’s longing to testify before white women merely reflects the probability of white women being legally permitted to serve on a jury before black women. It may well be that Hurston had an image of her meetings with Charlotte Mason in mind, as she sat in her patron’s high chair, pleading her case for financial support: “But [Janie] sat on in that trial chair until the lawyer told her she could come down” (178). Hurston’s protagonist, like her creator, is back up in a high chair, just as Jody Starks had wished (58). The conflation of these images of chairs suggests that Janie’s trial is somehow all wrong, that

there is an inherent alliance between Janie's old status as the wife of the Eatonville mayor and her new status as legal defendant.

The very fact that Hurston chooses to put Janie and Tea Cake's relationship on trial points to her unease at endorsing romantic love as the perfect ending for a novel of awakening. Embedded within the narrative's depiction of Janie and Tea Cake's life together are many signals that their relationship is transitional. Janie's discovery of Tea Cake's gambling, for example, provides textual instability (and a temporary source of income), just as their journey away from the impending hurricane reinforces their status as migrant workers. Tea Cake's unwillingness to believe that the hurricane's approach is a serious business suggests his inability to dislodge himself from his own notions of contract. As he tells Janie, " 'You couldn't have a hurricane when you're making seven and eight dollars a day picking beans' " (147). His logic is rooted in commerce, not in a deep understanding of nature herself that goes beyond exchanging beans for money. When he notices the local Seminoles fleeing the Everglades, he derides their knowledge, asserting that " 'Indians don't know much uh nothin; tuh tell de truth. Else dey'd own dis country still' " (148). Ownership and commerce exchange are still foregrounded as vital principles for human existence, only this time by Tea Cake.

One of the greatest controversies inspired by *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is how to interpret the fact that Janie's testimony before the white jury is never presented word for word. Instead, it is summarized, an example of what DuPlessis has called "undepicted speech" (108). Whether or not this undepicted speech truly represents silence or not is still an open question. In her essay "I Love the Way Janie Crawford Left Her Husbands," Mary Helen Washington focuses her attention on those moments when

Janie is silent: the beating and her trial. Taking her cue from Robert Stepto's analysis that Janie's acquisition of voice is an "essential illusion," undercut by a lack of first-person narrative, Washington agrees that the trial scene, told in the third person, works against a claim that Janie achieves her own subjectivity (Stepto 166).

The fact remains, however, that Janie's words are somewhat accessible to the reader, as her direct testimony is presented indirectly:

She tried to make them see how terrible it was that things were fixed so that Tea Cake couldn't come back to himself until he had got rid of that mad dog that was in him and he couldn't get rid of the dog and live. He had to die to get rid of the dog. But she hadn't wanted to kill him. A man is up against a hard game when he must die to beat it. She made them see how she couldn't ever want to be rid of him. She didn't plead to anybody. She just sat there and told and when she was through she hushed.

(178)

Janie's rhetoric is what is missing from the courtroom scene. Are her words a confession or a justification? Are the only alternatives in this situation complete silence or total confession? And what are the consequences of either? Hurston's use of undepicted speech raises some complicated questions as to whether Janie's constitutes a confession.

In returning to a discussion of what constitutes a confession, I return to Peter Brooks's study on that subject. In *Troubling Confessions*, Brooks characterizes confession as "a speech-act that has a constative aspect (the sin or guilt confessed to) and a performative aspect (the performance of the act of confessing), and that the performative aspect can produce the constative, creating guilt in the act of confessing it"

(52). As he investigates whether a legal confession can ever actually be voluntary, he asserts that “It is indeed arguable that confession most often is produced from a state of dependency and abjection rather than from one of autonomy and dignity” (72). “Thus,” Brooks concludes, “the act of confessing may in its very nature undercut the notion of human agency that the law wishes to- and must- promote” (74).

The meaning(s) of the courtroom scene in *Their Eyes* hinges on to what degree undepicted speech subverts Janie’s testimony. Janie must take the stand, sit in the high chair, not to have anyone “pouring honor over her,” but to save her own life, and, even more importantly, to put an end to “lying thoughts,” misrepresentations, mis-significations (58, 178). Yet she is being compelled to do so through legal means, through a legal process which Patricia Williams has reminded us, has had a vested interest in denying voice to those most in need of expressing it, “[. . .] [in particular,] women are taught not to experience what they experience, in deference to men’s ways of knowing” (Williams 13). Perhaps Hurston’s point, in leaving Janie’s direct testimony out of the novel, is that her words should only exist as undepicted speech, even in the realm of the courtroom. To present Janie’s own words would be to acknowledge them as words within a confession, and thus in some sense coerced, not freely offered.

Equally absent from the depiction of the courtroom scene is not only Janie’s testimony, but the attorneys’ questions for her:

Then the strange white man that was going to talk for her got up there. He whispered a little with the clerk and then called on Janie to take the stand and talk. After a few little questions he told her to tell just how it

happened and to speak the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

(178)

Without a fuller sense of the verbal exchange occurring within the courtroom, it becomes difficult to assess how confessional Janie's words really are. And, as Peter Brooks helps us to see, a legal confession is not necessarily an expression of actual subjectivity. If we keep this in mind, then Hurston's choice of third-person narrative is noteworthy not as an expression of silence but as a defiance against the hypocrisies of a legal confession, coupled with the textual necessity of needing Janie to be acquitted of this crime in order to travel back to Eatonville and give her own, free, uncoerced story to Pheoby.

Mae Henderson has noted in her discussion of *Their Eyes* that Janie's trial allows Hurston an opportunity to present dual meanings of what it means to give testimony, allowing for both the secular and religious usages of the term *testimony* (21-22). Indeed, in her glossary to *Mules and Men*, her outstanding collection of folk tales, Hurston gives a definition of *testimony* that relies heavily on religious implications; offering testimony of God's love and fellowship is a means by which "public expression of good-will to the world" is presented (253). In analyzing Janie's progress towards voice, Henderson asserts that it is the "subjective plurality (rather than the notion of the cohesive or fractured subject) that, finally, allows the black woman to become an expressive site for a dialectics/dialogics of identity and difference" (37). Yet Janie's "speaking in tongues" is only represented indirectly, not through first person discourse, but rather through indirect, undepicted speech.

Janie does not, I would argue, awaken to the power of her own voice

through her testimony/confession at her trial. Instead, Janie's awakening extends beyond her legal battle into her conversation with Pheoby. This mode of discourse offers Janie an extralegal vehicle for non-judgmental verbal exchange. DuPlessis' argument that Janie's talk to Pheoby represents another trial in the novel is compelling, but misleading. Janie's awakening is to the limitations and inherent passivity implied within contract law, and to label her conversation with Pheoby another trial is to allow their exchange to be absorbed into a dominant legal discourse. It is only through an act of gift exchange, not legal testimony, that Janie can come to terms with the fact that she has killed Tea Cake, the man who, Hurston seemingly would have readers believe, is her true love.

By killing off Tea Cake, Hurston violates the unwritten contract of how a romance novel is supposed to end: why? Her autobiography *Dust Tracks on a Road* provides some clues. Hurston's biographer Robert Hemenway, in his introduction to the 1984 edition, reminds us of the atypical style of Hurston's autobiography, asking, "If so much of *Dust Tracks* is untrustworthy, why read the book?" (xiv). The answer, says Hemenway, is to discover "Hurston's style, rich and expressive, [. . .] a natural by-product of her attempt to represent the oral voice in written narrative, a process that marks the only time and public and private personae come together in the *Dust Track* text" (xxxiv). In chapter 12, Hurston retells a folktale which has particular significance for any examination of the connection between romantic love and awakening. According to the men whose voices Hurston appropriates here, black women have reputations for being more violent than loving:

[Black women] even had evil dreams. White, yellow and brown girls dreamed about roses and perfume and kisses. Black gals dreamed about guns, razors, ice-picks, hatchets and hot lye. I heard men swear they had seen women dreaming and knew these things to be true.

(225)

In comparing black women to other women, Hurston, through the guise of a male voice, reveals the incongruity between romantic love and awakening:

"Then she [“a yeller or a brown woman] will kiss you more times than you ask her to, and go on back to sleep. *But you take and wake up a black gal, now!* First thing she been sleeping wid her fists balled up, and you shake her, she'll lam you five or six times before you can get her awake. Then when she do git wake she'll have off and ast you, 'Nigger, what you wake me up for? Know what I was dreaming when you woke me up? I dreamt dat you shook your old rusty black fist under my nose and I split your head open wid a axe.' Then she'll kick your feets away from hers, snatch de covers all over on her side, ball up her fists gain, and gwan back to sleep. You can't tell me nothin. I know."

(226-emphasis added)

In this folktale, an awakening is severed from romantic love through acts of extreme violence, just as Janie and Tea Cake's romance is severed by the shooting. Having an awakening, as we have seen through examinations of actual scenes in *Their Eyes*, has less to do with marriage or romance, and far more to do with the expression of voice through mutual exchange.

Janie, in telling her story to Pheoby freely, is able to break through the confines of contract law, and to envision an extralegal alternative. Lewis Hyde reminds us that "A gift that has the power to change us awakens a part of the soul" (51). Janie's gift of giving voice to Pheoby is one such gift. As such, it functions outside the realm of legal discourse. The way Pheoby phrases her own reaction to her friend's story, " 'Ah done growed ten feet higher from jus' listenin' tuh you, Janie,' " hints at the ability storytelling has to reach her, to start a path of growth that might actually take Pheoby to a point of voice far beyond the "high chair" of Jody's store or the courtroom (182).

The political implications of Janie's awakening are indeed powerful. The extralegal alternative to contract law that Hurston hints at here could (theoretically) undermine a patriarchal system of law that has sustained American power relations for centuries. In awakening to the limitations of contract law and the power of giving voice, romantic love and marriage are superseded by the bonds of female friendship: Janie asserts a power accessible to black women. Unlike the female protagonists in the other novels I have examined throughout this dissertation, Janie ends up cognizant of her journey and willing to continue it. Through Janie, Zora Neale Hurston is willing to answer the question she posed in *Dust Tracks on a Road*: "what happens when you wake a black gal up?"

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<sup>1</sup>Many recent works of criticism demonstrate this scholarly commitment. Here, I am thinking of such studies as Carla Kaplan's *The Erotics of Talk : Women's Writing and Feminist Paradigms* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1996), Karla F.C. Holloway's *Moorings and Metaphors: Figures of Culture and Gender in Black Women's Literature*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1992.); essays such as Deborah E. McDowell's "The Changing Same: Generational Connections Between Novelists" (in *Reading Black, Reading Feminist*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. NY: Meridian, 1990. 91-115), Patricia Felisa Barbeito's " 'Making Generations' in Jacobs, Larsen, and Hurston: A Genealogy of Black Women's Writing." (*American Literature* 70:2, June 1998, 365-395), and Toni Morrison's "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation" (in Mari Evans's *Black Women Writers, 1950-1980 A Critical Evaluation*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1984, 339-345).

<sup>2</sup> See Walker's essay "Saving the Life that is Your Own: The Importance of Models in the Artist's Life" in *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*, in which Zora's name is invoked, much as a divinity would be.

<sup>3</sup> Williams is quite conscious of her experiment with language. Early on, she announces her intentions: "I am trying to create a genre of legal writing to fill the gaps of traditional legal scholarship. I would like to write in a way that reveals the intersubjectivity of legal constructions, that forces the reader both to participate in the construction of meaning and to be conscious of that process" (7-8).

<sup>4</sup> At one point in *Moses*, Hurston utilizes imagery of awakening, as Jethro, Zipporah's father, says to Moses, "You have a great soul and something down in Egypt had waked it up. And you can't wake up thoughts in men and put them back to sleep again." Moses's immediate reply to his father-in-law suggests a difference for Hurston between the way men and women experience an awakening. He says, "I have a wife now and I have you and the mountain for a friend and that seems to be all that I need" (103).

<sup>5</sup> The larger issue of linguistics in Hurston's works is addressed at length by numerous Hurston scholars, among them Karla F. C. Holloway- *The Character of the Word: The Texts of Zora Neale Hurston* (NY: Greenwood P., 1987). Holloway reminds us of the interconnectedness between Hurston's depiction of character and the four elements which she identifies as "the blend that defines character"-namely "Narrative Voice, Setting, Interpersonal Relationships and Language" (62). In discussing the role of dialect, Holloway notes that it "also functions to deepen the level of communication between characters who share the dialect" (67).

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