ABSTRACT

Title of Document: RESISTING REPRODUCTIVE REGULATION IN EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY AMERICAN WOMEN'S FICTION

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*Resisting Reproductive Regulation* contributes to a growing body of criticism about how women participated in early twentieth century debates about reproduction in the United States. While the mainstream American birth control movement led to the legalization of contraception, it gained popular support by prioritizing the desires of married white women who were able-bodied, born in the United States, and members of the middle and upper classes. Because birth control advocates embraced eugenics and condemned abortion, their campaigns resulted in greater reproductive regulation for many women deemed "unfit" for reproduction by eugenicists, including unmarried, poor, non-white, immigrant, and disabled women. *Resisting Reproductive Regulation* examines the fiction written by American women during this period that challenges this limited

agenda. These writers insist that women should be able to control the reproductive potential of their own bodies, regardless of their circumstances or forms of embodiment, and they examine the negative consequences that reproductive regulation enacts in American women's lives. As a result, their texts depict women's reproductive struggles in ways that anticipate late twentieth and early twenty-first century intersectional campaigns for reproductive justice.

Though Mary Hunter Austin, Josephine Herbst, and Katherine Anne Porter each enjoyed relative privilege as white, American-born, and generally able-bodied women, each experienced reproductive difficulties in her own life. Each subsequently challenged mainstream birth control advocacy from this period in her fiction by grappling with those difficulties and examining the conditions that caused them. In so doing, these writers expose the prejudices encoded in the arguments upon which early twentieth century American eugenicists and birth control advocates relied. *Resisting Reproductive Regulation* argues that their fiction reveals inextricable relationships between the reproductive regulations American women faced and American prejudices about (dis)ability, sexuality, class, race, and/or country of origin. By addressing these connections, these writers explore the ways that reproductive regulations secure and perpetuate existing patriarchal, nationalist, white supremacist, heteronormative, capitalistic, and ableist systems of power. By advocating for women to be able to control the reproductive potential of their own bodies, these writers also attempt to interrupt the reproduction of these systems of power.

Further, American women writing about contraception, abortion, and reproduction in the early decades of the twentieth century knew their depictions of these

topics were subject to censorship, suppression, and marginalization. This dissertation argues that these writers resisted this form of reproductive regulation as well, developing innovative narrative and aesthetic techniques in order to communicate with readers about reproductive issues. While some of their concerns and experiences were successfully suppressed and marginalized during their lives, Austin, Herbst, and Porter each preserved illuminating materials in their personal archives. This dissertation recovers many of those materials, which provide new context within which to examine their published fiction and to recognize their literary and feminist contributions.

# RESISTING REPRODUCTIVE REGULATION
# IN EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY AMERICAN WOMEN'S FICTION

By

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# Dedication

For Nora Jane and Annie Kate

# Acknowledgements

When I was preparing my PhD application, a trusted advisor told me that the applicants who stand out are the ones who demonstrate a desire to *do the work* of completing a doctoral degree. Seeing the completed dissertation before me, I am reminded of everything I've learned and everything I've achieved through my commitment to doing the work. I am also filled with gratitude for the mentors, colleagues, and loved ones who have made it emotionally, intellectually, and financially possible for me to *continue* doing the work.

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I could not have progressed through the doctoral program nor finished this dissertation without the help of the many people who have looked after and educated my daughters. They have provided careful, considerate, consistent care that enriched my daughters' lives and allowed me to focus my energy on my work. These caretakers and teachers include my in-laws, Patti and Chuck; the staff of the Goddard School in Columbia, including Patty, Lisa, Chrissie, and Delshurn; the staff of Kindercare in Gambrills, including Ellen, Imelda, Ashley, Candace, Tarah, Bonnie, Shavon, Shy, and Kathy; the staff of the Goddard School in Millersville, including Dipti, Courtney, Amanda, Vicky, Wendy, and Stephanie; the employees of Rippling Woods Elementary, including Mrs. Meekins; and our babysitter, Anna.

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# Introduction

When Cecile Richards took the stage at the Women's March on Washington on January 21, 2017, it was not surprising that she ended her speech by insisting that women have a right to "access to safe and legal abortion." As the President of Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA), Richards is the most prominent and recognizable face of the American pro-choice movement, which campaigns to ensure women's access to legal abortion. But PPFA also offers a wide variety of other health services, and before Richards mentioned abortion, she urged the crowd to defend "the right of working women to earn a living wage, for the right of immigrant families to live without fear, [and] for the right of mothers everywhere to raise families [] in safe communities with clean air and clean drinking water, including in Flint, Michigan." Richards's comments demonstrate the degree to which PPFA's advocacy for women's reproductive rights has grown increasingly intersectional in the twenty-first century. Many feminists emphasized a perspective that is now often called "intersectionality" well before Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term itself in 1993, but the Women's March gave this concept and this term unprecedented exposure.[1] On stage, women representing the National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health, the National Asian Pacific American

[1] Crenshaw recently summarized that she came up with the term "intersectionality" in 1993 "to deal with the fact that many of our social justice problems like racism and sexism are often overlapping, creating multiple levels of social injustice." The speakers on stage at the Women's March spoke to a massive crowd at a demonstration that garnered considerable media coverage and achieved historical significance. It was attended by over 500,000 people and was the impetus for over 600 sister marches nationwide. Experts estimate that total participation in the United States exceeded 4.2 million, and the Women's March also inspired over 200 sister marches with more than 300,000 participants internationally. January 21, 2017 was called "the single largest day for a demonstration in the U.S" by political protest activist and University of Delaware professor Erica Chenoweth (qtd. in Frostenson). Google Trends analytics, which tracks search trends back to 2004, indicates that searches for "intersectionality" peaked between January 21 and January 28, 2017, during which time the search was nearly twice as popular as its previous high point. Notably, this previous peak occurred only a few months earlier, when promotion of the Women's March on Washington had already begun.

Women's Forum, and the SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective all spoke about the need for intersectional attitudes toward reproductive issues.[2] On their website, SisterSong defines "reproductive justice" as "the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities."[3] In her speech at the Women's March, SisterSong's Monica Simpson emphasized the necessity of uniting across difference, saying "this reproductive justice movement understands that our movements are inextricably linked. All of us must work together to do this work to get to freedom and to see justice." Simpson also referenced an Audre Lorde speech from 1982, emphasizing that "we cannot have single issue movements because we do not live single issue lives."[4] By invoking Lorde, Simpson stressed the perspective that has come to be called intersectionality while also placing key emphasis on the connection between lived experience and political activism.

The form of reproductive justice promoted at the Women's March provides a stark contrast to the birth control advocacy of PPFA's founder, Margaret Sanger.[5] Sanger's own women's rights activism became increasingly narrow in scope after she adopted the legalization of birth control as her single political cause in the 1910s. Early in her career, Sanger wrote about the struggles of working class women and immigrant families that Richards indicated are central concerns of today's PPFA. But these concerns

[2] NLIR was represented by Executive Director Jessica González-Rojas, NAPAW was represented by Interim Executive Director Sung Yeon, and SisterSong was represented by Executive Director Monica Simpson.
[3] For more about the origin and history of the term "reproductive justice," which black women coined in the early 1990s, and of the reproductive justice movement, see Kimala Price.
[4] Simpson's comment paraphrases a Lorde's assertion that "there is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives" (139).
[5] PPFA traces their origins to October 16, 1916, when Sanger opened a birth control clinic in Brooklyn, New York. Sanger founded the American Birth Control League in 1921, which adopted the Planned Parenthood name in 1942 ("Planned Parenthood 100 Years Strong).

disappeared from Sanger's activism in the 1920s and 1930s, when she developed political alliances with medical doctors and eugenicists in an effort to legitimize birth control in the minds of the American public. Dorothy Roberts indicates that the birth control movement's embrace of eugenics turned birth control into "a means of controlling a population rather than a means of increasing women's reproductive autonomy" (80). *Resisting Reproductive Regulation* argues that while Sanger and the American birth control movement adopted and promoted this increasingly narrow vision, American women living in this period wrote fiction that demonstrates nascent intersectionality in its depiction of women's reproductive struggles. Mary Hunter Austin, Josephine Herbst, and Katherine Anne Porter each experienced her own reproductive difficulties and resisted the suppression of her perspective by writing fiction about these issues. Each woman's fiction stresses the importance of women being able to control the reproductive potential of their own bodies while also indicating that reproductive regulations are not simply a women's issue. Rather, their work reveals that the justifications for reproductive regulations, clearly indicative of gender prejudice, were also inextricable from early twentieth century American prejudices regarding (dis)ability, sexuality, class, race, and country of origin.

By focusing on these writers and their fiction, *Resisting Reproductive Regulation* contributes to a growing body of criticism about how women responded to and participated in early twentieth century American debates about reproduction. As I will show, this existing scholarship reveals a broad variety of ways Americans in positions of power sought to regulate the reproductive potential of women. Scholars interested in how issues of reproduction have been depicted in literature and popular culture have yielded

productive insights by focusing on birth control advocacy, abortion stigmatization, or racial stereotypes individually. This dissertation utilizes a different approach, demonstrating the insights that can be gained from reading across texts that do not fit neatly into the scope of these individual studies, but which grapple more broadly with the relationships between reproductive regulation and other forms of oppression. *Resisting Reproductive Regulation* also argues that analyzing the fiction written by women who have experienced reproductive difficulties can yield particular insights that are obscured when those conducting literary analysis of fiction insist on separating the writer from the work. In so doing, this study continues in the tradition of reproductive justice advocates, who have long emphasized the importance of women communicating about their own lived experiences. This approach also continues in the traditions of the intersecting critical discourses from which this dissertation draws, including feminist theory, disabilities theory, queer theory, and critical race theory, whose practitioners have likewise emphasized the importance of centering the perspectives of those individuals most impacted by injustice.

Austin, Herbst, and Porter were each white, born in the United States, and generally able-bodied, so each of these writers was generally the type of woman whose desires were prioritized by the American birth control movement. But despite these forms of privilege, all three women faced obstacles in controlling their reproductive potential and wrote fiction that addresses those obstacles. Austin, who gave birth to a daughter with an undiagnosed developmental disability and miscarried a second pregnancy, wrote fiction about reproduction that engages with the intersections of disability, class, and compulsory heterosexuality. Herbst, who terminated an extra-marital pregnancy through

abortion, lost her sister to a death caused by an abortion, and helped her first documented female lover to procure an abortion, wrote fiction about reproduction that engages with the intersections of abortion stigma, sexuality, and class.[6] Porter, who terminated at least one pregnancy through abortion, suffered the stillbirth of a child in a subsequent pregnancy, and was forced to undergo an ovarian surgery that rendered her sterile, wrote fiction about reproduction that engages with the intersections of slavery, white supremacy, and the patriarchal family. Biographical, autobiographical, and archival documentation of these women's lives indicate that these experiences were great sources of pain for each of them, and their fiction includes various autobiographically informed characters grappling with these issues. None of these writers fully escapes early twentieth century American assumptions and value judgments. But despite existing within the systems of power that they sought to expose and dismantle, their fiction reveals that their own reproductive difficulties gave them insights into factors that influenced women's reproductive lives but which were ignored or suppressed by birth control activists and eugenicists. Their fiction explores how the denigration of women based on their race, class, perceived disabilities, and/or sexual behavior led to further reproductive regulation of all women. Their fiction also shows that reproductive regulations contribute to the reproduction of patriarchal, nationalist, white supremacist, heteronormative, capitalistic, and ableist systems of power. Austin, Herbst, and Porter's fiction thus demonstrates what can be achieved and exposed by women willing to use their art to advocate for and defend themselves as well as other women who face greater regulation, oppression, and suppression.

[6] Herbst's own abortion and her sister's death following an abortion are well established in existing scholarship about her life. Chapter 2 will address the archival evidence that documents her involvement with the abortion procured by Marion Greenwood, her first documented female lover.

Like women's actual reproductive bodies, women's opportunities to speak and write publicly about reproduction have been heavily regulated in the United States. *Resisting Reproductive Regulation* also studies the ways Austin, Herbst, and Porter resisted this form of reproductive regulation. As I will show, the enforcement of women's ignorance about sexuality and reproduction predated the Comstock Act of 1873, but as existing scholarship documents, this legislation formalized the difficulty women encountered in their attempts to speak openly about reproductive issues and impacted advertisers, writers, and publishers. This dissertation builds upon these studies, arguing that women were forced to develop new reading strategies and skills as a result of the Comstock Act and the attitudes toward reproduction that it secured. Austin, Herbst, and Porter all struggled to get their work completed and/or published within these conditions. Each responded by developing innovative aesthetic, narrative, and/or formal strategies through which she sought to publish fiction that encoded her criticisms of the reproductive regulations women faced and the systems of power those regulations secured. In some cases, the pain of their personal reproductive difficulties was reproduced by the suppression of their attempts to grapple with these issues in fiction. But all three of these writers retained private archives of correspondence, original work, and supplementary materials, and each ensured that her personal archive would remain accessible to researchers. As a result, it is possible to further recover these writers' insights and contributions by reading their published fiction within the context of those archival materials.[7] Thus, *Resisting Reproductive Regulation* recovers important context

[7] Mary Hunter Austin's personal archive was first housed at the School of American Research, with which she had a professional relationship dating back to 1918 (Goodman and Dawson 221). Acquired from the Mary Austin Estate in 1951 by the Huntingon Library, Austin's archive remains accessible to researchers there and has been supplemented with acquisitions gifted by other individuals. It includes 6698 items in

from these archives, showing how archival materials can further illuminate the ways Austin, Herbst, and Porter attempted to communicate vital information about reproductive issues in their fiction during a period when explicit reproductive commentary was regulated.

Chapter 1, "Able-bodiedness, Eugenics, and Pathologized Mothers in Mary Hunter Austin's Feminist Fiction," examines how Austin's fiction challenges the devaluation of disabled people and mothers that was common within early twentieth century American debates about reproduction. In so doing, this chapter adds important nuance to Austin scholarship and to current understandings the relationship between American birth control campaigns and American literature. In *Textual Contraception* (2007), Beth Widmaeier Capo suggests that fiction about contraception most often reflected the same eugenic influences evident in birth control advocacy. In *Conceived in Modernism* (2015), Aimee Armande Wilson argues that the aesthetics of modernism and the rhetoric of birth control advocates were mutually influential, and she specifically indicates that both were influenced by the popularity of eugenics (24-25). Capo and Wilson's important insights reveal much about the similarities between birth control advocacy and American literature, but Austin's fiction also shows that some women

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148 boxes. ("Mary Hunter Austin Collection: Finding Aid"). I conducted research in this archive in October 2014. Josephine Herbst sold her papers to Yale in 1968 for $25,000, which Langer suspects was "not much less than the total amount of money that had passed through her hands in her entire lifetime" (326-327). Still held by the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale, Herbst's archive has been supplemented by gifts from Langer. It includes 52.87 linear feet of material in 134 boxes. ("Guide to the Josephine Herbst Papers"). I began research in this archive in November 2013, which I have been able to continue due to Yale's willingness to provide scholars with photocopies and digital images of their holdings. Katherine Anne Porter donated her personal archive to the University of Maryland in 1966, after being granted an honorary Doctor of Letters by the university. The University of Maryland subsequently agreed to "create and maintain the Katherine Anne Porter Room to display and make available parts of the collection to scholars." This collection has been expanded through additional donations and purchases in the years since. The papers include 174.5 linear feet of materials, and the collection also includes Porter's personal library of books, furniture, and other memorabilia ("Katherine Anne Porter papers"). I have conducted ongoing research in this archive since 2009.

objected to the devaluation of human life that was promoted by eugenicists and embraced by birth control advocates. Austin's fiction affirms the humanity and maternity of women designated as "unfit" for reproduction by eugenicists, including disabled mothers. Her characters reject patriarchal norms, ableist values, and the devaluation of difference, choosing instead to celebrate the connections that can be established among people and their environments. Austin's fiction also exposes and critiques the ways that early twentieth century American systems of compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory maternity depended upon the able-bodiedness of women. This chapter shows that Austin's depictions of reproduction can contextualized by the work of disabilities theorists, including Margrit Shildrick and Robert McRuer. Austin's feminist fiction frequently utilizes first person women narrators who reflect on their experiences after some time, and this form allows her to show how women reflect on ableist and patriarchal biases, resist those biases, and attempt to overcome them. This form also highlights the ways these narrators remain influenced by these biases themselves. Austin's fiction repeatedly insists that women must have the power to control their own reproductive bodies. Further, she figures motherhood as an experience through which women can create important connections, imagine new ways of existing in the world, and create space for people whose lives and bodies defy eugenic, patriarchal, and heteronormative values.

Chapter 2, "Abortion, Secrecy, and Disclosure in Josephine Herbst's Novels of the 1920s and 1930s," contributes to the study of how women who acquired abortions were stigmatized in the United States in the early twentieth century and analyzes the cultural consequences of that stigmatization. Leslie Reagan catalogues the tendency to

dehumanize abortion seekers in her historical study of the period, *When Abortion Was a Crime* (1997). Karen Weingarten addresses literary depictions of abortion more specifically in *Abortion in the American Imagination* (2014), showing that negative depictions of abortion seekers reflected American anxieties about social change. Josephine Herbst's fiction reveals how enforced secrecy about abortion and abortion stigma functioned to punish women for engaging in sex outside of marriage, to secure the idealized status of white heterosexual marriage, and to ensure that children would be born within marriage. Over the course of these six novels, Herbst grapples with the dynamics of secrecy both in content and through the utilization of innovative structures and linguistic styles that shift between disclosing and protecting sensitive information. Her engagement with these dynamics can be usefully illuminated by the insights of D.A. Miller and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. Herbst's novels from this period ultimately insist that literature can be used to expose and challenge the oppressive conditions that are secured through enforced secrecy, including secrecy about abortion. Herbst's advocacy for women's ability to control their reproductive potential, particularly through the use of abortion, remains steadfast. What develops from one novel to the next her depiction of the importance of keeping some information private to prevent the further marginalization of vulnerable people. Further, Herbst's analysis of how and why women's reproductive potential is regulated also examines how and why the lives of Americans are regulated and oppressed because of their gender, their class, their country or culture of birth, and/or their non-heteronormative behavior.

Chapter 3, "Black Mothers, Reproductive Regulation, and Narratives of Disavowal in Katherine Anne Porter's Miranda Stories," examines the consequences of

the ways that white Southern patriarchal families regulate and exploit the reproductive capacities and maternal labor of black women. Porter's Miranda stories reveal that some white women were troubled by this aspect of their families' slave owning pasts during the early twentieth century, even while many white birth control advocates sought new ways to regulate black women's reproductive bodies. The ways Porter grapples with these issues are usefully illuminated by Dorothy Roberts and Jennifer L. Morgan's research into the history of black women's reproductive regulation in the United States. Though Porter's fiction has not been included in existing studies of how narratives about maternity, slavery, and race function in early twentieth century American literature, the analysis of her work further elaborates on the insights of scholars who study these dynamics. In *Mothering the Race* (2001), Allison Berg shows that fiction written during this period by black and white women alike denaturalized the idealized notions of motherhood that helped establish and reinforce racial hierarchy. In *Mammy* (2008), Kimberly Wallace-Sanders shows that between 1900 and 1935, many white writers used the American stereotype of the black mammy who cares for white children to create nostalgia for slavery, while black writers and artists used the figure to subvert those depictions. Like the texts these critics study, Porter's Miranda stories grapple with the ways that white supremacy and the patriarchal family are reinforced by the narratives white Americans construct about black maternity. Porter's stories utilize shifting narrative perspectives to examine how black characters deconstruct these stereotypes, including that of the willfully subservient black mammy. These stories document the suffering of black mothers that results from this exploitation as they expose the narratives white women create to obscure their complicity in that exploitation. Further, the stories

narrated from Miranda's point of view provide insights into how the exploitation of black women facilitates the reproductive regulation and subjugation of white women and how her family's treatment of black mothers haunts her as she comes of age.

This introduction will conclude by outlining the historical developments that framed the ways these writers grappled with reproductive issues and which thus frame this dissertation as well. Reading Austin, Herbst, and Porter's engagement with reproductive issues within this historical context makes it possible to identify each writer's political critiques of reproductive regulations, recognize the nascent intersectionality of those critiques, and acknowledge each woman's use of artistic innovation to fight suppression and censorship. The first of these historical developments was the further regulation of reproduction information that was formalized by the Comstock Act of 1873. This legislation defined discussions of contraception and abortion as obscene, and in so doing, secured restrictions of what could be publicly said and written about reproduction in the decades that followed. As this section will explain, these restrictions limited what writers could publish, but it also meant fiction became a space within which women could resist censorship and grapple with the reproductive issues that interested them. The second historical development that frames this dissertation and the fiction it examines is the American birth control movement that began in the early twentieth century and secured the normalization of birth control by the 1940s. Over the course of this period, the goals of the birth control movement grew increasingly narrow in scope as activists abandoned their early advocacy for a woman's right to control her body's reproductive potential. The engagement with issues of race, class, sexuality, abortion, and able-bodiedness that Austin, Herbst, and Porter stage in

their fiction challenges the narrowing focus of the birth control movement, which ultimately won legitimacy for birth control by embracing privileged, heteronormative, eugenic, and racist ideas about which type of women should reproduce the nation.

## Fiction and the Regulation of Reproductive Information

Austin, Herbst, and Porter all attempted to write about reproductive issues during an American period when private and public conversation about these issues was both formally and informally regulated and censored. All three writers acknowledge the longstanding history of this kind of censorship, portraying American women in their fiction who come of age throughout the nineteenth century as unable to access sexual, reproductive, and contraceptive information that might have helped them control their reproduction. This type of enforced female ignorance about sexuality and reproduction was exacerbated when it was written into the law by the Comstock Act of 1873. After establishing the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice to regulate public morality earlier that year, Anthony Comstock convinced Congress to illegalize the distribution through the U.S. Mail of information he defined as "obscene." The law's ban on obscene materials included information about contraception or abortion, and its restrictions applied to public advertisements, political and literary publications, and even information people shared through personal correspondence.

The existing studies of fiction written about reproduction during this period acknowledge that the Comstock Act impacted writers and publishers, and historians indicate that women developed proficiency in understanding the coded advertising it necessitated. But existing scholarship has not yet addressed how the censorship the

Comstock Act formalized might have shaped women's reading or writing practices. This dissertation considers the possibility that women who learned to decipher coded messages about reproduction, and who created private networks to speak with one another about abortion and contraception, also applied these discursive practices to their reading of fiction. As a result, *Resisting Reproductive Regulation* argues that women who were interested in discussing sexuality, reproduction, and maternity in their fiction, including Austin, Hersbt, and Porter, developed and utilized aesthetic and narrative strategies that allowed them to communicate with these readers about these concerns. In some cases, these efforts were successful, this work made it into print, and these ideas were communicated to readers. In other cases, their work was censored or failed to reach wide circulation. Their preservation of these texts makes it possible to recover the ways these writers grappled with these constraints in order to address reproduction during this period.

The enforcement of the Comstock Act was inconsistent, but the censorship it engendered could be severe. Comstock and his supporters worked to entrap birth control advocates and providers, including some doctors, by requesting information and products under psuedonyms. They would then arrest the individuals who provided those materials and publicize the cases in which this transpired.[8] The prosecution of Margaret Sanger serves as one example of how the law could enact lasting effects even when its targets were not convicted. In 1914, Sanger began advocating for radical causes in *The Woman*

[8] Gordon shows how the arrest of Dr. E. B. Foote, a prominent advocate of women's access to birth control, demonstrates the way this entrapment functioned. Foote was arrested in 1876 after he responded to "a decoy inquiry sent by one of Comstock's agents" with a letter and a pamphlet that included contraceptive information. Foote was fined $3000, and Gordon indicates that his prosecution "had, and was intended to have, a chilling effect upon other pro-birth control doctors" (113). For more specific information about the Comstock Act, see also: Gordon 32-34 and 111-113; Capo 13-19; Weingarten 46-47; and Roberts 57-58.

*Rebel*. This self-written magazine was explicitly feminist and directed at an audience of working class women readers. Its advocacy included that of birth control, a term Sanger coined. Sanger was arrested for violating the Comstock Act, and because she faced 45 years in prison, she fled to Europe. While there, she came into contact with other contraception advocates and subsequently adopted birth control as her single cause. Sanger's obscenity case was dropped in 1916, and thereafter, Sanger resisted the Comstock Act's attempts to censor contraceptive information. But the scope and course of her activism changed considerably. Her arguments were never as radical or feminist as they were in *The Woman Rebel*, and she did not resume publishing the magazine. The contents of her subsequent periodical, the *Birth Control Review*, were considerably tamer, less committed to women's personal autonomy, and less invested in improving the conditions faced by working class women.[9]

A few demonstrative experiences in Austin and Herbst's own careers serve as illuminating examples of how the Comstock Act and the definitions of obscenity it secured impacted what risks publishers were willing to take, and thus, what writers could expect to have published. Capo studies this impact of the Comstock Act more broadly, pointing out that the "censoring restrictions" enforced by the legislation impacted publishers as well as writers, whose work was monitored for violations (17). Elizabeth Francis analyzes how prosecution for obscenity impacted Margaret Anderson, who founded and co-edited the *Little Review*, one of the most important modernist publications in the United States. She discontinued her work as co-editor after the magazine was targeted by Comstock's New York Society for the Suppression of Vice for

[9] For more on Sanger's prosecution, *The Woman Rebel*, and her time in Europe, see especially Roberts 57-58, Gordon 144-151, and Wilson 21-46.

publishing James Joyce's *Ulysses* (Francis 39-71). Though Austin was more widely published than many women during this period, even she was not immune to these regulations. Austin indicates in her autobiography that only four months after *A Woman of Genius* was published, Doubleday "had dropped the book and sold the remainders. I was told later that the wife of one of the publishers had decided that the conduct of the woman was immoral." She sold the book to Houghton Mifflin thereafter, and she indicates "it has been selling ever since, but it has never caught up" (*Earth Horizon* 320). Indeed, Josephine Herbst's first novel, *Following the Circle*, which features several abortion plots, has still never been published, even though Herbst circulated it among literary colleagues and friends, including Claude McKay and H.L. Mencken. Mencken, the influential literary critic and editor for whom Herbst had worked at *The Smart Set*, attempted to help Herbst find a publisher but was unsuccessful (Ehrdhardt, 160; Langer, 62-63, 66-67, 72).

Herbst's failure to find a publisher for this novel provides interesting insight into how the Comstock Act suppressed fiction that addressed abortion. As Julia C. Ehrhardt's research in Herbst's papers reveals, one editor who declined to publish the novel was Adele Szold Seltzer. In Szold Seltzer's letter to Herbst, she rejects the novel even though she acknowledges the strength of its characterizations and descriptions (Ehrhardt 160). Ehrhardt does not comment on the larger context of Szold Seltzer's rejection, but this editor was no stranger to the consequences of publishing fiction that ran afoul Comstock's definitions of obscenity. Szold Seltzer's husband, Thomas Seltzer, was the primary American publisher of English writer D.H. Lawrence's work. In the years prior to Herbst's 1925 completion of *Following the Circle*, Thomas Seltzer was repeatedly

targeted by the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice. Although Seltzer was ultimately successful in the legal defense of his publications, these legal proceedings were so costly that they bankrupted his publishing firm (Levin 215-224). Given these conditions, it is no wonder that Adele Szold Seltzer declined to take a chance on Herbst, an unpublished novelist without an existing audience, whose novel featured several characters who attempted abortions. Szold Seltzer's letter to Herbst indicates that "it is hard to put down in cold black and white just why" the book would not sell (qtd. in Ehrhardt 160). It may have been the novel's depiction of abortion that made Szold Seltzer reject it, but her phrasing makes it impossible to know for sure. Indeed, Seltzer's use of euphemistic phrasing to describe why publishing the novel would pose a financial risk is representative of the way topics classified as obscene were discussed at the time. One of the reasons the Comstock Act was effective was precisely because it prevented publishers and others who distributed their materials through the mail from discussing these issues "in cold black and white."

Indeed, women desirous of reproductive information were forced to become particularly discerning readers and interpreters of printed, publicly circulated material as a result of the Comstock Act. Gordon's research indicates that advertisers found circuitous ways to communicate with buyers about contraceptive products and their functions and that women developed proficiency in an emerging discourse that relied heavily on euphemism and coded language. For example, after the Comstock Act, advertisements for douching syringes could no longer indicate they were to be used with "anti-conception compounds." Instead, advertisements made ambiguous suggestions, like recommending the products be used for "hygienic practice"-- one example of a

euphemism that remains in use today. Gordon indicates these types of "hints were quite clear to those familiar with the discourse of the time" but were passable because they were too ambiguous to prosecute (34-35). Herbst addresses this discourse in *Following the Circle* when the teenage protagonist eavesdrops on a conversation between her mother and older sister about an unwanted pregnancy. The teenager remains oblivious that her mother is suggesting a common natural abortifacient when she tells the older sister, "we'll try that motherwort tea" (*Following the Circle* 20). But Herbst emphasizes the abortion attempt to the reader, later suggesting in the narrative commentary that "Mary's baby came this time. Motherwort tea didn't always work" (*Following the Circle* 29).

Though some of the euphemisms advertisers used predated the Comstock Act, they became more common thereafter, and the amount of discursive knowledge required to understand them varied widely. Gordon indicates that one "standard euphemism for abortion" was to suggest a product provided "relief" or aided women in "removing obstacles." She also suggests "the denomination 'French' indicated a contraceptive device (a 'French letter' was a condom), while 'Portuguese' denoted an abortifacient" (26). One of the most famous American abortionists of the nineteenth century utilized these foreign connotations, choosing to go by the name "Madame Restell" and referencing the low fertility rates in France in her advertisements (Gordon 33). Though describing a product as "French" or Portuguese" might lead one consumer to assume that the products originated in these countries, a more discerning reader who knew what to look for could easily decode these references. The same argument can be made about similar references in literature. In Porter's *Old Mortality*, a young, hastily married woman

writes her mother "I now have an eighteen-inch waist, thanks to Madame Duré" (*Collected Stories* 192). This disclosure has yet to draw any attention in existing scholarship, but given the association between the French and contraception and abortion during this period, Porter certainly could have expected this line to signal a terminated pregnancy to a reader familiar with this discourse.

Because the Comstock Act made it more difficult than ever to access information about reproduction, contraception, and abortion, the law also forced women who wanted to acquire this information to develop secret networks within which it could be shared without judgment or punishment. Reagan argues that once abortion was legally defined as obscene, the practice of abortion became what she calls an "open secret." Her research indicates that even if women "did not proclaim their abortions in open, political forums," they "did speak of their abortions among themselves within smaller, more intimate spaces" (21). She suggests this happened frequently enough that there existed "an unarticulated, alternative, popular morality, which supported women who had abortions" (6). This indicates that women's ways of communicating were irrevocably marked by the Comstock Act and the definitions of obscenity it affirmed, even though these women resisted the law's attempts to silence them and refused to accept its definition of abortion as amoral. Their circumstances forced them to develop new methods of communicating useful information about reproduction to one another.

Austin, Hersbt, and Porter all use their fiction to document this secret circulation of reproductive information among women. In *A Woman of Genius*, Austin writes, "all of the care and expectancy of children [was] overshadowed by the recurrent monthly dread, crept about by whispers, heretical but persistent, of methods of circumventing it. Of a

secret practice of things openly condemned" (219). In *Following the Circle*, Herbst's protagonist gets the information she needs to procure an abortion from a woman named Ella. She then reflects that "Ella, who tapped the underground life of women, knew hidden things, Ella had helped her out" (*Following the Circle* 108). The white family matriarch in Porter's "The Journey" "learned early to keep silent and give no sign of uneasiness" about the white men who visit the quarters of enslaved women on her property. But she is aware that her male relatives visit enslaved women to rape them because she "told her eldest granddaughter, years later," that she would wait to see "whether the newly born would turn black" (*Collected Stories* 337). These references show that Austin, Herbst, and Porter were all aware that reproductive information circulated in these ways, and the fiction they wrote about reproduction can be understood as another way of participating in, contributing to, and expanding these networks and conversations.

Given these historical developments regarding the regulation of reproductive information, this dissertation examines how Austin, Herbst, and Porter developed aesthetic and narrative techniques that catered to a particular audience of readers who were accustomed to carefully interpreting information about reproduction, contraception, and abortion. These strategies helped these writers grapple with criticisms and arguments about reproductive regulations in ways that would have been perceptible to this type of reader, but which might have been overlooked by readers and critics not interested in reproduction. *Resisting Reproductive Regulation* seeks to recover the nascent intersectionality of this feminist fiction, and to examine the aesthetic and narrative forms through which it is communicated, by focusing specifically upon how these writers

addressed reproduction, by considering the historical context within which they wrote, and by using the insights of later critical theorists to illuminate how their fiction functions. The Comstock Act, the codes of morality and obscenity it sought to secure, and the censorship it engendered demonstrate the importance of paying careful attention to the reproductive focus of published texts and of recovering texts that were prevented from being circulated more widely during the early decades of the twentieth century.

## Birth Control Advocacy and the Embrace of Reproductive Regulation

The normalization of birth control in the United States was another influential development that took place during first several decades of the twentieth century. Feminists and birth control advocates initially campaigned to legalize the practice in order to expand women's control over their own bodies and lives. But they were challenged by traditionalists who argued women were obligated to enter patriarchal marriages, to remain in the home, and to reproduce the nation's ideal population. A brief overview of the ways the mainstream American birth control movement gained popular acceptance for birth control by narrowing the movement's focus to appease these critics provides necessary context for understanding how much Austin, Herbst, and Porter's advocacy for women differs. Austin's consideration of disabled mothers and the toll reproduction takes on women's bodies challenges the willingness of birth control advocates to accept ableist and eugenic definitions of which American women should be encouraged and permitted to reproduce. Herbst's fiction insists upon a woman's right to extramarital sexual activity, defends women who utilize abortion, and documents the economic reasons they rely upon them. In so doing, this fiction counters the prioritization

of heterosexual marriage, the economic elitism, and the stigmatization of abortion that were perpetuated by birth control advocates. And Porter's fiction, by addressing the ways white women have benefitted from the exploitation of black women's reproductive bodies and maternal labor, grapples with the racism that motivated and influenced activists on both sides of the birth control debate. Birth control advocates helped establish hierarchies of women's lives by distinguishing between the types of women they sought to empower and the types of women to whom they agreed the criticisms of birth control opponents applied. In contrast, Austin, Herbst, and Porter insisted women should control their own reproduction, and their fiction examines the reproductive difficulties of women whose experiences trouble the hierarchical distinctions that birth control advocates accepted.

Women's use of birth control became the topic of particularly contentious American public debate during the "race-suicide controversy," which Gordon indicates reached its peak "from about 1905 to 1910" (86). Those who advocated against what they called "race suicide" were reacting to demographic changes in the United States over the course of the nineteenth century. These advocates indicated that the use of birth control was amoral, believed it allowed women to abandon their primary responsibility of motherhood, and feared that the American population on the whole was not growing quickly enough. More specifically, they feared that white, native-born Americans would soon be outnumbered by black, immigrant, and poor Americans.[10] This attitude was

[10] For more about the "race suicide" debates, see especially Gordon 87-11 and Roberts 60-61. Gordon also addresses which of these beliefs are supported by historical records and which were exaggerated. She suggests it is true that American women birthed progressively fewer children over the course of the nineteenth century and that this change resulted from the practice of contraception. The belief that immigrant and non-white populations were growing at a higher rate that the American-born white population is "controversial," and records indicate that while "the immigrant birth rate remained relatively high in relation to the birth rate among the native-born privileged class, a little-noticed fact is that blacks

espoused by many in positions of considerable power, including President Theodore Roosevelt, whom Gordon contends was "a representative of race-suicide thought" and "a powerful influence on it" (90). Roosevelt's 1905 speech before the National Congress of Mothers serves as a demonstrative example of how fears about the population attracted attention to women's reproductive potential. He asserted that the "a good wife" must be "willing to perform the first and greatest duty of womanhood," which he defines as bearing children "numerous enough so that the race shall increase and not decrease" (par. 3). In this speech, Roosevelt also demonstrates the implicit racism of this line of argument. As Gordon argues, Roosevelt's "ambiguous" use of the term "race" left it unclear whether he was referring to "the human race or the white race," making his use of the word "powerful precisely because it connoted both meanings simultaneously, encouraging a tendency to identify the human race with the white race" (91).

In their response to race suicide arguments, feminists and birth control advocates insisted that women should be able to use contraception to allow them leave the family home to access respectable professions. Gordon argues that the "race-suicide propagandists did not succeed" because they did not convince women to stop practicing contraception or to abandon their pursuit of careers (103). But by emphasizing the value of birth control specifically for women who could choose to work outside the home, and defending the right of those women to limit their family size, feminists and birth control advocates ignored the needs and difficulties of working class women for whom working was not a choice, failed to take issue with their opponents' prioritization of reproduction among white American-born families, and accepted the importance those opponents

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had the greatest birth rate decline of all" (100). Gordon concludes that the belief that birth rates declined quickly toward the end of the nineteenth century "was wrong" (101).

assigned to heterosexual marriage. Indeed, Gordon argues that "the race-suicide episode was an additional factor identifying feminism almost exclusively with the aspirations of the more privileged women of the society" (103).

After 1910, the increasing willingness of young women to have sex outside marriage also influenced American perceptions of birth control and abortion. Women began claiming sexual freedom in the Greenwich Village and Harlem communities in New York City even before WWI, and this change in attitudes became widespread and commercialized through advertising in the 1920s. Birth control thus became increasingly associated with non-marital sexual activity. Many birth control advocates defended women who practiced birth control for this reason, indicating it gave women sexual freedom more similar to that which men enjoyed. But as Gordon points out, this "sexual revolution was not a general loosening of sexual taboos but only of those on nonmarital heterosexual activity" (131). Further, Margaret Sanger and others in the birth control movement also defended birth control by characterizing it as a favorable alternative to, and preventative of, abortion. They argued that contraception was safe and morally sound while abortion was dangerous and amoral (Gordon 150, Reagan 36-37, Weingarten 53). In American popular culture, women seeking abortions were most commonly depicted as unmarried, easily seduced, amoral, and alone. Weingarten indicates that abortion was understood as "a practice introduced on the margins of society," often by individuals who were foreign born or non-white (24, 66). These characterizations strengthened the negative stigma about abortion and extramarital sex even though, in reality, most abortions were performed upon married women until after WWII, and wealthy women had an easier time procuring abortions than poor women did (Reagan 23, 54-68). Birth

control advocates figured women who used abortion as scapegoats in order to secure birth control's superior status in the minds of the American public, arguing that responsible, family-oriented women utilized birth control while amoral, sexually promiscuous women utilized abortion.

Following World War I, the race suicide fears prevalent in the United States after the turn of the century transitioned into a resurgence of American nativism, which facilitated the growing acceptance of eugenic attitudes through the 1920s. Like those who promoted the idea of race suicide, eugenicists' definitions of whose reproduction should be encouraged was very narrow, and they sought to regulate women's reproduction, not to help women control their own reproductive potential. Eugenicists in the nineteenth and earlier twentieth century had focused primarily upon *positive eugenics*—encouraging the reproduction of those they considered superior. But during and after the war, eugenicists began to focus more heavily on *negative eugenics*—regulating and minimizing the reproduction of those they considered inferior. Gordon summarizes, "this new eugenics sought to reproduce the entire American population in the image of those who dominated it politically and economically" (190). Roberts makes a similar point by focusing more specifically on race, arguing that even though the eugenic policies about which people should be considered "fit" for reproduction were "directed primarily at whites," those policies "grew out of racist ideology" (61). Eugenicists and their policies fostered racism, supported laws against miscegenation, promoted segregation, and vilified immigrants and poor people. Eugenicists also wanted to eliminate the reproduction of any individual perceived as disabled or pathological. They argued that social programs designed to help people who were classified as "unfit" for reproduction saddled the American people with

the financial burden of supporting them and harmed the nation as a whole by making it possible for undesirable people to reproduce (Roberts 62-65, 70-72, 79, Gordon 193-197).

Birth control advocates embraced eugenic attitudes and rhetoric largely because doing so gave them the chance to present birth control as a solution to what eugenicists depicted as a national problem. Setting their advocacy for women's rights even further aside also allowed the birth control movement to benefit from the legitimacy eugenicists and their claims lent to the cause. The embrace of eugenic rhetoric and values is demonstrated by the contents of Sanger's *Birth Control Review*, which began advocating eugenic attitudes in its first issue in 1917. Prominent eugenicists also held positions on the board of directors of the American Birth Control League, and Sanger promoted negative eugenics in the articles and books she wrote. Gordon also points out that eugenic ideas were easily adopted by "many feminist birth controllers" who already "harbored racist and ethnocentric attitudes" and "had a reservoir of anti-working-class attitudes" (196). Support of birth control in the South was significantly motivated by racism, where the desire to curb the reproduction of black women led to the creation of clinics meant to serve them specifically.[11]

As the alliance between eugenicists and birth control advocates grew, and as eugenic arguments became increasingly useful to campaigns for birth control, the more feminist goals previously emphasized by birth control advocates increasingly slipped out of focus. By the 1930s, birth control campaigns no longer addressed women's rights; they

[11] Though suppressing reproduction within black communities did not seem to be Margaret Sanger's own objective, she and others nonetheless treated the black doctors and administrators they recruited to work in their clinics with considerable paternalism and condescension (Roberts 76-79, 82-89, Gordon 233-237).

focused instead on family regulation, national demographics, and fiscal concerns.[12] Sterilization laws and practices also show that the authority eugenicists were able to achieve was derived from popular American acceptance of racism *and* ableism. Indiana was the first state to legalize involuntary sterilization in 1907. Despite some subsequent legal setbacks, the legality of the practice was secured by the 1927 *Buck v. Bell* Supreme Court decision, wherein the legality of Carrie Buck's sterilization was upheld on the grounds that her family history proved she was "feebleminded." Within the next few years, thirty states had laws sanctioning involuntary sterilization. During the Depression, sterilization was used increasingly to prevent the reproduction of poor people and black people in the South (Roberts 65-70).[13] The incompatibility of eugenic arguments with the birth control movement's earlier goals, and the willingness of birth control advocates to accept the same racist and ableist attitudes that were used to justify involuntary sterilization, show that birth control advocates were willing to abandon the argument that women should be able to control their own bodies in order to convince the American public to accept the practice of contraception.

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*Resisting Reproductive Regulation* argues that it is within this confluence of reproductive regulations that Austin, Herbst, and Porter used innovative fiction to grapple with the reproductive difficulties that they experienced in their own lives and to document the reproductive difficulties women faced across the nation. These writers used their fiction to advocate for women, for women to have the ability to utilize contraception

[12] For more about this shift, see Gordon 198-203 and 218, Roberts 56-59, 72-76, 79-82.
[13] Roberts indicates that, all told, "between 1921 and 1941, more than 2,000 eugenic sterilizations were performed each year in the United States" and that the total number of sterilizations performed because of these laws exceeded 70,000 (89).

and abortion to limit their reproductive potential, and for women to be able reproduce on their own terms. In so doing, Austin, Hersbt, and Porter resisted the suppression of reproductive concerns and critiqued birth control advocacy that only addressed the interests and priorities of American-born white women of relative privilege. As the following chapters will show, it was while the advocacy of mainstream birth control activists became increasingly less feminist and more narrow in its scope that Austin, Herbst, and Porter used their fiction to focus on the lives of women that birth control advocates ignored and dehumanized. Instead, these writers insisted on grappling with how women's reproductive struggles intersected with the other obstacles American women faced within a patriarchal society, including compulsory heterosexuality, classism, ableism, and racism.

# Chapter 1 — Able-bodiedness, Eugenics, and Pathologized Mothers in Mary Hunter Austin's Fiction

Mary Hunter Austin was one of the most widely published American women writers of the early twentieth century. She published novels, short stories, plays, poetry, and a range of non-fiction pieces in various venues between 1892 and 1934, when she died at age 66.[14] The significance of her work has been recognized for its depictions of the American West, for its advocacy for Native Americans and their cultures, and for its ecological concerns. While Austin's feminism began earning critical attention in the 1970s, very little scholarship addresses the ways she grapples with issues of maternity and disability. Austin's published work advocates for women's ability to control their reproductive potential while repeatedly featuring women who experience reproductive difficulties, mothers who are perceived as disabled or unwell, and children who die or who struggle to survive. This critical gap in Austin scholarship demonstrates the necessity of literary and feminist studies to direct more attention to issues of disability, and it also illustrates Claudia Malacrida's claim that, even within the discipline of disabilities studies, the connection between disability and reproduction remains under-examined.

By arguing that Austin used her fiction to theorize maternity, disability, and able-bodiedness, this chapter considerably revises our understanding of Austin and her work. She has been characterized by some as a proponent of the philosophy of eugenics, which rose to social and scientific prominence in the United States during her lifetime and

[14] Peter Lancelot Mallios, who calls Austin "one of the most original, diversely prolific, and politically engaged authors in American literary history," indicates that she wrote "more than thirty books and plays" as well as "over a hundred essays and articles in which [she] articulated her wide latitude of historical, cultural, anthropological, ecological, and literary interests" (125-126).

explicitly devalued the lives of disabled people.[15] Austin biographers Susan Goodman and Carl Dawson indicate that "how much [Austin] believed in genetic inheritance—or [Sir Francis] Galton's eugenics—seemed to shift with the circumstances" (32), and they point out that she met Margaret Sanger, who was vocal in her advocacy of eugenic ideas, in New York City in 1919 (xvi, 149). Penny Richards was the first scholar to perform a nuanced analysis of Austin's articulation of eugenic attitudes, arguing that "in her nonfiction writings" Austin "seemed confident in the potential of eugenic policies" to "improve humanity" but suggesting Austin's short stories "allow, perhaps, a glimpse of the private reservations Austin held about eugenics" ("Bad Blood" 151, 154).[16] This chapter builds upon this suggestion, arguing that while Austin's writing about disability often shows her to be a product of her time, her fiction also reveals her to be a woman whose reproductive difficulties and experience with disability made her sensitive to the pathologization of disabled mothers promoted by eugenicists during her lifetime. This chapter will focus principally on how her two most famous fictional texts grapple with these issues, but her autobiographical essay titled "Woman Alone" serves as a useful introduction to how she conceptualizes these issues. The essay was published

[15] Although eugenic thinking first took hold in the United States during the 19th Century, and underwent some slight modification around the turn of the century, it became particularly popular between 1910 and 1930, when its emergence as an academic discipline bolstered its claim to legitimacy. During this period, advocacy for limiting reproduction among particular classes ("negative eugenics") replaced the primary advocacy for increased reproduction among desirable classes ("positive eugenics") that had been prioritized in American eugenic thought and rhetoric for decades (Gordon 77, 194, Capo 112).

[16] In her essay, Richards indicates that the "eugenic policies" Austin supported include "marriage restriction, segregation, or sterilization for the unfit" ("Bad Blood" 154). I am indebted to Dr. Richards for her clarification upon this point. When I contacted her via email, she reviewed her notes and elaborated on the claims she makes in this essay. Richards wrote that while Austin spoke publicly and pitched non-fiction articles about "(informed, voluntary) marriage restriction and sex education," she "didn't speak for or against sterilization, directly, that I ever noted" (PR to ED 3 March 2015). In my own extensive research within Austin's published non-fiction, as well as within her personal archive of papers at the Huntington Library, I have never found record of her advocating for eugenic segregation or sterilization. She did place her own disabled daughter in an institution and wrote, "in the end I was compelled to put my child in a private institution where she was happier and better cared for than I could otherwise manage" ("Woman Alone 229).

anonymously in *The Nation* in 1927, as one of seventeen installments in a series titled "These Modern Women." Austin also retained the essay in her personal archive. The introductory note on Austin's essay suggests the series was intended to document "the personal backgrounds of women with a modern point of view" ("Woman Alone" 228).[17] Elaine Showalter indicates that all of the women who contributed to this series were invited to do so by the editors, and that "anonymity was offered as an encouragement to uninhibited self-disclosure and as protection against the hurt feelings of relatives or the abuse of strangers" ("Introduction" 3). The fact that this sort of anonymity would be seen as desirable or necessary for women famous enough to be invited to contribute to the series speaks to the ongoing difficulties women faced in their attempts to write about these types of issues.[18] In "Woman Alone," Austin describes how her experiences with reproduction and disability served as catalysts for her fiction, her feminism, and her consideration of American attitudes toward able-bodiedness.

Austin states that the essay's purpose is to explain why she has "become a fighting feminist" ("WA" 228), and in telling this story, she explicitly links her writing career and her feminism to the necessity of providing for her disabled daughter. Goodman and Dawson indicate that Austin's daughter Ruth was born in 1892 with an unspecified developmental disability (30-34). Given the objective of the essay and the series in which it was published, "Woman Alone" focuses on the impact that bearing a disabled child had on Austin, rather than upon Ruth's experience of disability. It is important to acknowledge that Austin's use of ableist language, her descriptions of her

[17] Subsequent citations of this essay will be abbreviated "WA."
[18] The likelihood that this anonymity would have been appealing to Austin is debatable, but even if she embraced this particular opportunity to write anonymously, she was not committed to keeping the details she describes in her essay secret. She documented many of these same experiences in her extended autiobiography, *Earth Horizon*, which she published only five years after "Woman Alone."

daughter's disability, and her comments about her daughter's impact on her life sometimes contribute to the further stigmatization of disability. But Austin also characterizes her daughter's disability as something that facilitated her greater understanding of the world, compelled her to pursue her literary career, and motivated her political activism. Austin writes, "caring for a hopelessly invalid child is an expensive business. I had to write to make money." She then indicates that this financial obligation compelled her to pursue the "literary success" she achieved, which she gives credit for allowing her to access the "larger life which opened to me" thereafter ("WA" 229). It is within her experience of this larger world that she "found plenty of reasons for being a feminist in the injustices and impositions endured by women under the general idea of their intellectual inferiority to men" ("WA" 229-230).

This perspective led Austin to realize that it was sexism which made her particularly vulnerable to the judgments of an ableist society. She indicates it was only after her daughter's disability became evident that she found out her husband had neglected to tell her the "obvious handicap" ran in his family. But Austin indicates that despite this information, her own family blamed her for her daughter's condition. While her "husband's family were good sports" who tried to remain involved in Ruth's life even after she was institutionalized, Austin suggests her own mother responded to Ruth's disability by telling Austin "I don't know what you have done, daughter, to have such a judgment upon you" ("WA" 229). Austin also indicates her mother "was never quite reconciled to my refusal to accept my trouble as a clear sign of God's displeasure" ("WA" 230) and that the rest of her family "never ceased to treat me as under a deserved chastisement" for her daughter's condition ("WA" 229). She considers this familial

shunning and condemnation among the "facts that gave color and direction to my feminist activities" ("WA" 230). As a mother who bore a disabled child, Austin could not escape being blamed for her daughter's condition, even though that condition was common within her husband's family. Austin's refusal to accept the blame others assigned her for bearing a disabled child begins to explain why her fiction interrogates the stigmatization women suffer as a result of their disabilities and/or their bodily difference from accepted norms.

Indeed, the ways Austin's family blamed her for her daughter's condition, and acted as if it was proof of her own personal or moral failures, demonstrate attitudes toward maternity and disability that were particularly common during Austin's lifetime. She reproduced and wrote during a period of American history when advocates of eugenic ideas targeted, delegitimized, and sought to regulate women they classified as "unfit" for reproduction because those women could not bear children that eugenicists classified as healthy, moral, and beneficial to society. These approaches and attitudes were among the eugenic ideas adopted by birth control advocates. Austin's treatment of disability and able-bodiedness should be considered an important element of her feminism because during her writing career the stigmatization normally assigned to people categorized as disabled was also applied to women labeled "unfit" for reproduction. A brief overview of the eugenic attitudes toward disability and reproduction that were popular in the United States in the early decades of the twentieth century provides important context for how Austin's fiction grapples with maternity, disability, and able-bodiedness. This context helps to illuminate how Austin's fiction

resists the dehumanization of disabled people and mothers even though, as "Woman Alone" demonstrates, she was sometimes guilty of contributing to disability stigma.

Richards provides a useful and comprehensive synopsis of what she calls "the basic eugenic tenets, as understood by an interested layperson" in Austin's lifetime. She summarizes that eugenicists believed "that behaviors, talents, and traits were passed predictably from generation to generation; that biological inheritance far outweighed environment in determining the attainments of the individual; and especially, that restrictive policies should be pursued to improve the human race" ("Bad Blood" 151). But as Gordon suggests, references that eugenicists made to "the human race" were identified specifically with "the white race" (91), and Roberts shows how eugenic tenets based on "racist ideology" resulted in policies that were "directed primarily at whites" in order to increase reproduction within privileged white American families (61). In Austin's archive of papers, now housed at the Huntington Library, she preserved a eugenic tract that shows how these ideas were used to advocate for the legalization of contraception. Her ownership of *Birth Control in its Medical, Social, Economic, and Moral Aspects*, written by S. Adolphus Knopf, MD, an influential male eugenics advocate of the time, could easily be interpreted as evidence that she supported its views. But the ideas promoted in the tract provide a stark contrast to how Austin depicts disability and maternity in her fiction.

In this tract, Knopf utilizes eugenic arguments about difference that were familiar to the American public by the time of its original publication in 1916.[19] The tract shows

[19] Austin retained a second edition of the tract, published in 1919. Included in this edition are the contents of the lecture Knopf first delivered before the American Public Health Association in October 1916, an account of the "discussion" that followed, including comments from the audience and Knopf's response to

how eugenicists devalued women who could not or would not reproduce the type of children they classified as desirable. Knopf emphasizes his negative perception of the people he categorizes as "unfit" for reproduction through the repeated reference to their lives as "waste" or "wastage" (6, 24). The tract's devaluation of disabled peoples' lives in particular is demonstrated by one respondent to Knopf's lecture, who is permitted to speak for everyone when he suggests, "I suppose no one would advocate the raising of idiots or physically deformed people" (26). Knopf's tract is not interested in securing greater opportunities or reproductive control for women themselves. His stated objective is legalizing contraception so that it can be administered in government-funded medical contraceptive clinics (20). Knopf's arguments demonstrate that, as Gordon explains, American eugenicists made distinctions between those they considered "fit" and "unfit" for reproduction not only by arguing "that the 'unfit,' the criminal, and the poor were the products of congenital 'deformities,'" but also, importantly, by insisting that the conditions of one's life are the direct result of one's hereditary inheritance, rather than the product of one's environment or circumstances (190).[20] Knopf explicitly condemns social reforms designed to help women and families achieve greater prosperity, quoting another eugenicist who suggests these types of programs "would only increase the evil" (6). Knopf's tract never advocates for the regulation of reproduction based upon racial difference alone, but he does praise the value, productivity, and efficiency of white and

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them, and a preface Knopf added for the second edition in December 1919, re-emphasizing the necessity of his message following the conclusion of the First World War.

[20] Gordon and other researchers indicate that beginning in the 1870s, "eugenic thought emphasized heredity in opposition to environmentalist schools of thought," and that as a result, these thinkers "doubted the efficacy of social reforms" to solve social problems (76). Cuddy and Roche also point out that Francis Galton first published his eugenic ideas in Macmillan's Magazine in 1865, although he did not coin the phrase "eugenics" until 1883 (11-13). Reverend William Inge, another English eugenic advocate and neighbor of Galton, summarized the eugenic position acutely in 1909, suggesting that "progress, for the moralist and for the biologist alike, means improvement in the people themselves and not in their condition" (qtd. in Cuddy and Roche 11).

Eastern European lives while criticizing other national and racial heritages.[21] This creates an implicit affiliation between the individuals deemed "fit" for reproduction and whiteness.

In the analysis that follows, I argue that in two of Austin's most widely read feminist fictions, "The Walking Woman" (1907) and *A Woman of Genius* (1912), she grapples with the stigmatization of disability and reproductive difficulties in illuminating and significant ways that are central to the articulation of her feminism. These texts show that, as Richards concludes, Austin's fiction "challenged" many of the "tenets" of eugenic thought by depicting environment as more influential upon a person's characteristics than heredity ("Bad Blood" 151). But these two texts also show that Austin's fiction challenges eugenic thought by affirming the humanity and maternity of women considered by eugenicists to be "unfit" for reproduction. Both texts feature a first-person female narrator telling the story of what has happened to her years in the past, allowing her the opportunity to describe what transpired and to offer her later commentary on those experiences. In each case, this form results in the depiction of the experiences and thoughts of a woman clearly influenced by the patriarchal and ableist biases of her society who engages in reflection and storytelling in order to recognize, resist, and attempt to overcome those biases and the effects they have had on her life and the lives of other women.

[21] Knopf and his supporters repeatedly praise the reproductive policies and quality of residents in England and its colonies, France, and the Netherlands by suggesting that their citizens are the strongest, live the longest, are able to endure the most, and make the best soldiers (8, 14, 15, 17). Knopf even suggests that the outcome of the war verifies the superiority of the citizens that inhabit the victorious nations, among whom England and France were well known for their acceptance of legal contraception (8, 30). Conversely, the Russians, Germans, Indians, and Chinese are depicted as inferior citizens and used as negative examples of the consequences of failing to implement contraceptive practices (Knopf 8, 30, 31).

"The Walking Woman" stages an interaction between an able-bodied narrator and the titular character, whom the narrator believes to be disabled. Their interaction suggests the possibility that disability is largely constituted by the perceptions of those who fixate upon differences they regard as inferior. But the story also grapples with the changes in perception that can result when women are able to bond over their shared value of motherhood. As a result of this connection, the narrator is inspired by the Walking Woman's rejection of expectations of female behavior, and she begins to recognize the flaws in her perceptions of the Walking Woman's purported disabilities. The story also catalogues the Walking Woman's self-imagined worldview by including her own storytelling. As she speaks about formative and healing experiences in her own life, she insists these experiences are related to one another and places heavy emphasis on her connection with other people, with animals, and with the land during those experiences. As the analysis will show, the Walking Woman's worldview resonates with Margrit Shildrick's theorization in *Dangerous Discourses of Disability, Subjectivity, and Sexuality* (2009) about how disabled embodiment can be embraced. The Walking Woman continually traverses vast geographic distances in the American Southwest and interacts with inhabitants of different racial and cultural backgrounds. Through her walking, she is able to imagine a worldview wherein connections between people are no longer hindered by differences, including those that are characterized as disabilities by the American society she has largely abandoned. The story itself promotes the Walking Woman's worldview both by allowing her to articulate it and by suggesting her insights have the power to transform the unnamed narrator.

*A Woman of Genius* (1912) is a novel written as the autobiography of its protagonist, Olivia Lattimore, who tells her story in order to condemn the social values promoted by privileged white Americans and to help other women achieve their own non-traditional goals. In writing her autobiography, Olivia comes out as the type of unsuccessful mother and inadequate wife that is stigmatized by these social ideals and who would be defined an "unfit" mother by eugenicists. Olivia grapples with how a normative able-bodiedness is central to the ideals she criticizes. She does so by discussing the impacts that the illness she endures during pregnancy and the death of her infant son have on her marriage, her future plans for motherhood, and her pursuit of a career. Once she begins to excel as a tragic actress, she comes to recognize that the ideal wife and mother are not natural states, but rather, roles that women perform which allow them access to social authority. The reading of *A Woman of Genius* will show how Olivia's experiences and her manner of telling her story can be illuminated by Robert McRuer's analysis of the relationship between compulsory heterosexuality and able-bodiedness in *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (2006). By examining her society's demands for able-bodied maternity, and by documenting and resisting the cultural and social expectations and norms that have made her life more difficult, Olivia seeks to empower other women to resist these norms. In so doing, she challenges the idealized image of white American motherhood that was promoted by birth control opponents, birth control advocates, and eugenicists in order to regulate the reproductive potential of all women, particularly that of the disabled, poor, immigrant, and black women who were classified as "unfit" for reproduction.

These stories begin to show that Mary Hunter Austin's feminism was influenced by her willingness to grapple with attitudes toward able-bodiedness. Her extensive catalog of published fiction proves fertile ground for examining the intersections between motherhood, disability, and feminism; for understanding how women used artistic expression to oppose the eugenic attitudes and policies popular in the United States in the early twentieth century; and for analyzing how sexist and ableist attitudes, ideals, and policies have negatively impacted women and mothers over time.

## Motherhood, Disability, and Boundary Crossing in "The Walking Woman"

Mary Hunter Austin's most anthologized short story, "The Walking Woman," serves as a powerful example of what fiction can accomplish by grappling with the intersection of maternity and disability. The story was first published in 1907, before American eugenicists and birth control advocates forged an alliance, but during the period in which American public conversations about the relationship between contraception and population demographics grew increasingly charged. Also published as the final story in Austin's *Lost Borders* collection (1909), "The Walking Woman" depicts the influential encounter between the elusive titular character, who is explicitly labeled as physically and mentally disabled by many of the people who come in contact with her, and the unnamed woman who serves as the narrator of the entire collection. The two women's mutual regard for motherhood facilitates an encounter within which they are able to connect because the borders between their worldviews, their bodies, and their perceptions are blurred, crossed, and erased.

Through this interaction between two mothers, and the narrator's later reflection upon it, "The Walking Woman" examines how definitions of disability harm people. The story also proposes ways of thinking and modes of being that could avoid that harm by embracing bodily and mental difference. Existing scholarship on the story has emphasized the degree to which the Walking Woman's behavior defies American expectations of femininity, but the story makes clear that the woman's purported disabilities also play an important role in why people, including the narrator, perceive her as different, strange, and enigmatic. The encounter itself and the narrator's telling of the story both emphasize the degree to which she is drawn to the Walking Woman and finds her worldview compelling in spite of her fixation on the woman's difference. The story suggests that the narrator's attention to what she regards as signs of the Walking Woman's disability impacts the way she perceives the woman, limiting her ability to absorb the woman's insights. But rather than dismissing the Walking Woman on the grounds of the disabilities she perceives, the narrator attempts to make sense of the Walking Woman's difference and her own reactions to it. Her narration indicates that she grapples with this issue during the encounter itself and that she continues to work through her reactions to the woman and the woman's story as she recounts the interaction.

"The Walking Woman" also imagines an alternative way of understanding difference through its documentation of Walking Woman's behavior and value system. In addition to rejecting traditional notions of femininity, she remains in constant motion and places repeated emphasis on the value of togetherness and connection. This value system does not grant the Walking Woman a stable place within the American society which devalues her, but it suggests that what she values most is a way to perceive the world

wherein her own behavioral, bodily, and even mental differences from expected norms can be understood as valuable rather than pathological. The narrator's praise of the Walking Woman's departure from gendered expectation and her ability to begin to recognize flaws in her perception of the Walking Woman indicate the narrator has been even more changed by the encounter than she can articulate.

The story's inclusion in an anthology called *Lost Borders*, its setting, the narrator's use of the moniker "Walking Woman" for the titular character, and the woman's behavior all emphasize that she creates a dynamic space for herself by practicing willful disregard for boundaries and borders. Like all of the stories in *Lost Borders*, "The Walking Woman" takes place in the American Southwest around the turn of the twentieth century. This region was formally the property of the United States after 1848, had previously been a Mexican territory and a Spanish colony, and was originally inhabited by Native Americans. Accordingly, in the story, this land serves as home to American settlers, long-standing residents originally of Mexican and Spanish origin, and indigenous Native Americans. The Walking Woman's race and nationality are not explicitly identified, but contextual clues indicate that the United States is the country of origin for both the narrator and the Walking Woman. The narrator and the Walking Woman are noteworthy residents in this region, where "the number of women is as one in fifteen" ("The Walking Woman" 256),[22] not only because they are women, but also because they willfully interact with the longer-established residents of different backgrounds more regularly than the other American settlers do. Indeed, the narrator characterizes the Walking Woman as someone who possesses insider knowledge about residents, events, and geographic places that cross national and racial identification. The

[22] Subsequent citations for this text will be abbreviated "WW."

narrator indicates that because of her mobility, the Walking Woman witnesses several "rare happenings" that have taken place in the mining settlement of "Maverick," in the Spanish American town of "Tres Piños," and in the region the Shoshone call "Tunawai" ("WW" 255-256). The resident of a space already characterized by an unusual degree of cultural and racial interaction, the Walking Woman is also a woman whose very moniker and activity emphasize her conscious engagement with transgressing geographic boundaries as well as social and cultural expectations. The narrator indicates she "came and went about our western world on no discoverable errand, and whether she had some place of refuge where she lay by in the interim" was "never learned." The narrator also says, "no one knew her name," but because of her behavior, they refer to her as "the Walking Woman" and "called her to her face Mrs. Walker," but she only "answered to it if she was so inclined" ("WW" 255). Significantly, the narrator introduces her readers to the Walking Woman with this information, but then she specifies that though all of these things "should have made her worth meeting," this is "not, in fact, for such things that I was wishful to meet her" ("WW" 256). The narrator specifies that she wants to meet the Walking Woman for two specific reasons: because she wants to understand how the woman remains unharmed by men within this space, and because she is intrigued by the rumors about the woman's mental and physical disabilities. Though the narrator chooses to focus on these limited features of the Walking Woman's intrigue, the details she includes about the woman's border crossing habits nonetheless provide important context for understanding the value system the Walking Woman espouses once they meet.

The specific reason for her interest in the Walking Woman that the narrator describes first is how the Walking Woman has "passed unarmed and unoffended" among

the male inhabitants who predominate in the region ("WW" 256). As Faith Jaycox's representative feminist reading of the story indicates, the Walking Woman's way of life, which involves "skillful work," "the freedom and independence to roam" far from "the hearth," and "protecting oneself rather than being protected," explicitly defies the "socially sanctioned role" ascribed to women as well as the woman's "socially legitimate 'nature'" of being nurturing, gentle, and domestic (8). Jaycox points out that the key values of work, love, and motherhood that the Walking Woman advocates "attack conventional femininity point by point" because hard work could "dissipate the [norm of the] physically and morally frail female," because unregulated sexuality "contradicted women's supposed moral superiority," and because having a child outside marriage "attacked patriarchy at its foundation" (9). There is no question that the narrator admires the Walking Woman's ability to disregard American expectations regarding female behavior. After describing their encounter, she praises the Walking Woman for having "walked off all sense of society-made values, and, knowing the best when the best came to her, was able to take it" ("WW" 261).

The narrator then indicates that her desire to meet the Walking Woman is also motivated by "the contradiction of reports of her," all of which have to do with the Walking Woman's rumored disabilities. Some reports describe the woman as "comely" ("WW" 256), while others consider her "plain to the point of deformity. She had a twist to her face, some said; a hitch to one shoulder; they averred she limped as she walked. But by the distance she covered she should have been straight and young. As to sanity, equal incertitude" ("WW" 257). Indeed, following her documentation of these rumors,

the narrator indicates that the Walking Woman's habit of walking is related to her experience of illness and possible disability. She explains,

> By her own account she had begun by walking off an illness. There had been an invalid to be taken care of for years, leaving her at last broken in body, and with no recourse but her own two feet to carry her out of that predicament. It seemed there had been, besides the death of her invalid, some other worrying affairs, upon which, and the nature of her illness, she was never quite clear, so that it might very well have been an unsoundness of mind which drove her to the open, sobered and healed at last by the large soundness of nature. ("WW" 257)

Thus, the woman's walking habit is something that she describes as a way of recovering from an illness she endured after the death of someone in her care. But the narrator's description here demonstrates her own willingness to speculate about the Walking Woman's illness and disability beyond what the Walking Woman herself specifies. The narrator is the one who suggests that this "illness" may have been an "unsoundness of mind." Later in this paragraph, the narrator also asserts that "at the time I knew her" the Walking Woman "was perfectly sweet and sane" ("WW" 257). This clarification attempts to validate the Walking Woman's insights, which the narrator begins to describe thereafter. But in making this clarification, the narrator demonstrates that she assigns high value to the outward appearance of sanity while also demonstrating her belief that she is capable of accurately assessing the mental state of another person, even from a brief personal interaction. Throughout the story, the Walking Woman's purported disabilities remain ambiguous and unsettled, but with only one exception at the very end, the narrator continues to insist that she can accurately delineate and define those disabilities. Indeed, the form of the story draws attention to the contradictions and inconsistences between the Walking Woman's own experiences and words and what the narrator asserts about the Walking Woman's illness and disability. This creates an important and illuminating

tension that allows room for the interrogation of the difference between how embodiment and/or disability are experienced and how they are perceived.

In particular, the repetitive phrasing used to describe what the woman accomplishes by walking renders conspicuous the difference between the Walking Woman's statements and those of the narrator. In the early passage quoted above, the narrator indicates that "by her own account" the Walking Woman "had begun by walking off an illness," but late in the story, the narrator praises the Walking Woman for "having walked off all sense of society-made values" ("WW" 261). This phrasing invites an interpretation of the Walking Woman's "account" wherein the "illness" she was able to walk off is not the "unsoundness of mind" the narrator speculates in that early description, but rather, the very same "sense of society-made values" the narrator praises her for abandoning. If the values of the Walking Woman's society are what made her feel unwell following the death of the person in her care, and those values compelled her to seek recovery through walking, the Walking Woman's abandonment of societal values serves a dual but connected purpose. Her walking is an ongoing process of claiming a different type of womanhood *and* of rejecting a society within which she feels disabled because those who belong to that society define her as different, create distinctions between her embodiment and mental state and their own, and devalue her according to these distinctions. By suggesting that the woman's experience of disability might result from the pressures of social expectations rather than from the woman's own mental or bodily pathology, the story grapples with possibilities that anticipate the paradigm shift that helped to establish disability studies as an academic discipline in the 1980s. At that point, disability theorists began to promote what they termed the "social model of

disability." This model argues that social stigmatization of disability has a more profound and negative impact upon peoples' lives than physical or mental impairments, and its proponents have pushed for societal change by insisting that the ways disabled people are perceived must be changed.[23]

The narrator devotes the majority of her story to recounting one important interaction with the Walking Woman, which draws focus to how the shared experience of maternity facilitates the narrator's ability to perceive the woman as well as to how the narrator's own perceptions of the woman impact her understanding of the encounter. When they have a chance to speak privately, the woman makes a comment from which the narrator "inferred that she had had a child." The narrator continues, "I was surprised at that, and then wondered why I should have been surprised, for it was the most natural of all experiences to have children. I said something of that purport, and also that it was one of the perquisites of living I should be least willing to do without" ("WW" 258). Her surprise that the Walking Woman is a mother is far from innocuous, as Samantha Walsh points out. Walsh writes that another woman's "sense that I could not mother because of my disability suggests that disability somehow negates the validity of my personhood" (84). The narrator's surprise that the Walking Woman is a mother, her unwillingness to interrogate why this surprises her, and her subsequent mental correction about motherhood being "natural" all indicate the degree to which she regards the Walking Woman as strange and abnormal in spite of the fact that she is drawn to her.

[23] Lewiecki-Wilson and Cellio provide a one useful gloss of this model, which they specify was "articulated first by British theorists." They indicate that proponents of the social model of disability "countered th[e] assumption that it is the disability that causes exclusion. They argue that exclusion is the result of social arrangements that favor some kinds of people and not others. The social model separates the impairment from the socially disabling barriers and attitudes that exclude" (12). Barnes specifies that it was Michael Oliver who coined the term "social model of disability" in 1981. Barnes indicates that Oliver conceptualized the social model as "a tool with which to provide insights into the disabling tendencies of modern societies in order to generate policies and practices to facilitate their eradication" (18).

In this moment and several that follow, the narrator demonstrates the anxiety about difference that characterizes the society the Walking Woman abandons, and which Margrit Shildrick connects to the oppression of disabled people. Shildrick contends that "disabled people continue to endure broad cultural discrimination and alienation" not explicitly because they are different, but "because their form of living in the body lays bare the psycho-social imaginary that sustains modernist understandings of being a subject." She defines this pyscho-social imaginary as that in which "physical and mental autonomy, the ability to think rationally and impartially, and interpersonal separation and distinction are the valued attributes of western subjectivity." Her work reveals that people who occupy various types of bodies become victims of discrimination when their forms of embodiment call attention to "interdependency and connectivity, or of corporeal instability" because their bodies become the "occasion—for the normative majority—of a deep seated anxiety that devalues difference" (*Dangerous Discourses* 1-2).[24] Shildrick suggests that people who experience this anxiety about difference are particularly troubled by moments or actions that blur the boundary between self and other. She indicates that physical touch literalizes this type of transgression, "troubl[ing] the dimensions of the embodied self for all participants," because "to touch another is in some sense always to compromise control, for even when the intent is outward—whether aggressive or palliatory—we are also touched in return" (*DD* 23). Because those who are "anomalously embodied" occupy bodies that already call into question the idealization of

[24] Subsequent citations to this text will be abbreviated *DD*. Elsewhere, Shildrick summarizes that because of this anxiety that devalues difference, the "consequence" of being "anomalously embodied, is that difference is made other, rejected and devalued by those who are able to broadly align themselves with the illusory standards of the psychosocial imaginary" ("Critical Disability Studies" 31).

coherent, independent, and stable forms of embodiment, their touch is perceived as particularly threatening and subject to stricter regulation (*DD* 30).

The narrator's surprise and seeming discomfort with the discovery that the Walking Woman is a mother, when considered in light of Shildrick's insights, draws attention to why disabled mothers might be perceived as a particularly potent source of discomfort. All reproductive bodies, with their potential to blur the lines between bodies and their ability to create new bodies, draw attention to the instability of the notion of subjectivity that Shildrick critiques, which places high importance on the independent, coherent, contained self. This is doubly true for disabled reproductive bodies, which draw attention to the inadequacy of notions of the independent, coherent self *and* which contain the potential to further reproduce bodies which will continue to challenge that notion of the subject. Like the narrator's insistence that the Walking Woman is worthy of consideration because she is "perfectly sane" at the time of their encounter, the narrator's surprise at the Walking Woman's maternity reveals she is the product of a society in which difference is devalued in this way, and in which the reproduction of a disabled mother becomes a particular occasion for anxiety. Her surprise that the woman shares her own appreciation of motherhood also suggests she is troubled by the woman's disclosure because it erases the boundary between them that was held in place by her assumption that the woman could *not* be a mother. In this moment, the narrator learns she has even more in common with this enigmatic woman than she has realized.

Equally important to the narrator's initial shock at being confronted with the Walking Woman's maternity, however, is her willingness to set her surprise aside, to re-interpret the woman's maternity as "natural," and to articulate her shared appreciation of

motherhood aloud. The narrator demonstrates the anxiety about difference that Shildrick documents, but she does not seem to automatically devalue difference in the ways that Shildrick indicates many people who discriminate against disabled people do. The narrator's willingness to bond with the Walking Woman about motherhood serves as a key moment in their interaction, because she specifies that the woman's mention of motherhood is how "the best of our talk that day began" ("WW" 258). When the narrator allows a boundary she had perceived between herself and the Walking Woman to be removed, she enters a space wherein they can share a meaningful encounter. In their own analysis of the intersections of maternity and disability, Leweicki-Wilson and Cellio recognize a similar positive potential in the moments that force people to grapple with "liminal spaces where borders flow into one another, particularly the borders between the social and the personal, outside and inside, others and self" (1). They argue that while "the liminal processes of interdependent and shifting self and other are threatening, stigmatized, and associated with the fear of disability," they can also "allow the possibility of transformation and growth. The unstable and shifting identities of mothering and disability can thus both induce a kind of panic because of the blurring of categories, but can also be productive, revealing the impurities and instabilities of categories and concepts themselves" (Leweicki-Wilson and Cellio 7). Throughout the story, the narrator repeatedly reveals herself to be grappling with dual impulses that resonate with Leweicki-Wilson and Cellio's claims. The narrator remains fixated on the Walking Woman's difference, but she also remains committed to trying to understand the woman on her own terms. The narrator's words indicate that her ability to perceive the Walking Woman and the woman's insights are influenced and limited by her own

fixation on the woman's difference. But the way she describes the encounter also emphasizes that the narrator is significantly changed by it because she accepts the dissolution of some of the boundaries that her perceptions of difference create.

These dual impulses are evident again immediately after the narrator establishes the two women's bond over motherhood. As the Walking Woman begins to describe her own values, the narrator focuses on the other woman's bodily difference. When the Walking Woman begins to talk about what the narrator calls the "three things which if you had known you could cut out all the rest," the narrator provides commentary, insisting that in this moment she has objectively deciphered the woman's facial characteristics. She decides that the woman "really did have a twist to her face, a sort of natural warp or skew into which it fell when it was worn merely as a countenance, but which disappeared the moment it became the vehicle for thought or feeling" ("WW" 258). The narrator subsequently indicates that the woman's facial "twist" reappears when the woman mentions that changing her own priorities has helped her manage "to do without" the "looking and seeming" that she implies are typically associated with womanhood ("WW" 259). These details indicate that perceptibility of the Walking Woman's purported physical difference, which the narrator calls a "twist," is, like the body that traverses geographic space, always in flux. These claims also indicate that the woman's "twist" is linked to her attitude toward the societal pressures that define her as different. Further, the narrator's acknowledgement that the appearance of the Walking Woman's face *changes* introduces the possibility that the visibility of the "twist" is a product of the observer's perceptions and expectations. This suggestion, like the idea that

the Walking Woman's illness might have been caused by her social environment, again grapples with the possibility that disability is, to a significant extent, socially constructed.

These early and ambiguous suggestions that disability might be constituted largely by the perceptions of others fixated on difference, rather than constituted exclusively by bodily difference, are underscored by the story's final image. After the Walking Woman takes her leave of the encounter, the narrator perceives the woman as having "a queer, sidelong gait, as if in fact she had a twist all through her." But "recollecting suddenly that people called her lame, I ran down to the open place below the spring where she had passed. There in the bare, hot sand the track of her two feet bore evenly and white" ("WW" 262). This conclusion indicates that following their encounter, the narrator has begun to recognize her own perceptions of the woman's apparent disabilities to be fallible. She narrates the entire interaction years after it takes place, so the contradiction of the footprints evidently does not make her question her perception of the Walking Woman's facial twist. But her repetition of the word "twist" draws attention to this parallel for readers. By concluding with this image, the story emphasizes that although the narrator presents herself as an unbiased and particularly perceptive observer of the people and places she documents, the documentation of her subjective feelings and the inconsistencies in her narration warrant closer examination. Her first-person narration makes it possible to recognize how she continues to grapple with the encounter, to recognize the anxiety about difference that she demonstrates, and to recognize that her perceptions of difference may be unreliable as a result of that anxiety.

The ways that "The Walking Woman" engages with ideas that anticipate the social model of disability are remarkable for a story published in 1907. But, just as

importantly, the story also moves beyond merely considering how difference and disability are pathologized. In recent years, critical disabilities theorists have argued that the ongoing efficacy of the social model of disability may be limited.[25] Rather than pushing for policy changes that better accommodate disabled people, many disabilities theorists seek to imagine new ways of being that regard disability as constitutive to human experience rather than regarding it as an obstacle to be overcome. The Walking Woman, who has "walked off society made values," demonstrates herself to be committed to, and considerably successful in achieving, a similar re-imagining of priorities. By documenting the Walking Woman's behavior and insights, the story gives voice to a non-normative worldview that embraces difference by emphasizing the value of connections between people and experiences.[26]

The Walking Woman's own suggestion that she "had begun by walking off an illness" ("WW" 257) invites consideration of how the Walking Woman may have imagined a new way of being, within which she does not feel ill, by physically traversing land that has a complex history of habitation, is occupied by different types of people and other living beings, and is put to use by different people for very different reasons. Similarly, Eli Clare imagines a "politics of cure" that will "mirror[] the complexity of all our bodies and minds" and acknowledge the "intense contradictions presented by the

[25] Shildrick suggests, for example, that while she shares the belief that the "major 'problem'" is located "with the normative mainstream," and she acknowledges that the social model of disability has "undoubtedly promulgated a more inclusive organization of social life" for many people living with disabilities, she nonetheless argues that this approach has not succeeded in "contesting the underlying attitudes, values, and subconscious prejudices and misconceptions that figure an enduring, albeit often unspoken, intolerance" (*DD* 5).

[26] Peter Mallios's research suggests this type of connection across difference characterizes Austin's work more broadly. In his explication of Austin's promotion of Joseph Conrad's work, Mallios argues that while praising Conrad, Austin proposes a model of "solidarity" which is constituted by "the appreciation and recognition of difference in a manner that engenders among differing agents potential new frameworks and vocabularies of conjunction, cooperation, deliberation, participation, and understanding" (130).

multiple meanings of health" (206) by walking through a Wisconsin cornfield that is in the process of being restored as a "tallgrass prairie" (204). Contemplating the "ecological restoration" of the prairie he visits, Clare recognizes this process as one that focuses on the need "to repair the damage wrought by monocultures and to resist the forces of eradication" (214). Thus, he understands prairie restoration as "part of the same repair and resistance" that is enacted through "a radical valuing of disabled and chronically ill bodies" he seeks, which he importantly identifies as "inseparable from black and brown bodies; queer bodies; poor and working-class bodies; transgender, transsexual, and gender-nonconforming bodies; immigrant bodies; women's bodies; young and old bodies; fat bodies" (214-215). The Walking Woman seeks only to repair her own health through walking, and the land she transverses is not yet in need of restoration. But Clare's attention to the relationship between the establishment of monocultures, the forces of eradication, and the suffering of those who occupy disabled and chronically ill bodies helps to illuminate why caring for an "invalid" within the society established by American settlers might have made the Walking Woman feel ill. Because of the arrival of the American settlers to whom she ostensibly belongs, and the mining towns they establish, the land the Walking Woman chooses to traverse is in the process of being turned into a monoculture that literally mines the land for profit. Further, the arrival of those American settlers also threatens eradication to the indigenous and long-standing inhabitants of that land. The Walking Woman, while caring for an "invalid" and thus limited in her ability to participate in the mining or the settlement of this land, evidently experiences the damaging effects of these forces in her own body and resists them by choosing mobility. The narrator speculates that the Walking Woman was "sobered and

healed at last by the large soundness of nature" ("WW" 257), while the woman's own dialogue suggests she refuses to stay in one place and stresses connection and togetherness in her storytelling. These details indicate that the rejection and transgression of settlement, of boundaries, and of distinctions are integral to the type of healing she experiences. Her walking also suggests that this type of healing is, indeed, an ongoing process.

Once the Walking Woman begins telling the narrator about her life, her repeated use of the word "together" emphasizes that her value system is built upon an appreciation for connection between people, between people and the land, and between life experiences. The narrator is aware of the emphasis that the Walking Woman assigns to connection when she begins recounting their conversation. She paraphrases the woman's words by suggesting the three things the Walking Woman values most "were good any way you got them, but best if, as in her case, they were related to and grew each one out of the others" ("WW" 258). Once the narrator begins including the Walking Woman's words in direct dialogue, it becomes increasingly clear that the woman's sense of who she is and what she values emerges from her mobility and her connection with others. Her use of gestures of physical touch also suggests that the value she assigns to connection is related to her bodily experience.

When the Walking Woman describes how she came to appreciate work done well by helping a shepherd named Filon Giraud save his sheep in a storm, she emphasizes how she connected to him through this work. She says, "in the black dark of night, I knew where Filon was. A flock-length away, I knew him. Feel? What should I feel? I knew." Describing their success, she says, "we kept upon their track and brought [the sheep]

together again." When she reiterates, "we kept the flock together," she suggests a double meaning that stresses that she and Filon kept the animals together by working together. Her emphasis on her ability to feel Filon across a geographic distance, which she measures by the size of the flock, indicates that when people work toward a common goal in coordination with their environment, the boundaries between people, living things, and their surroundings can be productively dissolved. In spite of her lack of shepherding experience, the Walking Woman's work is not inferior to Filon's, and she does not play a secondary role in the rescue of the sheep. She and Filon work together, and as a result, the sheep are saved.

The emphasis that the Walking Woman places on connection importantly revises the priorities of the society she feels compelled to abandon, wherein even those who regard her with respect continue to speculate about the ability of her body and her mind. Shildrick indicates that a belief system that assigns positive value to the interdependencies of bodies and interactions between them can create the world she hopes for, in which to be "differently embodied" would mean "to simply represent one position among a multiplicity of possibilities" (*DD* 1). Shildrick calls for the recognition of "a tissue of intercorporeality in which each body is open to and affected by the others," which she hopes would create a world wherein "the binary division that would separate the categories of disabled and non-disabled makes little sense" (*DD* 26).[27] The Walking Woman's pursuit of togetherness, like Shildrick's concept of intercorporeality, seems to recognize touch as capable of enacting positive potential. The narrator indicates that as

[27] Shildrick further explains that by recognizing "our forms of embodiment [as] dynamic and to a strong degree not simply other-responsive, but other constructive," "the belief that some forms of embodiment are more settled and unified than others" is undermined. As a result, there remains no grounds upon which to establish a hierarchy of bodies (*DD* 27).

the Walking Woman recounts this experience, she "stretched out her arms and clasped herself, rocking in them as if she would have hugged the recollection to her breast" ("WW" 259). The narrator thus interprets the Walking Woman's gesture toward herself as a way of physically connecting with the pleasant memory of the time she felt physically and intuitively connected to Filon, his flock, and the land. Indeed, the Walking Woman's use of touch indicates that the sort of physical gesture can cross not only bodily, perceptual, and geographic boundaries between different people, as Shildrick suggests,[28] but that physical touch can also be used to cross boundaries of time. For the Walking Woman, speaking to the narrator about these formative experiences serves as an opportunity for outward connection with the narrator. But utilizing gestures as she tells her story also gives her an opportunity to strengthen her own connection to events she is describing. When she clasps herself, she uses movement to strengthen her own connection to the intellectual, emotional, and physical value of the experience of saving the sheep together with Filon.

The Walking Woman reiterates the value of emotional and bodily connection when she describes how she and Filon's working relationship turned into a romantic and sexual one. She continues, "we had saved the flock together. We felt that. There was something that said together in the slope of his shoulders toward me." She suggests their romance begins after he gives her a "look that said 'we are of one sort and one mind'" ("WW" 260). The Walking Woman's romance and eventual reproduction with Filon, whose name and affiliations suggest he is of Mexican or Spanish ancestry, serve as a particularly pronounced example of her willingness to cross cultural boundaries others

[28] Shildrick also discusses what can be achieved through via "metaphoric" touch, such as "'being in touch' rather than separate and distant" and "'being touched' in the sense of emotionally moved," both of which can transgress geographic barriers (*DD* 24).

have established. When the narrator indicates she understands the look that the woman is describing, the Walking Woman "put out her hand and laid it on my arm" ("WW" 261). In this moment, the narrator provides an entire paragraph of commentary about her inability to comprehend the gesture, suggesting she is surprised by this physical crossing of the border between herself and the woman. The narrator explains, "I have always said, and I will say again, I do not know why at this point the Walking Woman touched me" ("WW" 260). She offers a few speculative explanations but insists she cannot come up with a satisfactory one. Her confusion about the woman's touch echoes her response to discovering that the woman is a mother, and this is the second time in the story that the narrator expresses surprise about a form of touch that defies her expectations.[29] But, here, the narrator's reaction draws attention to her surprise about this boundary-crossing physical action while also emphasizing her ongoing attempts to understand the gesture. This willingness to examine her own lack of understanding years after the fact indicates that she has not only been physically touched by the Walking Woman, but that she continues to be emotionally and intellectually touched by their encounter, as well.

Following this gesture, the Walking Woman emphasizes connection and inter-relatedness again as she sums up her earlier comments. She says "to work together, to love together," before adding "there you have two of the things; the other you know." Thereafter, both women emphasize physical touch in referencing motherhood, with the narrator saying, "the mouth at the breast" and the Walking Woman replying, "the lips and

[29] Before describing their encounter, the narrator remarks on the Walking Woman's surprising ability to avoid being physically and sexually violated despite traveling so frequently alone among the lonely men of the American West. The narrator documents her surprise the men like those "who lifted [the Walking Woman] out of white, hot desertness and put her down at the crossing of unnamed ways" had not sexually assaulted her despite having "had no other touch of human kind than the passing of chance prospectors, or the halting of the tri-weekly stage" ("WW" 256).

the hands." This second moment in which the women bond over their shared appreciation for maternity, the connection is even deeper than the first. Both women emphasize the bodily sensation of nursing, an act through which the borders of the bodies of the mother and baby are blurred and transgressed. Given the high value the Walking Woman assigns to connection, togetherness, touch, and motherhood, it is no wonder that the narrator believes "there ensued a pause of fullest understanding" between the women in this moment ("WW" 261).

When the Walking Woman continues by describing the conditions under which her son was born, she makes another "remembering gesture to her breast." She explains that the baby did not live very long, and after she says that "whenever the wind blows in the night… I wake and wonder if he is well covered," she gathers her things and walks away ("WW" 261). The woman thus begins and ends her story by emphasizing her love for her baby and the value she assigns to having been his mother. In so doing, the Walking Woman indicates that she has been profoundly and positively shaped by maternity, despite the nontraditional conditions under which she conceived and despite the baby's early death. The baby's life also serves as a material manifestation of the value she places upon connections between relationships and experiences because he is the physical, embodied manifestation of the connection she experienced between herself, Filon, the land, and their work. Rather than marking her as an unsuitable candidate for motherhood, her different way of life affords her an opportunity to appreciate the life of her child despite its brevity.

But while the Walking Woman's self-created value system helps her appreciate her son's brief life, her final comments and her departure in this moment suggest that she

must remain on the move in order to deal with the loss of her child and to avoid the judgments of the society that defines her as unusual due to their perceptions of her difference. Despite the narrator's articulation of her own appreciation of motherhood, the Walking Woman does not share many details about her maternal loss, only indicating that she still wonders about her son's well being. And this woman, who places such a high value on connection, feels most comfortable spending the bulk of her time walking alone. This suggests that she cannot achieve sustained connection with people who belong to a society that still seeks to highlight, define, and quantify her difference. The Walking Woman's comment about Filon shortly before she departs indicates she does not expect others to recognize the same value in her as she finds in herself. She says that she and Filon stayed together for the duration of the pregnancy, and "it was a good time, and longer than he could be expected to have loved one like me" ("WW" 261). Her ability to connect with Filon does not depend upon his own rejection of a value system that characterize her as an unusual or strange romantic partner for a man who is introduced in the story as "red-blooded, of a full laughing eye, and an indubitable spark for women" ("WW" 258). But given his attitude toward women, which reflects patriarchal values, it is not surprising that their connection cannot endure. Indeed, the narrator's description of the Walking Woman's departure also emphasizes her own continued perception of the woman's difference, indicating that the woman "went as outliers do, without a hope expressed of another meeting and no word of good-bye" ("WW" 261). After this departure, the narrator summarizes the woman's insights in a way that demonstrates the limits of the narrator's own ability to understand the truly transformational notion of

personal connection and boundary crossing that the Walking Woman practices and espouses.

The narrator's concluding remarks about the Walking Woman's worldview are clearly meant to celebrate the woman's insights, but she does not mention the repeated emphasis the Walking Woman places on connection, togetherness, and boundary crossing. Instead, the narrator articulates the Walking Woman's three values of work, love, and motherhood in a way that isolates them from one another. She summarizes,

> She was the Walking Woman. That was it. She had walked off all sense of society-made values, and, knowing the best when the best came to her, was able to take it. Work—as I believed; love—as the Walking Woman had proved it; a child—as you subscribe to it. But look you, it was the naked thing the Walking Woman grasped, not dressed and tricked out, for instance, by prejudices in favor of certain occupations; and love, man love, taken as it came, not picked over and rejected if it carried no obligation of permanency; and a child; any way you get it, a child is good to have, say nature and the Walking Woman; to have it and not wait upon a proper concurrence of so many decorations that the event may not come at all.
>
> At least one of us is wrong. To work and to love and to bear children. That sounds easy enough. But the way we live establishes so many things of much more importance. ("WW" 261-262)

This reflection indicates that the Walking Woman's values have caused the narrator to reconsider those promoted by her own society, and the narrator is particularly taken by the Walking Woman's rejection of constrictive expectations of women's behavior. But while the ways these values disrupt notions of traditional femininity are indeed important, by focusing on only this aspect of the Walking Woman's insights, the narrator indicates that she has failed to fully comprehend the Walking Woman's message. She does not acknowledge or reiterate the transformative potential of the emphasis the Walking Woman places upon the connection between these realizations. Feminist scholarship that highlights only the Walking Woman's disruption of gender norms repeats this oversight,

failing to address the aspects of the woman's worldview that are rooted in her experiences of being perceived as different and her constant movement within a liminal space.

Though "The Walking Woman" does not include the types of discussion of reproduction that would have been suppressed or censored by the Comstock Act, the narrator's failure to interpret the Walking Woman's story in a way that is comprehensive and fully accurate reflects Austin's own anxieties about her society's inability or unwillingness to validate the insights she shared in her work, including her characterizations of motherhood. Though she was widely published, she remained convinced that social expectations, like those enforced by the Comstock Act, prevented women's insights from being fully understood or valued. In "The Walking Woman," the narrator's own sense that she is profoundly misunderstood is, indeed, something that she believes she shares with the Walking Woman. She writes that the men in the mining camps "told me as much of [the Walking Woman's] way of life as they could understand. Like enough they told her as much of mine. That was very little" ("WW" 255). In a similar vein, Austin writes in her autobiography that the "advance publicity" for her books "frequently contradicted all my notions of how and why the book came to be written" (*Earth Horizon* 320). By depicting the narrator as someone who is changed by her encounter with the Walking Woman despite her inability to fully comprehend the meaning of the woman's message, the story documents the problem of misperceiving those who are different from oneself while retaining hope that listening to a woman's story can be transformative.

Because “The Walking Woman” uses the narrator’s first-person reflective narration to depict the successes and failures of the narrator’s attempts to perceive the Walking Woman, the story grapples with the extent to which shared appreciation of motherhood can help women eliminate boundaries between one another in order to connect. The story validates the Walking Woman’s value system, which rejects patriarchal expectations for female behavior, rejects boundaries and separations of various kinds (particularly those based on perceptions of difference), assigns value to the connections between people, and recognizes people as interconnected with one another, with other living creatures, and with the land. Importantly, the story also validates her claim to motherhood in spite of her rumored disabilities and in spite of her child’s early death. The story’s form examines how one’s own anxieties about differences and fixation upon quantifying those differences can produce inaccurate perceptions of others. Rather than insisting that disability is exclusively a matter of non-normative embodiment or mental state, “The Walking Woman” posits that disability is a matter of perception and that illness can be caused by social pressures and expectations. And while the narrator’s ability to comprehend the Walking Woman’s values and her message is limited, the narrator is nonetheless significantly changed by the interaction. The story suggests that this is because, despite her fixation on the Walking Woman’s difference, she respects the woman’s humanity and seeks to understand her. By focusing upon a woman considered strange both because she defies gendered norms and is rumored to be disabled, “The Walking Woman” suggests that this woman’s insights can benefit women who struggle against the expectations of society. But importantly, through the Walking Woman, the

story also begins to imagine a world in which difference from norms can be perceived not as threatening but as generative of positive potentials.

## Beyond Compulsory Heterosexuality and Able-Bodied Maternity in *A Woman of Genius*

Austin's 1912 novel, *A Woman of Genius*, has attracted even more praise from feminist critics than "The Walking Woman." These critics have examined how the novel's protagonist, Olivia Lattimore, escapes from the constraints of marriage in order to pursue her theatre career and artistry, and the novel has been compared to Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900) and Willa Cather's *Song of the Lark* (1915).[30] But existing scholarship tends to overlook her maternity and does not address the fact that her marriage is negatively shaped by her reproductive difficulties. And though the novel is written as its protagonist's autobiography, the unique potential that this form animates has not been carefully examined. Olivia does not reject heterosexuality itself, but the novel-as-autobiography can be read as a type of "coming out" story because she rejects the compulsory force of heterosexuality in contemporary society, both through her actions and by using her autobiography to claim the position of a woman who has been marginalized by that force. Moreover, while Olivia does not have what we might typify

[30] Arno Press re-issued the book in 1977 as part of its "Rediscovered Fiction by American Women" series, Elaine Showalter calls it Austin's "first important novel" (*A Jury of Her Peers* 246), and Elizabeth Ammons indicates it is "the novel widely regarded as her best" (90). Even Janis Stout, who suggests that "critical consensus" about Austin's feminism overlooks the "tension and conflict" in their engagement with feminist ideas, argues that *A Woman of Genius* is Austin's "most consistently feminist" novel ("MHA's Feminism" 78, 80). Anna Carew-Miller summarizes what has been understood as the novel's main conflict when she writes, "*A Woman of Genius* documents the struggle of the gifted woman who attempts to leave the Victorian world of her mother and enter modernity as an artist" (109). For an extended comparison to *Sister Carrie*, see Elizabeth Klimasmith. Stout addresses the comparison to *Song of the Lark*, which she indicates has also been discussed by Nancy Porter, Blanche Gelfant, and Sally Allen McNall ("MHA's Feminism" 89).

as a mental or physical disability, the illness she endures during pregnancy makes it impossible for her to perform her obligations as a wife. Her body is irrevocably harmed by childbirth, and her lack of access to adequate medical care results in the death of her infant son and her subsequent miscarriage.

Olivia's stated objective for writing her autobiography is to expose how she has been harmed by the "social ideal" of her rural small town (*A Woman of Genius* 5).[31] Unlike "The Walking Woman," which features a woman resisting American social expectations while living in a place and time marked by the mixing of people with different social and cultural backgrounds, *A Woman of Genius* uses Olivia's story to address the ideal of what she calls "true womanliness" that is promoted and enforced by the white residents of rural American towns (*WG* 3). Since this social ideal demands that these women become wives *and* mothers, it is necessary to examine how Olivia's reproductive difficulties factor into her inability to live according to this social ideal. After she achieves wealth and recognition as a theatrical performer, Olivia begins to recognize that women who enjoy the authority granted to wives and mothers are performing those roles, as well. Significantly, she invokes the language of disability when she articulates her realization that social expectations have "enmeshed and crippled" her, making it very difficult for her to pursue a life of her own choosing (*WG* 487).[32] As the following reading of the novel will show, her manner of telling her story can be usefully illuminated by Robert McRuer's theorization of the relationship between heterosexuality and able-bodiedness and of various forms of coming out in *Crip Theory:*

[31] Subsequent citations of this text will be abbreviated *WG*.
[32] This use of the word "crippled" demonstrates Austin's tendency to use language that is considered ableist by twenty-first century standards. But here, she uses this term to suggest that society has introduced obstacles into her life, indicating a belief system that anticipates the social model of disability.

*Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (2006). By claiming the position of a woman who fails to abide by the ideal of "true womanliness," Olivia shows that this ideal is constituted by a combination of compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodied maternity that negatively impacts women and limits their choices. By documenting and critiquing the ways that the ideal of "true womanliness" regulates the lives and reproduction of women like Olivia, the novel challenges the idealization of white American womanhood that opponents of birth control promoted, that birth control activists were unwilling to contest in their campaigns to legalize contraception, and which were used by eugenicists to justify the reproductive regulation of women they regarded as "unfit" mothers, including poor women, disabled and ill women, black women and other women of color, and immigrant women. Olivia advocates for reproductive control as a woman's right and opposes the forces that regulate women's reproductive lives. Through her narrative, the novel argues in direct defense of women whose lives are economically unstable and whose bodies cannot easily reproduce, and in so doing, challenges the ideals that were used to disempower and oppress all women eugenicists classified as "unfit" for reproduction. [33]

Importantly, the novel's autobiographical form figures Olivia's writing of her story as an act of resistance through which she chooses to claim positions vilified by adherents of the social ideal she condemns. Claiming these positions helps her imagine alternatives to the narrow way of life prescribed by the interrelated systems of

[33] One way to recognize the unique quality of this advocacy and its relationship to racial politics is to compare *A Woman of Genius* with with Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915), published a few years later. As Deborah Rosenfelt points out, Gilman's feminist novel imagines a utopia inhabited solely by women, wherein motherhood is worshipped by the inhabitants, but "the 'unfit' in this planned society are not allowed to reproduce at all." Rosenfelt asserts that this detail reveals that *Herland* "is based on the rather disturbing notion of rigid socio-economic planning to further the development of 'the race'," which is explicitly identified in the novel as Aryan ("Getting into the Game" 368).

compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodiedness, and she uses her autobiography to encourage other women to resist those systems as well. The reflection on and telling of her life story serves as a vehicle through which she can achieve her other stated goal for writing her autobiography: that of "making things easier" for women like herself, who struggle against society's expectations (*WG* 503). The novel's construction as a quasi-autobiography written by Olivia also makes it possible to recognize how much she continues to be influenced by the ideals she condemns. In so doing, the novel exposes even more about the impacts of the interrelated systems of compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodied maternity than Olivia realizes.

The transgressive nature of the pseudo-autobiographical form the novel utilizes and of the attitudes Olivia documents is underscored both in the opening pages of the novel and in the story of its publication. The novel opens with Olivia indicating, "it is strange that I can never think of writing any account of my life without thinking of Pauline Mills and wondering what she will say of it." Olivia describes her childhood friend Pauline in this opening as a woman who enjoys reading autobiographies because they give her the opportunity of "finding in them new persuasions of the fundamental rightness" of her own value system, and Pauline reads these stories only "as the advertisement of that true womanliness which Pauline loves to pluck from every feminine bush" (*WG* 3). Olivia then indicates that Pauline likely will not read the book because her husband will read it first. She thinks he "has been so successfully Paulined," that he will "stamp it with insidious impropriety" because it offers a "statement of life [which] lie[s] outside his wife's accepted bias" (WG 4). Olivia thus introduces herself as a woman who knows that men and women who abide by the social ideal her autobiography

is designed to expose and condemn are likely to condemn the book and challenge its validity. She also acknowledges her own awareness that the book will disrupt the expectations of many readers of autobiographies because it will refuse their attempts to use her story to affirm their pre-existing belief system. She acknowledges that these concerns shape her choice to write her story, but she chooses to write that story in spite of them. She thus offers her story as a challenge to these types of Americans, and these types of readers, beginning with her very first sentence.

By framing the novel this way, Austin demonstrates her intimate knowledge of the ways women's stories were delegitimized, regulated, and censored during this period, which she also addresses frequently in her nonfiction. In her own autobiography, Austin writes that near this point in her career, "I had more than a little trouble with editors and publishers." She indicates that while "there was a growing interest in the experiences of women, as women," she believes that interest was interrupted by "a marked disposition of men to determine what should and should not be written" (*Earth Horizon* 319). And even when she managed to write the story of a woman who "behave[s]" like a genius in *A Woman of Genius*, this attempt was thwarted. She writes, "I found after four months that the publishers had dropped the book and sold the remainders. I was told later that the wife of one of the publishers had decided that the conduct of the woman was immoral" (*Earth Horizon* 320). This is the very problem that Olivia anticipates in the opening pages of the novel. But like Olivia, Austin's actions indicate she was committed to preventing women like this from silencing different perspectives. After the novel was discontinued by Doubleday, Austin writes that she "sold the book to Houghton Mifflin company and it has been selling ever since," though it has never proven particularly

profitable (*Earth Horizon* 320). These details draw particular emphasis to Austin's intention for *A Woman of Genius* to be a disruptive novel, to the novel's autiobgraphical form as a strategy Austin uses to acknowledge the novel's content as disruptive, and to Austin's ongoing commitment to resisting the regulating forces that seek to obscure the critiques she offers through Olivia in the novel.

While Olivia feels out of place throughout her childhood, it is after she gets married to Tommy Bettersworth that she recognizes herself as acutely incapable of conforming to her small town's social ideal, despite her best efforts. When Olivia describes her early months of marriage, she makes explicitly clear that pregnancy makes her so ill that she is unable to fulfil the domestic expectations that both she and her husband have for her. This highlights the extent to which being able to adhere to the expectations of the ideal wife and mother relies upon having a body that can endure pregnancy without difficulty. The passage is worth quoting at length, particularly given how uncommon it was for published fiction written by American women to document reproductive difficulties like pregnancy-related illness during this period, when the Comstock Act and its supporters suggested that these topics were obscene.[34] Olivia indicates,

> My baby was born within ten months of my marriage and most of that time I was wretchedly, depressingly ill. All my memories of my early

[34] The censorship of a difficult childbirth Edith Summers Kelley wrote in the original manuscript of *Weeds* (1923) serves as a demonstrative example of the obstacles American women faced when attempting to depict pregnancy-induced illness and suffering in their fiction. This childbirth scene was among the sections of the manuscript cut by Harcourt and Brace prior to the novel's publication (Goodman 360-361). Charlotte Margolis Goodman indicates Kelley was "particularly irate" about the publisher's choice to eliminate the childbirth scene and speculates that Kelley "may well have been irked by the thought that twenty years earlier her friend Upton Sinclair had been permitted by his publishers to describe such a scene in *The Jungle*" (361). Indeed, Kelley indicated that she wrote the childbirth scene because "I had never read in the works of a woman novelist… an adequate description of childbirth" (qtd. in Goodman 361). The excised chapter, which is included in the 1996 Feminist Press edition of *Weeds*, depicts a difficult pregnancy and childbirth that shares similarities with Austin's depictions in *A Woman of Genius*.

> married life are of Olivia, in the mornings still with frost, cowering away from the kitchen sights and smells, or gasping up out of ingulfing nausea to sit out the duty calls of the leading ladies of Higgleston in the cold, disordered house; of Tommy gulping unsuitable meals of underdone and overdone things, and washing the day's accumulation of dishes after business hours, patient and portentiously cheerful, with Olivia in a wrapper, half hysterical with weakness—all the young wife's dreams gone awry! And Tommy too, he must have had visions of himself coming home to a well-kept house, of delicious little dinners and long hours in which he should appear in his proper character the adored, achieving male. (*WG* 129)

Olivia also indicates that the impact of her incapacitation extended beyond the duration of the pregnancy itself. She laments that she and Tommy "had not fairly known each other as man and woman before we were compelled to trace in one another the lineaments of parents," and she insists that "in this practical confusion of my illness, was laid the foundation of our later failure to come together on any working basis" (*WG* 130). The commentary she offers of these events when she reflects on them in the writing of her autobiography underscores the severe and long lasting impact the illness she endures during pregnancy has had on her life.

Olivia's commentary also shows that it is the community's ideal of "true womanliness" which prevents her from postponing pregnancy until she has had a chance to acclimate to marriage. Her accounts of her childhood reveal that members of the community prevent young women from accessing sexual and reproductive information that was officially defined as obscene by the Comstock Act. As Olivia looks toward her impending marriage, she is overwhelmed by what she calls a "looming terror of childbearing" and emphasizes to her readers that she had hoped "to interpose between marriage and maternity never so slight an interval in which to collect myself" (*WG* 124-125). She seeks contraceptive information from her mother, indicating, "it seemed a

natural sort of knowledge to which any woman had a right." Even after her mother says, "I'll not hear of such things! You are not to speak of them, do you understand!", Olivia presses on. She compels her mother to admit, "I'm sorry, daughter" and, "I can't help you. I don't know… I never knew myself" (*WG* 126). Mrs. Lattimore has suffered considerably from this lack of knowledge. Olivia indicates her mother bore three children who survived and "buried five" (*WG* 132, 138), and Olivia believes that for her mother, "the joy of loving was utterly swamped" by the "dread" caused by frequent pregnancy and childbirth as well as the havoc this cycle wreaked on her physical health (*WG* 19). Mrs. Lattimore's inability to access and share contraceptive information demonstrates the culture of what Elaine Showalter calls "female sexual ignorance," which she suggests is, in this novel, "an even bigger problem for women, especially women of genius, than financial dependency" upon men (*A Jury of Her Peers* 246).

But importantly, the novel emphasizes that this enforced ignorance relates not only to sexual activity but also to reproduction. Olivia also recounts, for example, that when she and her best friend Pauline are teenagers, they discuss their belief that women "aren't always as glad" as Pauline's aunt is about her pregnancy. Olivia suggests they "would have liked to have spoken further," but they are unable to do so because "around the whole subject lay the blank expanse of our ignorance " (*WG* 92-93). Olivia also insists that the fear of pregnancy is widespread but regarded as socially taboo, so women must speak to one another about reproductive control in private. She suggests that in Higgleston, the town she moves to after she marries, "all of the care and expectancy of children [was] overshadowed by the recurrent monthly dread, crept about by whispers, heretical but persistent, of methods of circumventing it. Of a secret practice of things

openly condemned" (*WG* 219). With these details, the novel gestures toward the ways that women were disempowered and pressured to remain silent because of the attitudes toward reproductive control that were formalized through the Comstock Act.[35]

The consequences that Olivia endures as a result of the enforced ignorance about reproduction and her physical incapacity during pregnancy are illuminated by McRuer's theorization of "compulsory heterosexuality," the system first identified and defined by Adrienne Rich. McRuer argues that compulsory heterosexuality is related to a system he names "compulsory able-bodiedness," explaining that "the system of compulsory able-bodiedness, which in a sense produces disability, is thoroughly interwoven with the system of compulsory heterosexuality that produces queerness" (2). In explaining what he means by "compulsory able-bodiedness," McRuer points out that being understood as "able-bodied means being capable of the normal physical exertions required in a particular system of labor" (8). Those who cannot perform the physical acts required by that system of labor come to be defined as disabled. The system of labor that demands compulsory able-bodiedness also requires the reproduction of children who will be able to perform the physical exertions that system of labor requires, showing that its maintenance is related to maternal reproduction, as well.

Olivia's experiences and manner of documenting them demonstrate the degree to which it is necessary for women to perform able-bodied maternity in order to abide by the demands of compulsory heterosexuality. Her experiences draw attention to the fact that being able-bodied as a wife in her community means being capable of the physical exertions of conceiving, carrying, and birthing any child that is conceived, and

[35] Open secrecy about reproductive control, particularly about abortion, is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

compulsory heterosexuality demands that the physical experience of reproduction does not interfere with a wife's domestic responsibilities. Because compulsory heterosexuality seeks to ensure unmarried women's ignorance about sexual and reproductive information, Olivia cannot avoid becoming pregnant almost immediately. And because pregnancy makes her so ill that she cannot fulfill the expected obligations of a wife, her inability to perform compulsory able-bodied maternity renders her incapable of successfully performing compulsory heterosexuality.

The eugenic contraception tract that Austin retained in her papers also emphasizes that during this period in particular, American women were only considered able-bodied within the system of compulsory heterosexuality if they were capable of performing the labor of maternal reproduction. Though Knopf's tract was first published four years after *A Woman of Genius*, the arguments he makes therein are demonstrative of the eugenic ideas that Gordon indicates gained increasing traction in American public debates about contraception during the early decades of the twentieth century (72-85, 86-91). The types of people Knopf's tract devalues in calling for the suppression of their reproduction are diverse in kind and significant in number. On just one page, for example, Knopf labels as unsuitable for reproduction "the physically, mentally, and morally unfit" as well as "the ignorant, the poor, the underfed and badly housed, the tuburculous, the degenerate, the alcoholic, the vicious, and even the mentally defective" (10).[36] By grouping these people

[36] Over the course of the tract, Knopf continues to rely on these types of lists to devalue and conflate the lives of a remarkably diverse number of people. Those he deems unfit for reproduction also those afflicted with "insanity, idiocy, epilepsy, and alcoholic predisposition" or "with serious cardiac or renal diseases, or frail or ill from other causes;" those who are "enfeebled or diseased" (13); the "feebleminded" and "poverty stricken" (19); the "idiotic, half insane, chronic alcoholics, and chronic criminals" (20); "defectives and criminals" (23); and "imbeciles or degenerates" (27). Lists that employ these various terms to describe individuals are deployed frequently throughout the tract, often in different iterations that use the same terminology but combine different designations of unfitness. In his 1919 preface, Knopf suggests that

together and emphasizing their inability to align with his ideal, Knopf effectively classifies as disabled any woman who could not or would not produce children eugenicists deem desirable.[37] Further, the unwillingness or inability of these women to have "fit" children was understood as proof of the women's personal failings and, resultingly, pathologized. *A Woman of Genius* resists this rhetoric and its ableism, insisting that the problem lies not with the women eugenicists classified as "unfit" but with the social pressures that force women into marriage and motherhood even as they prevent women from accessing reproductive control.

Olivia's fixation on timing as she reflects on women's inability to control their pregnancies also demonstrates the limits of her ability to escape the ideals she critiques. Her bodily difficulty during pregnancy, her inability to defer her pregnancy until she feels settled in her marriage, and the frail health her mother endures due to frequent pregnancies, all serve as indications that compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodied maternity function, in part, by making it impossible for women to control the timing of their pregnancies. Jack Halberstam highlights this correlation, arguing that "reproductive time and family time are, above all, heteronormative time/space constructs" (10). As a result, Halberstam asserts the value of "articulating and elaborating a concept of queer time" and the importance of examining the "specific models of temporality" which develop "once one leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance" (6). Lee Edelman, in his own critique of what he terms "reproductive futurism," examines the heteronormative

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perhaps "the proportion of women mentally and physically unfit to be mothers might have been equally as great" as "one-third" of all American women (3).

[37] McRuer makes a related point when he acknowledges "the early twentieth-century consolidation and spread of the able-bodied home that I'm tracing did not produce a sharp distinction between" illness and disability (92).

idealization of the figure of the Child and the specific and limited orientation toward the future this idealization secures. He suggests that this value system obscures the existence of those who do not idealize the figure of the Child and/or do not experience or perceive time with this orientation toward the future (2-4). Indeed, Edelman indicates that one of the things that "*queerness* names" is "the side of those *not* 'fighting for the children,' the side outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the absolute value of reproductive futurism" (3).

Halberstam and Edelman's theorizations expose the limited nature of Olivia's critique. She recognizes that both she and her mother suffer tremendously because of the time constraints that Halberstam and Edelman attribute to the prioritization of reproduction. But while Olivia wishes she could exert more control over how she spends her time within the structures that idealize reproduction, she does not imagine contraception as something that would *free* her from the reproductive time that compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodied maternity combine to pressure her to value. This is made particularly clear by her assertion that "I was by the shock of too early maternity driven apart from the usual, and I still believe the happier, destiny of women" (*WG* 130). She writes this reflection long after she has achieved success as a widowed and childless actress, and yet she still labels the "destiny of women" that includes marriage and motherhood as not only the "usual" one, but also the "happier" one. She perceives the timing of her pregnancy as the problem, rather than recognizing the idealization of her reproductive potential itself as a problem. Olivia condemns the way her society compels women to reproduce when they are not ready or when they do not wish to have more children, but here, she stops short of recognizing or criticizing the

reproductive futurism of the social ideal she condemns. Nonetheless, her narration renders conspicuous moments like this one, wherein she inadvertently promotes the ideals she intends to critique. These moments in her narration invite consideration of the degree to which she has internalized her society's ideals and the struggle she continues to undergo in her attempts to ascertain how these ideals have influenced her life.[38]

*A Woman of Genius* also demonstrates the connection between the systems of compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodied maternity because Olivia's illness during pregnancy makes it impossible for her to continue to use marriage as a shield that can protect her from the negative judgments of others. Olivia's recounting of her own life makes clear that when she is young, her community thinks her behavior toward men is inappropriate. She recalls slapping a boy who tries to kiss her without her consent, and she concludes that her mother did not sympathize with her in this moment because her mother believed "it was less disconcerting to have my springs of action accounted for on the basis of what [a neighbor] would have called "common," than to have it arraigned by her own standard as 'queer'" (*WG* 51-52). Olivia's behavior occasions a minor scandal when she is seen kissing a young man named Helmeth Garrett, after which she chooses to "let [Tommy] engage himself to me to save me from immanent embarrassment" (*WG* 115). Indeed, her accounts of her early life show that by

[38] The degree to which Olivia remains influenced by her society's ideal of "true womanliness" is demonstrated elsewhere in the novel when Olivia judges women for failing to live up it. This is particularly true regarding the wife of her colleague and close confidante, Jerry McDermott. Over the course of her friendship with Jerry, the parallels between Olivia's own experiences and those of Jerry's wife—whose own name Olivia never mentions—are clearly evident. Olivia's narration of these events reveals that she persistently makes judgments about the state of Mrs. McDermott's appearance, about her inability to satisfy her husband's demands, and about what Olivia perceives to be neglectful parenting. Olivia even justifies her own willingness to lie to Mrs. McDermott in order to make life easier for Jerry by suggesting, in her narrative commentary, "I suppose I wouldn't have done it if I hadn't found his wife in a wrapper at four o'clock in the afternoon, when I went out there. If she wouldn't make any better fight for herself, who was I to fight for her?" (*WG* 328).

the time she writes her autobiography, she recognizes her early attempts to avoid scorn for the actions her mother regarded as "queer" were misguided. She explicitly describes her relationship with Tommy as one that was desirable to her at the time because it provided her with "cover, something to get behind in order to exercise myself more freely in the things he couldn't understand" (*WG* 107). But because of her difficult pregnancy, marriage cannot function as the "cover" she imagines it to be. Her failure to live up to the expectations of a young wife is evident to herself and her husband, but her inability to host the "leading ladies of Higgleston" who visit her while she's pregnant effectively outs her to the entire community as an inadequate wife (*WG* 129). Because she cannot perform the expected duties of a new wife while she is pregnant, she cannot access the social acceptance that she hoped her marriage to Tommy would grant her.

While Olivia's illness during pregnancy begins to limit her ability to embody the role of the ideal wife and mother, it is the early death of her son that fully forecloses her ability to claim the position of the ideal mother. She blames lack of access to proper medical care for the difficulty she endures during childbirth, for her inability to care for her baby following the birth, and for his death. In so doing, she refutes the idea that her suffering and her baby's death are the result of her own pathology, as eugenicists claimed in regards to the mothers they defined as "unfit." Olivia is attended in childbirth by a widow with no medical, nursing, or midwifery training, and a doctor is only called when her condition turns dire. Even then, codes of femininity interfere with her safety because "there were symptoms concealed from the doctor on the ground of delicacy" (*WG* 132). Years later, she discovers that the medical care she received was "mostly wrong" (*WG* 131). Her experience of childbirth is so debilitating that she is left with a "racked body,"

and this prevents her from caring adequately for her newborn son (*WG* 133). She also insists that her baby, "was feeble from birth, a bottle baby; the best that could have been done would hardly have been a chance for him." But any chance he might have had for survival is lost because he is not cared for adequately. She indicates that she attempts to "fight for him" by "interpos[ing] such scraps of better knowledge as had come to me through reading." But because she is bedridden after childbirth, she is unable to intervene in the decisions made by her mother and her childless older brother, who do not even feed the baby "at regular hours" (*WG* 132).

In telling her story, Olivia struggles to write about the details of her son's illness and death, but she manages to make clear that these circumstances have a long-term effect upon her and her marriage. She recalls debating with Tommy about whether to call the doctor for the baby and learning only years later that "we had done the wrong thing. To this day I cannot come across any notices of the more competent methods for the care of delicate children, without a remembering pang" (*WG* 135). The impact of the baby's death on Tommy is demonstrated when, as he faces his own death following a physical altercation, he asks Olivia "where is the baby?" even though their son has been dead for years (*WG* 255). Olivia explicitly blames her lack of access to healthcare for her circumstances when she writes, "whatever chance I had of growing up into the competent mother of a family was probably lost to me through the inexactitudes of country practice" (*WG* 131). By implicating her lack of access to proper support and adequate medical care for her physical and emotional suffering, as well as her son's death, Olivia further demonstrates that she lives in a culture that assumes a woman will encounter no physical

or medical difficulties in her pursuit of motherhood and makes no accommodation for women who do.

The novel's indication that compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodied maternity are roles women are compelled by social pressure to perform, rather than the natural states of being Olivia is taught to believe they are, is emphasized by her pursuit of an acting career after she fails to be an ideal wife and mother. Judith Butler's profoundly influential insights about the performative nature of gender hinge on the realization that, as she writes, "drag is not an imitation or a copy of some prior and true gender; according to [Esther] Newton, drag enacts the very structure of impersonation through which *any gender* is assumed" (312). Butler explains that drag is a type of performance that exposes how the "compulsory system" of gender functions because drag "implies that all gendering is a kind of impersonation and approximation" which "produces the very notion of the original as an effect and consequence of the imitation itself" (313). There is no passage in *A Woman of Genius* wherein Olivia states, outright, that it is her experience performing roles on stages that compels her to reevaluate other women's performances of the ideal of "true womanliness." But Olivia repeatedly uses the language of performance to describe the behavior of women who choose to embrace these roles, particularly that of her friend Pauline. In her narrative commentary, Olivia characterizes Pauline's behavior explicitly as an act. She writes that when she visits Pauline, she witnesses her friend's "continuous performance of the domestic virtues (*WG* 265), and she takes note of how well Pauline played "the part she had cast herself for as the perfect wife and mother." She even recognizes Pauline's behavior as a series of repeated performances that compel others to perceive that behavior as natural. She writes,

"I doubt now if Pauline ever had an idea or permitted herself a behaviour which was not conditioned by the pattern she had set for herself, which she intrigued both [her husband] and myself into believing was the only real and appreciable life" (*WG* 266).

Further, the novel suggests that Olivia comes to recognize "true womanliness" as a conscious performance because one of the things that facilitates her success in her career as an actress is her experience trying to abide by this ideal. It is only because Olivia's attempts to become a mother are unsuccessful that the possibility of a theatrical career even opens up to her. After documenting her baby's death and her subsequent miscarriage, Olivia opens the next chapter by indicating "very closely on the loss of my baby, of which I have spared you as much as possible, came crowding the opening movement of my artistic career." She must travel to Chicago to recover "from the disastrous termination of another expectancy that had come, scarcely regarded in the obsession of anxiety and overwork during the last weeks of my boy's life, and had failed to sustain itself under the shock of his death" (*WG* 140). While she is in Chicago, she is awed when she visits the theatre for the first time, where she begins to recognize theatrical performance as a powerful force and a form of art.

After she returns home, Tommy suggests that she participate in a small traveling production in Higgleston to mitigate her mourning about her son's death. Though married women were often prohibited from acting, she suggests she was "unhindered by convention… on behalf of my recent mourning" and, importantly, she is encouraged to participate because everyone believes her recent maternal "sorrow" makes her an appropriate candidate for a play depicting "the anguish of war-bereaved women" (*WG* 150). Had her husband and her community continued to sanction her use of theatrical

performance to grapple with the emotional experiences that result from her bodily difficulties, she may have been able to perform a version of compulsory heterosexuality in spite of her inability to fulfill compulsory able-bodied maternity. But she is trapped by the restraints of compulsory heterosexuality once again. Her newfound passion for the theatre compels her to take a professional role, which pays her and requires her to travel away from home. For this, she is again regarded by her community as someone who transgresses the expectations of "true womanliness." Butler's insights about how drag performance exposes that "*gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original*" (313) illuminate the fact that Olivia's theatrical performances must be shut down because they threaten to reveal "true womanliness" to be a performance, or a kind of imitation, rather than a natural state of being.

Significantly, the negative attitude the townspeople have toward Olivia's pursuit of an acting career is articulated by mothers who suggest she is not to be trusted around their children. Once she has some professional success, she hopes to serve her community by organizing the yearly children's pageant. But she is told by the minister that "a good many of the mothers thought they'd rather not have [the children] exposed to… er… professional methods" (*WG* 179). Elizabeth Klimasmith analyzes Olivia's acting career, summarizing that "the actress stands for all that simultaneously buttresses and threatens bourgeois society" because she is "mobile, capable of artifice, needing management, and coded as prostitute" (130). The minister's and the mothers' rejection of Olivia's participation in the pageant also demonstrates Carew-Miller's broader argument that, over the course of the novel, Olivia loses "the securities of maternity and marriage." But Carew-Miller's claim that "Olivia has unintentionally rejected the social values that

continue to shape her worldview" (111) fails to account for the fact that her bodily failure to reproduce healthy children makes it impossible for her to live within the parameters set by these social values. Olivia's status as a mother is delegitimized by the death of her child, so her belief that she can be of service to other children can be delegitimized by their mothers. These mothers can claim the authority of compulsory able-bodied maternity that Olivia's body's inability to reproduce makes inaccessible to her. Her opportunities within this community are limited because her inability to have healthy children makes her vulnerable to women whose children give them authority *and* because the work that she pursues, in part to help her deal with her loss, threatens to expose the ideal of "true womanliness" as a performance.

Olivia's second romantic relationship also comes to an end because neither she nor her lover can reconcile her career as an actress with the restrictive combination of marital and maternal expectations demanded by the "social ideal" they have been taught to value. In describing the failure of this relationship, she emphasizes how the compulsory nature of those expectations inhibited her choices. After Tommy's death, and after Olivia has achieved success as an actress, she is reunited with Helmeth Garrett, whom she kissed immediately before her engagement to Tommy. Helmeth's wife has also passed away, leaving Olivia and Helmeth free to engage in a passionate affair. She depicts their regard for one another as sincere and passionate, and she admits that they engage in sex outside of marriage. But the relationship comes to an end because Olivia refuses to abandon her career to marry him. Importantly, a key reason he objects to marrying her is because he has two daughters, and as he tells Olivia, "their mother wouldn't want them brought up in the atmosphere of the stage" (*WG* 407). This suggests

that as a delegitimized mother with no living children, Olivia remains subject to the value judgments of a woman whose motherhood grants her moral authority even after she dies.

In describing why she cannot leave the stage, Olivia says, "it has got into my blood, Helmeth. I can't explain, and I didn't realize until we got to talking of it, but I don't believe I could live away from it" (*WG* 408). Though less explicit than her body's earlier inability to reproduce children who live, Olivia still considers her inability to be the type of mother their society sanctions as tied to her body—this time, to her body's desire and need to participate in performances that are perceived as artistic, rather than understood as compulsory. The body that failed to perform compulsory able-bodied maternity has, through performing on stage, become a body that cannot perform compulsory heterosexuality because it would require her to abandon her artistic career. As Olivia recounts this conversation in the writing of her autobiography, she emphasizes how her attitude toward these circumstances has changed since they transpired. She writes that when she was making these decisions, "I was still of the opinion" that "the stage wasn't the proper atmosphere for the rearing of young ladies" because "all my training and heredity had fostered an ideal of family life which rendered obligatory a proper house and servants, in the neighborhood of good schools, and the exclusion from it of everybody but those who found themselves in an identical situation" (*WG* 408). This invocation of the influence of "heredity" suggests, interestingly, that she has internalized the eugenic belief that moral values were to some degree passed down through generations. But while she perceives this notion of married motherhood as something else that exists within her body, she actively works to disregard this inheritance.

Further, Olivia's choice to prioritize her career over marriage and family is an act that rejects reproductive futurism even though she does not acknowledge it as such. She has maternal feelings for Helmeth's daughters, the idea of becoming a mother to them appeals to her, and Helmeth's proposal offers her a second chance at the type of life she refers to elsewhere as the "usual, and I still believe the happier, destiny of women" (*WG* 130). But she chooses otherwise. She is not willing to abandon her career in order to mother Helmeth's daughters in the manner her society deems fit. She even acknowledges that the "social ideal" she condemns is only accessible for wealthy Americans when she indicates that the models available to her and Helmeth involve having "servants," owning homes in particular neighborhoods, and practicing the "exclusion" of "everybody" who does not share an "identical situation." Halberstam makes a similar point more explicitly, specifying that because of "organizations of time and space that have been established for the purposes of protecting the rich few from everyone else," many "queer subjects" who choose to live outside these constructs face considerable risks (10).There is much less risk involved for Olivia in rejecting Helmeth's offer of a family because her own earning potential is secure at this point. But when she declines Helmeth's proposal, she makes a similar choice to continue her life outside the constraints of reproductive time. She may not recognize this aspect of her choice, but what she *has* come to recognize is that she might have been able to make a different choice had she witnessed others living outside these norms. The fact that no such example was available to her demonstrates, yet again, the strength of the connected systems of compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodied maternity.

Because the novel is written as Olivia's autobiography, it is full of scenes like this one, wherein she supplements the account of events that have transpired with her later narrative commentary about them. The autobiography can be read as a "coming out" story wherein she claims positions that have been pathologized by the combined systems of compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodied maternity because she acknowledges her body's reproductive difficulties, discusses the conflicts in her romantic relationships, and admits that she engages in extramarital sex. Her willingness to claim these pathologized positions has ramifications beyond herself, as McRuer's discussion of the power of "coming out crip" and Lewiecki-Wilson and Cellio's discussion of the power of narratives about motherhood and disability examine. McRuer suggests that "coming out crip" is an act through which one claims the positions that have been pathologized by the interrelated systems of compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodiedness, and in so doing, contests those systems at the same time. McRuer specifies that "coming out crip" means "claiming disability *and* a disability politics while nonetheless nurturing a necessary contestatory relationship to that identity politics" and "claiming the queer history of coming out" while "simultaneously talking back to the parent culture" to prevent the act of coming out from being reduced to a specific and prescribed type of performance (71).[39] McRuer thus positions "coming out crip" as having less to do with one's bodily or mental impairments and more to do with the willingness to embrace a stigmatized position associated with disability, to push back

[39] McRuer specifies that this form of talking back to "any parent culture" would "entail rejecting the various ways that LGBT understandings of coming out have devolved (and the ways disability coming out might devolve)—into, for instance, discovery, announcement, and celebration of individual or individualized difference" (71). McRuer's formulation of coming out thus acknowledges that "coming out," when it is understood merely as an act which announces an essential identity, can function as a normalizing structure similar to the process Butler analyzes in "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," wherein gender identity is constructed and normalized through repetitive performance.

against that stigma, and to redefine that position. Indeed, seeking to change existing conditions is a fundamental aspect of coming out crip. McRuer indicates that doing so is an act of "demanding that… another world is possible," particularly an "accessible world," and of recognizing any person or system which denies that "a disabled world is possible and desirable" is proof of that person or system's "need to be cripped" (71). McRuer's theorization of "coming out crip" is intersectional, and he cites Sharon Snyder to emphasize the importance of examining how disability is "mapped onto bodies marked by differences of race, class, gender, and ability" (72).[40] Regarding conceptions of disability and mothering more specifically, Lewiecki-Wilson and Cellio focus on the power of narrative to help people imagine a more accessible world. They insist that narrative "offers spaces for the re-writing of stories, the crafting of new versions of living, leading to social and cultural change" (127).

These insights draw attention to what Olivia accomplishes by, in the parlance utilized by eugenicists during this period, coming out "unfit" as both a mother and a wife. She confronts the women in her life who have pressured her to comply with the systems that have oppressed her, and in so doing, she claims the positions stigmatized by compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodied maternity. She also comes out as "unfit" in her writing, documenting her experiences and these confrontations, and using her narrative commentary about them to empower other women to resist these systems. Through this storytelling, she seeks to help readers imagine a world where

[40] This intersectional emphasis of McRuer's notion of "coming out crip" also speaks to the importance of recognizing that theorizations of "coming out" have not always paid adequate attention to other identity categories. As Marlon B. Ross has argued, for example, it is important to "explore how *racial* ideology functions in our appeals to the closet as the definitive articulation of modern sexuality and progressive homosexuality" (162).

compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodied maternity do not limit other women's opportunities as they have limited hers.

The death of Olivia's son makes her failure to reproduce a healthy child visible to everyone who knows her, but she willingly claims the position of the woman who exercises reproductive control and comes out against compulsory able-bodied maternity in a conversation with her mother. She turns this into an opportunity to affirm her belief in her own value and to justify the use of contraception to readers of the autobiography. Shortly before her death, Mrs. Lattimore asks Olivia if she'll ever have more children. Olivia specifically indicates that her body's difficulty with pregnancy and childbirth impacts her choice, saying "Oh, I hope so, mother. I haven't been strong, you know, since the first one. We didn't think it advisable." This comment shows that Olivia and her mother discuss contraception with the ambiguous language that characterized discussions of topics the Comstock Act defined as obscene. Their interaction following this comment is presented as follows.

> "Well, if you can manage it that way…" There was a trace in her tone of the woman who hadn't been able to manage. I wished to reassure her.
>
> "When I was in the hospital the doctor told me…" I could see the deep flush rising over her face and neck; there were some things which her generation never faced. (*WG* 212)

Olivia's comments thus confirm that she has learned some form of contraception from the doctor who treated her in Chicago following her miscarriage, but this information can only be understood through interpretation of what she actually says.[41] While Olivia says she still hopes to have children, her admission that she continues to practice contraception in order to avoid another pregnancy demonstrates, yet again, that she consciously defies

[41] Gordon's research confirms this practice, indicating that doctors sometimes provided information about regulating reproduction to patients despite its illegality (36).

both the pressure to reproduce and the pressure to remain silent about contraception that her mother and their society put on her.

Mrs. Lattimore's reaction makes clear her discomfort with Olivia's willingness to acknowledge this transgressive behavior, but Olivia's admission also compels Mrs. Lattimore to acknowledge that the system of compulsory able-bodied maternity that vilifies the use of contraception may be wrong. She replies, "I used to think those things weren't right, Olivia, but I don't know. Sometimes I think it isn't right, either, to bring them into the world when there is no welcome for them" (*WG* 212). Then Mrs. Lattimore references what she regards as "wild things" in Olivia that she "never looked for in a daughter of mine." She suggests she may have "turned" Olivia "against life… against my kind of life" because "when I knew you were coming, I—hated you, Olivia" (*WG* 213). Here, Mrs. Lattimore describes Olivia's departure from traditional norms as something of a pathological birthright that resulted from her own resentment about conceiving Olivia. In so doing, she verbalizes a belief that Gordon indicates was promoted by eugenicists through the turn of the twentieth century. Those eugenicists argued that the mood and attitude of the mother during pregnancy affected the demeanor and character of the child in utero (Gordon 77).

Olivia's response demonstrates her commitment to claiming a pathologized position while resisting the pathology associated with it. First, she insists that the "scientists" have argued, "it isn't so that things before you are born can affect you as much as that" (*WG* 213). Then she insists, "as for the things in me which are different, do you know, mother, I'm getting to know they are the best things in me." She interrupts the narration of this dialogue to add, "I honestly thought so; and after all these years I think

so now" (*WG* 214). Here, through acknowledging her transgressive use of contraception to her mother, Olivia achieves a new level of comfort with her own departure from traditional behavior, and in so doing, advocates for the use of contraception and challenges the stigmatization of women who cannot or will not perform compulsory able-bodied maternity.

Only a few pages later, Olivia directly challenges eugenic notions by again discussing her use of contraception to achieve reproductive control. Though she does not explicitly describe her use of contraception, she specifically addresses a hypothetical reader who is critical of her willingness to avoid conceiving more children. She writes, "and if you ask me why I didn't take the chance life offers to women to justify themselves to the race, I will say that though the hope of a child presents itself sentimentally as opportunity, it figures primarily in the calculation of the majority, as a question of expense" before detailing the financial difficulties she and Tommy faced (*WG* 218). In this assertion, which is her most explicit criticism of the pressure women face to reproduce, Olivia makes a significant move from describing her own reasons for avoiding further pregnancy to suggesting those reasons are shared by "the majority." Klimasmith reads this scene as evidence that "even motherhood is desentimentalized" in the novel, suggesting it shows that "economic reality pervades domesticity, making Olivia less eager, if not unwilling, to have another child" (142). But after Olivia acknowledges the financial burden children pose, she continues, "nor had I even quite recovered the bodily equilibrium disturbed by my first encounter with the rending powers of life" (*WG* 218). Olivia's repeated attention to issues of disability and able-bodiedness must be recognized as central to her critique of the pressure women face to become mothers.

By insisting that she has a right to avoid "justify[ing]" herself "to the race" by reproducing because of her financial circumstances and body's difficulty enduring pregnancy, Olivia explicitly challenges the argument that practicing contraception amounts to "race suicide" and the eugenic arguments in favor of reproductive regulation. As the introduction of this dissertation addresses in more detail, Theodore Roosevelt was one of the most famous and influential promoters of "race suicide" fears, and he used his platform as President in 1905 to insist that "the first and greatest duty of womanhood" was to bear "healthy children" in numbers "numerous enough so that the race shall increase and not decrease" (par. 3). Roosevelt and others who called the use of contraception "race suicide" ignored the practical reasons women might wish to avoid bearing children and condemned contraception in an attempt to ensure that white, native-born Americans would not be outnumbered by black, immigrant, and poor Americans (Gordon 87, Roberts 60-61). In addition to attempting to regulate the reproduction of black, immigrant, and poor American women, eugenicists also specifically targeted disabled women. Knopf's tract proves that though eugenicists in the 1910s and 1920s adopted the opposite attitude toward contraception, arguing that it should be legalized, they made these arguments for reasons similar to those Roosevelt and other promoters of the idea of "race suicide" espoused.

Olivia's advocacy for contraception challenges arguments about "race suicide" by acknowledging the reasons that many women practiced contraception during this period. They could not afford to have children, they wanted to control the timing of their pregnancies, and/or they could not endure pregnancy without risking their health. And she challenges the arguments of eugenicists with contraception advocacy that is clearly

woman-centered. She does not pathologize women who will not or cannot reproduce, as eugenicists did, and she seeks to disrupt the system of compulsory able-bodied maternity by insisting that women deserve access to sexual, reproductive, and contraceptive knowledge so they can practice reproductive control on their own terms. In so doing, Olivia challenges eugenic pathologization of women who were poor and physically incapacitated and argues that these women have a right to control their own reproduction. By undermining the eugenic call for reproductive regulation, Olivia also challenges the logic that threatened immigrants, black women, and other women of color. Indeed, this particular defense of her use of contraception is the closest Olivia ever comes to asserting a woman's right to have children only on her own terms, even if this means avoiding reproduction altogether.

Olivia also comes out against compulsory heterosexuality when she confronts her lifelong friend, Pauline Allingham Mills, in the novel's climax. While the revelation she makes in this scene regards her participation in extramarital sex, Olivia's condemnation of Pauline also challenges the authority that heterosexuality and able-bodied maternity grant women willing to participate in their idealization. Following their marriages, Olivia feels inferior whenever she visits Pauline in Chicago because Pauline progresses through the celebrated stages of reproductive time with as much ease as Olivia has difficulty. Pauline seems to have a happy marriage, healthy children, and increasing wealth and status. As Olivia's performance on stage starts to earn her a different type of credibility and prestige, Pauline repeatedly dismisses Olivia by positioning herself as a maternal authority and characterizing Olivia as a child. On successive visits, Pauline refers to Olivia as a "dear, ridiculous child" (*WG* 186), an "absurd child" (*WG* 267), and a

"Comedy Child" (*WG* 318), and she refuses to loan Olivia money when she is facing starvation. By using this language and her more stable position to assert her authority over Olivia, Pauline demonstrates that within her imagination, female power always takes the form of the mother scolding the child. This strategy effectively makes Olivia feel inadequate until she learns that Pauline's husband engages in an extramarital affair with another actress, which makes it possible for her to perceive the image of family harmony that Pauline projects as a performance.

Olivia claims the position of the type of woman Pauline disdains in order to condemn Pauline personally, to criticize her idealization of compulsory heterosexuality, and to undermine the authority she achieves through the performance of "true womanliness." Olivia begins this coming out with a sentence that successfully communicates to Pauline that she has engaged in extramarital sex. Olivia says,

> "Well no, if you insist on knowing, I'm not what you would call a good woman." I threw it at her as though it had been a peculiar kind of scorn heaped up on her for being what I had just denied myself to be. I saw myself for once with all my thwarted and misspent instincts toward the proper destiny of women, enmeshed and crippled, not by any propensity for sinning, but by the conditions of loving which women like Pauline set up for me. "And if you want to know," I said, "why I'm not a good woman, it is because women like you don't make it seem particularly worthwhile." (*WG* 487)

Olivia's narrative commentary and her dialogue both emphasize that it is through the act of saying out loud that she is "not what you would call a good woman" that she is able to recognize how she has suffered as a result of these definitions of what constitutes a "good woman." By invoking the language of disability, Olivia insists that the obstacles she has faced in her life have been introduced not by her own pathology, failings, or form of embodiment, but by the standards established by the interrelated systems of compulsory

heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodied maternity. It is in claiming the position of "not a good woman" that Olivia is able to recognize Pauline's worldview as one that has no positive place for women like herself, and thus, to recognize it as a worldview demonstrating its need to be changed.

As the confrontation continues, Olivia's further criticisms of Pauline condemn her and empower readers of the autobiography sympathetic to Olivia's struggles. Olivia questions "what right" women like Pauline have to "tie up all the moral values of living to your own little set of behaviors," to attempt to "make us over into replicas of yourselves," and to "fatten your moral superiority on the best of all we produce." She references extramarital sex again, saying, "the price you despise us for paying, nine times out of ten we pay to the men who belong to you" (*WG* 489). Ultimately, Pauline flees wordlessly from the encounter, giving Olivia the last word in the moment itself. She also gets the final say by figuring the encounter this way in her autobiography, condemning Pauline and everyone else who perpetuates the ideal of "true womanliness" which restricts women by insisting upon particular versions of marriage and maternity.

Olivia's stated motivations for writing her autobiography include not only wanting to condemn the social ideal that has inhibited her, but also helping other women imagine their own alternatives to the ideal of "true womanliness." Speaking up in opposition to the forces that try to regulate women's awareness of alternative ways of living is central to this objective. When she reflects on why she has written the autobiography, she indicates that her younger sister Effie has helped her find "ways of making things easier for women who must tread my path" and that "it is partly at her suggestion that I have written this book, for Effie is very much of the opinion that the

world would like to go right if somebody would only show it how" (*WG* 503). Sarah Croyden, Olivia's longtime friend and theatre colleague, is less optimistic than Effie but nonetheless maintains her own belief in the powerful potential of Olivia's willingness to come out against "true womanliness." She tells Olivia, "it is the fact of your telling, whether they believe you or not, of your not being ashamed to tell, that is going to help them… At any rate, it will help other women to speak out what they think, unashamed" (*WG* 503). The extent to which Olivia has internalized her own society's system of values is demonstrated again by her choice to relegate her relationships with these women largely to the margins of her story, even though these relationships demonstrate how women can work together in order to pursue and achieve ambitions outside the narrow constraints their society perpetuates. Olivia is directly responsible for Effie's own ability to escape the expectations of "true womanliness," and Olivia's friendship with Sarah plays a fundamental role in her ability to succeed as an actress and become comfortable with her non-traditional choices.[42] Nonetheless, it is through her solidarity with these women that Olivia recognizes the broader potential of her willingness to tell her own story. Stout points out that Austin wrote these concluding chapters after she became involved in organized women's associations and argues that in its conclusion, the novel

[42] Effie's own ability to pursue a life of her own choosing demonstrates how Olivia's refusal to conform to the expectations of the social ideal can help other women. Following their mother's death, Effie tells Olivia of her fear that she will be trapped in their hometown of Taylorville to live as a companion for their unmarried brother, Forrester. She says, "I want to do things in the world… like you have… and I want to marry and have babies… I want to be *me*" (*WG* 301-302). Olivia subsequently ensures that Effie is able to continue her education and leave Taylorville on her own terms. It is clear that Sarah's example has had a profound influence upon Olivia. She meets Sarah very early in her acting career, and Olivia regularly goes to her for guidance in navigating the profession. Over time she comes to rely on Sarah for helping her understand how the social ideal she condemns has shaped her expectations. Sarah regularly helps her adjust those expectations, make sense of her experiences, overcome her disappointments, and enjoy her successes. Olivia is at her most destitute in Chicago when she is separated from Sarah, and she achieves her greatest professional success and acceptance of herself while living with Sarah in New York.

moves toward "advocacy of feminism as a group movement" because Olivia's success is positioned as "an example and an inspiration for all" ("MHA's Feminism" 87).

As feminist critics have acknowledged, *A Woman of Genius* tells the powerful story of a woman who overcomes what she calls the ideal of "true womanliness" to achieve success as an actress and devote her energy to pursuing her artistic "genius." But the novel is also the story of how a woman carries on with her life after her body and her lack of access to adequate medical care prevent her from succeeding in what she eventually recognizes to be the performance of the idealized roles of mother and wife. In documenting her own struggles, despite her knowledge that many would seek to suppress stories like hers, Olivia exposes the interrelated functioning of compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodied maternity. Her story serves as an opportunity to examine the degree to which occupying these roles depends upon a body that can reproduce without any difficulty. She documents how societal expectations and regulation of resources function to prevent her from being able to pursue her marital and maternal ambitions. She advocates for women to be able to control their reproductive reproduction, not only because they may have bodies which make reproduction difficult, but also because unregulated reproduction is difficult for all bodies to endure. She uses her autobiography to come out as an example of the deficient mother and inadequate wife that her society pathologizes, claiming this position in order to expose that rather than being a pathological failure, she is a victim of the combined systems of compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodied maternity. She grapples with issues of able-bodiedness and maternity in order to demonstrate her own humanity and to empower other women to imagine and insist upon ways of living that do not abide by the social

ideal of "true womanliness." In these ways, the novel begins to deconstruct the very idealization of privileged white American motherhood which mainstream birth control advocacy would not challenge, and which was promoted by those who stirred fears about "race suicide" and by eugenicists who sought to regulate women's reproduction. In asserting that her own form of embodiment is not to blame for her reproductive difficulties, and in defending her own right to make decisions about her reproductive potential, Olivia promotes a women-centered version of contraceptive advocacy that defends all women categorized by eugenicists as "unfit" for reproduction and asserts their rights to make their own reproductive decisions.

## Maternity and Ableism in Austin's Other Work

As these readings demonstrate, scholarship about Austin's fiction can grow increasingly significant and intersectional by examining her depictions of disability, able-bodiedness, and motherhood. Likewise, the study of how Austin grapples with these issues in her fiction contributes to current disabilities studies in meaningful ways. Disability, able-bodiedness, and maligned mothers show up time and again in her fiction. Even the stories that seem most ableist from a surface reading grapple with these questions in interesting ways. For example, another story from *Lost Borders* called "The Readjustment" features a deceased mother whose spirit returns to her family's home to haunt her husband. The story suggests the couple's son is disabled, but that the couple found it too difficult to have meaningful conversations about his disability before the mother's death. A woman who is a neighbor and friend of the family senses the return of the mother's spirit, after which she compels the husband to confess that "he had

blundered" because he had "begotten a cripple upon her" and he "blamed himself utterly" ("The Readjustment" 237). The mother's attitude toward disability as a pathology her husband should apologize for is difficult to read, and it certainly participates in the stigmatization of people who demonstrate bodily and/or mental impairments. But the mother's spirit is not satisfied with the father's admission of guilt and responsibility. Her spirit only leaves the home once the neighbor convinces her that the husband will not be able to offer her any further peace. This opens room for the interpretation that the mother's spirit remains unsettled precisely because she thinks of disability in these pathologizing and hereditary ways.

Austin's nearly forgotten novel, *No. 26 Jayne Street* (1920), offers extensive social and political commentary about the Great War and the American political campaigns that opposed capitalism during the war. This novel was published just one year after the edition of Knopf's eugenic contraception tract that Austin kept in her archive. *No. 26 Jayne Street* explicitly undermines the rhetoric and arguments Knopf uses to pathologize the women he considers "unfit" for reproduction. The novel includes depictions of disadvantaged, ill, and deceased women and children, suggesting that their conditions result not from their own pathologies, but rather, from the economic and political structures that are designed to benefit men. The novel's narrative commentary condemns the existing capitalist government and its officials, indicating that the "representatives of American efficiency" who make political and economic decisions during the Great War "refuse to "provide for the underfed offspring of some millions of mothers." This commentary suggests it is because these men have been "nurtured on the faith that the American woman is the enshrined and privileged product of American

efficiency" that they refuse to accept evidence proposed by feminist activists that American women and families are suffering (*No. 26 Jayne Street* 204-205).[43] Similarly, the novel features a young female protagonist name Neith Schuyler, who becomes engaged to a leading social progressive. His friends and progressive political colleagues accept the story that his deceased wife "had been a pretty, inadequate creature, who had receded from her first and unsuccessful attempt at motherhood into a fretful invalidism," after which she spent two years in a sanitarium before dying (*JS* 248). But this political leader's thoughtless and selfish treatment of women ultimately results in Neith's growing skepticism about the personal politics of social progressives and in her choice to terminate her engagement to this man. Neith believes his deceased wife "gave one the impression that she felt—thwarted" (*JS* 56), and his treatment of women in the novel suggests his wife may have felt this way not because of any personal pathology or disability, but because of the way she was mistreated by her husband. This novel, which also features another character who struggles through her pregnancy and postpartum period, suggests that mothers perceived as a burden to society because they are unable or unwilling to produce healthy children should be understood instead as evidence of the sexist, ableist demands of the society that fails them.

Austin's stories about Native Americans can also be usefully illuminated by examining how they grapple with maternity, disability, and the restraints of American society's ableist values. One illustrative example appears in another of Austin's frequently anthologized short stories, the brief "Papago Wedding" (1925), which uses irony to challenge racial stereotypes. Therein, a landowning white man named Shuler has five children with a woman from the Papago tribe, which is now recognized as the

[43] Subsequent citations of this text will be abbreviated *JS*.

Tohono O'odham Nation ("Official Website"). Shuler calls her Susie and treats her as his common law wife. But when Shuler leaves her to begin a relationship with a white woman, he takes Susie to court to gain custody of their mixed-race children. She appears in court with the five children, who onlookers agree "looked like Shuler." It is by turning the ableist and patriarchal values of his own society against him that she retains custody of her children, despite this resemblance and his legal authority as a white man. She insists "Shuler's not the father of them" as she "makes a sign with her hand" that, based on contextual clues, implies he is impotent ("Papago Wedding" 75). Indeed, more analysis of the disability politics in Austin's fiction about Native Americans is warranted by Goodman and Dawson's suggestion that the "biased and hierarchical science" promoted by eugenicists "challenged [Austin's] sympathy for the dispossessed Paiute and Shoshone neighbors she had come to admire" (32).

These stories show that while Austin's willingness to address issues of reproduction, able-bodiedness, and social stigma is particularly pronounced in her most famous feminist fiction, these concerns show up repeatedly in her work. Austin's personal experiences of sexism and ableism following the birth of her disabled daughter Ruth begin to explain why she was unwilling to accept the pathologization of mothers promoted *Birth Control in its Medical, Social, Economic, and Moral Aspects* (1919), which she preserved in her personal archive of papers. Birth control advocates were willing to accept these eugenic arguments to secure popular American support for the legalization of contraception, despite the ways these arguments further victimized the vulnerable American women who needed access to reproductive control most. In contrast, Austin's fiction challenges these eugenic arguments, condemns the

pathologization of disabled mothers and those considered otherwise "unfit" for reproduction, defends the women to whom these labels were assigned, and condemns the systems of power that oppress these woman. In so doing, Austin's fiction imagines new ways of perceiving disabled mothers and disabled children so that their conditions will no longer be perceived as proof of personal pathology, and so that the social norms that fail disabled people can be recognized and changed.

# Chapter 2 — Abortion, Secrecy, and Disclosure in Josephine Herbst's Novels of the 1920s and 1930s

"I sometimes feel as if I were writing in a void and for a void," Joesphine Herbst wrote in a 1931 letter to Katherine Anne Porter, who Herbst considered one of her best and most insightful readers (JH to KAP 1 Feb. 1931).[44] Herbst's career was long characterized by her disappointment that her novels never enjoyed a particularly large audience. She died in relative obscurity, most of her fiction is currently out of print, and her work is rarely taught in university classrooms. But the work of a few devoted readers has allowed Herbst's reputation as a notable fiction writer and important political activist to endure, albeit at the margins of literary studies. Herbst's fiction has attracted the most attention from scholars interested in her leftist politics, particularly among feminists who have worked to recover and analyze the contributions of what Deborah Rosenfelt has called the "radical tradition in American women's literature" ("Getting into the Game" 363). Herbst's only biographer, Elinore Langer, undertook an exhaustive study of the archive of papers Herbst sold to Yale in 1968 and communicated with many of Herbst's friends and colleagues while working on *Josephine Herbst* (1984).[45] The committed work of these scholars documents several of Herbst's personal experiences with abortion and

[44] Herbst's sense that Porter was something of an ideal reader for her fiction in the 1920s and 1930s is documented throughout their correspondence. Her inscription of the copy of *Nothing is Sacred* she gifted Porter includes, for example, the declaration that "this book is handed to her by her boozum friend and well wisher by one grateful for the practically only review that coincided with the opinion of its maker" (JH to KAP 2 October 1928).

[45] Herbst sold her papers to the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale for $25,000. Langer characterizes this as a major undertaking and a significant achievement for Herbst, not only because the payment was "perhaps not much less than the total amount of money that had passed through her hands in her entire lifetime," but also because the preservation of her papers would change her from "a minor writer" into a "major personage" and would record even those personal experiences she had chosen not to include in her fiction, her journalism, or her memoirs (326-327).

acknowledges that her fiction frequently depicts abortion plots informed by her own life. But little scholarly attention has been paid to the role that her depiction of abortion plays in her fiction or in her political activism.

Given the regulation of discussion about abortion and contraception enforced by the Comstock Act, it is remarkable that all of Josephine Herbst's novels from the 1920s and 1930s document the suffering women endure when they are unable to control their reproductive potential, particularly when they are unable to access safe and legal abortion. Herbst's sometimes frank depictions of abortion indicate that the inaccessibility of abortion and the secrecy that shrouded the topic in public and private discussions function to punish women for their sexual behavior, to reinforce the idealization of heterosexual marriage, and to ensure the reproduction of children within marriage. These novels grapple with how art can be used to depict secret and suppressed information in order to resist, expose, and change oppressive conditions. As the analysis in this chapter will show, Herbst's depictions of abortion as well as her engagement with issues of secrecy and disclosure can be usefully illuminated by D.A. Miller and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's theorizations of secrecy and the stigmatization of non-normative sexual behavior. Herbst's fiction grapples with the boundaries and power dynamics of secrecy and disclosure, both in its content and in its use of innovative aesthetic techniques. Her fiction renders conspicuous its careful disclosure of information and its intentional withholding of information by depicting events from different characters' perspectives, by including detached and sometimes ironic narrative commentary, by alternating between the use of eloquent and terse language, and by inventing narrative structures that express her meaning effectively.

What Herbst's depictions of abortion reveal is that she is explicit in her advocacy for women having the right and the opportunity to utilize abortion. Her successive depictions of abortion also examine connections between the oppression endured by women who cannot control their reproductive potential and the oppression endured by other individuals marginalized as a result of their gender, their class, their country or culture of birth, and/or their non-heteronormative behavior. Ultimately, both the content and form of Herbst's fiction indicates that the pain caused by the inability to control one's reproduction can be productively turned into inspiration for a commitment to political activism. Herbst's fiction thus sets her apart from many American birth control advocates including Margaret Sanger, who stigmatized abortion and promoted eugenic rhetoric that disempowered many women. Herbst's depiction of reproduction and non-heteronormative behavior also differentiates her from many leftist political leaders and literary figures of the 1930s, who Paula Rabinowitz suggests promoted "homophobic and antifeminine rhetoric" (23) and regarded abortion and contraception as more of a class issue than a gender issue (46-47). The political activism promoted in Herbst's novels advocates for women who utilize abortion, for poor people, and for otherwise vulnerable people, regardless of gender or marital status. Beginning with the three novels Herbst wrote in the 1920s and culminating with the trilogy of novels she published in the 1930s, Herbst uses and theorizes literature as a vehicle for this form of activism. These novels indicate that through careful attention to the power dynamics of secrecy and disclosure, literature can be used to challenge the oppressive conditions that are secured through secrecy and censorship.

Herbst's frequent fictionalization of her own experiences with abortion, and her use of fiction as a form of political activism, suggest that like her characters, Herbst's own experiences with abortion informed and catalyzed her literary career and political activism. Two of Herbst's firsthand experiences with abortion are no secret: they are well documented by Elinore Langer's biography, discussed at length in the archive of personal papers Herbst sold to Yale, and fictionalized in her novels. In the summer of 1920, at age 28, Herbst underwent an illegal abortion in New York City after her married lover refused to help her support the child. Only a few months later, her married younger sister, Helen Herbst Barnard, died from complications that resulted from her own illegal abortion. Herbst's letters confirm that the loss of the baby she had initially wanted to keep and the death of her beloved sister were sources of deep pain and sorrow for Herbst (Langer 60-78).

Herbst's third experience with illegal abortion has yet gone unrecognized, even though its occurrence is also documented within Herbst's archived correspondence. The letters between Herbst and her first known female lover, Marion Greenwood, indicate that in 1932, Herbst helped Greenwood procure, pay for, and recover from an illegal but successful abortion. Langer characterizes Herbst's passionate, romantic affair with Greenwood as "the personal secret at the heart of Josie's life," because she did not speak about it openly or directly fictionalize it in her autobiographically informed fiction (127). But Langer speculates that Herbst must not have intended for the relationship to remain a secret forever. Herbst included both sides of their correspondence in the archive of papers she prepared and sold to Yale, an act that, as Langer points out, required her to preserve Greenwood's letters *and* to recover her own letters to Greenwood (128). These archived

letters between Greenwood and Herbst reveal that what Langer describes in her biography as a "stomach ailment" suffered by Greenwood a few months after their affair began (136) was actually an abortion from which she had difficulty recovering.[46] This detail further confirms Herbst's belief in using abortion as a form of reproductive control and her support for women who utilize abortions. But importantly, Greenwood's abortion also reveals that in Herbst's own life, as in her fiction, secrecy, abortion, and non-heteronormative sexual relationships were even more intricately bound up with one another than existing scholarship on Herbst acknowledges.

A chronological analysis of how Herbst grapples with abortion, secrecy, and disclosure in her novels of the 1920s and 1930s reveals how her depictions of these subjects developed. Her first completed novel, *Following the Circle* (1925), attempts to explicitly interrupt secrecy about abortion. *Following the Circle* documents how stigmatizing narratives about depraved single women seeking abortion and idealizing narratives about white married maternity function together to oppress women and limit their reproductive control. The novels Herbst wrote after she was unable to find a

[46] Langer does indicate that Greenwood "worried and wondered whether she would get her period or not," but does not address clear indications of Greenwood's pregnancy and abortion in the correspondence (136). The word "abortion" is never written in the letters between Herbst and Greenwood, but successive letters make it increasingly clear that in the fall of 1932, Greenwood realized she had conceived an unwanted pregnancy and consulted Herbst for advice. Greenwood writes, ""I should come around by tonight-- what shall I do if I don't? I refuse to believe anything has happened in that way. It seems all wrong. Will you write me immediately and tell me what to do?" (MG to JH 15 Oct. 1932). Greenwood's letters also indicate that Herbst offered to help her procure an abortion when she writes that although she has not begun menstruating, she does not need Herbst to "bother speaking to your friend Bill," because she plans to make an appointment with a woman referred to her by another friend. She suggests this woman is "very good and just gives a poke in the right place and brings on the menstruation" (MG to JH 19 Oct. 1932). Later, Greenwood indicates that Herbst helped pay for the procedure, writing, "what a load off my mind, and its all due to you, Herbst my sweet, you'll never know how grateful I am, never," before offering to repay $75 when she gets the opportunity (MG to JH 25 Oct. 1932). In the course of the next several weeks, Greenwood responds to Herbst's inquiries about her health, finally writing, "I've been leaking blood every now and then and I don't know whether it's menstruation or not," but insisting she will follow through on her plans to go to Mexico with Herbst and her husband (MG to JH 5 Dec. 1932). The correspondence trails off once the three of them set out on their travels together, but in an undated letter clearly written after their affection for one another had begun to sour, Herbst indicates that she and her husband went to extreme lengths to care for Greenwood in the weeks that followed their departure (JH to MG Undated).

publisher for *Following the Circle* demonstrate growing skepticism about what could be achieved through explicit disclosure of censored information. The minor abortion plot in her first published novel, *Nothing is Sacred* (1928), indicates that it sometimes benefits those oppressed by secrecy to keep secrets, acknowledging that the disclosure of sensitive information can further endanger vulnerable individuals. Herbst's next novel, *Money for Love* (1929), emphasizes how women suffer as a result of secrecy about abortion. But importantly, it also proposes that those women can attempt to mitigate that suffering both by protecting their secrets and by making careful, strategic disclosures in pursuit of their own goals. All three of these novels acknowledge connections between the oppression of women who cannot control their reproductive potential and the oppressions other marginalized individuals face, but it is in the trilogy of novels Herbst published in the 1930s that these connections are interrogated at length and in illuminating depth. In *Pity is Not Enough* (1933), *The Executioner Waits* (1934), and *Rope of Gold* (1939), lack of access to abortion, lack of access to reproductive control more broadly, and maternal loss are figured as sources of suffering that galvanize key characters to participate in political activism. Through this activism, these characters use written and spoken language to resist the oppressive circumstances that vulnerable individuals face not only because they lack access to reproductive control, but also because of their non-heteronormative intimacies and their economic vulnerability under capitalism.

## Open Secrecy and Abortion Narratives in *Following the Circle*

White women's desire and willingness to terminate unwanted pregnancies is addressed early and often in the first novel Hersbt completed, which contains three

abortion plots.[47] *Following the Circle* is heavily informed by the Herbst's own abortion experiences, and the novel's protagonist, Judith, is largely based on Herbst herself. The first abortion plot features Judith's older sister, Mary, who unsuccessfully attempts to terminate a pregnancy by using a home remedy. Mary's circumstances introduce abortion as a subject that, as Leslie Reagan claims, American women in the early twentieth century treated as an "open secret" by discussing it privately and practicing it in spite of its illegality (21). The novel's second abortion plot broadly follows stereotypical abortion narratives of the period, because Judith procures an illegal abortion from a doctor in New York City after conceiving an unplanned pregnancy during her extramarital affair. The novel's third abortion plot contradicts stereotypical depictions of the practice during this period by featuring the attempted abortion and death of Judith's younger married sister Clare. With these characters, *Following the Circle* explores the limited potential women achieve through treating abortion as an open secret. By juxtaposing these abortion stories in a single novel, *Following the Circle* examines how narratives that promote negative stereotypes about single abortion seekers function together with narratives that promote idealized stereotypes about white married mothers. These narratives work together to regulate white women's ability to control their reproductive capabilities and to reinforce and reproduce the power of those individuals and institutions that disempower women.

By showing the relationship between these narratives, the novel exposes why the advocacy of Margaret Sanger and other American birth control advocates was inadequate. These birth control advocates attempted to earn favor for the voluntary

[47] The manuscript catalogued in "Series II. Writings, Box 34. *Following the Circle*" in Herbst's papers at the Beinecke is treated as the authoritative text for this chapter. This manuscript indicates it is a "book copy" issued by the book department at the Brandt & Brandt literary agency. It is on this copy that Herbst has twice crossed out the typed title, "*Unmarried*," and written in "*Following the Circle*." Subsequent citations from this manuscript will be abbreviated as *FC*.

practice of contraception among married white women by suggesting it would strengthen families and the nation while condemning the practice of abortion, which Sanger depicted as amoral and irresponsible. *Following the Circle* indicates that women's ability to control their own reproduction is inhibited by any rhetoric that vilifies women based on their sexual behavior and/or perpetuates the idealization of married motherhood. The novel is clear in its insistence that women can only exert control over their lives when they can access abortion on their own terms. As a result, this novel warrants extended analysis both because it presents a rare documentation of white women's attitudes toward abortion in the early twentieth century in the United States and because it begins Herbst's use of fiction as a space within which to grapple with abortion, secrecy, and disclosure.

The reader of *Following the Circle* is introduced to open secrecy about abortion when Judith, as a teenager, becomes aware of the reality of unwanted pregnancy. This scene also introduces the reader to how the novel's form utilizes a shifting narrative perspective to negotiate layers of secrecy and disclosure. Judith is clearly the protagonist, and much of the novel is focalized through her point of view, including this scene. In this scene, this point of view makes it possible for the careful reader to ascertain what Judith's mother and sister are saying while drawing attention to the fact that Judith does not fully understand them. She eavesdrops on the conversation between her mother and her older sister Mary, who has only been married for a few months. Secrecy is explicitly referenced from the start, because Judith is "huddled in the doorway, hushed, secretive" when she overhears Mary confess she is pregnant. Judith hears Mrs. Stahl tell Mary that it is common for women to be upset about unexpected pregnancies before attempting to reassure Mary, saying "maybe it isn't so. We'll try that motherwort tea. Don't you cry

now" (*FC* 20). Mrs. Stahl's immediate suggestion of motherwort tea demonstrates the attitude toward abortion that many women held at the time. As the introduction to this dissertation addresses in more detail, the Comstock Act of 1873 labeled information about abortion and birth control as "obscene," and this legislation made it illegal to distribute any such information though the U.S mail (Capo 13, Weingarten 46-47). But researchers suggest that the laws passed in the United States between 1860 and 1880, which illegalized the termination of pregnancy at any point, did not reflect women's commonly held beliefs. Women often believed there was nothing wrong with ending a pregnancy before "quickening"— the point at which the pregnant woman can feel the movements of the fetus (Reagan 13, Gordon 18, 26). Similarly, Mrs. Stahl's ability and willingness to recommend motherwort tea indicates that in spite of the illegalization of abortion and the restrictions of the Comstock Act, women were able to access some information about abortificients and were willing to help one another terminate pregnancies in these circumstances. By including this conversation in its very early pages, *Following the Circle* depicts the attempted termination of unwanted pregnancies as a fact of life, not as a moral transgression.

But unlike Reagan's analysis of open secrecy about abortion, this scene acknowledges that open secrecy can, as D.A. Miller has theorized, reinforce the systems of power it seeks to resist.[48] This scene demonstrates Miller's claim that when people practice open secrecy it "is not to conceal knowledge, so much as to conceal knowledge

[48] Meg Gillette's 2007 dissertation acknowledges the connection between Reagan's claims of open secrecy and D.A. Miller's theorization of it, but does not fully consider his theoretical insights. In one chapter, Gillette argues that Edith Wharton's *Summer* and Gertrude Stein's "The Good Anna" depict abortion as "not an option to be chosen or rejected, but a secret to be kept or uncovered" (48). Gillette very briefly mentions Reagan's claims about abortion and open secrecy, quotes Miller's insights about secrecy, and acknowledges that Wharton and Stein use subtle disclosures to figure abortion in modernist fiction. But Gillette does not consider Reagan and Miller's claims in depth or examine how they relate to one another, likely because her focus is upon secrecy more broadly, rather than open secrecy specifically.

of knowledge" in an attempt to escape the consequences of possessing the knowledge that is disavowed (206). Mrs. Stahl's own way of offering Mary comfort and Judith's shock at learning her sister is not happy about the pregnancy both indicate that Mrs. Stahl has concealed her knowledge of unwanted pregnancy and abortion from both daughters up to this point. Evidently, Mrs. Stahl did not even discuss the possibility of an unwanted pregnancy with Mary when she entered her marriage. Mrs. Stahl is only willing to abandon the pretense of her ignorance about unwanted pregnancy once she must reveal her knowledge of motherwort tea to try to help her daughter solve an existing problem. Gordon's research similarly suggests that during this period, women were often willing to discuss abortion in private only after an unwanted pregnancy had been conceived (31-32). Significantly, while Judith understands that her sister "wasn't glad" to be pregnant, the narration of her thoughts gives no indication that she understands her mother's willingness or capability to help Mary terminate the pregnancy through the ingestion of motherwort tea (*FC* 20). Mrs. Stahl uses language that effectively conceals her knowledge about abortion even from her eavesdropping teenage daughter.

Mrs. Stahl and Mary also confuse Judith even further by returning to their normal demeanor and behavior immediately after the secret conversation. In so doing, they demonstrate Miller's claim that when people practice open secrecy to avoid "the costs of social discipline," those costs often "have been averted only in an equally expensive self-discipline" (203). When Mary and Mrs. Stahl resume their domestic duties as usual, Judith believes her mother's "voice was her own voice again" and so "no one would know anything had happened." Their composure makes Judith wonder if her perception about the pregnancy being unwanted is a "mistake" (*FC* 20). Mary and Mrs. Stahl's

regulation of their own behavior gives Judith the impression that the unwanted pregnancy is an inappropriate topic to discuss, even if they do not actually believe terminating a pregnancy is an immoral act. Judith is unaware that she has witnessed the treatment of abortion as an open secret, though this is clear to readers who know about motherwort tea's abortifacient properties. This highlights how this secrecy prevents Judith from understanding the information she overhears in a way that could be useful once she begins to consider sexual activity of her own.

This scene also emphasizes that the positive potential of treating abortion as an open secret is limited because Mary cannot terminate the pregnancy with the information her mother provides. A few pages after the initial incident, the narration confirms that Mary has tried and failed to end the pregnancy, indicating, "Mary's baby came this time. Motherwort tea didn't always work" (*FC* 29).[49] This clarification provides important context for Mary's disappointment with her life after the baby is born, showing that her disillusionment is rooted in her inability to control her own reproduction. This first abortion plot in *Following the Circle* thus introduces open secrecy about abortion and indicates that it provides women with some useful information. But it makes clear that treating abortion as an open secret fails to dislodge its practice from the realm of obscenity and does not provide women with the information or abortion access they need to control their lives.

The novel's next two abortion plots depict abortion more explicitly, intervening in open secrecy about abortion to insist that the practice of abortion is not obscene and to examine reasons why women rely upon it. Throughout the course of the novel, this

[49] The typewritten manuscript reads simply "Mary's baby came." Herbst has added in by hand, "this time. Motherwort tea didn't always work" (*FC* 29). This indicates Herbst wanted to emphasize the fact that Mary did attempt to terminate the pregnancy but that the attempt failed.

intervention is made through narration that also grapples with the dynamics of secrecy and disclosure at the level of form. This narration focuses most often on Judith and her thoughts, but it also enters the minds of the many other characters to depict events from their perspectives, even narrating their thoughts in free indirect discourse. This creates interesting juxtapositions of the different characters' thoughts and feelings, makes evident how they react to sensitive information, and shows how they keep secrets from one another that are not kept from the reader. The narration also frequently moves outside the characters' own thoughts, achieving some critical distance and yet maintaining an ambiguous perspective wherein a concrete external narrator never comes into view. Judith's abortion plot largely aligns with the most common narrative used to document American women's use of the procedure during this period. After Judith conceives a child with a married man who refuses financial support, she procures an illegal but successful abortion from a doctor in New York City. But *Following the Circle* also defies the conventions of the period by depicting abortion as a desirable option for Judith's younger sister Clare, who conceives a child with her husband. By depicting these abortion stories together, the novel explores an important connection between narratives that vilify women like Judith, who have sex outside marriage, and narratives that idealize married women like Clare, who are assumed to engage in sexual activity only within their marriages with the intention of having children.

The juxtaposition of Judith and Clare's abortion plots can be usefully illuminated by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's theorization of homosexual definition, which includes examination of why certain sexual practices are vilified while others are normalized. Sedgwick examines the "radical and irreducible incoherence" between what she calls the

"minoritizing" and "universalizing" views that constitute Western "understanding of homosexual definition." She describes the "minoritizing view" as the belief that there is a distinguishable population of deviant and amoral individuals who can be appropriately and comprehensively defined as "homosexual" (*Epistemology of the Closet* 85).[50] However, Sedgwick contends that if homosexual desire were as stable as this minoritizing view suggests, the power of vilifying and marginalizing the individuals who fit this definition would be limited. They would suffer as a result of their sexual behavior, but they would neither cease to be homosexual nor would the danger exist that anyone else could *become* homosexual. Sedgwick argues that it becomes necessary for Western culture to create definitions of homosexual identity, and to vilify those who fit those definitions, because of the fear caused by what she calls the "universalizing view." This "universalizing view" is the fear that anyone, at any time, might be harboring desires that could lead them to engage in homosexual activity (*EC* 85-90). Thus, Sedgwick shows that the vilification of people defined as homosexual and the idealization of people defined as heterosexual function together to punish those who engage in homosexual behavior and to secure heterosexuality's status as normative. Open secrecy about homosexual behavior helps to conceal the incoherence of these two views.

As the following analysis will show, Judith and Clare's experiences with abortion demonstrate a similar fundamental incoherence governing American attitudes toward women's sexual behavior, their reproductive potential, and their reliance on abortion. A "minoritizing" view of abortion can be understood as that which defines abortion as an immoral solution chosen by women who engage in extramarital sexual activity. These women are deemed deserving of scorn and punishment because they are defined as

[50] Subsequent citations of this text will be abbreviated *EC*.

transgressors against acceptable behavior. Reagan, Gillette, and Weingarten all examine the degree to which, in Reagan's words, "the image of the seduced and abandoned unmarried woman… dominated" popular ideas and popular depictions of the type of women who wanted to use contraception and abortion in the early twentieth century (23).[51] The popularity of this narrative was largely a response to young women's changing sexual practices during this period. Gordon argues that women's willingness to engage in extramarital sex was "*the* significant change" in the United States "in the first decades" of the twentieth century (130). But the widespread public denigration of these women betrays the existence of a competing "universalizing" view of abortion—a belief that any woman, at any time, could desire an abortion for any number of reasons. Popular and literary texts rarely depicted married women who pursued abortions, even though Reagan concludes that until after World War II, the *majority* of abortions in the United States were performed upon married women (23).

Importantly, popular American narratives about these "minoritizing" and "universalizing" views of abortion applied most regularly to the privileged white women whose reproduction was most highly valued by many Americans in positions of power during the early decades of the twentieth century. At that time, many white Americans were anxious about decreasing birth rates among people like themselves, as the introduction to this dissertation addresses in more detail. These anxieties were fueled in part by the knowledge that white women were practicing abortion and contraception. Married white women's abortions, and their reasons for resisting reproduction, needed to be obscured because they contradicted the idealized image of married white motherhood promoted by President Theodore Roosevelt and other Americans. Indeed, American fears

[51] See also Gillette, 25; Weingarten, 24, 66.

about changing attitudes toward extramarital sex during this period also applied specifically to white women. As Dorothy Roberts indicates, "from the moment they set foot in this country as slaves, Black women have fallen outside the American ideal of womanhood" (10), and stereotypes of black women have long depicted them as naturally sexually promiscuous, morally depraved, and remarkably fertile (8-12). Weingarten argues that popular narratives about immoral women utilizing abortion were designed to serve as cautionary tales specifically for white women, suggesting that these depictions "effectively demonized the practice [of abortion] as something 'bad' girls do," including white women who conceive children with "black and immigrant men" (15). Indeed, as Marlon B. Ross has pointed out, Sedgwick's analysis of the relationship between universalizing and minoritizing views of homosexual definition relies upon performing "sustained close readings of several texts by elite European American males while bracketing the matter of racial ideology" even though "the minority/universal binary borrows" from "racial ideology" (169-170). Thus, Ross importantly calls into question Sedgwick's characterization of the epistemology of the closet "as a universal phenomenon" (170). And yet, his suggestion that Segwick theorizes twentieth-century *white* Western culture draws focus to why this theorization can help to illuminate the ways abortion, as practiced by privileged white women, was condemned and obscured. *Following the Circle* shows how the minoritizing narratives about abortion and the idealization of white married motherhood function to obscure universalizing views of abortion, and in so doing, function together to regulate the reproductive control that married and unmarried white women alike can achieve.[52]

[52] Herbst's fiction about abortion does not address the ways that the regulation of white women's reproduction develops from and, in turn, further facilitates the reproductive regulation of women of other

Rather than depicting Judith as morally bankrupt because she aligns with a minoritizing view of abortion, *Following the Circle* sympathetically describes how she is pressured to terminate her pregnancy because she engages in extramarital sex. Her abortion plot indicates that illegal abortions, which are made accessible by open secrecy, facilitate the reproduction of the nation according to mainstream ideals. These abortions obscure men's extramarital sexual activity, and in so doing, benefit men willing to engage in extramarital affairs, reinforce the power of the institution of marriage, and interrupt opportunities for female solidarity. When Judith discovers she is pregnant, she has already taken a job at a hotel in upstate New York in hopes of forgetting about her married lover, Alan Gardner. She initially plans to keep the child, but she decides she needs an abortion after Alan refuses emotional and financial support. Alan and Judith are both white members of the middle class, but his ability to abandon Judith speaks to his higher degree of privilege as a married man. The novel again acknowledges the status of abortion as an open secret among women when Judith's coworker, Ella, provides her with the name and address of a person in New York City who can facilitate an abortion. Judith reflects gratefully that this widowed chambermaid "Ella, who tapped the underground life of women, knew hidden things, Ella had helped her out" (*FC* 108). Access to this secret network benefits Judith because it culminates with the successful termination of her pregnancy. But the novel also makes clear that access to an illegal abortion neither grants her control over her reproduction nor ensures her safety.

Instead, Judith's ability to access an abortion makes it possible for her lover to escape the consequences of his own extramarital sexual activity. After Judith pays for her

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races. For a discussion of that dynamic, see Chapter 3: Black Mothers, Reproductive Regulation, and Narratives of Disavowal in Katherine Anne Porter's Miranda Stories.

abortion herself, Alan admits he was "afraid" when he learned Judith was pregnant and that he rebuked her in order to avoid "the burden that would be always hanging over him if [Judith] had a child" (*FC* 114). Alan's ability to abandon Judith depends upon a minoritizing view of abortion that vilifies women who utilize the procedure and the open secrecy that makes abortion available to these women. The novel underscores that Alan's refusal to father Judith's child depends on her vulnerable position, because Alan only pursues the affair after he finds himself unable to refuse the obligation of a child conceived *within* his marriage. Before consummating the affair with Judith, Alan reflects that his most recent baby with his wife Dorothy

> had come with the war going on, while men were shoveled under the earth never to have women again. Dorothy had said they ought to have one now, [their son] Robert needed a companion. He had resented the child, it was somehow his justification for sitting here planning to make love to Judith. (*FC* 69)

This reflection indicates that Alan cannot compel *his wife* to get an abortion, even though he resents the power she wields over him, because her power as a white woman is legitimated by the authority of their marriage and her insistence that they have a responsibility to reproduce the nation during wartime. This provides a stark contrast to his willingness and success in forcing Judith to abort the child she initially hopes to keep.

Judith's abortion also reinforces the power of the institution of marriage and the reproduction of nation by keeping the illegitimate pregnancy a secret. Ultimately, Alan's affair with Judith allows him to feel as if he has rebelled against his wife and these forces without actually threatening their authority over him. After he stops seeing Judith, Alan "was shut in with his secret, proud. His secret consoled him, made him able to go home every night" to his wife and family. He still thinks resentfully about the "children he

never wanted" with his wife (*FC* 115), but he is able to remain committed to his family and he continues to provide for them financially. His ability to keep the secret, and to take satisfaction in his secret disloyalty to his wife, depends upon the open secrecy about abortion that makes it accessible to Judith in spite of its illegality. Alan, his wife, and his children escape facing any consequences for his extramarital affair precisely because Judith is able to terminate the pregnancy. These conditions help ensure that the reproduction of the nation's white population will take place within the institution of marriage despite men's willingness to engage in extramarital affairs.

Because Judith's abortion prevents his wife Dorothy from learning about her husband's affair, and because Dorothy is able to claim the legitimacy and authority of marriage, any solidarity that might have developed between the two women Alan has mistreated is also foreclosed. Judith and Dorothy begin as friends, but even before Judith's pregnancy, they have a major disagreement. Judith cannot hide her awareness that the privileges enjoyed by married women like Dorothy are dependent upon the vilification of women like herself. When Dorothy tells Judith she'd be happier if she fell in love, Judith lashes out, telling her that "if a man touches a woman not his wife, he must do it obscenely, so that marriage may be preserved. Happy marriages, happy morality." Further, Judith insists, "it's not love, but marriage, respectability people believe in" (*FC* 88). Aware of these dynamics, Judith never even considers telling Dorothy about the affair with Alan or the abortion. This shows that open secrecy about abortion and the vilification of women who have sex outside marriage also perpetuate divisions between women who suffer as a result of male privilege, interrupting opportunities that might otherwise provide those women the chance to band together.

Contrastingly, Clare's abortion plot examines how the idealization of white married motherhood makes abortion inaccessible to married women who demonstrate a universalizing view of abortion. Clare's lack of access to abortion facilitates the reproduction of the nation according to mainstream ideals by obscuring the regularity with which white married women seek to avoid or postpone pregnancy, concealing the reasons they consider these options, and interrupting female solidarity by preventing them from speaking openly with one another about these issues. When Clare finds out she is pregnant, her panic is evident in the letter she writes Judith. She documents the reasons she is attempting to terminate the pregnancy, writing "I'm doing everything. I'll do anything. We've no money. How can we have a baby? It would only be passing the buck, that's all. The old story. The war, now this. Aren't we ever to have a chance? To be trapped, to just give in. I won't do it." (*FC* 138). Clare's response to this pregnancy indicates that her hope to have a child eventually is overshadowed by her inability to deal with circumstances beyond her control, including the early interruption of her marriage while her husband was forced to serve in the Great War, the couple's subsequent poverty, their inability to acquire stable jobs, and their dissatisfaction with life in a rural small town with little opportunity. In attempting to terminate the pregnancy, Clare hopes to minimize the impact that these outside forces can exert upon her own choices and upon those of her eventual children.

Judith knows that the network of open secrecy that made it possible for her to acquire an abortion does not make the procedure equally accessible to her sister. Judith is "afraid to tell Clare of her own experiences" because she feels

> there was so little she could tell her, where could she go? Only secretly and underground could she find a way out, a musty way that was

> dangerous, that might, in a small town, lead to anything, even to death. She shut her mind from this, thought how easy it was, after all, how simple. (*FC* 138)

In the book copy of *Following the Circle* that Herbst preserved, "in a small town" has been added to the manuscript by hand, underscoring the fact that Clare's rural location plays a significant role in Judith's attitude toward her sister's options. Reagan confirms that "in general, urban women had greater access to abortion than rural women" (17) and that rural women sometimes traveled to cities if they could not find an abortionist in their own communities (16). Fearful that telling her sister she has survived an abortion will make Clare rush to make the same choice without proper precaution, Judith writes that her friend has had the procedure performed, emphasizing that "it was safe, if you went to a good doctor" (*FC* 139). Judith's anxiety for Clare is heightened by her memories of "stories half heard as a child, mysteriously obscure for years" about women who died following attempts to terminate their pregnancies (*FC* 141).[53] Judith's lack of candor in writing to her sister is a direct result of her knowledge that while abortions can be procured in large cities, which have a higher concentration of single working women, they are not so easily accessible in rural towns, where women are more beholden to traditional expectations like marriage. Judith is powerless to change the options available to Clare, so she feels she must participate in the treatment of abortion as an open secret. Because she is fearful that the cost of revealing her abortion to her sister will be the endangerment of her sister's life, she too demonstrates Miller's insights about how open

[53] This memory obliquely references the practices of women who attempted to end their pregnancies by ingesting dangerous substances or introducing foreign objects in their bodies, both of which were common in rural areas, although the novel does not address these practices explicitly. American women sometimes orally ingested a variety of dangerous substances, including blueing, starch, gunpowder, and whiskey, and sometimes attempted to induce abortions by penetrating their bodies with knitting needles, crochet hooks, hairpins, scissors, and button hooks (Reagan 43).

secrecy compels people to discipline their own behavior. Further, Judith later responds to the news of Clare's death by saying "It's my little sister. I did it" (*FC* 144). Disciplining her own behavior does not prevent Judith from paying the price of losing her sister, but her inability to provide Clare with a viable solution makes her feel she is responsible for her sister's death. This response reveals that open secrecy about abortion also causes women to take responsibility for the consequences that it has enacted upon them and their loved ones.

The doctor Clare visits regulates her access to reproductive control, and in so doing, he explicitly invokes an idealized image of white motherhood and disavows the universalizing view of abortion she represents. The narration of Clare's thoughts while she awaits the consultation references the novel's title, and her thoughts acknowledge abortion as a desirable solution for married women who do not feel good about the prospects their families face. As she stares at women's magazines that depict idealized notions of motherhood and family, Clare thinks, "it was so hard to believe that for such a little thing, just for living with a man you got into this. The consequences were so tremendous; she could see that they would never end, that they would be passed on from children to other children, in their turn parents" (*FC* 140). She perceives abortion as a way to disrupt the pressures of what Jack Halberstam has called "reproductive time" (10) and to avoid repeating the cycle of disempowerment and lack of opportunity that she and her husband experience. Clare's abortion request in the doctor's office remains unnarrated, placing the emphasis on the manner in which he refuses her. He first asks, "Don't you know it is against the law?" before continuing "ministerially, 'not only the statutes, but the moral law, the physical law?'" (*FC* 140). He is the only character in the

novel who explicitly condemns abortion in this manner. But because he is the doctor, his disapproval of the procedure is powerful despite the many women in the novel who support abortion.[54] By narrating his thoughts after he refuses to grant Clare's request for an abortion, the novel further emphasizes that he refuses precisely because he is guided by an idealized notion of motherhood that disregards women's agency. He thinks to himself, "women were a little stubborn at first, but they got used to it. They really wanted babies, it was the natural life, some of them baulked but you had to be firm with them as you would with children. They were children, really. What else did they want if not babies?" (*FC* 140). This doctor uses the medical authority he gains by accepting a minoritizing view of abortion to dismiss the needs and wants of women like Clare, whose abortion request exposes a universalizing view of abortion. In so doing, he perpetuates the patriarchal oppression and reproductive regulations that all American women endure.

The novel's depiction of Judith's abortion also indicates that doctors benefitted from open secrecy about abortion and the minoritizing view that vilified women who procured them after engaging in extramarital sex. Judith must travel to New York City to procure an abortion, and she must pay for it herself. This emphasizes that Judith's ability to benefit from open secrecy about abortion depends upon her geographic and economic privilege.[55] But neither her whiteness nor these degrees of privilege can ensure her safety.

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[54] This detail is corroborated by Reagan's argument that the official medical stance that defined abortion as amoral did not represent the popular morality, particularly among women, that accepted the practice of abortion (6-8). Clare's doctor's refusal also demonstrates key findings of James Mohr's research, which indicates that the American Medical Association, shortly after it was founded in 1857, mobilized a campaign against abortion in order to enhance the power of the "regular" physicians who comprised their membership. The illegalization of abortion allowed these institutionally trained doctors to dictate how medicine would be practiced, giving them legal and medical authority over their patients as well as over "irregular" or less formally trained medical practitioners, including midwives (Mohr 147-225).

[55] Gordon (36), Capo (36), and Reagan (58, 67, 69) all indicate that wealthier women tended to have greater access to illegal abortion and that poor women were aware of this disparity. Herbst's own letters show that

The scene that depicts the aftermath of Judith's abortion transitions between narrating Judith's own thoughts and those of the doctor, juxtaposing her fear and vulnerability with his dismissive indifference toward his patients. The doctor thinks to himself, "the first time's the worst. After that, not so bad. Some women every year. Fashionable women every year. Saves the figure. Easier than douche." His secret thoughts reveal a universalizing view of abortion because he knows that privileged married women utilize the procedure. But his flippant reflections indicate that he does not take his patients or their reasons for utilizing abortion seriously. For Judith, the procedure is a very serious undertaking. She cannot afford to be flippant because she remains fearful about the vulnerable position she's in. She even thinks, "I may die" while she watches the doctor literally wash his hands of her (*FC* 109). Indeed, her later actions indicate she anticipates her extreme vulnerability even before the abortion. At the hotel where she stays to recover from the procedure, Judith places two letters she has prepared, addressed, and stamped in advance "conspicuously on the stand by the bed" so they can be found in case "she died" (*FC* 111).

Though the doctor verbally reassures Judith she'll be "all right," he again demonstrates his lack of regard for her when he thinks to himself it is "time she got started out of here, case anything should happen, better she was gone. Can't have anything happen" (*FC* 109). This willingness to usher his patient out of his office echoes Reagan's claims that although doctors continued performing abortions despite their illegalization, and open secrecy about abortion provided these doctors with patients, the legal prosecution of abortionists endangered women by making doctors less willing to

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she believed this as well. Herbst writes to her sister, for example, that "society women know where to go" to have abortions performed (JH to HHB Circa Oct. 1920).

provide those women adequate recovery care (69-71). Judith is forced to leave the doctor's office when she is still so weak that she barely makes it out to a cab, and she is convinced she will die on the way to her hotel. Because the doctor refuses to provide her with care while she recuperates, and because the vilification of single women who procure abortions compels her to keep the procedure a secret, she recovers alone without medical supervision. By practicing his own type of open secrecy about the medical care he is willing to provide, Judith's doctor endangers her life while reinforcing his own power to continue practicing medicine as he sees fit without facing the repercussions of the law. His thoughts indicate that her experience is not unusual, but his actions also isolate her from the other women who seek treatment from him. She certainly is not given an opportunity to recover alongside other women who have endured similar circumstances.

Indeed, Judith's thoughts during her recovery indicate she is aware that it is because she has engaged in extramarital sex that she must risk her life and become subject to the scorn promoted by a minoritizing view of abortion. She chooses to recover alone at the Hotel Tracy in New York City to avoid further disclosure of her circumstances to others. As she enters the hotel, she reflects that there are "dark places" like this hotel which offer "dark respectability for the disreputable" (*FC* 110). Weingarten does not address Herbst's fiction, but her extensive analysis argues that women who procured abortions were *often* depicted as being expelled from respectable society in a similar manner (14-37). Judith's own awareness that she has ended up in this hotel because she is a woman who has engaged in extramarital sex is emphasized when she remembers song lyrics she heard weeks before. The lyrics Judith recalls once she

enters the Hotel Tracy are "go slow and easy—easy as a man can be—" (*FC* 104, 110). The song itself draws attention to the relative ease with which men move through the world as compared to the difficulties faced by the woman singing. The woman sings about how her shoes make it impossible for her to keep up with the movements of the man who leads her as they dance to the blues (Williams and Spencer). But this recollection bears additional significance because earlier in the novel, Judith hears the song while watching a Hungarian waitress she works with at the Hotel Blum be physically removed from the resort. Like Judith, the waitress is expelled from her respectable society when her extramarital sexual activity threatens to expose the transgressions of the men who are protected by codes of respectability.

The expectation of open secrecy about extramarital sex at the Hotel Blum is made explicit by the man who runs the resort. When he hires Judith, he tells her he "can't prevent a woman from slipping a man into her room if she does it discreetly," but "it's letting it get seen I won't stand for" (*FC* 92). The Hungarian waitress becomes a scapegoat because she is female, foreign, poor, and illiterate, making her the most vulnerable inhabitant of the resort. Not even Judith bothers to learn her name despite her awareness of their similar circumstances.[56] After the waitress is seen leaving a guest's room, the manager thinks to himself, "you can't have things like that going on in a respectable hotel," and a spectacle is made of her removal (*FC* 104). The waitress's expulsion from the resort allows the manager to assert the respectability of the Hotel

[56] Though the similarities between the experiences of Judith and the waitress come into sharpest focus when the former recalls these song lyrics, they are evident as soon as the waitress is introduced into the novel. As Judith waits for and receives disappointing letters from Alan, the Hungarian waitress waits on a letter from her lover that never arrives. When the Hungarian waitress tells her secrets to Ella because no one else offers a sympathetic ear, Judith overhears the waitress saying "I can't stand it" and then repeats this phrase herself when thinking about her relationship with Alan (*FC* 102). Eventually, Judith also finds herself with no option but to consult Ella when she must procure an abortion.

Blum even though it has been exposed as a fiction by the willingness of male guests to have extramarital affairs with her. Her expulsion thus affords privilege and protection to the wealthy guests, allows male guests to engage in sexual behavior with vulnerable employees without facing the threat of reproach, and soothes the resentment of other employees who take pleasure in watching as the waitress is removed. Judith's memory of these song lyrics as she enters the Hotel Tracy suggests that she implicitly understands similarities between her isolation following the abortion and the removal of the waitress after her sexual activity is exposed.

For readers, Judith's recollections of what she has seen at the Hotel Blum emphasize the ways she is similar to the people who are stigmatized there while also drawing focus to Judith's degree of privilege relative to the waitress and the Hotel Blum guests. The sting of shame Judith experiences as she retreats into the Hotel Tracy and her recollection of the song lyrics indicate that she can experience feelings similar to those the waitress might have felt as she was expelled from the Hotel Blum. But the juxtaposition of Judith's circumstances with those of the Hungarian waitress also emphasizes that unlike the waitress, who is expelled from her job and her residence as nearly the entire population of the Hotel Blum takes pleasure in watching, Judith can privately retreat to the Hotel Tracy because she is white, American born, and has enough money to pay for her abortion and lodging. Judith also has difficulty confronting the fact that the maid who cleans her room at the Hotel Tracy may be judging her negatively for utilizing abortion. She realizes this when her maid's actions remind her of the anti-Semitic comments made by Ella at the Hotel Blum, who refers to the Jewish guests as "horrid dirty people" as she cleans their rooms and asserts, "you can't tell me white folks

are like this" (*FC* 101). Judith's maid also focuses on Judith's economic privilege. The narration enters her consciousness to indicate she thinks that "perhaps [Judith] had money—that woman—her brush and comb were good stuff. Fifth Avenue stuff" (*FC* 111). While Judith is not as wealthy as the Jewish guests who visit the Hotel Blum, she is not automatically subject to the scorn of her chambermaid because of her religion or race, as they are. Rather, Judith is judged because her actions do not adhere to definitions of propriety for American white women who "had money." While *Following the Circle* focuses almost exclusively on the circumstances and choices of American-born white characters, Judith's reflections in her most vulnerable moments demonstrate Herbst's awareness that Judith's stigmatization intersects in complex ways with those who are stigmatized merely because they cannot access some of the privileges that Judith holds.

Judith's relative privilege as a woman who can access an abortion through the network of open secrecy is also emphasized by the fact that her sister Clare dies because she *cannot* access an abortion. But both outcomes serve similar ends. Judith's ability to access an abortion secures existing power structures by allowing her pregnancy to remain a secret, while Clare's death secures existing power structures because it keeps secret her objections to motherhood as a married white woman. When Clare leaves the office of the doctor who refuses to perform the procedure, she feels she has "nowhere to go," and she wanders aimlessly on foot through her rural hometown. She feels her surroundings "pushing against her, crowding in on her," making her "very tired" (*FC* 140, 141). Shortly thereafter, she dies of exhaustion, unable to survive the fear of her impending circumstances and her dejection about being unable to control her reproduction. The toll of the pregnancy and the home remedies she attempts to terminate it might also render

her vulnerable to physical exhaustion. Like the women whose deaths Judith recalls hearing about in her youth, Clare's death relegates her story to the realm of the "mysteriously obscure" (*FC* 141). Open secrecy about abortion does not allow awareness of her reasons for desiring an abortion to circulate beyond her trusted family members, so the reality of a universalizing view of abortion is obscured by her death. When she dies, so does any chance she has to spread awareness of her desire to pursue the procedure because of her husband's war service, her poverty, her inability to secure a job, and her despair about the lack of opportunities available to her.

Like the scene that depicts the argument between Judith and her lover's wife Dorothy before Judith's pregnancy, there is a scene that precedes Clare's pregnancy that provides context for why she is denied reproductive control. A women's club meeting in her rural hometown is narrated from an ironic critical distance that includes narrative commentary. One of the attendees, Mrs. Warren, cannot conceive children, but she does not feel comfortable admitting this. Instead, she attempts to justify her childlessness by arguing that "bearing children is not the only thing" that can bring women happiness. Her comment is wholly dismissed by Mrs. Beveridge, a mother of four, "whose one achievement is motherhood," according to this ironic narration. When Mrs. Beveridge "rules that motherhood is all, the holy of holies," the other women in the club "nod, superstitious about motherhood." Mrs. Warren is silenced, along with any of the women who might agree or sympathize with her, because Mrs. Beveridge is able to claim authority over the subject by invoking an idealized image of motherhood. The narration then asserts, ironically, that "this is life in the towns. Women free, not tied to the home as their mothers were" (*FC* 130). It is no wonder that Clare feels intellectually and socially

trapped in a small town where even meetings of women's clubs do not welcome difference of opinion and fail to create the communities of trust necessary for open communication among women. Instead, this club meeting serves as an avenue for the perpetuation of existing patriarchal gender roles, where women are willing to cling to what little power they can grasp within that structure.

The disingenuous yet effective power of idealizing motherhood is also addressed through Judith's involvement in an event called Neighbor's Day. This event is linked to Clare's desire for an abortion and her death because Judith is so preoccupied with planning the event that she has trouble responding to her sister's letters about her pregnancy in a timely manner. Neighbor's Day is a fundraising event devised by the New York City civic organization for which Judith works following her abortion. They plan to secure financial contributions by promising that "for one day prejudices would be forgotten" and that during this event "brotherly love was to walk the streets, calling out hello neighbor. Jew was to greet Gentile, Anti-Saloon Leaguer, greet Bootlegger, capitalist greet common worker. Hello neighbor" (*FC* 122). Judith's employers' plans thus indicate their awareness that for their fundraiser to be successful, participants will have to disavow their knowledge of the conflicts and prejudices that exist between themselves and other residents of New York City. Thus it is telling that their plans for Neighbor's Day are explicitly based on the success of campaigns to promote Mother's Day, which was designated a national holiday in 1914.[57] The organizers recognize that idealizing the notion of neighborliness, even with empty gestures, might have significant effects on par with the idealization of motherhood. The plans for Neighbor's Day

[57] At that time, President Woodrow Wilson signed a law passed by Congress requesting that government officials and private citizens display the American flag "as a public expression" of "love and reverence for the mothers of our country" (Rice and Shauffler 3-5).

eventually fall through, indicating that this type of narrative cannot be wholly invented for the organization's gain. But the parallels between Clare's circumstance and Judith's involvement in Neighbor's Day, like Judith's memories of the vulnerable employees and guests at the Hotel Blum, indicate Herbst's attention to the ways different types of people are disempowered by the promotion of hypocritical narratives. Among these community organizers, within the women's club, and inside Clare's doctor's office, the idealization of motherhood conceals the type of maternal difficulties that would expose a universalizing view of abortion if they could be openly articulated.

*Following the Circle* extensively catalogues white women's attitudes toward and experiences of abortion during this period. In so doing, the novel demonstrates that the stereotype of the ideal, married, white mother that disempowers Clare and the stereotype of the amoral unmarried abortion seeker that disempowers Judith function together to regulate all women's access to reproductive control. Like the minoritizing and universalizing views of homosexual definition that Sedgwick theorizes, these minoritizing and universalizing views of abortion betray the incoherent understandings of why white women utilize abortion, which is obscured through open secrecy about its use. *Following the Circle* interrupts the cycle of open secrecy about abortion by depicting Judith's abortion experience with sympathy and by validating Clare's reasons for desiring the procedure. By juxtaposing their abortion plots, the novel shows that the individuals, institutions, and groups that stand to benefit most from Judith's illegal abortion—men, doctors, heterosexual marriage, patriarchy, the nation, and its predominantly white population—are the same individuals, institutions, and groups who stand to benefit most from Clare's inability to access an abortion.

As the introduction to this dissertation suggests, Herbst's failure to find a publisher for *Following the Circle* was likely the result of the very dynamics of open secrecy about abortion in which the novel attempts to intervene. The notoriously influential writer and critic H.L. Mencken tried to help Herbst place the novel, but no publisher was willing to distribute it (Ehrhardt 160; Langer 62-72). The restrictions the Comstock Act placed upon what could be written about contraception and abortion in print, and the legal cases brought against publishers for violating the Act's definitions of obscenity, made it particularly risky to publish the content Herbst includes in *Following the Circle*. One editor who declined to publish the novel was Adele Szold Seltzer, whose husband, Thomas Seltzer, had previously been forced to defend his publication of D.H. Lawrence's fiction in court. Though Seltzer was ultimately exonerated, the litigation put his publishing firm out of business (Levin 215-224). Adele Szold Seltzer wrote Herbst in praise of certain aspects of the novel but still rejected it, suggesting "it is hard to put down in cold black and white just why" she did not think the book would sell (qtd. in Ehrhardt 160). The impossibility of confirming whether Szold Setlzer was referencing the novel's frank depictions of abortion or some other disqualifying feature underscores the ways that the topic of abortion was obscured by euphemistic language that skirted definitions of obscenity. Herbst's next five novels, which she published between 1928 and 1939, indicate that she remained committed to documenting the consequences women suffer due to the inaccessibility of safe abortions and the ways that open secrecy negatively impacts the lives of vulnerable individuals, particularly American women. These novels also indicate, however, that following her inability to find a publisher for

*Following the Circle*, Herbst grew increasingly skeptical about what the disclosure of secrets could reasonably be expected to accomplish.

*Following the Circle*'s frank depiction of abortion has led Langer, Julia C. Erhardt, and Elaine Showalter to speculate that Herbst must not have been particularly committed to publishing it (Langer 71-72, Ehrhart 160, "A Jury of Her Peers" 345). But Herbst's attempts to publish the novel, her retention of the manuscript for over forty years, and her choice to include it in the papers she sold to Yale suggest otherwise. Ultimately, it is this choice through which the contents of *Following the Circle* remain accessible, albeit in a very limited capacity. Should a publisher choose to release the novel after all these years, or should Yale's Beinecke Library select the manuscript for inclusion in their ever-growing online Digital Collections, the secrecy within which the novel has been shrouded would finally be interrupted.

## *Nothing is Sacred* and Herbst's Shifting Attitudes Toward Abortion Disclosure

The novels Herbst successfully published after she wrote *Following the Circle* continue to insist that there is power in disclosing secrets, and that it is necessary to disrupt open secrecy to communicate important ideas, especially about abortion. But these novels also demonstrate developing skepticism about the effectiveness of straightforwardly disclosing information that has previously been guarded as secret. Beginning with *Nothing is Sacred* (1928), Herbst's novels theorize how the circumstances under which such disclosures take place impacts their power to enact positive or negative change. Like *Following the Circle*, *Nothing is Sacred* focuses on one

white family living in a rural Midwestern town, examining how secrecy functions within families and communities and asserting that the idealization of maternity can make women feel disillusioned and alienated. But unlike *Following the Circle*, *Nothing is Sacred* also examines the negative consequences that individuals suffer when their secrets have been discovered, and it acknowledges that willful disclosure of sensitive information does not always achieve positive results.

Abortion enters the narrative of *Nothing is Sacred* because it impacts the marriage of Hilda, the youngest sister in the family. Her relationship with her husband Ross is threatened when he admits he's had an affair and tells Hilda how troubled he is by what his lover has gone through to get an abortion. Because this conflict serves as only a minor one in the larger scheme of the novel, *Nothing is Sacred* addresses the open secrecy of abortion in a much less detailed way than *Following the Circle*. This may help to explain why the novel's abortion plot did not prevent Coward-McCann from selecting the novel for publication and why the novel was able to earn deserved critical acclaim.[58] Though it is a minor part of the novel, this abortion plot represents a significant development in Herbst's depiction of abortion by acknowledging that while disclosures about abortion can have positive effects, they also expose the people involved to considerable risks. *Nothing is Sacred* demonstrates how ascertaining the secrets of others gives people power and allows them to leverage that power to discipline the behavior of those whose secrets they possess. For these reasons, the novel's abortion plot and its examination of how secrecy functions within predominantly white American communities can be usefully

[58] Langer indicates that the novel was recommended to Coward-McCann by Ford Madox Ford, that "jacket blurbs were provided by Hemingway and Ring Lardner," and that it was reviewed in over fifty newspapers, including favorable reviews written by Ford and Katherine Anne Porter (101).

illuminated by Sedgwick's theorization of secrecy, disclosure, pleasure, and power within what she calls the "spectacle of the closet" (*EC* 209-210, 213-251).

Ross's willingness to tell Hilda about his extramarital affair and his lover's abortion are depicted in the novel as positive disclosures because they facilitate the continuation of Ross and Hilda's passionate marriage. But his willingness to tell other people about the affair and the abortion creates problems for them. Ross explains that while Hilda was away visiting her family, his lover in Chicago "got pregnant, and it was pretty awful. She had to have an abortion, and, oh, god, it was awful" (*Nothing is Sacred* 167).[59] Although Hilda is upset that Ross has spoken to their friends about these events, their open communication allows them to share some of their angst with one another, and she decides to stay in the marriage and to defend him to his parents. Ross's parents use ambiguous language to confront him, but they still make clear that they know about the illegitimate pregnancy and the abortion. They are displeased with his behavior, but their comments indicate the real reason they chastise him is because public knowledge of his behavior impacts the family's reputation in his own hometown. The disclosure of his transgressions gives the other people in their community the opportunity to act as what Sedgwick calls "spectators" of the family's affairs. Sedgwick specifies that once the spectator gains access to secret information, that spectator gains pleasure and power from being the possessor and judge of that information (*EC* 225). As she continues, Sedgwick indicates that it can be particularly thrilling for a spectator to find out that the private information of others gratifies their own suspicions, but this is not necessary for the spectator to find the experience pleasurable. Because the spectator claims "authority" over the private information of others and the ability to judge it, knowing another

[59] Subsequent citations of this text will be abbreviated as *NS*.

person's secret, regardless of what that secret is, allows the spectator to assert dominance over those to whom their judgments apply (*EC* 230). When Ross's parents insist they will not allow him to "bring disgrace on us, not if we can help it," his mother lists the things he's done that have caused a "scandal" in their hometown. This includes not only "get[ting] a poor girl into trouble" but also "bragging of it, that's the worst" (*NS* 199). Ross's parents' outrage suggests that their status is threatened once the other people in their town can take pleasure in appointing themselves possessors and judges of the family's private affairs. Ross's parents' authority is not threatened so much by his behavior as by their community's knowledge that their son has not, in their words, "lived respectable" (*NS* 201).

These dynamics threaten Ross and Hilda because of the power Ross's parents maintain over him, not only because they are his parents but also because they are very wealthy. Their power helps them compel their son to stop disclosing information that threatens the family's reputation. Although Ross is characterized as someone committed to being honest, he and Hilda both lie to his parents when he is confronted by this reproach because he feels it would be counterproductive to be honest with them. At one point, he and Hilda feel they "could only lie to the parents' accusations" because "what good would it do to say they didn't want to be respectable?" (*NS* 202). Importantly, Ross and Hilda also find it difficult to be straightforward because he fears his parents will withhold his inheritance. Ross's parents succeed in influencing his behavior, and convincing him to participate in secrecy, by compelling him to avoid their judgment and discipline.

Ross and Hilda's marriage endures and regains its initial physical passion near the end of the novel, indicating that honesty about abortion can be beneficial within trusting relationships marked by mutual affection. But their willingness to lie to his parents demonstrates how even those individuals who are otherwise willing to disclose details about abortion can be pressured into participation in open secrecy because they are vulnerable to those who occupy positions of power. This series of events shows how spectators of others' private information can leverage the power of that position to enact discipline even upon those who wish to be open about their experiences. Herbst's next novel, *Money for Love*, returns to the explicit depiction of abortion that characterized *Following the Circle*, but this third novel, like *Nothing is Sacred*, continues to grapple with the power dynamics of secrecy, disclosure, and spectacle in complex and nuanced ways.

## Abortion and Strategic Disclosure in *Money for Love*

In *Money for Love* (1929), as in *Following the Circle*, Herbst depicts the struggles endured by a single white woman living in New York City, whose experiences align with a minoritizing view of abortion, while also validating the struggles endured by a married white woman living in a rural small town, whose experiences prove the existence of a universalizing view of abortion. When the novel begins, protagonist Harriet Everist and her roommate Louise Parmeter share an apartment in New York City. Each woman's life was changed by an abortion that took place three years prior to when the novel begins. Harriet procured an abortion in the city after conceiving a child with a married lover. Around the same time, Louise's married sister Rosamonde died following her own

abortion in the Midwest. As such, this novel again insists that open secrecy about abortion costs some women their lives. *Money for Love* devotes considerably less attention than *Following the Circle* to showing how existing modes of power are reinforced through the scapegoating of those who represent the minoritizing view of abortion and the disavowal of those who represent the universalizing view. But because this novel takes place several years after the abortions in question, *Money for Love* documents the lasting negative impacts that secrecy about abortion has on these women's lives. The novel also subtly acknowledges the racial and national factors that play a role in the stigmatization of abortion. Further, the depiction of abortion in *Money for Love* also moves beyond the scope of *Following the Circle* by theorizing how these characters' attitudes toward secrecy and disclosure impact their ability to mitigate the negative impact that secrecy about abortion has on their lives. While the novel's terse use of language has been criticized by critics since its publication, this style can be appreciated when it is considered a formal manifestation of the novel's theorization of secrecy and disclosure. In its content and style, *Money for Love* examines how women who manage to survive can take control over their lives despite the ways those lives have been damaged by the stigmatization of extramarital sex and abortion, by open secrecy about abortion, and by the combination of social conditions that regulate their reproductive control. The novel indicates that women can mitigate the negative impacts of these factors by being mindful of the judgments of others and practicing the careful disclosure of their secrets. It also suggests that those who attempt to gain power by ascertaining the secrets of others risk doing so at their own peril.

Because it is set three years after Harriet and Rosamonde's abortions, *Money for Love* shows how secrecy about abortion continues to impact the surviving characters. The novel makes clear that Harriet's life is still negatively shaped by the stigmatization and disempowerment she experiences because she aligns with a minoritizing view of abortion. At no point does Harriet demonstrate regret or remorse about her willingness to engage in sex outside of marriage. Neither Harriet nor any of her friends regard abortion as a morally controversial procedure, even though Louise's sister died as a result of one. At no point do Harriet's recollections suggest is traumatized by her choice to utilize an abortion, given the circumstances she faced. Rather, she remains angry about the way her circumstances rendered abortion the only choice she felt she could make. This calls into question Joy Castro's suggestion that Harriet demonstrates characteristics of "postabortion syndrome." As Castro specifies, this syndrome was defined by Spekhard and Rue in 1992 as being marked by "unsuccessful attempts to avoid or deny painful abortion recollections" (qtd. in Castro 22). In the years since Castro's 2004 essay, however, the concept of post-abortion syndrome has become a topic of increasingly controversial debate. Emily Bazelon points out that a very small percentage of women who utilize abortion report the symptoms of post-abortion syndrome. Research suggests that many of the women who do report feeling distressed by the experience after the fact also endured circumstances "surrounding the abortion" which put them at greater risk for depression symptoms, like "a disappointing relationship, precarious finances, [and/or] the stress of an unwanted pregnancy" (Bazelon).[60] This distinction is an important one in

[60] Bazelon also points out that the idea of post-abortion syndrome is promoted heavily by anti-abortion advocates, many of whom participate in the vilification of abortion and the women who utilize the procedure—practices that Herbst's fiction repeatedly condemns.

Harriet's case, because *Money for Love* makes explicitly clear that she regards her circumstances surrounding the abortion as the source of her suffering.

Harriet's ongoing resentment stems from the fact that her circumstances allowed her lover to force her to procure the abortion. She recalls that when Bruce Jones "knew she might have a baby he had been scared to death. Yes, he had scared her then and made her lose all the good healthy notions she had about going ahead with it" (*Money for Love* 67-68).[61] Months after her abortion, Harriet suffered a breakdown because she learned that Bruce's wife Elsie had just delivered their fourth baby. Harriet realizes that marriage secures Elsie's privilege, and she reflects angrily that "nobody ever saw Elsie Jones not have a baby if she wanted one" (*ML* 67). Reiterating the dynamics Herbst first documented in *Following the Circle*, this series of events indicates that the treatment of abortion as an open secret subjects women who conceive illegitimate pregnancies to stigmatization, allowing men to pressure those women to terminate their pregnancies while making it more difficult for men to pressure their wives to do so. Castro makes a related point about how Harriet's vulnerability to Bruce negatively effects her, suggesting the novel "investigates the impact of male economic privilege on sexual dynamics" (19). In addition to his refusal to support the child financially, Harriet is also deeply wounded because after the pregnancy, Bruce rejects her from his life and dismisses the validity of her feelings. She is reduced to tears, for example, when he replies to one of her letters by insisting that women who are sexually experienced are less susceptible to heartbreak (*ML* 214). While Harriet is not plagued with remorse about the abortion itself, the conditions that compelled her to terminate the pregnancy have a lasting impact on her life. Her access to illegal abortion made it easier for her married lover to refuse to provide for the

[61] Subsequent citations this text will be abbreviated *ML*.

child, to stigmatize her as a woman who engages in extramarital sex, to abandon her, and to dismiss her desires.

*Money for Love* also uses Harriet's characterization to acknowledge the racist and nativist undertones of the stigmatization of women who procure abortions, albeit subtly. While the novel provides no explicit account of her ancestry or ethnicity, Harriet was born in the American Midwest, and all the contextual details in the novel suggest she and her friends are white. Yet other characters in the novel perceive Harriet's skin as noticeably dark, which is relevant to her status as the type of woman who is vilified for aligning with a minoritizing view of abortion and who can be forced to make reproductive decisions against her will. Early in the novel, a friend of Harriet's suggests she could play a Japanese character on stage, not only because she can act, but also because "you're dark, too" (*ML* 32). Late in the novel, one character confirms that she has visited his house while he was away by asking his neighbor if the woman the neighbor saw was "dark." The neighbor answers in the affirmative, further specifying that the visitor was "Spanish looking, that's the one all right" (*ML* 266). These two references to Harriet's "dark" complexion suggest it is immediately noticeable, it sets her apart from others, and it creates a mental association between herself and foreigners in the minds of others. Weingarten addresses the racist and nativist origins of the stereotypes about abortion seekers in her analysis of how these women where characterized and vilified during this period. She provides other popular and literary examples that indicate abortion was conceived as "a practice introduced on the margins of society," often by individuals who were foreign born or non-white (Weingarten 24). Harriet's dark complexion serves as a subtle clue that her skin color marks her, in the minds of many, as

an inferior outsider whose behaviors must be regulated. By depicting her as someone perceived as dark-skinned, and by insisting that the negative judgments made of women who procure abortions is unjust, the novel acknowledges parallels between her circumstances and those of dark-skinned and/or foreign-born American citizens and residents who are vilified and subject to reproductive regulation.

*Money for Love* also documents how Louise Parmeter's life has been negatively impacted by the death of her sister Rosamonde, whose abortion affirms the existence of a universalizing view of abortion. Like *Following the Circle*, this novel indicates that abortion among married women is not uncommon, suggesting Rosamonde decided to go ahead with the procedure after "a married woman told her it wasn't much" (*ML* 127). The novel also depicts Rosamonde's desire for an abortion as practical and reasonable. Louise remembers that even before the pregnancy, her sister "grew feverish about time going by and having no money to do anything with," and when Rosamonde "found out she was going to have a baby she was about crazy. She was scared to do anything for fear it would spoil her for having more some day. She hated to think she couldn't have children when she was better fixed for them" (*ML* 127). Harriet has a pragmatic attitude toward Rosamonde's death following an abortion, thinking that "if anyone was to blame it was some old doctor who didn't know his business" (*ML* 97). Rosamond's death emphasizes that the secrecy about abortion endangers married women's lives. But the novel also expands upon the negative consequences of this dangerous secrecy because Louise and Rosamonde's husband, Joseph Roberts, find their lives completely derailed by Rosamonde's death. Joseph suggests "the snap went out of" Louise when her sister died, and he feels "absolutely no ambition. No ambition at all" even three years after his wife's

death (*ML* 181, 103). Louise agrees, suggesting both she and Joseph have been "sidetracked" (*ML* 89). Prior to Rosamonde's death, Louise had been pursuing a promising career as a chemist, but she has so thoroughly abandoned these pursuits that the man she begins dating in the novel, Carl Slater, doesn't even know about them until Joseph tells him. But rather than blaming Rosamonde's circumstances or her doctor for her death, Louise blames herself for being unable to prevent her sister from needing an abortion. While losing her sister is understandably difficult for Louise to overcome, the novel examines why she cannot move beyond this loss.

The novel theorizes the power dynamics of secrecy by depicting the contrasting ways Harriet and Louise deal with negative impact that secrecy about abortion has had on their lives. Both Harriet and Louise treat private and/or sensitive details of information like texts to be analyzed, so Sedgwick's theorization of secrecy illuminates their actions. As the following analysis will show, Harriet's behavior aligns with what Sedgwick refers to in *Touching Feeling* as "reparative practices," while Louise can be understood as a character who engages in what Sedgwick calls "paranoid practices." The novel's ending leaves the success of Harriet's marital and career plans unresolved. But a reparative reading of her behavior and the novel's conclusion shows that Harriet's approach toward pursuing her goals facilitates modest and yet important gains in overcoming the damage open secrecy about abortion has had upon her life. In contrast, Rosamonde's death causes Louise to become stuck in a state of stasis, unable to proceed in her career or her romantic life because she is consumed by the past. The novel's advocacy for Harriet's approach and its examination of the futility of Louise's approach are facilitated by the

style of its prose, which confounds and refuses to validate readers who participate in the same types of paranoid practices Louise demonstrates in her relationships.

Sedgwick theorizes the differences between what she defines as "paranoid practices" and "reparative practices" in order critique what she considers to be the unacknowledged dominance of paranoid critical reading practices. She indicates that paranoid practices are demonstrative of what Paul Ricoeur first called a "hermeneutics of suspicion" (*Touching Feeling* 124).[62] In her analysis of how paranoid reading has attained a privileged status, she notes several shortcomings and limitations of this approach. In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick examines how paranoid practices can be a source of manipulative pleasure (230), but in *Touching Feeling*, she recognizes even more consequences of this approach. She finds that those who engage in paranoid practices often become so committed to "minimiz[ing] negative affect" that they become incapable of pursuing the "potentially operative goal of seeking positive affect" (*TF* 136). Sedgwick also indicates that the "paranoid trust in exposure" is misplaced when she questions the assumption that disclosure of secret information will "surprise or disturb, nevermind motivate, anyone to learn that a given social manifestation is artificial, self-contradictory, imitative, phantasmic, or even violent" (*TF* 141). Citing Melanie Klein, Sedgwick also describes the "paranoid position" as "understandably marked by hatred, envy, and anxiety" (*TF* 128).

While paranoid practices are largely oriented toward the past, Sedgwick argues that reparative practices are more oriented toward the future. She defines reparative practices as those which "use one's own resources to assemble or 'repair' the murderous part-objects" enacted within oneself or upon oneself by the outside world "into something

[62] Subsequent citations of this text will be abbreviated *TF*.

like a whole—though, I would emphasize, *not necessarily like any pre-existing whole*" (*TF* 128).[63] Sedgwick also draws from Melanie Klein's theorization of the depressive position in order to emphasize that reparative strategies demonstrate commitment to "mov[ing] toward a sustained *seeking of pleasure*" (*TF* 137). While Sedgwick suggests that one "only sometimes, and often only briefly, succeeds in inhabiting" the reparative position, she nonetheless emphasizes that to do so is an "anxiety-mitigating achievement" (*TF* 128). While paranoia attempts to avoid surprises, for those occupying a reparative position, "it can seem realistic and necessary to experience surprise. Because there can be terrible surprises, however, there can also be good ones." Although hope of this type can be difficult to maintain because it can lead to devastating consequences, it can be worthwhile because it allows one to engage in the work of repairing one's circumstances (*TF* 148).

*Money for Love* documents Harriet's attempts to begin to repair the impact her former lover Bruce has had on her life through the careful, intentional course of action. Her actions align with Sedgwick's definition of reparative practices through which one attempts to use the resources that are at one's disposal to try to turn a fragmented existence into one that feels more whole, even if that sense of being whole does not fully recover how one felt before the outside world created that sense of fracture. Harriet's plan is to pressure her former lover, Bruce Jones, to give her enough money to travel abroad with her current lover, Rosamonde's widower Joseph Roberts. Harriet's approach results in her marriage to Joseph and their impending departure to pursue new careers in Europe. Early in the novel, she thinks to herself, "she had to have money. It wasn't as if

[63]Here, Sedgwick describes Melanie Klein's theorization of the depressive position, but this comes to define what Sedgwick means by the reparative position.

she and Joseph were in love for the first time. Joseph had been married and he wasn't her first love. It was up to her to find a way to make their lives go together" (*ML* 20). This reflection indicates that though Harriet recognizes the relationship with Joseph is not perfect, she demands the money from Bruce because she is committed to doing whatever she can to create the best future for herself that she can.

Harriet frequently wavers in her commitment to this plan, but she is able to maintain its pursuit in part because she refuses to allow the negative judgments of others to heavily influence her behavior. Even readers of the novel have subjected Harriet to these judgments, including Bevilacqua, who suggests that Harriet's behavior demonstrates her "personal deficiencies" (27). While Harriet is aware that others will think she is unfairly extorting Bruce, she doesn't let it stop her. She recognizes that "anyone who knew about [the plan] would say she had no honor," but because she believes "all those hifalutin words meant nothing at all," she decides she is "quite ready now to stoop to anything to win out with Bruce Jones" (*ML* 121). Ultimately, Harriet is successful in procuring a considerable sum from Bruce. She suffers in pursuit of this goal, but she uses this money to help finance the trip with Joseph to Europe that she hopes will secure their future. While this shows that the progress achieved through reparative practices may not be ideal, Sedgwick's insistence that even mitigated progress is significant allows for a reading in which the feat Harriet accomplishes can be understood as considerable.

Harriet's pursuit of her goals is also facilitated by her careful avoidance of assuming that disclosing information will compel people to change, which is an assumption Sedgwick indicates is commonly demonstrated by those who engage in

paranoid practices (*TF* 141). This skepticism about disclosure helps Harriet avoid being subjected to further negative judgments from those who would condemn her behavior. This is particularly true with Louise, who treats Harriet as a friend even as she actively attempts to end Harriet's romantic relationship with Joseph throughout the novel. Harriet believes "Louise had a way of looking straight at her and she made Harriet feel she saw through her little ways," and as a result, "more than once, Harriet had it on the tip of her tongue to tell [Louise] everything" (*ML* 59-60). While this passage suggests that Harriet is tempted to disclose her secrets to Louise, it also emphasizes Harriet's ability to withhold information from individuals she perceives as threats. She is not always successful in these attempts, and she sometimes discloses information to Louise that the latter attempts to use to disempower her. But because Harriet is able to learn from these incidents, she avoids suffering the fate that might have awaited her if she had been even more honest with Louise.[64]

But Harriet also demonstrates a reparative commitment to pursuing positive pleasures because she does risk making certain disclosures in spite of her knowledge that disclosing her secrets can also work against her. From the very beginning of the novel, Harriet tries "to decide how much to tell" Joseph about her plans to demand money from Bruce because she believes "there was no need to tell everything" (*ML* 7). She initially relates only enough information to keep Joseph's interest piqued, which also requires her to exaggerate and simplify certain aspects of her plans. Eventually, Harriet decides she is

[64] Louise's behavior proves that Harriet is wise to believe her plans to extort Bruce will be negatively perceived by some. Louise begrudgingly assures Harriet's Aunt Rachel that there is no reason to be concerned about her niece because "that girl will get along" and subsequently thinks to herself, "Harriet would look out for herself. That girl would come out on top of the heap" (*ML* 199, 201). Louise's use of the term "that girl" while passing negative judgment upon Harriet resonates with the scene in *Following the Circle* in which Judith's maid condemns her as immoral by thinking of her as "that woman" (*FC* 111). This comparison draws even greater emphasis upon Harriet's willingness and ability to ignore the negative judgments of others.

willing to disclose the full truth when she feels compelled to ask Joseph if he agrees with Bruce's belief that women who are sexually experienced cannot have their hearts broken. By taking the risk of making herself vulnerable to Joseph's rejection, Harriet creates the circumstance in which Joseph finally articulates a sincere commitment to their relationship. He indicates he does not feel the same way Bruce does about her sexual experience, shows approval of her willingness to demand money from Bruce, "put[s] his arms around her," and says, "I'll stand by you. Give it to him" (*ML* 214). Their marriage, though not ideal, shows that the practices Sedgwick defines as "reparative" can help women begin to move beyond the negative consequences they suffer once they are stigmatized for engaging in extramarital sex and procuring abortions.

In contrast, Louise's ongoing attempts to terminate the developing romantic relationship between Harriet and Joseph, even though she regards Harriet as something of a friend, demonstrate her tendency to dwell on the past and to engage in paranoid practices. From the very beginning, Louise practices the hermeneutics of suspicion that characterize the paranoid position. Though she takes pleasure in attempting to ascertain the secrets of others, she repeatedly fails to acquire accurate information through these practices and misjudges the impact her disclosures of secret information will have. For example, Louise congratulates herself for interpreting Harriet's behavior when she realizes that Harriet and Joseph have spent the night together. Louise thinks to herself, "Joseph thought she was kidded into thinking he was a platonic friend of Harriet's. Louise knew better. Harriet didn't have to say a word. From the first Louise knew all about it from the way Harriet acted" (*ML* 125). But this is a rather self-congratulatory train of thought, given that Harriet makes no attempt to hide her interest in Joseph. When

Harriet does decide to disclose secrets to Louise, the narration reveals that Louise's paranoid reading of Harriet's behavior is often inaccurate. At one point, for example, when Harriet admits that she has been crying about a letter she receives from Bruce, "Louise was astonished. She thought Harriet had been crying on account of Joseph" (*ML* 140). Louise demonstrates the paranoid trust in disclosure when she assumes that sharing this information with Joseph will change his feelings toward Harriet. Though he is initially disappointed by the information Louise relates, he and Harriet subsequently take an overnight trip together, leaving Louise to despair about the failure of her disclosure to mitigate Joseph's interest in Harriet. In moments like this one throughout the novel, Louise is plagued by anxiety and her animosity toward Harriet only grows. This demonstrates Sedgwick and Klein's assertion that occupation of the paranoid position is "marked by hatred, envy, and anxiety" (*TF* 128).

Louise also demonstrates Sedgwick's claim that those who operate from paranoid position become so devoted to avoiding negative affect that they fail to seek positive affect. Louise's fixation with Joseph and Harriet's romance interferes in the progress of her own romance with Joseph's friend Carl Slater, despite her interest in Carl, his obvious and sincere affection for her, and his admiration for her earlier career. When she learns that Harriet and Joseph have gone away together, she is so upset that she snaps at Carl. He subsequently leaves because she does not explain her behavior, despite the fact that the narration suggests she "really wanted him to stay"(*ML* 175). Further, Louise's failure to interrupt Harriet and Joseph's relationship indicates that the use of paranoid practices does not always allow one to avoid negative affect, either. Louise cannot prevent Harriet and Joseph from marrying or traveling abroad together, and she is deeply disheartened at

the novel's end. While Harriet's future happiness remains uncertain at the end of the novel, she achieves the goals she has in sight at the novel's beginning, while Louise fails.

In addition to examining the failures of paranoid practices through Louise's experiences, the novel utilizes a style that thwarts readers committed to paranoid reading and to decoding clues to ascertain the characters' secrets. Sedgwick argues that paranoid reading has prevailed as such a dominant mode of criticism that "to apply a hermeneutics of suspicion is, I believe, widely understood as a mandatory injunction rather than a possibility among other possibilities" (*TF* 125). The narrative's refusal to reward a paranoid reader helps to explain why, as Langer documents, the initial readers of *Money for Love* found it unpleasant (105), and why, despite its reissue by the feminist Arno Press in 1977, critics have continued to struggle to make sense of the novel's accomplishments. Serious scholarly attention to the novel seems to have been foreclosed, at least to some degree, because readers have accepted Herbst's criticisms of the novel as justification for disregarding it. But Herbst's correspondence indicates the novel's terse style was an intentional artistic innovation designed to suit the novel's content, and a reparative reading of the novel underscores the effectiveness of this innovation.

Like Harriet's behavior in the novel, the narrative style does not often gratify the paranoid reader who attempts to derive pleasure from practicing a hermeneutics of suspicion. As in Herbst's other novels, the narration in *Money for Love* enters the consciousnesses of its various characters, providing direct accounts of their thoughts and memories. But this narration also stands out in comparison to that of Herbst's other novels because of its particularly terse use of language, which is largely devoid of insightful or ironic narrative commentary. The narrative commentary in *Money for Love*

rarely helps illuminate characters' thoughts, actions, and motivations for the reader. In some cases, the characters' private thoughts are laid bare through direct narration. At other points, the narration poses questions that are impossible to answer through the practice of paranoid reading. The narration hints at details about the characters' secrets but it often remains impossible, even for the most paranoid reader, to confirm the contents of those secrets through a consolidation of contextual clues.

One demonstrative example of the way the narration raises the existence of secrets but frustrates a paranoid reader attempting to ascertain them is the novel's depiction of Harriet's Aunt Rachel and her secrets. In one scene, Harriet, Louise, Joseph, and Carl return to the women's apartment during an evening of drinking, only to discover that Harriet's Aunt Rachel is waiting there. The narration indicates that "everyone looked uncomfortable" before this narration enters what seems to be the collective consciousness of all four young people, suggesting they are all experiencing the sense that "there didn't seem to be any place where they could feel at home." Switching to Aunt Rachel's perspective, the narration suggests she "was a little nervous but she tried to remember that it was her part as an older woman to put them at their ease." She attempts to do by telling them she went to a "spiritualist" (*ML* 158). But as she continues speaking, she withholds the only information about this visit they want to know. She says,

> "I don't see how [the spiritualist] knew. She just told me everything." She said it solemnly and looked at Harriet as if she alone could even imagine what the woman had told her. Everyone listened while Aunt Rachel told about the séance. The room was sort of dark. Then the spiritualist spoke up in a deep voice not at all like the voice she had used when they came into the room. Mrs. Blum had gone with Aunt Rachel and the spiritualist took first one and then the other.
>
> "How do you suppose they know," said Aunt Rachel. Carl tried to find out what had actually been told Aunt Rachel but she wouldn't tell. She had a far off look and her cheeks were flushed. (*ML* 159)

Aunt Rachel draws attention to a secret, but despite Carl's interest in the secret and her desire to put the young people at ease, she refuses to reveal it. She describes mundane details of the séance instead. The narration does not indicate whether Harriet understands the meaning of her aunt's knowing glance, nor does it ever confirm what the spiritualist has told Rachel. It is possible for a paranoid reader to connect this reference to curious disclosures the narration makes earlier in the novel. Recounting events that transpired before the novel begins, the narration indicates that Harriet gets her way with her father because she "said things nobody ever got wind of" (*ML* 72). On the next page, the narration states that when Harriet's father died suddenly, it was not Harriet's own mother, but Aunt Rachel who "had hysterics" and "stood out in the family as the stricken one" (*ML* 73). The narration gives no clear proof that these three secrets relate to one another, but paranoid readers might attempt to interpret them together. These details might suggest that Harriet knows why Rachel reacted so strongly to Mr. Everist's death. Rachel subsequently moves to New York, where Harriet is living, and ultimately gives Harriet a large sum of money. It is possible that these secrets relate to those choices, as well. But the narration of Harriet's thoughts and words never address her possible knowledge of her father's secrets or her Aunt Rachel's, and the narration does not offer enough clues to confirm or refute any interpretation of what these secrets might be. These details demonstrate how the novel's narration confounds a paranoid reader who expects to take pleasure in deciphering the characters' secrets, just as Rachel's description of the séance confounds Carl. The reader's frustration in attempting a paranoid reading of the text also resembles Louise's frustration in her efforts to determine Harriet's secrets and intervene in the progress of Harriet and Joseph's relationship.

Though Herbst indicated she was not wholly satisfied with the novel, her archived correspondence and public comments show that she was initially enthusiastic about it and that even after the novel became the subject of criticism, she remained convinced that she had accomplished what she set out to do. Before *Money for Love* was published, Herbst wrote to Katherine Anne Porter, "I tingled as I finished it off, and I think it beats *Nothing is Sacred* by a nose if not a tail" (JH to KAP 9 May 1929). Herbst also explained to Porter that she attempted a "more bare" narrative and "limited the book in time, to compress it into its most real and vital phase. It seemed to me that by doing that, I got what I was after" (JH to KAP 23 Sept. 1929). Herbst was irritated when Isador Schneider, a personal acquaintance of hers, compared her work to Ernest Hemingway's in *The Nation* in 1931 in order to criticize them both for engaging in what Schneider termed the "fetish of simplicity." Schneider indicates that Herbst's novels suffer because she "avoids the literary effects that she uses naturally in her speech" (185).[65] Elinore Langer echoes Schneider's critiques when she decries what she refers to as the novel's "flatness" (100) and Wiedemann suggests this style is efficient in Herbst's short fiction but monotonous in the novel (36). Langer also cites Herbst's published response to Schneider, in which Herbst writes she "never liked [*Money for Love*], do not like it now, and have always considered it pinched" (qtd. in Langer 101). But Herbst's response to Schneider's critique also reiterated that she had meant for the novel's style to facilitate the message of its content. In her published letter of response, she writes, "the machinery dominated the content in this case, and not by chance" ("Counterblast" 275). In her correspondence with Porter about Schneider's review, she again insists that she felt she had utilized the

[65] Herbst was so frustrated by Schneider's criticisms, which she felt mischaracterized her work, that she wrote Katherine Anne Porter to ask her to respond to him in print (JH to KAP 18 Feb. 1931).

"bareness" of the novel's style "successfully" despite her decision to discontinue this "method" in her subsequent work (JH to KAP 18 Feb. 1931).

While Herbst and Hemingway were close friends and contemporaries, the comparisons Schneider, other reviewers, and Langer make between *Money for Love* and Hemingway's fiction are most interesting to note because Hemingway explicitly advocated for the type of paranoid reading that *Money for Love* thwarts.[66] Hemingway wrote the famous description of his method in *Death in the Afternoon* (1932) only one year after the publication of Schneider's critique. Hemingway explains,

> If a writer of prose knows enough of what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of movement of an ice-berg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water. A writer who omits things because he does not know them only makes hollow places in his writing. (154)

Here, Hemingway indicates that good writers communicate with their readers through a formalized practice that can be understood as very similar to open secrecy. Hemingway's description of his method presumes consistency between what "things" the writer communicates indirectly and what "things" the reader is able to perceive. Given this dynamic, the writer retains authority over what is communicated even when he does so indirectly. Hemingway's confidence that his work will effectively communicate his unstated but intended meaning is understandable for a male writer whose work earned considerable critical acclaim from its earliest publication. But circumstances were different for Herbst. One reviewer in *The Saturday Review of Literature* felt comfortable writing of *Money for Love*, "Mr. Hemingway's still waters run deep; Miss Herbst's do not" and characterizing the ongoing turmoil two women endure following abortions as

[66] For details about Herbst and Hemingway's friendship, see Langer 101-112, 178, 211-223, and 307-315.

"so emotionless that it becomes false to human nature" ("The New Books" 570). Yet Herbst's concern with abortion was clearly not shared by those who reviewed the novel. The abortion plotlines are not mentioned in this review nor those published in notable periodicals including *The American Mercury*, *The Bookman*, *The Outlook*, or *The Nation*. These responses, many of which criticize the novel on the grounds that reviewers did not find it pleasurable to read, indicate that Herbst's attention to the dynamics of open secrecy, especially that regarding abortion, made it impossible for her to "omit" things from her writing with the expectation that others would interpret those omissions as she intended.

In its form and its content, *Money for Love* demonstrates an aversion to paranoid practices, considers the degree to which people disclosing private information can be manipulated, and yet indicates that under some circumstances, risky disclosures can achieve positive ends and facilitate common understanding. The critical dismissal of the novel indicates that to some degree, the risks Herbst took in the novel failed to make its claims about abortion, open secrecy, and the oppression of vulnerable women in ways that members of the literary community found compelling. And yet, given Herbst's inability to find a publisher for *Following the Circle,* it is possible to recognize that *Money for Love* achieved considerable success by being published, by securing reviews in major periodicals, and in so doing, ensuring that its contents would be remain accessible to interested readers.

The disclosures that *Money for Love* is willing to risk making are those that reveal, first, that women who have sex outside of marriage and who conceive children within marriages alike are willing to utilize abortion to control their reproduction and

improve their lives. In so doing, the novel acknowledges the minoritizing and universalizing views of abortion that *Following the Circle* documented but failed to make public. It insists that these views of abortion regulate women's reproduction and cost them their lives. *Money for Love* also uses these plotlines to insist that women in oppressive conditions are always vulnerable to others who can attempt to ascertain their secrets for pernicious purposes. The novel insists that, as a result, women who have been vilified and exploited can improve their lives by being careful about the conditions under which they disclose of their secrets. Because the novel's publication has kept it in circulation, it remains accessible to readers willing to acknowledge its significant focus upon a woman who is committed to overcoming the way she has been victimized in the past. She does so through conscious attempts to secure the future of her choosing and by recognizing the necessity of refusing to discipline her own behavior according to the demands of others. Indeed, *Money for Love* may prove to be a novel that can only be appreciated over the course of time. Years after writing her politely critical review, Katherine Anne Porter wrote Herbst that she had read the novel again recently and despite her "one reservation," she believed *Money for Love* "is a beautiful full compact book. Every line tells something, moves the story along, it is full of the most sharp and telling comments on character. Blieve me, I'm waiting your next." A reparative reading reveals that even Porter's "one reservation," that "I feel your characters had more to them than you were willing to admit," may have been part of the point (KAP to JH 1 June 1931).

## Reproductive Injustice as a Catalyst for Political Activism in Herbst's Trexler Trilogy

In the 1930s, Josephine Herbst published three novels that she regarded as a trilogy: *Pity is Not Enough* (1933), *The Executioner Waits* (1934), and *Rope of Gold* (1939). The novels take place predominantly in the United States between the 1860s and the 1930s, documenting four generations in the lives of the Trexler family. When the trilogy begins, the Trexlers are a working class white family who live in Pennsylvania, and by its end, they occupy all regions and economic classes in the United States. Indeed, they are a fictionalized version of Herbst's mother's extended family, and Victoria Wendell Chance, whose mother is a Trexler, is based largely on Herbst herself. While Herbst was still alive, critics including Walter Rideout and David Madden analyzed the trilogy as an example of radical and proletarian fiction, comparing it to *U.S.A.* by John Dos Passos and *Studs Lonigan* by James T. Farrell.[67] But Herbst's own opposition to the idea of proletarian fiction as a genre are well documented, and as she writes in a letter Madden quotes, she "felt that my own writing has been considerably damaged by the category" (xv). Celia Betsky called for critics to "reconsider" the Trexler trilogy in 1978, arguing that it deserves to be evaluated both as "a political document" and "as a work of art" (45). Feminists have taken an interest in the Trexler trilogy since then, and as Rabinowitz shows, the trilogy is well classified as an example of "women's revolutionary fiction" of the 1930s. Rabinowitz defines this as a genre within which the "context,

[67] Analysis of Herbst and her Trexler trilogy is often absent from major twenty-first century studies of fiction about working class politics. She is not mentioned in *Class and the Making of American Literature: Created Unequal* (2014) or *Critical Approaches to American Working-Class Literature* (2011), and she is only mentioned in a footnote in *American Working-Class Literature: An Anthology* (2006). Notable exceptions are *The Novel and the American Left* (2004), which includes chapters written by Joy Castro and Caren Irr about Herbst novels, and Nicholas Spencer's extended reading of the Trexler trilogy in *After Utopia* (2006), his study of spatial concerns in radical American fiction (59-98).

content, and form of white women's" fiction provides "differently gendered narratives of class struggle" than the novels written by men during the period (3).[68] However, the political commentary included in the trilogy is often treated as a departure from the concerns Herbst addresses in her novels of the 1920s, rather than a continuation or development of them, even by those scholars who acknowledge Herbst likely would not have perceived things this way (Bevilaqua 31, Wiedemann 44-45, 72). Further, the trilogy's artistry and its theorization of the political function of literary disclosures have been given much less critical attention than the trilogy's radical politics.

The analysis that follows will show that the Trexler trilogy can best be understood as a continuation of Hersbt's concerns from the 1920s, but there were key changes in her life before the publication of the trilogy that influenced its contents. Herbst found Marxist ideas compelling when she traveled to Russia in 1930. She participated in large-scale Leftist political events thereafter, like The Farmer's Second National Conference in 1933, even though she never officially joined the Communist Party. Langer speculates this may have been because she objected to the sexism demonstrated by Communist leaders and remained more committed to writing as a form of political resistance. John Herrmann, the man Herbst married in 1926, joined the party sometime around 1931, after which he abandoned his career as a writer to focus on political activism. Langer suggests this put a strain on their marriage that was "less a divergence of principle than it was of practice" (123). Langer concludes that the trilogy became the "chief repository" both of Herbst's "economic radicalism" and of her "feelings about women and men" (122).[69]

[68] Indeed, Herbst wrote to Madden that she preferred the term "revolutionary" over the "proletarian" label (xvii).

[69] For more on Herbst's adoption of and opposition to leftist politics, see especially Langer 115-123 and Rabinowitz 138-139, 157-170).

Herbst's feelings about men and women also underwent significant changes during this period. In 1932, while working on *Pity is Not Enough*, Herbst began a romantic affair with Marion Greenwood, her first documented female lover. As the opening of this chapter documents, it was during their relationship that Herbst helped Greenwood procure an abortion and recover from it. This affair and this abortion are not directly fictionalized in the trilogy. Rabinowitz speculates that Herbst chose to depict her autobiographically informed protagonist, Victoria, having an extramarital affair with a man, instead of a woman, out of a "desire not to offend the extremely homophobic leadership of the Communist Party." Citing Elsa Dixler, Rabinowitz also points out that the Communist Party's homophobic attitudes were related to the fact that at the time, "motherhood was being saluted by the Party as woman's highest goal" (168). These insights highlight the degree to which Herbst and Greenwood's relationship and Greenwood's abortion could have been perceived as a particularly egregious violations of acceptable behavior by Herbst's political allies.[70]

When Herbst's use of an innovative form, her continuing engagement with issues of secrecy and disclosure, and the trilogy's depictions of abortion, reproductive difficulties, and maternal losses are examined, it becomes clear the Trilogy develops the concerns that Herbst's previous novels address while incorporating her changing perspectives to significant ends. The trilogy utilizes a form within which the main

[70] The sexism of the Left in the 1930s and the impact of this sexism upon Leftist women writers has long been a focus of feminist criticism. In her 1981 analysis of Tillie Olsen's life and experience, for example, Rosenfelt examines the contradictions women like Olsen and Herbst faced. She shows that the "Left was a profoundly masculinist world in many of its human relationships, in the orientation of its literature, and even in the language used to articulate its cultural criticism" even while "the Left gave serious attention to women's issues" and "valued women's contributions to public as well as to private life." This created a complicated literary landscape within which women like Olsen and Herbst participated ("From the Thirties" 381).

narration is periodically interrupted with what Herbst called "interpretive inserts."[71] These inserts depict short scenes and anecdotes that give context for the portions of the main narrative they interrupt and, in so doing, enhance the meaning of the main narrative. The shifting perspectives articulated within the main narrative and the interpretive inserts also reveal how the characters are constantly navigating the boundaries of secrecy as they make important disclosures. As the following analysis will show, some of the interpretive inserts draw attention to the information they refuse to disclose, while some make explicit and political disclosures, taking the form of reportage that was popular among 1930s writers of the Left and which Herbst herself was perhaps best known for writing.

Like its form, the Trexler trilogy's content also continues Herbst's developing attitudes toward secrecy and disclosure. Herbst may well have given Victoria a male lover because she wanted to avoid offending Communist leaders, but her ongoing awareness of how disclosures about stigmatized sexual behavior can be used to disempower people suggests this choice may also have been a means of protection and/or self-preservation. In her novels of the 1920s, Herbst addresses the vulnerability of those who do not abide by heterosexual norms by questioning the idealization of motherhood and by defending women who procure abortions after conceiving children outside of marriage. For the first time in Herbst's fiction, the Trexler trilogy also defends characters who depart from heterosexual norms by pursuing intimate relationships with members of their own gender. *Pity is Not Enough* and *The Executioner Waits* each acknowledge that these characters are vulnerable because non-heteronormative intimacies can be labeled as

[71] These sections have been referred to by critics as "intersections" (Irr 97), "inserts" (Bevilacqua 44), and "historical inserts" (Rabinowitz 159), but Hubler indicates that Herbst referred to them as "interpretive inserts" (84). In addition to being Herbst's own phrase, "interpretive inserts" captures both the way the narration of the inserts interprets the circumstances they document and the ways the inserts allow for a more nuanced interpretation of the main narrative.

obscene and because those who pursue them can be ostracized. The trilogy asserts that sometimes secrets like this need to be protected in order to prevent these characters from becoming further stigmatized and disempowered. But it is also in the trilogy that Herbst most extensively promotes disclosure of private information, by theorizing and demonstrating a model through which suppressed information can be productively and publicly shared. Victoria learns to use her writing to come to terms with her painful past, to advocate on behalf of oppressed people, to amplify their voices in order to resist the regulation of their lives and perspectives, and to instigate social and political change.

Further, the trilogy continues Herbst's interest in issues of reproduction and maternity, and it remains faithful to Herbst's advocacy for women's access to reproductive control. *Pity is Not Enough* is dedicated to the memory of Herbst's sister Helen, who died following an abortion thirteen years before the novel was published. Victoria Wendell Chance is born into a family fraught with reproductive and maternal difficulties, endures the death of her sister during an unwanted pregnancy, and suffers her own maternal loss when her baby is stillborn. Rabinowitz claims that "one of the central developments of women's revolutionary literature in the 1930s was the incorporation of social events and political responses into the female body" (41). The Trexler trilogy's attention to the ways that reproduction, reproductive difficulties, and abortion are inextricably tied to women's economic conditions both demonstrates this claim and complicates it. For Herbst, this was not an innovation of the 1930s; it was a continuation of the concerns she had foregrounded in her novels since 1925.[72] In the trilogy, Herbst

[72] Agnes Smedley's important first novel, *Daughter of the Earth* (1929), is often recognized as a watershed text due to its depiction of the reproductive, economic, and racial obstacles women face. These include women's dependence on men and their struggles related to pregnancy, abortion, death in childbirth, and prostitution. Rosenfelt has argued, for example, that "no work in the thirties, indeed no fiction until our

again insists on women's rights to reproductive control and depicts safe abortion as a desirable solution to unwanted pregnancy. In certain moments, Herbst's novels of the 1920s acknowledge similarities between the oppression women suffer as a result of secrecy about abortion and the oppression other groups of people face in a capitalist, patriarchal, and nativist society. But it is in the Trexler trilogy that Herbst develops these connections at length and in depth, and wherein the desire to rectify the wrongs of reproductive regulation and maternal loss motivate characters to pursue broader social and political activism.

The trilogy emphasizes the importance of protecting the secrets of vulnerable people from its very first pages. *Pity is Not Enough* begins with a brief interpretive insert wherein Anne Trexler Wendel refuses to disclose to her daughters, including Victoria, why her deceased brother Joe "ran away" and why she calls him "poor Joe" (*Pity is Not Enough* 1).[73] The daughters adopt the position of spectators eager to ascertain Joe's secrets, anxiously gathering details about his life to try to make sense of their mother's comments. They are "ashamed" when they learn he was involved in a scandal and adopted an alias, but they "didn't feel that way anymore" once they discover a newspaper clipping that suggests Joe suffered from mental illness late in his life (*PNE* 4). When this discovery forces Anne's daughters to question the judgments they made while attempting to discern his secrets, they adopt the sympathy for their uncle that their mother has tried

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own era, provides as thorough and harrowing a discussion of the intersecting oppressions imposed by gender and by class" as *Daughter of the Earth* ("Getting Into the Game" 369). The praise of Smedley's novel is well earned, and these concerns were certainly taken up by a growing number of published novels written by American women in the 1930s. But *Daughter of the Earth* and Herbst's *Money for Love* were both published in 1929 by Coward-McCann, and Herbst's novel addresses many of the same concerns Smedley has been praised for documenting. Herbst's inability to publish *Following the Circle*, which grapples with several of these issues four years prior, suggests that other woman-authored novels about what Rosenfelt calls the "intersecting oppressions imposed by gender and by class" may have been similarly suppressed until publishers grew increasingly willing to distribute them.

[73] Subsequent citations of this text will be abbreviated as *PNE*.

to advocate all along. Anne's secrecy about her brother does not succeed in keeping his secrets kept, but her sympathy for him does influence her daughters into developing a similar attitude toward his circumstances. Indeed, this sympathy is demonstrated in Victoria's own name, which she is given to honor her Uncle Joe as a reference to his chosen alias. This opening interpretive insert encourages readers to consider Joe's actions, which are subsequently documented in the main narrative of *Pity is Not Enough*, from Anne's generous and sympathetic perspective.

Existing scholarship does not yet address how Joe's attempts to practice heteronormativity are fraught, nor have critics acknowledged that his most intimate bonds are with other men. But these details are relevant to the trilogy's insistence that his legacy must be evaluated with nuance and Anne's sense of him as a man who has suffered more than he deserved. *Pity is Not Enough* most explicitly addresses the stigmatization Joe endures for behavior deemed unsuitable according to definitions of masculinity when his older brother Aaron makes a comment about Joe being a "dandy" in order to undermine Joe's standing in the family. Their sister Catherine chastises Aaron, asking "why must you always sneer and belittle like that?" (*PNE* 24). As the details of Joe's life unfold, he grows increasingly reluctant to satisfy expectations of masculinity and heteronormativity. After he becomes embroiled in controversial business dealings in the South, he flees the region, leaving behind allegations of criminal activity and abandoning the woman he is engaged to marry. He eventually does marry a different woman, but he relies upon an intimate male friend to help him endure the emotional and sexual dysfunction of this marriage.[74] When Anne repeatedly calls him "poor Joe" but refuses to acknowledge what

[74] Joe's strong attachment to other men and his aversion to heterosexual norms have yet to be addressed by critics, but they are not hard to detect. While Joe's brothers are both sexually promiscuous, Joe's sexual

she means by this term, she attempts to protect his legacy by obscuring the details of his lived experience that she thinks may subject him to further scorn, including not only his criminal behavior but also his departures from masculine norms and his non-heterosexual intimacies.

*The Executioner Waits* includes one scene that specifically addresses the ridicule endured by those who engage in intimate relationships with members of the same gender and their need to keep details of those relationships private. Sue Trexler, daughter of the wealthiest Trexler brother and one of Victoria's cousins, develops an intimate bond with another young woman after the death of the young man Sue is engaged to marry. Though Sue's friend is also engaged to a man, the members of Sue's family are uneasy about the friendship. At one point, her brother Dave discovers Sue writing what he suspects to be a love letter immediately after he has a dispute with their father. Dave insists on seeing the letter, suggesting he has been "worried" about her. When Sue demands to know why her friendship with the woman could be worrisome, he says "there's a name for that kind of thing but I won't tell you." He rips her letter attempting to read it, acting "as if to wrench her secret from her." When Sue refuses to allow him to do so, Dave says "it's time you

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interests prior to marriage are mentioned only once, when Joe's male friend invites him to visit a brothel. In this scene, no heterosexual activity is narrated, and the emphasis is placed instead upon the connection between the men. The narration indicates, "it was almost midnight when they came out together leaning toward one another like weak reeds (*PNE* 35-36). Joe finally gets married after he is pressured to do so by a woman his entire family regards as manipulative. The narration suggests, "in his misery and desire for quiet somewhere, [Joe] married Agnes" (*PNE* 305). Joe admits to himself that "out of misery, he would collapse and try to make love to her. But it was an ordeal to get into bed with such a woman. He never knew what it might turn out to be" (*PNE* 335). They do not conceive any children (*PNE* 329). When his health begins to deteriorate, his younger brother David thinks it must be the result of a sexually transmitted disease contracted from a woman, because he has lived in "those mining camps and all," but he is told by Joe's doctor that this is "positively not" the source of Joe's ailments (*PNE* 354). Ultimately, it is his closest friend, John, who supports Joe as he loses his grip on reality. Throughout their friendship, Joe proves his claim that he "would do more" for this friend "than he would for his own brother (*PNE* 329), and John certainly does more for Joe than his own brothers do. John twice writes to Joe's female relatives to advise them about the necessity of attending to Joe's mental health. As a result, they are able to bring Joe back home before he dies.

got some sense. You and that girl are too mooney to suit me." Finally, Sue breaks down, screaming "I'm sick of hearing such talk" and asserting "this is all I've got, a friendship is all I've got and you want to spoil that. You want to degrade everything and what is it all about?" as she cries (*The Executioner Waits* 208-209).[75] In this scene, Dave directs his anger toward his father at a more vulnerable family member, and the invocation of homosexuality allows him to assert the dominance over his sister that he is unable to achieve with his father. Throughout the trilogy, characters who attempt to protect the sensitive information of vulnerable individuals do not always succeed. But the contents of Sue's letter to her friend are kept secret both from her brother and from readers of the novel. By refusing to disclose the information Sue seeks to protect, the narration underscores the necessity of protecting those who can be ostracized and disempowered by the negative judgments of others. As in *Money for Love*, the Trexler trilogy asserts that some information must be kept secret to protect the vulnerable, but for the first time in Herbst's fiction, this recognition of vulnerability includes not only those who have sex outside of marriage but also those whose intimate relationships conspicuously defy heteronormative conventions.

While the trilogy protects information about these types of intimacies, and does not depict Herbst's relationship with Greenwood or Greenwood's abortion, these novels continue to demonstrate Herbst's commitment to disclosing how much women suffer as a result of reproductive regulations. Over the course of the three novels, a remarkable scope of reproductive and maternal struggles is depicted. Because the trilogy is fundamentally concerned with social and economic inequalities, the depictions of motherhood tend to focus upon how women in vulnerable economic conditions suffer as

[75] Subsequent citations of this text will be abbreviated as *EW*.

a result of their inability to control their reproductive lives.[76] These details place the trilogy firmly within the tradition of women's revolutionary literature of the 1930s, which "foregrounded the need for contraception and abortion" and which is "bound together" as coherent tradition "by the ways it links class and gender" (Rabinowitz 61,62). But this reproductive focus has not yet been addressed by scholars interested in the trilogy's political interventions. For example, while Spencer conducts a thorough and illuminating argument about how Herbst positions the "domestic space" as that which "produces, sustains, and renews the political commitment" of many of the characters (82), he does not address their reproductive concerns.

Each of the novels in the trilogy examines the ways that the idealization of maternity and illegality of abortion disempower women. Midway through *The Executioner Waits*, Victoria's sister Rosamond attempts to terminate her pregnancy, seeks a doctor willing to perform an abortion, and dies before she can procure one. Like the similar characters in *Following the Circle* and in *Money for Love*, this Rosamond's experiences acknowledge the universalizing view of abortion by drawing attention to a

[76] *Pity is Not Enough* depicts barrenness (16-18), the interracial children born of the rape of enslaved black women by white owners (47), trials of New York City abortionists (51), a woman forced to vacate her home because her children are illegitimate, who then dies in childbirth (164), a pregnant woman walking until the point of exhaustion in an attempt to terminate her pregnancy (197), women who visit a pharmacists to request abortifacient medication (252), the realization that motherhood and marriage are not satisfying (314), the practice of douching (318), and sexual frustration resulting from a wife's sexual ignorance and her husband's impotence (315). In addition to the depiction of Rosamond's attempt to procure an abortion, *The Executioner Waits* features a mother unable to afford milk for her bottle-fed baby (20), children who become sickly because their mothers are too poor to feed them (157), high infant mortality rates (158), a woman with seven children who cannot provide for them (174), the mention of pennyroyal tea, a popular abortifacient (202), a woman who finds her life meaningless despite having children (231), and a woman who is angry and bitter upon the birth of her child (232). Both *Pity is Not Enough* and *The Executioner Waits* document Anne Wendel's escalating despair about how, despite the sincere love she has for her daughters and delight she takes in being their mother, she cannot provide them with what they need to be content, and is therefore not as fulfilled by motherhood as she has always hoped to be. *Rope of Gold*, in addition to paying repeated attention to Victoria's stillbirth, features "puny" babies as proof of inequality of opportunity (81), the likelihood that women who miscarry and cannot stop bleeding will die (226), the vulnerable position of a woman who conceives a child outside of marriage (280), the sale of douching tools in drugstores (400), and a woman's maternal sorrow about the deaths her children (406).

married woman's desire to utilize the procedure because she cannot financially support the child she conceives. This series of events places abortion at the center of the trilogy's analysis of reproductive and maternal difficulties, both formally and thematically. The memories, thoughts, and conversations Rosamond has as she considers her options provide a detailed description of the variables involved in the choice she must make, revealing that neither choice available to her is a good one. Though *The Executioner Waits* does not depict an actual abortion procedure, the novel condemns the ways that the systematic oppression of women leaves them with no reasonable solution to the problem of an unexpected pregnancy. *The Executioner Waits* widens the scope of Herbst's earlier depictions of similar characters, however, by using its innovative form to explicitly connect Rosamond's disempowerment with the oppression suffered by rural farmers and other Americans living in poverty. Further, through Victoria and Rosamond's husband Jerry Stauffer's subsequent political activism, the trilogy figures the desire to achieve broader social and economic justice as motivated by awareness of reproductive regulations that harm women.

Rosamond's main reason for attempting to terminate her pregnancy is poverty, and her husband Jerry Stauffer's service in the Great War is figured as a direct cause of his inability to gain suitable employment or to provide for his family. When he returns from the war, he is poor and he is ill-suited and unqualified for the jobs he can pursue in Detroit, where Rosamond is working in a medical clinic for poor families. He and Rosamond decide to move in with her parents in their rural small town after he reads in the paper that "old Congress had shelved" plans to give returning soldiers a bonus (*EW* 184). When Rosamond learns she is pregnant, she explains it is "not that she didn't want

one, she wanted several, but at this time how could they support it?" Her fear is exacerbated by her awareness of how poor mothers suffer, and she has "horrible dreams" in which "the skinny babies in the clinic at Detroit grinned and shook rattles at her like human skulls." Though she "hunted jobs with a kind of frenzy," she is unable to find one (*EW* 190). Rosamond writes her sister Victoria that her husband "Jerry can't find anything that pays more than $25 a week. Imagine rearing an infant on that?" (*EW* 191). Rosamond and Jerry's conditions establish poverty as a debilitating obstacle to pursuing their ambitions, including their desire for a family, even though they are a white married couple who work long hours when they can, who have familial support, and who want to have children.

Because of her circumstances, Rosamond must attempt to procure an abortion through the rural network of open secrecy among women. But this does not yield a suitable solution. She remembers "old wives tales that scared her" (*EW* 192) and takes "vile medicine" in hopes of terminating the pregnancy, but it does not work and makes her sick. Her older sister suggests some women "went through it again and again," so Rosamond "made the rounds of doctors but no one wanted to touch it. Only the poor get the cold shoulder, she told Jerry." Eventually, "a doctor of rather shady reputation agreed to do the job," but she is hesitant to allow him to perform the procedure because she remembers "with terrible clearness the poor women brought into the clinic, their insides poisoned forever, their wombs spoiled for all time, never to bear again. It would be awful to be injured so she could not have children" (*EW* 193). Rosamond plans to follow through with the abortion despite her fears because she retains positive ambitions for her future. She hopes it will give her the opportunity "to be free, that was all that she wanted.

To be well again. To have her body to herself" (*EW* 193). But the more Rosamond considers her options, the more she begins to feel that it is impossible to be both well and free. She goes for a drive and continues to accelerate the car because doing so feels momentarily liberating. When she slams into a "big dark truck," "Rosamond did not even know it" (*EW* 196). Thus, Rosamond dies while attempting to escape, even momentarily, the reality of the decision she is being forced to make. Her death draws attention to the fact that reproductive regulations which prevent women from controlling their own bodies also prevent them from achieving their professional, personal, and maternal ambitions.[77]

The main narration of the novel breaks immediately following Rosamond's crash, following this scene with an interpretive insert. The inclusion of these interpretative inserts in the main narrative remains consistent throughout all three novels in the trilogy and are the most noteworthy aspect of the trilogy's innovative form. The events narrated in the interpretive inserts occur in a later chronology, and as Betsky points out, as the trilogy progresses, the chronological distance between the main narrative and the interpretive inserts shortens (45). By the end, the events in the two sections are only around a year apart. Although Rabinowitz suggests this creates a "fractured" narrative wherein history and desire are separated (159), other critics emphasize the ways the interpretive inserts enhance the main narrative. Bevilacqua indicates, for example, that

[77] Critics are inconsistent in their reading of Rosamond's death. Bevilacqua indicates Rosamond dies from a "car accident that she seems unconsciously to have willed" (42). Rabinowitz calls Rosamond's death a "suicide" (169). Foley, whose comments about the trilogy imply negative judgment of homosexuality and female reproductive control, indicates that "Herbst, in *Rope of Gold*, suppresses mention of her sister's death from abortion." Foley refers to Herbst's sexual relationship with Greenwood and her sister's death from abortion as "disturbing authobiographical materials" that Herbst replaced "with tamer fictional analogues" (233). Ehrhardt proposes that "given editorial resistance to depictions of abortion in fiction, it is not surprising that Herbst chose to give Rosamond a more palatable death" (172). But even if this is true, this assessment neglects to examine what Herbst accomplishes by figuring the death as she does.

this form is an important aspect of the "social criticism" made by the trilogy (37). The juxtaposition of Rosamond's death with the interpretive insert that follows in *The Executioner Waits* serves as a demonstrative example of how the inclusion of these interpretive inserts enhances the plot development and the political commentary offered by the main narrative.

Rosamond's death, which takes place around 1919 or 1920, is juxtaposed with a scene that takes place among farmers in 1934. In this interpretive insert, a farmer challenges a government official, declaring, "You're not paying us relief… you're paying the banks relief" before describing his grievance at length (*EW* 197). The government official attempts to diffuse the farmers' frustrations by dismissing them and departing, but as he drives through the rural countryside, he acknowledges "the worst of it was, they were right. He groaned within himself," regretting his occupation (*EW* 198). His drive parallels the one Rosamond takes which results in her death, during which she looks out across the farmland and thinks "there is good rich living in the land and why should it get pinched off, why should people feel squeezed and beaten, it wasn't the fault of the land" (*EW* 195). As the government official in the interpretive insert drives, he reflects that the feuds between farmers and shopkeepers must continue to "brew" because, the narration indicates, "if the little storekeeper ever got it into his head that his friend, his only friend was the poor farmer, not the rich banker, where in hell would the system be then? I ask you, where would it be then, and where in hell would his job be too?" (*EW* 198). This juxtaposition serves as an example of Irr's broader claim that "the interrelation of Victoria and Rosamond's family history with U.S. history offers them a model by which to understand oppression and to find a collective solution to it" (89). But the interpretive

inserts like this one also illuminate and underscore these correlations for readers of the trilogy. This interpretive insert draws attention to the way Rosamond's systematic oppression is secured by policies the government puts in place, which result in her poverty, her husband's vulnerability following the war, and her lack of access to reproductive control. Her vulnerability is similar to that of the farmers, whose oppression is perpetuated by government programs that encourage conflict between storekeepers and farmers. This juxtaposition equates women's lack of reproductive control with the financial oppression of hardworking farmers and shopkeepers, while indicating that both struggles are products of a government that reinforces patriarchal, capitalist, and nativist distributions of power. Throughout the trilogy, these interpretive inserts offer political critiques that stand alone on their own merits *and* that provide nuance and elaboration for the portions of the main narrative they interrupt.

Rosamond's circumstances also play a central role in the novel's theorization of how written and verbal disclosures can facilitate political change and reparative healing. *Rope of Gold* theorizes this type of disclosure through Victoria's choice of a career as a writer and through the trilogy's final scene, where Rosamond's widower Jerry Stauffer facilitates a labor strike. This advocacy for political disclosure is important within a trilogy clearly committed to promoting political and social change, but it gains additional importance when it is recognized as the culmination of Herbst's ongoing consideration of how art can be used to disclose injustices that are suppressed, which dates back to her inability to find a publisher for *Following the Circle*.

The scene near the end of *Rope of Gold* wherein Victoria commits to a career as an investigative reporter and writer emphasizes her connection to other women who

experience reproductive difficulties and maternal losses. *Rope of Gold*'s documentation of Victoria's own maternal loss builds upon her sorrow about Rosamond's death, which is first established in *The Executioner Waits*, wherein Rosamond discloses her own despair about her lack of access to reproductive control in her letters to Victoria. *Rope of Gold* indicates that shortly before the main narrative of the novel begins, Victoria experiences the stillbirth of a baby she conceives with her husband Jonathan. Critics are inconsistent in their discussion of this incident, and they sometimes minimize the impact it has on Victoria's life.[78] But *Rope of Gold* makes clear that she perceives the stillbirth as the death of her child, and this loss has profound impacts on her life. Her inability to forget about her maternal loss is emphasized when she wonders, "must she be always looking, thinking, now he would be five, now he would be fifteen, and when she was old, search crowds for a young man's face?" (*Rope of Gold* 88).[79] Much later in the novel, she reflects on "what a painful thing it is to struggle and then bring out a dead child" (*RG* 315). Her sorrow about the stillbirth is also depicted as having a clear impact on her deteriorating relationship with Jonathan, and in the moments when Victoria reflects on the stillbirth, she often thinks of losing Rosamond as well. These details provide important context for Victoria's epiphany about the connections between maternal loss and political struggle, which helps her understand the convictions of other women whose children have died.

[78] The inconsistency with which critics describe this loss indicates that little attention has been paid to how Victoria feels about it. Hapke calls it a "miscarriage" (201). Ehrhardt suggests that "when [Victoria] becomes pregnant, [Jonathan] threatens to leave her if she has the baby. Before she makes her choice, she suffers a miscarriage" (172). However, a close reading of *Rope of Gold* confirms that Jonathan makes this threat long before she actually conceives a baby, and by the time she does, they both plan for her to keep the child.

[79] Subsequent citations of this text will be abbreviated as *RG*.

The pivotal scene in which Victoria commits her life to her journalism begins when she descends into despair upon learning that Jonathan never wants to see her again. She receives this news while traveling back from covering sugar strikes in Cuba, where she has gained unprecedented access to an isolated mountain community called Realengo. There, the inhabitants have refused to vacate their land despite the attempts of the sugar companies to claim it. The community leader, Lino, makes his expectations clear to Victoria. He tells her,

> [he] just wanted her to know, and through her, the world—and as he said this, his face grew terribly still, his lips firmed, and he looked at her steadily as if entrusting her now with an important duty that she must by no means forsake—that they meant to keep their land or die. (*RG* 384)

Jonathan's rejection makes Victoria unsure whether she will be capable of bringing Lino's request to fruition. But her attitude changes when she remembers that one of the women in Realengo has told her "life is hard with us… the children die." Reflecting on this comment, Victoria remembers that her own mother had a similar expression on her face "when Rosamond died" the day before her planned abortion, and Victoria also remembers that at that time, her mother had said "when I think of my mother's sorrows, I can bear this." The narration emphasizes that these recollections cause Victoria to reflect "how little she had understood then and at this moment, at the very point where her life had failed her, it began to come back to her" (*RG* 405). The woman in Realengo helps Victoria to recognize maternal loss as a price women pay because of the systems that oppress them. This realization helps Victoria garner the will to tell the stories of the oppressed because it helps her recognize a connection between this woman's suffering and the maternal losses suffered in her own family and indeed, in her own life. Rabinowitz highlights the importance of this moment as well, arguing that Victoria's

literary and political "commitment is the result of reconciling a series of memories about her mother, sister, and stillborn son" (138). But Rabinowitz's ultimate conclusion, that Victoria is relegated to the role of the "spectator" of the political movements she covers (171), does not account for the deep feeling of connection that Victoria's loss of her own child helps her establish with the woman in Realengo and her own mother. Rabinowitz's interpretations of Victoria's activism are illuminating, but her conclusion that Victoria cannot fully identify with mothers suggests that a woman whose child is stillborn is not a mother.[80]

Victoria's epiphany and commitment to political writing are, importantly, facilitated by her relationship with Kurt Becher, the male lover who serves as a fictionalized version of Herbst's female lover, Marion Greenwood. Victoria gains access to the Realengo community by mentioning Becher's name, which allows her to acquire insider information and gain inspiration through her understanding of maternal loss. While indirect, Becher's pivotal role in the development of Victoria's writing career and political activism suggests that although Herbst does not explicitly include her affair with a woman in the novel, her relationship with Greenwood influenced the ways the trilogy grapples with secrecy, disclosure, and political activism. Once Victoria's experiences in Realengo help her connect with these sugar strikers, she commits to telling the stories of those strikers, who "had fallen in the island left behind her and lay now in prisons or in death; those that lived waited in silence to speak one day again" (*RG* 406). It is from this

[80] Rabinowitz asserts that "because the body of the female intellectual cannot always be reclaimed in a maternal collectivity, her primary narrative entry into history is accomplished by speaking or writing from the spectatorial position of outsider" (170). Rabinowitz further asserts that because the female intellectual's body in *Rope of Gold* "remains both unmarked by labor and unscarred by maternity" (170), she "is a spectator, both speculator and spectacle of history" (171). Building upon Rabinowitz, Laura Hapke concludes, "the novel ultimately could not applaud nor integrate feminine professionalism" (203). But these readings do not fully account for the physical labor of delivering a stillborn baby and the maternal sorrow that Victoria feels as a result of that baby's death.

realization onward that Victoria recognizes herself as someone who can use her writing to give those who have been silenced the opportunity to be heard. This is her chosen manner of resisting the regulation of their speech. Victoria does not appear in the novel again after this scene, but her colleague later recalls that "they had written the sugar articles and a series on Cuban politics for the *New York Post* that was talked about for a few days" (*RG* 411). Public interest in the work Victoria did in Cuba may not have lasted long, but this reflection nonetheless suggests she has succeeded in achieving Lino's ambition that she will use her resources to share his message with the world.

The trilogy's innovative form also demonstrates the power and success of the model of artistic political activism that Victoria adopts in this scene. Her commitment to communicating the struggles and convictions of people who are oppressed and exploited makes it possible to recognize her as the author of the trilogy's interpretive inserts. The interpretive insert that opens *Pity is Not Enough* makes clear that it has been written by one of Anne Wendel's daughters, and by the end of *Rope of Gold*, Victoria's presence in each of the locations documented in the interpretive inserts is either confirmed or plausible.[81] The trilogy's theorization of political activism and the role of writing is enhanced through the positioning of Victoria as the writer of the interpretive inserts. When they are read independently, the interpretive inserts make it is possible to trace the development of Victoria's political awareness, which begins within her own family, gradually expands outward into the rural areas surrounding her hometown, and finally broadens to address national and international concerns in the style of reportage. The content of the inserts also makes it possible to trace the development of Victoria's

[81] One of the excerpts Madden quotes from Herbst's letter to him also supports this interpretation. There, she indicated "the inserts dealt with the explosive episodes which related to the development of the one character who was continuous in the trilogy" (xx).

narrative style and perspective, which initially focus on her own experience but gradually become more committed to articulating and amplifying the lives and struggles of the vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups she observes and/or works alongside. In an interpretive insert that appears in *Rope of Gold* before the narration of Victoria's visit to Cuba, for example, a Cuban sugar cane worker describes his labor, his poverty, and his relationship to political resistance. Victoria's own presence is only acknowledged by the man's references to the "lady" to whom he is speaking (*RG* 222). This demonstrates Victoria's commitment to using her writing to amplify the voices of those who have been exploited and oppressed. As the interpretive insert that follows Rosamond's death shows, these passages also enhance the political commentary of the main narrative. In the trilogy, then, Herbst yet again succeeds in developing an innovative form of narration that further articulates her message. The novel's form demonstrates how communication between those inside and outside the conflict emotionally restores those involved and allows them to work together to render that conflict intelligible to outsiders. Victoria is able to draw from her own past experiences which threaten to suppress her voice, including her maternal loss and the death of her sister, and turn them into motivation to amplify the voices of those whose conditions have otherwise left them unable to speak or be understood.

Victoria's form of political activism, in which she uses her writing to make suppressed disclosures perceptible to the outside world, is also advocated by the final scene in the trilogy, which depicts a scene of more explicit political resistance. Surprisingly, the specific dynamics of this scene have not been given much attention even by critics who analyze the trilogy's political content. Steve Carson, another protagonist of

*Rope of Gold,* participates in a successful labor strike when he and other factory employees occupy the factory itself. As Rabinowitz points out, Steve's developing political activism is often paired with Victoria's developing journalism career (166, 168). Significantly, it is in this scene that Rosamond's husband, Jerry Stauffer, returns to the main action of the novel. Jerry's role in the strike is emphasized when Steve reflects on the strike's success.

> Steve was going over and over it in his mind, the high moment when the union sound-truck began talking to the boys inside right over the heads of the police and the company yes-men milling around in the crowd like specks of pepper. What a wonderful invention a sound-car was. It had talked right out loud, and he heard again Jerry Stauffer's voice, almost as even and clear as if he were talking to them earlier in the year in the basements of fellows' homes, telling them not to be scared, that they had their constitutional rights and must fight for them. (*RG* 425)

The strike that concludes *Rope of Gold* thus bears clear resemblance to the innovative Flint Sit-Down Strike of 1936 and 1937. There, participants achieved what has been called the "first major victory for unionization in America's history" by efficiently interrupting the factory's production because they rendered the plant inaccessible to strike breakers (Tuncer).[82] But Steve's reflection draws attention to the fact that the factory workers succeed because they adopt a resistance strategy very similar to the residents of Realengo, who refuse to vacate their own land despite outside pressure. Steve's reflections also emphasize that the strikers succeed because Jerry has a long history of creating solidarity and credibility with the factory workers, is willing to publicly speak up during the strike, and is able to project his voice above those who attempt to shut the strike down. The technology of the sound-car makes it possible for Jerry to be heard both by the strikers who occupy the factory and by those who seek to

[82] This strike was also significant because it led to "immediate wage increases," inspired others to stage similar strikes, and initiated a spike in union membership (Tuncer).

disrupt the strike. Again, this strategy parallels that of the residents of Realengo, who allow Victoria into their vigilantly guarded community, share their convictions with her, and ask her to communicate their message to the outside world. Instead of utilizing a sound-car, Victoria uses her reporting and writing as a technology through which to affirm and amplify the message of the oppressed. The trilogy thus suggests that internal resistance is necessary and that it can be particularly effective when it is promoted by an advocate who amplifies the demands of the oppressed to those outside the conflict. Further, both Jerry and Victoria are considerably motivated to engage in political action as a result of the death Rosamond suffers because she is unable to access reproductive control. This conclusion emphasizes, on a personal level, that by committing themselves to political activism, Victoria and Jerry have begun to succeed in opposing the systems of power that regulated Rosamond's reproductive options and, in so doing, caused her death.

The Trexler trilogy begins with an interpretive insert that addresses the need to protect the secrets of the vulnerable from exploitation and ends with this scene, drawing focus to the way Herbst advocates for both the careful disclosure of suppressed information and the protection of private information throughout the trilogy. The trilogy insists that literature can be used to make disclosures that contest the oppressive conditions enforced by open secrecy and censorship, but it also insists upon guarding against disclosures that would exacerbate those oppressive conditions. The Trexler trilogy, by advocating for all Americans whose lives are oppressed by capitalist distributions of power, thus serves as a culmination of Herbst's developing theorization of the delicate balance between the necessity of amplifying the perspectives and

experiences of people who are disempowered and protecting the type of information that is too dangerous to reveal. The trilogy's revolutionary political insights have been rightly lauded by critics. As this analysis shows, all three novels draw explicit connections between maternal loss, the reproductive regulations that disempower women, and the disempowerment of vulnerable American citizens and residents due to their class, gender, and/or country or culture of origin. For the first time in Herbst's career, the trilogy also explicitly addresses the danger faced by those whose relational intimacies resist heterosexual norms. This acknowledgement expands upon the critique of the heteronormative institution of marriage that characterizes Herbst's earlier novels, which examine how the institution of marriage is strengthened by the enforced secrecy about abortion that endangers women.

Rather than marking a departure from Herbst's earlier interests, the contents of *Pity is Not Enough*, *The Executioner Waits*, and *Rope of Gold* function together to most fully develop and articulate Herbst's resistance to reproductive regulations, her advocacy for women's reproductive control, her theorization of the power dynamics of secrecy and disclosure, her advocacy for vulnerable American citizens and residents, and her criticisms of patriarchy, heteronormativity, and capitalism. When all six of Herbst's novels of the 1920s and 1930s are read together, considered in context with Leslie Reagan's insights about open secrecy about abortion, and illuminated by D.A. Miller and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's theorization about secrecy, disclosure, and heteronormativity, the contributions Herbst makes through her fiction come into clearer view. These six novels demonstrate the ways Herbst's own life was powerfully impacted by the secrecy around abortion and non-heteronormative sexual activity. Further, these novels prove that

despite the risks this reproductive focus posed to her own economic stability and her literary reputation, she remained committed to illuminating the consequences women face due to reproductive regulations and to showing how these reproductive regulations relate to the ways that the lives of other vulnerable people are regulated and oppressed, as well.

# Chapter 3 — Black Mothers, Reproductive Regulation, and Narratives of Disavowal in Katherine Anne Porter's Miranda Stories

Scholars and biographers studying Katherine Anne Porter's life and work periodically examine her depictions of reproductive issues and her attitudes toward race, but her stories about Miranda address the intersection of these concerns in ways that criticism has yet to acknowledge. In 1942 a letter to her beloved nephew Paul, Porter considers what she calls "the whole race question." She speculates that there is "perhaps a certain tension that exists yet between even the most intelligent persons of the black and white races in this country." She hopes that this tension "can be overcome, outlived, not by denying the past, but by understanding it" (KAP to PPJ 29 Nov. 1942). Some of her attitudes pertaining to the "race question" are troubling, and biographers have done the important work of criticizing the instances of prejudice she demonstrated later in her life.[83] And yet, the Miranda stories Porter wrote in the 1920s and 1930s demonstrate the writer's sincere concern about the history of relationships between black and white people in the United States and her willingness to grapple with implications of that history. Porter's examination of racial issues is most pronounced in the seven short stories that comprise *The Old Order*, which feature Miranda and the Southern white

[83] Janis P. Stout examines Porter's private comments about black people most extensively. In *A Sense of the Times*, she concludes that Porter demonstrated "undeniable prejudice against African Americans" which intensified in her later years (110). But Stout also suggests these prejudiced attitudes exist in conflict with Porter's fiction, where she "created black characters of dignity and complexity who would seem to imply a perspective of sensitivity and acceptance" (134). Porter's earlier correspondence does periodically document her objections to racial prejudice, like a letter she wrote to her nephew Paul in 1944. There, she describes campaigning for President Franklin D. Roosevelt in upstate New York, indicates she will be attending a "Negro Democratic meeting" the following night, and condemns "bands of young toughs, horribly like the Hitler toughs I saw in action in Germany in 1931," who "go about at night painting the word Jew in big black letters on shops and housefronts" (KAP to PPJ 28 October 1944).

family from which she descends. When these stories are read together with *Old Mortality* and *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, which also feature Miranda and were written in the 1930s, it is possible to recognize how Miranda's family history of slave ownership continues to influence her well into the twentieth century.[84]

Importantly, these stories depict Miranda as sensitive to reproductive issues, particularly the reproductive regulation and exploitation of enslaved and emancipated black women. Porter's own reproductive complications and losses in the years prior to the composition of these stories devastated her. She had been heartbroken by the death of her beloved 6 year old niece in 1919, procured at least one risky abortion in 1921, suffered the stillbirth of a child in 1924, and was forced to undergo surgery to remove her ovaries in 1926, which rendered her sterile.[85] Indeed, the significance of the name "Miranda" captures the complexity of Porter's own past and her inability to have

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[84] Though there are some inconsistencies regarding Miranda's family in *The Old Order*, *Old Mortality*, and *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, her character remains consistent across all of them, justifying the practice of reading them as related texts. Six of the stories that comprise final *The Old Order* sequence were written in the late 1920s and 1930s, published in various periodicals between 1936 and 1941, and published together in *The Leaning Tower and Other Stories* in 1941, which Porter dedicated Paul Porter, Jr. *Old Mortality* and *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* were published individually in 1937 and 1939, respectively, and published together with *Noon Wine* in a volume titled *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* in 1939. In 1955, Porter published another collection called *The Old Order: Stories of the South*, which included the six stories from the original *The Old Order* sequence, *Old Mortality*, and three other previously published stories unrelated to Miranda. "The Fig Tree" was discovered in Porter's papers later in life, published independently in 1960, and finally joined the published sequence of *The Old Order* in the edition of *The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter* that was first published in 1965. Her personal letters indicate that she finished writing "The Fig Tree" in early 1928 (KAP to JH ca. Jan.-Feb. 1928, KAP to GPH 5 March 1928). Some critics include Porter's short story "Holiday" in the Miranda stories. But the protagonist of this story is never named, the story makes no specific reference to the large extended family that plays such a key role in the other Miranda stories, and the events that transpire in "Holiday" do not show up in the other stories that feature Miranda. Further, Porter began "Holiday" early in her career but did not complete it until just before its 1960 publication.

[85] Porter's reproductive difficulties were subject to much speculation until Porter scholar Darlene Harbour Unrue published *Katherine Anne Porter: The Life of An Artist* in 2005. Therein, Unrue carefully catalogues records which indicate that Porter likely suffered a stillbirth or miscarriage in 1910 or 1911 (46); had an abortion in 1921 (86-87); considered aborting another pregnancy before deciding to keep the baby, but delivered the baby stillborn in 1924 (100-104, 154); and was forced her to undergo surgery to remove her ovaries in 1926, leaving her sterile (107). Porter was also devastated by the death of her beloved six year old niece, Mary Alice, in 1919 (*Katherine Anne Porter* 64, 107). These cumulative reproductive and maternal difficulties help to explain why, in 1960, Porter told a friend "sadly that she had lost children in all the ways one could" (*Katherine Anne Porter* 246).

children. Biographer Darlene Harbour Unrue indicates that while anticipating the arrival of the child Porter had planned to keep, she had decided to name the baby "Miranda" (*Katherine Anne Porter* 104). After that baby was stillborn, Porter gave the name "Miranda" to her most famous protagonist—a character whose experiences are deeply informed by Porter's own past and that of her Southern family, some of whom had enslaved black people prior to emancipation.

In Dorothy Roberts's landmark historical study, *Killing the Black Body* (1997), she examines the intersection of white supremacy and reproduction in ways that usefully illuminate Porter's Miranda stories. Roberts argues that "the denial of Black reproductive autonomy serves the interests of white supremacy" (5), and she traces the influence of "whites' domination of slave women's wombs to sustain the system of slavery" through the twentieth century. Roberts argues that this practice served as a model that facilitated "the use of sterilization as a remedy for social problems," which was widely advocated by eugenicists and targeted specifically at black women and immigrants in the twentieth century (61).[86] While there seems to be no published record outside her fiction of Porter acknowledging the myriad ways black women have suffered due to the regulation of their reproduction, the sensitivity of these depictions in her fiction may be explained by the sorrow Porter experienced due to her inability to have children on her own terms. Roberts's fundamentally important work focuses primarily upon the effects that

[86] Roberts's research demonstrates that between 1929 and 1941, roughly the same period during which Porter was writing the Miranda stories, "more than 2,000 eugenic sterilizations were performed each year in the United States," and that researchers estimate "that a total of over 70,000 persons were involuntarily sterilized under these statutes" (89). Many researchers who study the birth control movement recognize that the white fear of "race suicide" promoted by eugenicists and birth control opponents alike helped pave the way for these sterilization statutes. But Roberts is unique in recognizing that the fear of "race suicide" was "just one manifestation of an intense nativism" that also resulted "in vicious race riots across the country." As a demonstrative example, she refers to those in Chicago in 1919, which consisted "primarily of whites against Blacks and natives against immigrants" (Roberts 60).

reproductive regulations have had upon black women and, by extension, black people. But Roberts also indicates that the regulation of black women impacts women more broadly, which is relevant to Toni Morrison's insistence that it is important to study "the impact of racism on those who perpetuate it" and to investigate "what racial ideology does to the mind, imagination, and behavior of masters" (*Playing in the Dark* 11, 12).

Porter's Miranda stories explicitly engage with these questions, examining the impact reproductive exploitation has upon black women themselves while also theorizing the impact these actions have upon Miranda and her white family members, who seize control of black women's bodies and of the narratives the family tells. These stories grapple with some of the important historical conditions and consequences that were ignored by prominent American birth control advocates in their campaigns to legalize contraception. As researchers have shown, many early twentieth century birth control advocates were actively racist and pursued the legalization of contraception in part to suppress reproduction among black Americans, particularly in the South (Roberts 76-78, Gordon 233-237). Porter's Miranda stories do not directly address contraception or abortion, but they demonstrate that any form of regulation that prevents specific women from controlling their own reproductive potential can lead to the regulation of women of all races and backgrounds. As a result, these stories expose the danger inherent in the choices American birth control advocates made to ally themselves with eugenicists, adopt eugenic rhetoric, and embrace eugenic science, all of which prioritized reproduction among white Americans and advocated for reproductive regulation of the "unfit."

The stories within *The Old Order* that most prominently feature Miranda's grandmother Sophia Jane, the family matriarch, document how she reproduces her own

white Southern patriarchal family by exploiting the reproductive potential and maternal labor of Nannie, the enslaved woman she forces to care for her children. By depicting their lives from Sophia Jane's point of view, "The Journey" also shows how she crafts a narrative about Nannie as a willfully subservient mammy that normalizes Nannie's exploitation and obscures her own responsibility for that exploitation. "The Last Leaf" affirms Nannie's humanity by showing how she manages to grasp power through her maternal labor, to reject the role of the mammy, and in so doing, to cause the white grandchildren to realize their family has mistreated her. The stories within *The Old Order* that focus on Miranda reveal that she is aware of, and particularly sensitive about, her family's exploitation of Nannie and other black mothers. Miranda grapples with the discomfort she feels as the beneficiary of Nannie's maternal labor by alternating between renouncing the things she stands to gain through that labor and practicing the family habit of ignoring this exploitation. Shifting focus slightly, *Old Mortality* indicates that the family's regulation of black women's reproductive capabilities sets a precedent for their control of the reproduction of the young white women within the family. They promote family narratives that normalize this regulation and obscure its damaging effects on women, but Miranda's sensitivity to this type of exploitation compels her to attempt to reject the family and these narratives. Miranda's awareness of the suffering of Nannie and other black mothers returns in *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, shaping the ways she deals with the crises of the Great War, the influenza pandemic of 1919, and the death of her lover.

Throughout these stories, Porter emphasizes the role that family narratives play in the reproduction of prejudice. When readers recognize that Porter draws attention to

these prejudices by narrating the stories from these characters' own flawed perspectives, it becomes clear that the regulation of black women's reproductive potential has profound consequences for those black women and the families who exploit them. The stories emphasize that those in control rely heavily on carefully crafted, self-satisfying narratives which normalize the reproductive regulation of black women by disavowing responsibility for the suffering those women endure. These narratives function both to obscure black women's suffering, and in so doing, to render white women subject to similar control. Even though Sophia Jane identifies with the patriarchal oppression Nannie experiences, she chooses to secure her own power within that structure rather than to challenge it, and she does so by participating in the reproduction of damaging narratives. Once Sophia Jane's perspective is recognized as fallible, it becomes clear that she is complicit in Nannie's exploitation both because of her actions and because she promotes a self-serving narrative. Though Porter exposes Sophia Jane's fallibility and self-interest through the use of shifting narrative perspectives across the Miranda stories, the way these stories implicate Sophia Jane in Nannie's suffering have not often been acknowledged by critics. The subtlety with which the stories critique the prejudices of slave owners speaks to the difficulty women writers faced in addressing these issues during this period. But though it may have been impossible for a writer like Porter to publish fiction that interrogates white women's exploitation of black women more explicitly, she manages to use her fiction to expose Sophia Jane and the consequences of her behavior in ways that are profound and effective despite their subtlety.

Through the use of these shifting narrative perspectives, Porter criticizes the narratives of slavery nostalgia that were common in the United States during the Jim Crow era, particularly among Southern writers. Because Sophia Jane crafts narratives that obscure her own complicity in Nannie's suffering in the attempt to secure her own power within the white Southern patriarchal system that oppresses her, Sophia Jane's choices also bear a striking resemblance to the choices of early American birth control advocates. As the introduction to this dissertation addresses in more depth, Margaret Sanger and other activists promoted narratives they hoped would normalize the practice of contraception among married white women who were American-born, able-bodied, and members of the middle and upper classes. In so doing, these birth control advocates ignored and obscured the suffering of non-white, immigrant, poor, disabled, and otherwise vulnerable women. Miranda's experiences reveal the inhumanity of obscuring the suffering of the most vulnerable members of society while also showing that those who perpetuate this inhumanity cannot escape facing its dangerous consequences in their own lives.

Porter's Miranda stories emphasize that the white Southern patriarchal family reproduces itself by controlling women's reproductive potential and by controlling the narratives about those women and the reproductive regulations they face. And yet, the guarded hope of possibility for change exists in Miranda, who serves as proof that the suffering of black and white women who face reproductive regulation remains perceptible to those willing to look closely. A careful reading of her experiences with an eye turned toward race and reproduction indicate that white family members have difficulty escaping the legacy of enslavement and the narratives those families promote.

Miranda continues to experience anxiety and guilt about her family's role in the suffering of black women for generations to come, but she makes attempts to reconcile that anxiety and guilt in her own actions. Through her continued effort to grapple with these issues, Miranda attempts to understand the "race question" and racial "tension" by "understanding" the past, as Porter wrote her nephew that Americans must be willing to do.

## Sophia Jane's Mammification of Nannie in "The Source" and "The Journey"

The first two stories in the *The Old Order* sequence, "The Source" and "The Journey," focus on Sophia Jane, the family matriarch of a white Southern land owning family that enslaves black people. Central to this focus is Sophia Jane's relationship with Nannie, a black woman born into slavery who serves as Sophia Jane's companion, as wet nurse and caretaker to her children, and as caretaker to her grandchildren as well. While some existing scholarship takes notice of Nannie's importance, none of these studies consider the inconsistent ways she is characterized across the stories nor the emphasis the text places upon her maternal and reproductive labor. [87] Nannie's importance can be better recognized within the context of the work of scholars who have studied the complex interplay between white supremacy, slavery, gender, reproductive liberty, and maternity in the United States. Chief among Roberts's insights in *Killing the Black Body*

[87] Critics have recognized Nannie's changing role in the family, and in the stories, though few of them have followed up their insights with detailed analysis of her characterization. Stout finds, for example, that Nannie "is accorded great power and dignity as a character" ("Writing in the Borderlands"). Gary Cuiba suggests that because "Nannie grows from being a shadowy double of Sophia Jane to becoming a self-possessed woman who is finally more free than her white mistress," the stories in *The Old Order* "virtually enacts Morrison's reclamation of the Africanist presence in American literature" (78). Merricks considers Nannie's reproduction briefly in her analysis of how the stories in "*The Old Order*" critique the "obsession with commodity culture and its emphasis on production" within the southern plantation family (114), but she is less interested in how the reproductive focus of the texts relate to the racial dynamics documented in the stories.

is her argument that "regulating Black women's reproductive decisions has been a central aspect of racial oppression in America," which she first began to realize from "studying the lives of slave women… who fought to retain control over their reproductive lives" (6, 5). Jennifer L. Morgan takes up a similar point of inquiry in *Laboring Women* (2004), where she argues that slave owners created "an economic and moral environment in which the appropriation of a woman's children as well as her childbearing potential became rational and, indeed, natural" through the use of "outrageous images and callously indifferent strategies" (7). In *Mammy* (2008), Kimberly Wallace-Sanders examines the ways that the exploitation of black women's reproductive and maternal labor was normalized through the popular figure of the mammy, a stereotype which "shift[s] emphasis from slave labor to slave loyalty" (97). She focuses specifically on the mammy's maternity and role as a caretaker of white children, in addition to her domestic service, in order to show how the mammy functions as "symbol of voluntary peonage" that has served as "the center of white southern perception of the perfectly organized society" (Wallace-Sanders 1, 10, 7). Similarly, Roberts argues that the mammy is depicted as "the embodiment of the ideal Black woman" (13), while Wendy Wagner finds that fictionalized accounts of mammy figures serve as a "source of comfort and stability to white readers" (8).[88]

Examining Nannie's characterization within this context reveals how Sophia Jane exploits Nannie's reproductive and maternal labor in order to facilitate the reproduction

[88] George Boulukos, in his analysis of the trope of the "grateful slave," characterizes the mammy figure as something of a more specific successor of this earlier character. He indicates the "grateful slave" character helped to naturalize slavery because these figures were depicted as "so overwhelmed by passionate, irrational gratitude that they enthusiastically accept their state of slavery" (4). He suggests that this stock character was replaced around the 1830s, in part, by the "mammy," who shares some similarities with the "grateful slave," but whose specific purpose is to "legitimate[] the idea of slavery as familial and as a mutual emotional bond" (Boulukos 235).

of her white family and their wealth. Further, the stories reveal that Sophia Jane devotes a considerable amount of intellectual and emotional energy to controlling the narrative within which family members perceive Nannie. Sophia Jane characterizes Nannie as a willfully subservient black mammy.[89] In so doing, Sophia Jane also overemphasizes her own willingness to transgress typical norms of enslavement and proposes similarities between herself and Nannie intended to conflate their experiences, particularly in regards to reproduction and maternity. It is through manipulating the narrative within which Nannie can be perceived that Sophia Jane seeks to normalize her control of Nannie's reproductive potential, and in so doing, disavow her own responsibility for Nannie's exploitation. This demonstrates Sophia Jane's utilization of "strategies of escape from knowledge," a phrase Toni Morrison uses in her influential analysis of the ways white writers have managed to eliminate African Americans from their fiction. But within Sophia Jane's narrative, as Morrison indicates, these types of absences "call attention to themselves" ("Unspeakable Things Unspoken" 1013). If the narration of Sophia Jane's point of view is taken at face value, it appears that she manages rather successfully to control the way Nannie is perceived. But her narration invites readers to question her point of view by including details that suggest her characterization of Nannie and their relationship is inaccurate.

The first story in the *The Old Order* sequence, "The Source," sets up in brief many of the dynamics regarding control, maternity, and race that are explored in more

[89] The common mammy figure is a dark-skinned black woman who serves as a domestic servant in the white family's home and as a caretaker for their white children. Though she often has children of her own, which makes her available to serve as a wet nurse for the white family, she is typically depicted as asexual. She thinks of the family she serves as *her* white family; her relationship to the white children is foregrounded and her affection for them is emphasized. If her own black children are acknowledged at all, her treatment of them is depicted as harsh and severe in comparison to her treatment to the white children. See Wagner 7-10, Roberts 13-16, and Wallace-Sanders 2-7.

depth in the stories that follow. This first story describes Sophia Jane's yearly pilgrimage to re-establish her form of order at a farm she owns in the country. The narration refers to her exclusively as "the Grandmother" and creates an explicit link between her desire to control what happens on her property and her role as a mother. The narration indicates that she asks about the crops, the "Negroes," and the animals on the property "as if she enquired after her favorite child" (*The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter* 321).[90] Though these events take place well after emancipation, the story makes clear that Sophia Jane retains almost complete control over the black workers who live on her property. After describing the specific details of the demands Sophia Jane makes of these workers, the narration connects her behavior to the family's slave owning past, suggesting "for two weeks this would go on, with the Grandmother a tireless, just and efficient slave driver of every creature on the place" (*CS* 324). But the details included contest the idea that a slave driver's actions can be called "just." For example, when Sophia Jane considers the list of "annoyances" that "had to be soothed at once," among them is the fact that a three-year old black child "was acting like she was deef" for months after laudanum is used to treat her earache (*CS* 324). This strikes Sophia Jane as no more concerning than the fact that one black woman has complained that she "needed a little sugar for her cawfy" (*CS* 323). Nannie is introduced to the sequence of stories for the first time with a sentence that reads "Leaving Aunt Nannie, who had been nurse to her children, in charge of the town house, [Sophia Jane] set out on her journey" (*CS* 322). This brief but telling detail acknowledges that the entire enterprise Sophia Jane undertakes at the country home is possible only because she is able to leave Nannie in charge of her home in town. By referring to Sophia Jane's actions in this story as a *journey* dependent upon Nannie's

[90] Subsequent citations of this text will be abbreviated as *CS*.

labor, this sentence establishes the dynamic between the two women that will be explored in considerably more detail in the next story, itself called "The Journey."

Unlike "The Source," which utilizes narration that describes Sophia Jane's actions with a slight degree of ironic critical distance, the narration of "The Journey" examines Sophia Jane's perspective by adopting it. Existing scholarship on "The Journey" often fails to acknowledge the alignment of the story's narration with Sophia Jane's own values, attitudes, and habits of mind, implying instead that Porter herself is the story's narrator or treating the story's narration as reliable.[91] But recognizing that this account describes Sophia Jane's experiences only as *she* perceives them invites a reconsideration of those events and a critical analysis of the perspective from which they are depicted. This narration follows a recognizable pattern in its characterization of the two mothers, its description of the relationship between them, and its documentation of their attitudes toward reproduction and maternity. Time and again, this narration resembles both the pro-slavery literature of Sophia Jane's time and the literature of slavery nostalgia common in Porter's time by insisting that Nannie is a beloved mammy and family

[91] While scholars have examined how the narration in other stories in the sequence adopts the perspective Miranda, none have recognized the narrative perspective of "The Journey" as synonymous with Sophia Jane's point of view. The failure to account for the form and shifting narrative perspective of the stories has resulted in interpretations that lack necessary nuance. For instance, Jan Bloemendaal performs an extensive analysis of Porter's depictions of race. But this analysis is incomplete given his assertion that Porter herself is the "narrator" of all the stories in "*The Old Order*" (114), despite their internal inconsistencies. Recognizing that the narration of "The Journey" is unreliable, and should be understood as representative of Sophia Jane's point of view, helps to clarify the seemingly contradictory claims some critics make about the relationship between Sophia Jane and Nannie. While Cuiba argues that Sophia Jane "overmasters blackness at every opportunity" (62-63), he still argues that the experiences of the two women mirror each other, and that "Sophia Jane and Nannie spend their old age as virtual soul mates in 'The Journey'" (79). While Chandra Wells performs a thorough analysis of the interracial friendship between Sophia Jane and Nannie, she also frequently indicates that the point of view depicted by the narration is Katherine Anne Porter's own. Wells acknowledges that "The Journey" juxtaposes the disparity between Sophia Jane and Nannie's experiences, and suggests the text includes a "quiet irony" that is generated "by interpolating references to Nannie's suffering" (766). But because she regards this to be an afterthought, rather than a carefully utilized aesthetic strategy, she interprets the complacent narrative that Porter exposes in this story as "Porter's revisionist agenda" instead of a perspective that the story self-consciously interrogates (768).

member, that Sophia Jane and Nannie's relationship is characterized by harmony and equality, and that Sophia Jane's treatment of Nannie is particularly gracious. However, Sophia Jane's attempt to use this narrative to bury proof of her responsibility for Nannie's exploitation is incomplete. In order to position Nannie as a willfully subservient mammy and herself as a benevolent slave owner, Sophia Jane's version of events must include the very details that expose the responsibility for Nannie's exploitation that Sophia Jane wishes to disavow.[92]

The first scene in which the narration follows the pattern of focusing on reproduction in order to celebrate the harmony purportedly enjoyed by a benevolent Sophia Jane and a willfully subservient Nannie takes place early in the story. Sophia Jane and Nannie reflect upon their grandchildren and their roles as mothers and grandmothers. After Nannie calls her grandchildren a "wuthless, shiftless lot, jes plain scum," a new paragraph begins, which reads:

> The Grandmother defended [Nannie's grandchildren], and dispraised her own second generation—heartily, too, for she sincerely found grave faults in them—which Nannie defended in turn. "When they are little, they trample on your feet, and when they grow up they trample on your heart." This was about all there as to say about children in any generation, but the fascination of the theme was endless. They said it thoroughly over and over with thousands of small variations, with always an example among their own friends or family connections to prove it. They had enough material for their own. Grandmother had borne eleven children, Nannie thirteen. They boasted of it. Grandmother would say, "I am the mother of eleven children," in a faintly amazed tone, as if she hardly expected to be believed, or could even quite believe it herself. But she could still point to nine of them. Nannie had lost ten of hers. They were all buried in Kentucky. Nannie never doubted or expected anyone else to doubt she had children. Her boasting was of another order. "Thirteen of 'em," she would

[92] Sarah Robertson makes a related point, suggesting "it is Sophia Jane who celebrates her own closeness with Nannie, who leads the family in its attempt to gloss over the family's dependence upon black labor" (253). But she does not discuss how the narrative form and perspective of "The Journey" demonstrate Sophia Jane's manipulation of the narrative about her life to her own advantage.

> say, in an appalled voice, "yas, my Lawd and my Redeemah, thirteen!" (*CS* 329-330)

Here, Nannie's criticisms of her own grandchildren and defense of Sophia Jane's grandchildren cast her in the mold of the stereotypical mammy figure who has a strong affection for the white children she serves while she is severe in her treatment of her own black children. The narration suggests the women are alike because each is more critical of her own grandchildren, and it takes care to emphasize Sophia Jane's willingness to criticize her white grandchildren. But the harmony the narration asserts between the women in this regard does not hold up. The way this passage refers to Sophia Jane as "the Grandmother" and to Nannie by her name underscores the way the passage centers Sophia Jane's experience of maternity and relegates Nannie's to the periphery, even as it insists that their experiences are equivalent.[93] Further, while the narration includes Nannie's critique of her grandchildren in her own words, and these critiques align with common stereotypes of black people as inferior, the faults Sophia Jane finds in her white grandchildren remain unnamed. Sophia Jane's purported defense of Nannie's grandchildren is equally hollow. Their positive qualities are not included in the narration, and their existence is not mentioned again within the story.

This passage also implies a level of equality between Sophia Jane and Nannie by suggesting they share the same attitude toward motherhood, derived from the fact that both women have had many children. But this apparent equality is undermined by the disclosure that most of Nannie's children, themselves born into slavery, have died. Historical records from this period support the radical discrepancy between Sophia Jane

[93] Though the narration most frequently calls Sophia Jane "Grandmother," this chapter refers to her by her name for precisely this reason. Referring to each woman by her given name counteracts the centering of Sophia Jane and her experiences that this narration enacts at the level of language and at the level of plot.

and Nannie's children's survival rates. Roberts indicates that in 1850, the infant mortality rate among black children doubled that of whites, and fewer than 2 out of 3 black children lived to age ten (36). But the narration glosses over this discrepancy quickly, refusing to consider that it might influence either woman's attitudes toward motherhood. Even when the narration acknowledges that Nannie's "boasting" about the number of children she has borne "was of a another order" than Sophia Jane's boasting about the same, it does not reflect on why this might be the case. By adopting Sophia Jane's perspective, this narration shows that she chooses to perceive her circumstances as similar to Nannie's in order to bury any knowledge she has of her responsibility for Nannie's maternal losses.

The narration also suggests that Sophia Jane imagines harmony and equality between herself and Nannie by thinking of Nannie as a woman who is grateful to Sophia Jane for claiming her as a well-loved member of Sophia Jane's family. Claiming kinship with the people they enslaved was a way for slave-owning families to naturalize their ownership of other people. And yet, the narration of how Sophia Jane symbolically claims Nannie as a family member reveals not equality, but the degree of power she wields over Nannie's life. The narration of "The Journey" indicates that because Nannie does not know the year or date of her birth,

> Sophia Jane, aged ten, opened a calendar at random, closed her eyes, and marked a date unseen with a pen. So it turned out that Nannie's birthday thereafter fell on June 11, and the year, Miss Sophia Jane decided, should be 1827, her own birth-year, making Nannie just three months younger than her mistress. Sophia Jane then made an entry of Nannie's birth-date in the family Bible, inserting it just below her own. "Nannie Gay," she wrote, in stiff careful letters, "(black)," and though there was some uproar when this was discovered, the ink was long since sunk deeply into the paper, and besides no one was really upset enough to have it scratched out.

> There it remained, one of their pleasantest points of reference. (*CS* 328-329)

This passage praises Sophia Jane's willingness to include Nannie in the family by suggesting she transgresses expected behavior to claim Nannie as something of an equal. Sophia Jane's inscription does depart from conventional slave owning behavior, because births of enslaved people were typically recorded in the family business ledger, not the family Bible (Roberts 24). But in praising Sophia Jane, the narration includes details that show how this inscription demonstrates the control she has over Nannie and the conditions of Nannie's life. By assigning Nannie a birth date, Sophia Jane claims authority over Nannie's birth. By writing Nannie's name in the family Bible *beneath* her own and by giving Nannie the white family's last name, Sophia Jane literally fabricates Nannie's position in the family as an inferior one. And by noting Nannie's racial difference, Sophia Jane shows that the act of claiming kinship with the people they enslave is a way for slave owners to assert racial difference, rather than to disavow it. It is only because of the importance white people have attributed to race that Sophia Jane is able to act in this way.

Further, the assertion that this is "one of their pleasantest points of reference" both suggests that Nannie appreciates Sophia Jane's action and indicates that her feelings are not distinguishable from those of the woman who owns her. This assertion serves as a demonstrative example of the way the narration of "The Journey" repeatedly indicates that Nannie is a stereotypical mammy who happily accepts Sophia Jane's control over her life. The common depiction of a mammy figure as grateful for her status as a member of the white family is powerful because it implies that she willfully accepts her inferior status within that family. By believing that she has graciously offered Nannie a role in the

family and that Nannie happily accepts that position, Sophia Jane demonstrates her belief in her own superiority and her belief in Nannie's inferiority. This hierarchy shows why she thinks it is acceptable for Nannie to be treated as property and why she thinks nothing of the fact that Nannie's body is subject to the family's control.[94]

The passage that describes Sophia Jane and Nannie's marriages continues to suggest that the women experience major life experiences pertinent to reproduction in the same ways. However, it also shows how, by commodifying Nannie's reproductive potential, Sophia Jane's family ensures that her wealth will grow while she is able to utilize Nannie as the mammy and wet nurse for her children. The paragraph that describes these marriages reads,

> Nannie had slept in a bed and had been playmate and work-fellow of her mistress; they fought on almost equal terms, Sophia Jane defending Nannie fiercely against any discipline but her own. When they were both seventeen years old, Miss Sophia Jane was married off in a very gay wedding. The house was jammed to the roof and everybody present was at least fourth cousin to everybody else. There were forty carriages and more than two hundred horses to look after for two days. When the last wheel disappeared down the lane (a number of guests lingered on for two weeks), the larders and bins were half empty and the place looked as if a troop of cavalry had been over it. A few days later Nannie was married off to a boy she had known ever since she came to the family, and they were given as a wedding present to Miss Sophia Jane. (*CS* 333)

[94] Further, the narration of this story repeatedly asserts knowledge of how Nannie feels about her enslavement. It indicates that Nannie "had no ideas at all as to her place in the world," "had all her life obeyed the authority nearest to her," (*CS* 328), and that the way she is treated by the white family "more than fulfilled her notions of good fortune" (*CS* 332). This narration also suggests that "Nannie, born in slavery, was pleased to think she would not die in it. She was wounded not so much by her state of being as by the word describing it. Emancipation was a sweet word to her" because it gives her the chance to tell her mistress "I aim to stay wid you as long as you'll have me" (*CS* 336). But some passages call these assertions into question by indicating Nannie is well aware that black people are mistreated. At one point, the narration acknowledges that Nannie wonders aloud "whether God, Who had been so cruel to black people on earth, might not continue His severity in the next world" (*CS* 337). Relatedly, Merricks points out the unreliability of the passage which describes how Sophia Jane claims Nannie as a personal plaything after Sophia Jane's father purchases her. Merricks suggests that the white family "chooses to hear the story as if it were a funny anecdote rather than a heartbreaking image of exploitation" (146).

The passage uses several techniques to equate and conflate the marriages of the two characters. It begins by suggesting they share a bed and emphasizing the "almost equal terms" of their early lives, praising Sophia Jane's willingness to defend Nannie from the discipline of others. It creates a linguistic parallel between the weddings by saying both young women are "married off" and insists that they "were both seventeen years old" at the time. Cuiba's argument that Sophia Jane and Nannie's experiences and behaviors mimic one another includes his suggestion that their lives "became still more symmetrical" through these marriages (79). But within the context of their relationship over the course of their lives, their shared childhood bed demonstrates Robin Bernstein's claim that "intimacy does not mitigate subjection, but instead constructs it at the deepest levels" (94).[95] And the narration's insistence on the parallel nature of their marriages is undermined, not only by the fact that Nannie's actual age is unknown, but also by the details about the lavishness of Sophia Jane's wedding. Further, the only real parallel between the marriages— that they take place within weeks of one another— is neither a sign of their equal status nor a coincidence.

By forcing Nannie to marry and gifting the couple to Sophia Jane, Sophia Jane's father allows his daughter to remain with her lifelong companion. But more importantly, this act also secures his daughter's status within their patriarchal society. It grants Sophia Jane's husband ownership of Nannie, her new husband, and their future children, and it ensures that Sophia Jane will be able to rely on Nannie as a mammy and wet nurse when she has her own children. Like the discrepancy in the survival rates of the white and black children, the family's use of Nannie as a wedding gift for Sophia Jane is

[95] In making this point, Bernstein also cites Saidiya V. Hartman, Ann Laura Stoler, and Laura Wexler's insights about how "physical tenderness can function as a necessary component of racial domination and violence" (94).

historically accurate. Morgan examines records of cases in which enslaved people were willed or gifted in male/female pairs, showing that this was done with the explicit intent of making the value of the gift increase when those couples reproduced (86). Morgan also finds that, as is the case for Nannie, enslaved people paired off for reproductive purposes were matched "with relatively little regard to the behavior, or the sentiment, of the women they enslaved." Morgan points out that it could not have escaped the attention of enslaved people that they were being gifted and bequeathed in pairs for reproductive reasons (91, 102-103). Further, slave owners often used the gifting of enslaved women as a sign of particular affection for the recipient of that gift precisely because the value of enslaved women could reproduce itself (Morgan 101).[96] Both marriages confirm the things Sophia Jane has been taught to value—that she has superior status, that her family has affection for her, and that her marriage will facilitate the reproduction of her family and her wealth. When the narration suggests, from her perspective, that marriage is yet another experience she and Nannie share on "almost equal terms," it is possible that her life experience and her family's values have rendered her incapable of recognizing just how much Nannie is exploited for her benefit.

But "The Journey" also introduces the suggestion that Sophia Jane recognizes injustices inherent in the patriarchal white family structure but chooses not to oppose them. Very early, the narration indicates that both Nannie and Sophia Jane "had questioned the burdensome rule they lived by every day of their lives" (*CS* 327), but they

[96] Merricks suggests that Sophia Jane's father's act of giving Nannie as a wedding gift is "a moment that seems ridiculously extravagant" (152). She does not address the historical context of this gift, but because this practice was fairly common and indeed intentionally extravagant, it further emphasizes Merricks's claim that Nannie's body and reproductive potential are commodified by the white family (119, 145). Porter's own family history also demonstrates that this practice was not uncommon. Stout suggests that Porter's paternal grandmother "had been given as a wedding present a slave whom she brought with her to Texas" (*A Sense of the Times* 3).

only rarely "hint" to one another about "how much suffering and confusion could have been built up and maintained on such a foundation." The narration emphasizes that Sophia Jane, in particular, feels obligated to keep silent, for "her own doubts and hesitations she concealed, also, she reminded herself, as a matter of duty" (*CS* 328). Given this acknowledgment, it is possible that Sophia Jane imagines and/or asserts equality between her marriage and Nannie's in order to conceal any doubts or hesitations she feels about the way Nannie is forced into marriage with a reproductive partner she does not choose, about the fact that Nannie has no control over her own life or that of her future children, and/or about the ways Nannie's reproductive body is treated as an asset to be used to enrich Sophia Jane's own white family.

The paragraph that follows the descriptions of Sophia Jane and Nannie's marriages describes the conditions under which the women reproduce and continues to conflate their experiences. Like the earlier examples, this passage overemphasizes similarities between their experiences, deemphasizes the differences between those experiences, and adopts a laudatory tone in describing Sophia Jane's treatment of Nannie. However, the details that the narration must disclose in order to praise Sophia Jane's behavior also have the effect of revealing how she exploits of Nannie's reproductive potential and maternal labor to her own benefit and to Nannie's detriment. This key passage about their reproductive lives is begins,

> Miss Sophia Jane and Nannie had then started their grim and terrible race of procreation, a child every sixteen months or so, with Nannie nursing both, and Sophia Jane, in dreadful discomfort, suppressing her milk with bandages and spirits of wine. When they each had produced their fourth child, Nannie almost died of puerperal fever. Sophia Jane nursed both children. She named the black baby Charlie, and her own child Stephen, and she fed them justly turn about, not favoring the white over the black, as Nannie felt obliged to do. Her husband was shocked,

> tried to forbid her; her mother came to see her and reasoned with her. They found her very difficult and quite stubborn. She had already begun to develop her implicit character, which was altogether just, humane, proud, and simple. (*CS* 334)

The tone and language of the passage suggest Sophia Jane and Nannie support one another in bearing the burden of reproduction. Both Stout and Wells celebrate Sophia Jane's transgression of society's codes through the choice to nurse Nannie's child, with Stout suggesting it demonstrates Sophia Jane's developing "moral discernment" (*Sense of the Times* 135) and Wells arguing it is an example of "female solidarity inspired by empathy and friendship" (767). But this passage also demonstrates that even when Sophia Jane feels the strongest solidarity with Nannie and acts in what can be recognized as a proto-feminist way, she centers her own experiences so considerably that she glosses over Nannie's near death as well as Nannie's obligation to feed her owner's children before her own. Instead of grappling with how Nannie's suffering necessitates Sophia Jane's intervention, this narration emphasizes Sophia Jane's pain in suppressing her milk, praises her willingness to nurse both children despite her family's objections, and applauds her willingness to give equal treatment to both children she nurses simultaneously.

The family conflict about Sophia Jane's choice to nurse Nannie's child also draws attention to how Nannie's role as a wet nurse benefits the white family. The family's stance hints at a main reason enslaved black women were forced to perform this maternal labor in the first place: to make it possible for the white family to reproduce more *rapidly*. Janet Golden argues that "infant feeding was not a woman's choice, but a family's decision," in part because breastfeeding delays ovulation, thus slowing down reproduction (13, 24). Thus, Sophia Jane's mother and husband attempt to pressure her to

put herself in the best position to conceive again more quickly than if she were to nurse each of her babies herself. Merricks recognizes this, pointing out that because Sophia Jane and Nannie share the nursing responsibilities, the white family is able to multiply "at a ridiculous rate at the expense of their servants" (152). And while Sophia Jane's choice to nurse Nannie's child is transgressive, this action is complicated by the fact that Sophia Jane's family *owns* the child she names Charlie, so nursing him has the potential to increase the value of her property. Golden documents a historical precedent for Sophia Jane's action, suggesting that plantation mistresses sometimes nursed enslaved infants because the death of these infants was "calculated in dollars as well as sentiment" (73). Further, Sophia Jane's ability to choose to nurse Charlie in defiance of the family's demands underscores Sophia Jane's privilege relative to Nannie, who has no choice about whether or not she will nurse Sophia Jane's children. Her enslavement requires her to serve as the wet nurse to white children as long as Sophia Jane demands it.[97]

In praising Sophia Jane for feeding both children "justly turn about, not favoring the white over the black, as Nannie felt obliged to do," and in admitting that Nannie nearly dies from puerperal fever, the passage also shows how Nannie's responsibilities as the white children's mammy endanger her and her black children. Puerperal fever is a generalized term used to describe a bacterial infection of the reproductive organs that a woman contracts following childbirth or a miscarriage (Cunningham et al. 682-694).[98] This brief detail suggests that Nannie gives birth in unsanitary conditions and/or does not

[97] Wells makes a similar point, suggesting that "even Sophia Jane's most poignant gestures of friendship reflect her greater agency" (771). However, she states this claim as a critique of the story rather than interpreting it as critique built into the story itself.

[98] In her personal library, Porter preserved a 1929 medical volume by Howard Wilcox Haggard, titled *Devils, Drugs, and Doctors: The Story of the Science of Healing from Medicine-Man to Doctor*, which describes puerperal fever and its causes at length (66-69, 86-89).

receive adequate medical care during and after the birth. This introduces the possibility that her children's deaths might also be explained by unsanitary, unsuitable living conditions. The priority Sophia Jane's children are given at Nannie's breast also suggests that Nannie's children do not have adequate access to nourishment or attention in their earliest days.[99] Roberts's research reveals that the conditions under which enslaved mothers were forced to live, including wet nursing arrangements and separation from their own children, contributed to the high infant and child mortality rates of enslaved children (25). Indeed, one of the very few details *The Old Order* includes about Nannie's children is that Charlie, the only black child given equal access to nourishment from the white mother, is one of Nannie's only three surviving children. As the passage continues, it explains that because Sophia Jane has a particular affection for him, Charlie is "brought up in the house as a playmate for her son Stephen, and exempted from hard work all his life" (*CS* 334). For Charlie, being nursed by the white mother gives him greater access to her nutritive milk and to her affections, resulting in a better chance at survival and a reprieve from work he otherwise would have been required to perform. The benefits Charlie enjoys as a result of being treated more like a white child highlight the degree to which his black siblings suffer as a result of being born into enslavement. What the narration itself calls a "race of procreation" is revealed to be not a shared experience between the two women, even if Sophia Jane genuinely perceives it as one, but rather, a competition in which white children are given priority while black children die.

[99] The mammy who also serves as a wet nurse is recognized by scholars as a literal representation of the more metaphorical ways that the mammy is forced to prioritize the white family and its reproduction. Wallace-Sanders suggests that images of healthy white babies being nursed by black women serve as a "reminder that the South has grown fat on slave labor and owes its wealth to African Americans" (5). Similarly, Wagner argues that the mammy plays an important role in "the reproduction of the white patriarchy" by making it possible for white children to prosper and allowing them to repeat the cycle of oppressing black people (8).

By treating the suffering of Nannie and her children as unremarkable, and by praising Sophia Jane's willingness to intervene in that suffering, the tone and language of this passage reveals that nursing Nannie's baby is a key occasion through which Sophia Jane can conceal any doubts or hesitations she has about the patriarchal white value system under which both she and Nannie live. She doesn't conceal her own suffering—indeed, focusing on her own discomfort and conflict is a means through which she conceals Nannie's suffering. Instead of grappling with Nannie's near death or the deaths of Nannie's children, Sophia Jane focuses on what she perceives as their common experiences and thinks of Nannie as indebted to her. This is particularly evident as the passage continues, when she tells her older sister, "I understand now… why the black mammies love their foster children. I love mine" (*CS* 334). Here, she verbally affirms the stereotypical understanding of the black mammy who has particular affection for the white children in her care. Then she goes a step farther, imagining that because she voluntarily nurses one child born to another mother, she can understand how enslaved black wet nurses feel about nursing the children that may someday own them. Sophia Jane's mental manipulation of the details of her circumstances helps her bury her knowledge of the ways that her family thrives while Nannie suffers and her children die. The narration suggests Sophia Jane may be so successful in this manipulation that she can conceal this knowledge even from her own conscious awareness, though she does not forget the details which prove Nannie's exploitation.

Patricia Yaeger examines Southern white women's fiction that depicts a similar unwillingness among white southerners to acknowledge the damaging and exploitative repercussions of their actions. But Yaeger's formulation does not quite capture the willful

disavowal of facts that Sophia Jane must practice to bury her awareness of her own implication in the system that exploits Nannie. Yaeger examines texts like Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind* (1936) and Eudora Welty's *Delta Wedding* (1946) in light of Morrison's insistence that white American authors engaged in considerable effort to remove the presence and full humanity of black Americans from their work. In so doing, Yaeger finds that these texts reveal white southerners' "refusal to think about" the ways that white supremacy benefits the lives of white people while exploiting and marginalizing the lives of black people (103). Yaeger uses the term the "unthought known" to describe this phenomenon (xiii), [100] and she concludes that fiction written by Southern women often "invents structures to get at this everyday world of white unseeing" (104). Similarly, through adopting Sophia Jane's perspective and showing how she manipulates the narrative within which Nannie is perceived, "The Journey" reveals ways that white Southern women denied the role that the black people they enslaved played in their lives. But this narration does not wholly erase black people from its contents, and invites more critique of Sophia Jane's perspective and behavior than Yaeger's formulation suggests. The narration of "The Journey" indicates that for Sophia Jane, what is known is *not* unthought. The narration from her perspective repeatedly mentions details which hint at the extent of Nannie's suffering, suggesting that Sophia Jane cannot put that suffering wholly out of mind, particularly in regards to reproduction and motherhood. But because she accepts it as her duty to conceal her objections to the patriarchal system that produces this suffering, Sophia Jane develops beliefs about herself and Nannie that allow her to imagine them as equals. Through these habits of mind, she

[100] Yaeger uses this term, first coined by Christopher Bollas in 1987, but clarifies that she wants "to wrest this idea from its psychological context and use it as a cognitive and political category for thinking about the South" (101).

seeks to disavow her implication in the system she recognizes as flawed and her responsibility for Nannie's exploitation and suffering. But because Porter shows that the way Sophia Jane characterizes herself and Nannie depends upon the former's careful structuring of the narrative about the latter's reproductive and maternal life, the details of Nannie's exploitation nonetheless remain within that narrative, conspicuous to those willing to approach Sophia Jane's perspective with a more critical eye.

## Nannie as a Radical Mammy Figure in "The Last Leaf"

While "The Journey" exposes Sophia Jane's characterization of Nannie as one that fits her self-serving narrative and includes details that undermine that characterization, the stories that follow validate and explore Nannie's humanity by shifting to focus on the perspectives of Sophia Jane's children and grandchildren. In so doing, these stories reveal that while Sophia Jane's positioning of Nannie as a beloved and willfully subservient mammy has influenced the children who have benefitted from Nannie's maternal labor, the power of this narrative is threatened by their exposure to Nannie's care. "The Last Leaf" warrants careful analysis of its own because it places Nannie at the center of its focus, rather than at the periphery. Its narration adopts the perspective of Sophia Jane's son Harry and his children, often depicting their thoughts and feelings in free indirect discourse, and showing how they struggle with the contradictions between Nannie's behavior and what they have been taught to believe about her. The story begins with Sophia Jane's death, which marks the end of her ability to exert control over Nannie's actual behavior as well as the end of her ability to control the family narrative about Nannie's role within the family. Through literary allusion,

"The Last Leaf" characterizes Sophia Jane's influence on Nannie's life as akin to a deadly disease and emphasizes that Nannie survives that influence by wielding the authority she claims through her maternal labor. While Nannie cannot escape the toll that her exploitation has taken upon her mind and body, her success in gaining independence from the white family is remarkable. This proves she is worthy of the kind of recognition Morgan asserts is past due for many enslaved women. Importantly, Nannie forces the children to reconsider the narrative Sophia Jane teaches them by rejecting her role as the family mammy and abandoning the relationships that facilitated that role. These changes cause Sophia Jane's grandchildren to begin to recognize how much the family has depended upon her, and as a result, stir up feelings of confusion and discomfort about the ways Nannie has been treated. In this story, Nannie serves as a significant example of what Wallace-Sanders calls a "radical mammy figure" (123) by defying the stereotypes of that character and inviting consideration of how that stereotype functions to reinforce black women's exploitation.

The title and plot of "The Last Leaf" utilize literary allusion in order to compare Nannie's ability to survive Sophia Jane's influence on her life with the survival of a fatal disease. Existing scholarship on Porter has not yet acknowledged the parallels between this story and one published with the same name in 1907 by O. Henry, but this use of allusion is another aesthetic strategy Porter uses to articulate her critiques of racist stereotypes and narratives.[101] O. Henry's "The Last Leaf" story features a personified "Mr. Pneumonia," who attacks even the weakest of victims without remorse, including a woman named Johnsy (505). Johnsy resigns herself to death when she contracts

[101] The parallels between the stories are immediately obvious, but this connection is underscored by the fact that O. Henry, whose given name was Sidney Porter, was a relative of Katherine Anne Porter's father (Johnston A1).

pneumonia, believing she will pass away once the last leaf on the ivy vine outside her window falls. Johnsy's roommate suggests that she has accepted death in this way because "she is very ill and weak" and "the fever has left her mind morbid and full of strange fancies" (Henry 508). In Porter's story, Nannie sits "expecting her own death momentarily" after Sophia Jane suggests their final parting may indeed be their "last farewell on earth" (*CS* 348). Nannie's body grows more and more frail as the white family continues to rely upon her labor. This allusion aligns Sophia Jane with Mr. Pneumonia and suggests that her influence on Nannie's life is akin to the deadly illness from which Johnsy suffers. Like Johnsy's pneumonia, Sophia Jane's treatment of Nannie over time has left her weak in body and spirit, willing to accept that her life is over because Sophia Jane suggests it is. But this is only their final parting because Sophia Jane dies before she returns. Nannie endures.

The plotting of Porter's "The Last Leaf" story draws attention to the important role Nannie's agency and resourcefulness play in her own survival, particularly her ability to make the children she cares for feel indebted to her maternal labor. In O. Henry's story, Johnsy survives pneumonia because she interprets the unexpected endurance of the leaf outside her window as a sign that she has been wrong to welcome her death. The story ends with a surprise twist characteristic of O. Henry's fiction: the surviving characters discover this leaf has been painted on the wall by a benevolent neighbor. Conversely, Porter's story ends with Sophia Jane's son Harry remembering how Nannie asserted her authority over him "in the old days." Though the rest of the story takes place in chronological order following Sophia Jane's final departure, this final paragraph enters Harry's consciousness as he remembers that by "slapping her slatty old

chest" and declaring "I nuhsed you at dis bosom!", Nannie has long been able to stir up a sense of indebtedness Harry and his brothers feel for "the womb that bore them, and the breast that suckled them" (*CS* 351).[102] Harry feels helpless to resist Nannie's demands when she does this, even though he knows she stopped acting as the family's wet nurse before he was born. By closing with this recollection, Porter's "The Last Leaf" story attributes Nannie's survival not to the intervention of a generous neighbor, as in O. Henry's story, but to Nannie's own ability to wrestle some authority out of the maternal labor she is forced to perform. As in O. Henry's story, this final detail provides necessary context for the recovery of the afflicted character that is narrated before it. Because the event Harry recalls takes place before the other events in this story, this ending also establishes an early precedent in Nannie's behavior for the greater agency she claims following Sophia Jane's death. Sophia Jane characterizes her as a grateful and willfully subservient companion and mammy, as shown in "The Journey," but Harry's memory of Nannie's ability to manipulate his behavior suggests she has long defied the mammy stereotype. When she slaps her chest and makes demands, she uses the presumed familial and maternal bond between them to her own advantage.

The ability Nannie demonstrates in this story to claim authority over her life, to decide how to spend her time, and to make her own money in her final years are examples of the type of agency Morgan praises enslaved women for acquiring. In her thorough study on the relationship between slavery and gender, Morgan advocates for placing critical emphasis on instances in which enslaved women "watched the landscape

[102] The publication history of "The Last Leaf" indicates that Porter wanted to place particular emphasis on Nannie's role as a wet nurse. When the story was originally published in the *Virginia Quarterly Review* in January 1935, it did not include the final clause of the quote above. Porter added "and the breast that suckled them" thereafter ("Two Plantation Portraits" 92).

for an opportunity to grab hold of some autonomy and did so" (195). Though Nannie is legally emancipated before "The Last Leaf" takes place, the amount of agency she is able to claim is illuminated by Morgan's critique of scholarship that expects black women living in oppression to assert absolute, explicit resistance to their circumstances—an expectation that surfaces even in Porter scholarship that takes Nannie's humanity seriously.[103] Harry's recollection of how Nannie has made him bend to her will by slapping her chest indicates she has always claimed some authority over the children she serves, even prior to her emancipation and Sophia Jane's death. The fact that Nannie achieves a considerable amount of independence in this story, despite her advanced age, is acknowledged but underexplored in existing Porter scholarship.[104] Once Sophia Jane is gone, Nannie convinces Harry to allow her to move away from the white family home and into her own cabin, discontinues her work in the service of others, and makes and sells rugs to "all kinds of white persons who had never owned a soul related to Nannie." The narration suggests that at this point, "she was no more the faithful old servant Nannie, a freed slave: she was an aged Bantu woman of independent means, sitting on the steps, breathing the free air" (*CS* 349). With its emphasis on Nannie's ability to utilize her maternal labor to her own benefit, and the suggestion that she enacts her own survival by claiming her independence, the story strikes an important note of guarded optimism

[103] Wells suggests that Porter's "emotional discomfort" with the subject matter is revealed because she interprets Nannie as failing to exhibit "overt hostility" or "covert expressions of resentment and resistance" toward Sophia Jane (774). Though Wells mentions that this is the case in the entire "published version of *The Old Order*" (774) and acknowledges that Nannie is further characterized in "The Last Leaf" (764, 771), her analysis and subsequent arguments focus on "The Journey" almost exclusively.

[104] Stout emphasizes this when she writes about "*The Old Order*" though she only discusses Nannie briefly. Stout suggests "one would be hard-pressed to find an image of the older black woman, seen from an external vantage by a white narrator, that more fully validates her as an individual and a social icon" (*Sense of the Times* 135) and reiterates in a later essay that Nannie "rejects subservience" and achieves "a new freedom to live in her own way" ("Writing in the Borderlands").

about a black woman's ability to reclaim ownership of her maternal labor despite its exploitation by white people.

"The Last Leaf" emphasizes Nannie's own agency in surviving the insidious effects of Sophia Jane's control over her life, but the story also makes clear that her life has been so difficult that she endures by retreating within herself spatially, relationally, physically, and emotionally. Once Sophia Jane is gone, Nannie practices habits that protect her from the outside influence of those who have played a role in her oppression. Spatially and relationally, she leaves the white family members and their home in favor of the cabin of her own. There, she practices a new level of autonomy, allowing people to visit her but insisting on living by herself. When her estranged husband, Jimbilly, implies that he would like to move in with her, she insists that the cabin "taint't no more than just enough fo' me," even though the cabin was previously occupied by a family (*CS* 351). Before Nannie leaves the white family and their home, the toll her exploited labor takes on her body is evident as she "grew silent, hunched over more deeply" and as "her spine seemed suddenly to have given way" (*CS* 348). The breakdown of her body continues even after she moves into her cabin, emphasizing the continued impact of this labor. The narration suggests, "the iris of the deep, withdrawn old eyes turned a chocolate brown and seemed to spread over the surface of the eyeball. As her sight failed, the eyelids crinkled and drew in, so that her face was like an eyeless mask" (*CS* 349). The ways her body changes mirror her spatial and relational withdrawal from her life with the white family, suggesting her body may also respond to its exploitation by retreating within itself and shielding itself from outside stimuli.[105] The story does not mention the frequent

[105] Yaeger contends that Nannie's "masked face is eyeless, refusing the look of others, but it is also sightless, blinded by years of other-directed labor. Nannie not only loses the pleasure of sight; she is unable

deaths of her children, nor attempt to grapple with how she may have felt about her maternal losses. But the narrative's unwillingness to broach her interior attitudes toward these maternal losses is consistent with its depiction of her as a woman who resists further exposure and retreats within herself to find relief.[106]

The penultimate depiction of Nannie, which appears immediately before the paragraph in which Harry reflects on her manner of claiming authority by slapping her chest, shows her finding peace by retreating within herself emotionally, as well. Nannie is sitting "by herself long after dark," still in need of rest to recover from the work she has done throughout her life.

> She had long ago got in the way of thinking that night was a blessing, it brought the time when she didn't have to work any more until tomorrow. Even after she stopped working for good and all, she still looked forward with longing to the night, as if all the accumulated fatigues of her life, lying now embedded in her bones, still begged for easement. But when night came, she remembered that she didn't have to get up in the morning

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to return the other's gaze" (221). While these insights are accurate, they take for granted that sight and the ability to return another's gaze is desirable for Nannie.

[106] Nannie appears in the fragmentary drafts of a story Porter began about the lynching of a black man, and in some pages of these drafts, the young man who is lynched is one of her descendants. These drafts include incomplete versions of a scene where Nannie condemns the white family she has served ("Lynching story, drafts, fragments"). This indicates that Porter was well aware that women in Nannie's position might feel intense disdain for the white people responsible for their suffering. But Porter ultimately chose not to publish any fiction that attempted to describe Nannie's interior feelings about that suffering, and some scholars have addressed the absence of frank discussion in "*The Old Order*" of how Nannie would have felt. Wells speculates that perhaps "Porter found it difficult to countenance the emotional discomfort that might be elicited by fully engaging with an African-American woman's perspective" (774). In her analysis of "The Journey," Merricks notes what she calls "the silence of the stories," noting briefly that while "Porter can tell the story of Sophia Jane's growth into motherhood," Porter "cannot tell Nannie's story because it would be far too painful and because it is inaccessible to her." Merricks is writing specifically about what she calls "the passage on breastfeeding" here (153), but her words apply to the stories at large. Regarding this issue, it is important to note that Nannie's suffering *would* have been largely incomprehensible to Porter, even though Porter experienced her own forms of maternal loss. Porter's refusal to broach Nannie's interiority about these issues can be understood as an acknowledgement of that fact. Indeed, Wallace-Sanders praises William Faulkner for his refusal to "intrude" in a black woman's moments of quiet contemplation in *The Sound in the Fury*, suggesting it would have been wrong for a white male writer "to try to explain what she is thinking or feeling" (124). Indeed, the danger of making assumptions about the interior lives of others more oppressed than oneself is demonstrated by the narration of "The Journey," which, by articulating the perspective of Sophia Jane, shows that she further oppresses Nannie by assuming she understands Nannie's thoughts, feelings, and values.

> until she was ready. So she would sit in the luxury of having at her disposal all of God's good time there was in this world. (*CS* 351)

This passage emphasizes that her body still aches with fatigue and that her thoughts continue to be shaped by the habits of mind she has used as coping mechanisms for survival throughout her long period of oppression. The feeling of obligation to do work is so ingrained in her experience that she has to re-remember every day that she has freed herself from the need to perform it. But Nannie, as she is depicted here, is very different from the Nannie the children can hear "groaning at night on her knees beside her bed, asking God to let her rest" immediately after Sophia Jane's final departure (*CS* 348). Her retreat within herself has allowed her to achieve a considerable amount of independence and to perceive having more time alive as a "luxury." Though "The Last Leaf" insists on depicting the lasting effects her enslavement and her suffering have had upon her, the degree of independence Nannie achieves in spite of this suffering makes her unique among Porter's female protagonists.[107]

Importantly, Nannie secures her independence through actions that undermine the characteristics of the willfully subservient mammy figure, making her what Wallace-Sanders calls a "radical mammy figure" (123). Wallace-Sanders's extensive analysis suggests that Porter's depiction of Nannie may be unique among mammy characters who appear in white-authored American fiction. Wallace-Sanders suggests Dilsey from William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) is "profoundly unique" in her study because Faulkner uncharacteristically grants Dilsey a few moments of "quiet

[107] Porter scholarship has examined at great length, and in great detail, how frequently her female characters strive for independence but fall short of achieving it, unable to fully escape the influence of their pasts. Esim Erdim's suggestion that "there is not a single one" among Porter's female protagonists "who has reached the stage of self-fulfillment through rebirth" provides a concise summary of the conclusions scholars have drawn about Porter's other female characters (64).

contemplation" while watching the weather before she resumes her labor in support of the white family (123, 124).[108] Wallace-Sanders finds this brief departure from depicting a woman in this role as willfully subservient and consumed by the needs of the white family as worthy of recognition. But Nannie, as she is depicted in "The Last Leaf," behaves in ways that even more explicitly undermine the mammy stereotype than Dilsey does. Because "The Last Leaf" is narrated largely through the perspective of Sophia Jane's grandchildren, it reveals how Nannie's abandonment of her role as their mammy forces them to reconsider what they have been taught about her and begin to feel uncomfortable about the way the family has treated her. Like her ability to get what she wants from Harry by slapping her chest and reminding him of his siblings' indebtedness to her maternal labor, she finds ways to force his children to realize their indebtedness to her and to demonstrate their gratitude to her.

Nannie's departure from the white family's home is troubling to Sophia Jane's grandchildren because it undermines their understanding of her as their devoted mammy and because it makes them realize how much they have depended upon her for their prosperity and comfort. The narration indicates that as she plans to leave the home, they are "astonished to discover that Nannie had always liked and hoped to own certain things, she had seemed so contented and wantless" (*CS* 349). When Nannie periodically comes back to the house to visit, her behavior further contradicts the idea of a "contented and wantless" mammy because, by actively performing according to their expectations of her,

[108] Wallace-Sanders describes the act of depicting characters with stereotypical mammy characteristics as falling into the "mammy trap," and she acknowledges that Faulkner's characterization of Dilsey does this at times. She suggests that Faulkner falls into the "mammy trap" by showing that Dilsey is harsh and violent with her own son but more gracious with the white family members she serves. Wallace-Sanders qualifies this depiction by pointing out that Dilsey's own son may be the only person she can lash out against, for "it was unthinkable for a southern black woman in 1928 to display any hostility toward the white people for whom she worked" (122-123).

she achieves a "kind of satisfaction in proving to them that she had been almost indispensible." The narration suggests that as she leaves after these visits, Nannie "would again for a moment be the amiable, dependent, like-one-of-the family old servant: 'I know my chil'ren won't let me go away empty-handed.'" But while these actions resemble her earlier behavior, the conditions under which they are performed do not. She calls Sophia Jane's grandchildren "my chil'ren" only as she leaves them, choosing instead the company of her own "great grandsons Skid or Hasty" (*CS* 350).[109] In this moment, Nannie renders the stereotype of the mammy who considers herself a member of the family conspicuous because she actively *performs* that role at the same time that she re-enacts her abandonment of it.

Indeed, the white children's expectation that Nannie will behave like a willfully subservient mammy is the reason they are unprepared for her desire to leave them in the first place. The narration suggests they are "surprised," "a little wounded," "rather put upon," and "chastened" by her decision to move into her own cabin. When this narration departs from their internal thoughts to offer commentary on their reaction, it is explicit in its critique of the point of view from which she is characterized in "The Journey." This commentary indicates the grandchildren regard Nannie's behavior as a "rebuke" because "the children, brought up in an out-of-date sentimental way of thinking, had always complacently believed that Nannie was a real member of the family, perfectly happy with

[109] Nannie's descendants help her transport the "baskets and bales of the precious rubbish she loved" which the white children gift her in hopes she will stay with them (350). Yaeger interprets this detail as proof that "Porter's story is contaminated by what it hopes to critique" because it depicts "the continued association of African American characters with waste, rubbish" and so on (Yaeger, 209). While the white children continue to make this association, it is significant that their gifts do not achieve the desired result: they do not convince her to stay. She abandons the role of the mammy to white children who always want more from her in order to embrace role of the great grandmother whose own black descendants assist her in her departure. As such, the gifts of rubbish can be recognized as part of the story's critique of the attitudes of the white children rather than a contamination of the story's critique.

them" (*CS* 349). The narration also underscores how much they have depended upon the labor she provides. Following her departure, "their fortunes went down, and they had very few servants, they needed her terribly. They realized how much the old woman had done for them, simply by seeing how, almost immediately after she went, everything slackened, lost tone, went off edge" (CS 349-350). The narration continues, "work did not accomplish itself as it once had" (*CS* 350), using passive language to emphasize that prior to her departure, they take Nannie so much for granted that her labor is invisible to them.[110] This narration documents the children's emotional discomfort upon learning that she is not "perfectly happy with them," their inability to recover from Nannie's departure, the family's loss of fortune in her absence, and the degree to which her exploitation has been normalized by the idea that she is a loving black mammy. In so doing, the story emphasizes how much the family has come to rely upon and benefitted from that exploitation. This narration also emphasizes that Nannie's behavior change makes the children feel rejected and uncomfortable because it disrupts what they have been taught about her, making it impossible for them to maintain their complacent understanding of her role in their family.

Nannie's final renunciation of her marriage to Jimbilly serves as another way that she rejects her role within the white family and forces Sophia Jane's grandchildren to reconsider the ways they have perceived her. The narration indicates that Harry's eldest daughter "Maria had not realized until after her grandmother's death that Uncle Jimbilly and Aunt Nannie were husband and wife." The narration exits her perspective to explain

[110] This narration also contradicts a key aspect of Yaeger's analysis of Nannie's characterization. Yaeger indicates that Nannie's ability to leave the white family home cannot be regarded as particularly significant because her "sonorous freedom spells danger for no one; Nannie is allowed to live in peace because her body has passed out of usefulness" (221). This assessment does not acknowledge the degree to which the white family is still very dependent upon Nannie's labor when she leaves.

"that marriage of convenience, in which they had been mated with truly royal policy, with an eye to the blood and family stability, had dissolved of itself between them when the reasons for its being had likewise dissolved." This commentary acknowledges what the narration of "The Journey" glosses over: that Nannie's marriage was designed specifically to benefit the white family by reproducing their wealth. Their marriage is invisible to Maria because "they seemed to forget they had children together (each spoke of 'my children')," and "they had stored up no common memories that either wished to keep" (*CS* 350). The passage that follows describes Nannie's refusal to allow Jimbilly to move into her cabin with her, suggesting it is this incident that makes Maria aware of Nannie and Jimbilly's marriage. Nannie responds to Jimbilly's advance by disavowing this relationship and what it has meant in her life, telling Jimbilly "I don' aim to pass my las' days waitin on no man," and concluding "I've served my time, I've done my do, and dat's all" (*CS* 351). Ciuba reads Nannie's rejection of Jimbilly as proof that Nannie is able to free herself from "economic and sexual rule by men" just as she has "freed herself from *The Old Order*'s white world" by moving into her own cabin (80-81). This is true, but because Nannie is forced by the white family to marry Jimbilly and reproduce with him in the first place, her rejection of him represents her renouncement both of his sexual rule over her and the white family's dominion over her sexual and reproductive life. Like leaving the white family's home, this act is a powerful demonstration of Nannie's agency, through which she achieves a considerable degree of independence. And also like the departure from their home, Nannie's act forces Sophia Jane's granddaughter Maria to reconsider her earlier perceptions of Nannie and her life circumstances.

Over time, Nannie's refusal to be consoled by the grandchildren while she is still acting as their mammy is even more unsettling for Maria than Nannie's later abandonment of that role. This refusal of their consolation, in addition to Nannie's other actions, makes Maria feel something akin to guilt. After Sophia Jane departs the story, and Nannie begins awaiting her own death, the white grandchildren attempt to cheer Nannie up by telling her "Aunt Nannie, never you mind! We love you!" The narration continues,

> [Nannie] paid no attention; she did not care whether they loved her or not. Years afterward, Maria, the elder girl, thought with a pang, they had not really been so very nice to Aunt Nannie. They went on depending upon her as they always had, letting her assume more burdens and more, allowing her to work harder than she should have. (*CS* 348)

By allowing the children to see that she is unmoved by their claims of love, Nannie's behavior contradicts the way her affection for the white children is characterized in "The Journey" and undermines the idea that the mammy willfully performs the maternal labor of caring for the white children because she loves them. Here, the narration draws a direct connection between Maria's realization that Nannie does not value her love and her realization that her family has mistreated Nannie, even though these realizations occur at different times of her life. The use of the word "pang" indicates this realization is, for Maria, a sudden and emotional one. Maria's use of passive language in this reflection indicates that like her grandmother, she is uncomfortable acknowledging the responsibility she feels about the way her family has treated Nannie. She thinks they have "not really been so very nice" and that they had merely been "letting" and "allowing" Nannie to take on the work that breaks down her body. Despite her inability to fully grapple with Nannie's powerlessness in this role, Maria's realizations begin to reveal

how the idea that the black mammy loves the white children who benefit from her maternal labor has been used to normalize her exploitation. This belief, which Maria acquires via Sophia Jane, allows the white family members to choose to perceive the mammy's labor as an act of love rather than of exploitation. This passage provides insight into how Nannie's behavior deconstructs Sophia Jane's characterization of her so significantly that the white children develop an unspoken sense of responsibility about the ways they have been allowed to mistreat Nannie. While the focus here is placed upon Sophia Jane's eldest granddaughter Maria, the other stories in *The Old Order* reveal that it is Sophia Jane's youngest granddaughter Miranda who is most sensitive to the knowledge that Nannie has been mistreated and exploited. Miranda carries this knowledge as a burden she cannot escape, and she is profoundly influenced by the discomfort she feels as a result of her family's mistreatment of Nannie and other black people.

## Miranda and the Knowledge of Black Women's Reproductive Exploitation in *The Old Order*

The other stories in *The Old Order* also examine Sophia Jane's grandchildren's growing understanding of the family's exploitation of black people and explore how the children manage that knowledge. Miranda, the youngest of Harry's children, emerges as the primary focus. These stories, which take place roughly between the time she is five and nine years old, reveal her to be particularly preoccupied with graves and death. Much of the criticism about *The Old Order* argues that this fascination is related predominantly

to the death of her mother.[111] Though several scholars focus on maternity and reproduction in these stories, even those who address race do not consider Nannie's role in Miranda's life in depth.[112] When Nannie is placed at the center of analysis, it becomes clear that the exploitation of her reproductive potential and maternal labor, her maternal losses, and her obligation to care for Sophie Jane's descendants have a significant impact upon Miranda, informing her anxieties about death, burial, and reproduction. These stories create a link between the children's practice of animal burial and their discomfort about their family's involvement in slavery, and these events establish Miranda as a child who is very attuned to scenes that evoke the suffering of black people. In particular, Miranda's sensitivity about the exploitation of black mothers and their maternal losses causes her to experience anxiety that influences her behavior and her developing understanding of her own reproductive vulnerability. By articulating her perspectives and perceptions, the stories show that as Miranda attempts to deal with her conscious and subconscious knowledge of how black women have suffered, and well as her fear for her own future, she is caught between two impulses. Her desire to renounce her family's exploitation of Nannie, of other black mothers, and of black people more generally is depicted repeatedly. And yet, she is also shown practicing her grandmother's habit of seeking comfort by concealing her knowledge of this exploitation and the suffering it

[111] For example, Mary Titus argues that Miranda's ritual burying of dead animals, like the chicken she buries beneath the fig tree, is her "way of coping with the terror and loss connected with her mother's death" (88). Heather Fox suggests that Miranda's feelings about the fig tree operate as a stand-in for her feelings about her mother's death (219).

[112] Yaeger claims that *The Old Order* depicts "landscapes loaded with trauma unspoken, with bodies unhealed or uncared for, with racial melancholia" (18) and suggests that Miranda "becomes the agonized vehicle for this lost remainder" (20). But she does not specifically address how Miranda is impacted by Nannie's maternal exploitation and losses. Robertson is interested in the family's "need to gloss over" their "role as both slave owner and continued procurer of black labor," but her interest in reproductive labor is largely limited to what she calls the family's "fear of miscegenation" (248-249). Patsy J. Daniels compares Miranda's fears about the burial of the chicken in "The Fig Tree" to Edgar Allan Poe's fascination with the possibility of the burial of live beings, though she connects Miranda's fears to an intuitive guilt about lynching rather than associating them with Nannie (24).

causes. In Miranda's case, this repeatedly takes the form of literally burying the reminders of black women's exploitation and suffering in addition to attempting to put those reminders out of mind. Thus, these stories show that although Sophia Jane has passed down the family habit of constructing complacent narratives that attempt to conceal the family's complicity in Nannie's suffering, Sophia Jane has not successfully concealed that complicity or that suffering. Miranda's experience of her world is deeply influenced by her awareness of black women's maternal losses and her family's responsibility for those losses.

The connection between Miranda's curiosity about the atrocities of slavery, her guilt about the treatment enslaved people endured, and the ritualized burials she practices for small animals is first introduced in "The Witness." The narration suggests, from the perspective of the white grandchildren, that Nannie's estranged husband Jimbilly "would talk in a low, broken, abstracted murmur, as if to himself; but he was really saying something he meant one to hear" (*CS* 341). The white children listen to his stories, which positions him, as James F. Tanner points out, as "an educator in the Uncle Remus tradition" whose "mournful tone when speaking of the old days under slavery makes him something more than this" (75). Indeed, the interactions between Jimbilly and the white children re-write those between Joel Chandler Harris's Uncle Remus and the unnamed Little Boy to whom he tells his stories. As Alice Walker's powerful objection to the Uncle Remus character makes clear, Chandler's figure and later interpretations of this character depict Uncle Remus as a black man who tells white children folktales from the black oral tradition that feature personified animals. Walker stresses that Uncle Remus ignores "his own children and grandchildren" to relate these stories to what Walker refers

to as "patronizing white children" (636). This suggestion illuminates the parallels between Uncle Remus and the stereotype of the black mammy who loves the white children she serves and disregards her own black children. Like Nannie, who deconstructs the stereotype of the black mammy in various ways, there is a conspicuous difference between Jimbilly's manner of storytelling and that of the Uncle Remus figure he resembles.

Jimbilly does not cater to the white children, but rather, compels them to listen to his "murmurs." And he does not tell them folktales, he tells them about the atrocities of slavery. The grandchildren's belief that "once upon a time Negroes had been slaves; but they had all been freed long ago and were now only servants" clearly shows Sophia Jane's influence on their understanding of the world (*CS* 341). This belief also explains why the stories Jimbilly tells are so uncomfortably candid for the children, ages ten, eight, and six, that they "wriggled a little and felt guilty" as they listen. Indeed, the discomfort of the middle child, Paul, who "would have changed the subject" (*CS* 342) most directly re-writes the Uncle Remus tradition. Bernstein calls Joel Chandler Harris "one of slavery's most effective and influential apologists" (133) and suggests that he explicitly stages the interaction between Uncle Remus and the Little Boy as one that encourages readers to focus on "the tender intimacy between the man and the boy" (139). There is no intimacy or coddling between Jimbilly and Sophia Jane's grandchildren; in fact, their relationship is characterized by their fear of him. One key reason they hear these stories that make them uncomfortable is because it is "Miranda, the little quick one" who "wanted to know the worst" (*CS* 342). Thus, Miranda's questioning results in the children's uncomfortable awareness of how enslaved people were physically abused and

psychologically tortured by white people. Robertson also emphasizes the importance of the guilt the children feel when they listen to Jimbilly's stories and Miranda's particular interest in the details of slavery. She describes Miranda as "the family archaeologist searching for those things buried beneath family myths" (254).

The way Jimbilly responds to the children's attitude toward small animals continues to contradict Harris's characterization of Uncle Remus as deferential to the Little Boy. Sophia Jane's grandchildren are exposed to Jimbilly's stories of slavery because they rely on him to carve the miniature tombstones they "often needed, for some small beast or bird was always dying and having to be buried with proper ceremonies." The narration of these interactions alternates between quoting Jimbilly's descriptions of the ways enslaved people were tortured and describing how he carves the tombstones. His dialogue itself also shifts between these topics without transitions. After Jimbilly tells Miranda "cose [the enslaved people] died… dey died… by de thousands and tens upon thousands," Maria asks "can you carve 'Safe in Heaven' on that, Uncle Jimbilly?" He refuses to inscribe this on the rabbit's tombstone, answering "a heathen like dat? No, *mam*. In de swamps dey used to stake 'em out all day and night…" (*CS* 342). This juxtaposition draws attention to the irony of the children's concern for small dead animals in the context of the slave owners' inhumane treatment of enslaved people. The children's desire to perform religious burials for small animals, whom they want to believe can ascend to heaven, is noteworthy behavior for children descended from a white family that has participated in chattel slavery, wherein enslaved black people were equated with animals, thought to have no souls, and treated accordingly. While Uncle Remus's storytelling positions Br'er Rabbit as a stand-in for black people, and Uncle

Remus appropriates stories drawn from the oral tradition of enslaved people to be consumed by a white child, Jimbilly refuses Maria's carving request by calling the rabbit a "heathen." In so doing, he implicitly affirms the white children's belief that a dead rabbit can have a soul even as he refuses their request. The children use their requests about the tombstones both as a way to interrupt their discomfort about the horrors he describes and as an excuse to stay in Jimbilly's presence to learn more about slavery. Indirectly, and in a way appropriate to children, they are contemplating the souls of the dead animals as they learn about how slave owners killed the enslaved people they regarded as property. Thus, the children's ritualized burials of small animals can be seen as their attempt to grapple with the discomfort and guilt they feel due to the contradictions between Jimbilly's representations of slavery and the stories their slave owning family members have told them.

"The Circus," the story that follows "The Witness" in the sequence, reiterates Miranda's curiosity about uncomfortable truths and reveals that the knowledge she acquires as a result of this curiosity influences the way she perceives her experiences. The story also shows Miranda attempting to practice the family habit of concealing feelings about uncomfortable experiences by positioning them within a more pleasing narrative. At the circus, Miranda is forced to confront evidence of female sexual vulnerability as well a dramatization of the victimization of black people. Entering the circus, Miranda's thinks about her desire to be like her older cousin Miranda Gay, whose beauty is celebrated by the family. When the younger Miranda notices boys "peeping up" from beneath the plank seats, her natural curiosity leads her to look "squarely into the eyes of one, who returned her a look so peculiar she gazed and gazed, trying to

understand it." Miranda inquires about these boys' presence to Dicey, the black young woman tasked with looking after her. Dicey "drew her knees together and her skirts around her, and said severely: 'You jus mind yo' own business and stop throwin' yo' legs around that way. Don't you pay any mind'" (*CS* 344). This response communicates to Miranda that she has reason to be fearful of male attention from unfamiliar outsiders without offering her any clarity about what is actually happening.

The circus begins immediately after this exchange, and Miranda is deeply troubled by a scene that evokes both the perceived sexual vulnerability of privileged white women and the lynching of black people. Porter's incomplete and unpublished story about the lynching of a black man has garnered critical attention, and the drafts of this story demonstrate Porter's awareness that the lynching of black men is connected to white men's interest in preserving and protecting notions of white women's sexual and racial purity.[113] And yet, scholars have not yet addressed the degree to which the events Miranda witnesses at the circus resemble a lynching, nor have they acknowledged the significance of this event taking place immediately after Dicey instructs Miranda to guard against her sexual vulnerability. Several aspects of the circus performance and the

[113] The drafts of this unfinished story, which feature Miranda and other members of her family, depict a young black man who is lynched after a white woman accuses him of rape. These drafts have been addressed in depth by Jan Nordby Gretlund, who suggests Porter began them around 1933 or 1934 and returned to them later (7) and by Jan Bloemendaal. In one version of what appears to be an outline for the story, Porter's notes address the connection between the lynching of black men and the protection of women's sexual and racial purity. The outline indicates the "low-white woman" who accuses a black man of rape is "said to be loose—is loose, in fact." Though "ordinarily no one respects her or believes anything she says," once this woman announces she "has been forced to defend her self from rape," the men in the town "eagerly seize on her lying testimony as revealed truth for the sake of having the pretxt [sic] they need, however falsely based this pretext, consecrated by a tradition equally false." After they lynch the black man she accuses, Porter's notes indicate the white men eventually "blacklist" the accuser and won't visit her fruit stand. "They fear her because she, their sexual scape goat, had power through her very sex to make them commit a murder in her defense" and they "blame on her a crime committed by them in which they had welcomed her as a pretext for action." Various other iterations of similar ideas appear in other pages of these drafts, as well ("Lynching Story, drafts, fragments").

crowd's reaction resonate with the conditions under which black men have been the victims of extrajudicial murder following accusations of crimes against white people, particularly accusations involving sexual contact with white women. Miranda watches carefully as the circus performer makes a large production of falling off the wire and hanging beneath it until he "swung back and forth like a scarf." Looking up at this spectacle, the behavior of the spectators resembles that of a lynch mob: "the crowd roared with savage delight, shrieks of dreadful laughter like devils in delicious torment." Miranda responds not with delight, but with terror. She "shrieked too, with real pain, clutching at her stomach with her knees drawn up." Then the performer "blew sneering kisses from his cruel mouth." This gesture toward licentiousness, particularly following Dicey's warning about the boys who stare up from beneath the seats, sends Miranda over the edge. She "covered her eyes and screamed, the tears pouring over her cheeks and chin" (*CS* 345). Miranda, who has been exposed to Jimbilly's stories of how white people have killed black people, is clearly traumatized by these events, even if she is not exactly sure why.

The family's reaction to Miranda's despair shows that they try to focus on the positive aspects of an experience to bury uncomfortable feelings about it. In this way, their behavior resembles Sophia Jane's attempt to conceal her knowledge of Nannie's suffering and loss by focusing on what she thinks is her kind treatment of Nannie and what she believes they share in common. The family also continues to rely upon the caretaking labor of black women. Harry orders Dicey to take Miranda home early, and when the rest of the family returns from the circus, "the other children told Miranda what she had missed" in extensive detail (*CS* 346). She tries to practice the family habit of

burying her memory of the traumatic scene she witnesses by creating mental images of the performances her family members have described to her. This allows her to fall asleep, but the strategy doesn't work for long. Her discomfort will not stay buried. When "she fell asleep, and her invented memories gave way before her real ones," she dreams of "the bitter terrified face of the man in blowsy white falling to his death" and another unpleasant sight she sees while departing (*CS* 347). She cannot bear to be left alone, and it is again Dicey's responsibility to console her. "The Circus" affirms that Miranda is particularly attuned to the ways white people exploit and abuse black people even as she relies upon the comfort a young black woman is forced to give. The story indicates that she senses connections between the abuse of black people and her own sexual vulnerability, and that she attempts to deal with this discomfort by practicing her family's habit of putting it out of mind.

"The Last Leaf" appears after "The Circus" in the sequence. As discussed in length above, "The Last Leaf" acknowledges that Nannie defies the stereotypes of the mammy figure because she speaks about her own black children to the white children she cares for, she makes Sophia Jane's descendants feel indebted to her maternal labor, and she renounces her role as their mammy. In so doing, she forces Sophia Jane's grandchildren to reconsider her role in their family and to feel uncomfortable because they begin to realize the exploitative nature of that role. Though "The Last Leaf" does not focus on Miranda specifically, these insights combine with the earlier stories' depictions of her particular curiosities, her sensitivity to awareness of the suffering of black people, and her practice of animal burial rituals to establish important context for "The Fig Tree" and "The Grave," the two final stories in the sequence. "The Fig Tree" focuses not just on

the children's awareness of the exploitation and suffering of enslaved people, but more specifically, upon Miranda's intimate exposure to the exploitation of Nannie's reproductive and maternal labor.

"The Fig Tree" depicts Miranda as a beneficiary of Nannie's maternal labor who struggles with debilitating anxiety about circumstances that evoke the maternal losses Nannie has endured while serving as the family mammy. In this story, Miranda initially resists the comfort available through Nannie's attempt to console her, but she is eventually able to get rid of her anxiety in a manner similar to her grandmother's— by embracing an alternative narrative that obscures the similarity between the circumstances that upset her and Nannie's maternal losses. "The Fig Tree" takes place before Sophia Jane's death, when Miranda is not yet old enough to attend school. It opens with a scene that demonstrates how Nannie is forced to look after Miranda. Nannie follows Harry's orders by forcing Miranda to wear her bonnet because she fears Harry will punish her if Miranda's skin is sunburned. In the following scene, Miranda's anxiety surfaces when she discovers a dead baby chicken beneath her favorite fig tree.

Even before Miranda finds the dead chicken, the setting of this incident draws attention to racial injustice through its correlation with the settings and images of lynching. Miranda enters the "very dark and shady" fig grove and then visits her "favorite fig tree where the deep branches bowed down level with her chin" (CS 354). Daniels addresses the lynching imagery in this scene by suggesting "figs on a tree resemble the dangling head of a hanged man" and by indicating that the description of the low-hanging nature of the fig tree's branches might resemble branches under the weight of a lynching victim (25). Indeed, the mention of the branches being "level with her chin" further

stresses the lynching allusion. Daniels also claims that Porter "doubtless heard" Billy Holliday's 1939 recording of the song "Strange Fruit" and "was perhaps inspired by it" (26). Holliday's song, and the 1937 poem by Abel Meerepol from which the song's lyrics are derived, both draw upon imagery similar to that in "The Fig Tree" in order to condemn the practice of lynching. The song begins, "Southern trees bear strange fruit/ Blood on the leaves and blood at the root/ Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze/ Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees" (qtd. in Wills). Porter did not publish the story until well after Holliday's song became popular, but the setting of the story is almost surely not inspired by the song or poem. Porter's correspondence indicates she finished the story in 1928 and made at least one attempt to publish it then. And yet, in one letter wherein she says she has finished "The Fig Tree," Porter also writes that she is focusing on the hanging of Martha Corey in her attempt to finish another writing project, her never-completed biography of Cotton Mather (KAP to JH ca. Jan.-Feb. 1928).[114] This confirms that at the time she was composing "The Fig Tree," Porter was contemplating the unjust practice of killing innocent people by hanging, and she was intentionally focusing on that practice to influence her work.

Miranda's discovery of the dead chicken beneath this fig tree also evokes the deaths of Nannie's children in several ways. "The Journey" indicates that, while nine of Sophia Jane's twelve children survive childhood and move with her first from Kentucky to Louisiana and then from Louisiana to Texas, "Nannie had lost ten" of her thirteen

[114]Porter wrote Josephine Herbst that she finished "The Fig Tree" and sent it off to Harper's in the same letter that she specifies she is focusing on Martha Corey swinging from the noose as she works on finishing the Cotton Mather biography (KAP to JH ca. Jan.-Feb. 1928). Though this letter in Hersbt's archive is undated, Porter scholar and archivist Beth Alvarez has used contextual clues to assign it the circa date of January-February 1928. In so doing, Alvarez cites a letter Porter wrote to her sister in March suggesting she has completed "The Fig Tree" (KAP to GPH 5 March 1928) and a 1930 letter from Janet Lewis to Porter, in which she indicates she is returning the story (JL to KAP, 12 Jan. 1930) (BA to ED 25 Nov. 2016).

children and "they were all buried in Kentucky" (*CS* 329). In "The Fig Tree," Miranda notices the baby chicken beneath the fig tree because it "did not move" when the other "little chickens all ran to their mother." She perceives the lone baby chicken as "sunburned," a racially charged description in this story, given Harry's fixation with protecting his daughters' white skin from darkening via sunburn. Miranda also calls the immobile baby chicken "lazy" (*CS* 355), echoing generalized stereotypes about black people as well as Nannie's description of her descendants as a "wuthless, shiftless lot" in "The Journey" (*CS* 329).

The parallel between Nannie's children and the dead chicken is also reinforced by the thoughts that are on Miranda's mind immediately before she notices the chicken. As the family prepares to depart for Cedar Grove, their country home, Miranda recalls, "Grandmother hadn't remembered to take any figs to the country the last time, she said there were plenty of them at Cedar Grove. But the ones at Cedar Grove were big soft greenish white ones, and these at home were black and sugary." With the limited understanding of a child, Miranda finds it "strange that Grandmother did not seem to notice the difference" (*CS* 355). This may seem strange to Miranda, but Sophia Jane's indifference about her granddaughter's preference for the black figs over the white ones reiterates what the preceding stories make clear. Sophia Jane's prioritization of her own beliefs and desires about figs, without regard to the preferences or values of others, recalls the way she prioritizes the reproduction of her white family without regard to Nannie's feelings and, indeed, at the expense of Nannie and her black children.[115]

[115] Robertson does not address Nannie's maternal losses in her analysis, but she argues that the fig grove itself "conjures up the black breast of Nannie who suckled Sophia Jane's eldest children" (261).

Miranda's preference for black figs highlights her difference from Sophia Jane, which is further developed by her realization that the baby chicken is dead. As soon as she realizes this, Miranda is plagued with anxiety caused by her grandmother's behavior. She feels compelled to make things right by burying the chicken, but she fears she will not be able to "get him buried properly" because Sophia Jane will interfere. Miranda thinks about how her grandmother always asks questions and demands answers until "nothing ever seemed so nice any more." In this particular case, Miranda expects to encounter even more difficulty because she anticipates that her grandmother and the other adults will "be after her, calling and hurrying her, and she wouldn't have time for anything and they wouldn't listen to a word" (*CS* 355). Miranda rushes through several steps to retrieve a box, put the chicken in it, and make the grave "just like peoples" (*CS* 356). At no point does she consider skipping the burial ritual or simply burying the chicken quickly in the ground. As is the case in "The Witness," Miranda's compulsion to bury dead animals according to set rituals is connected to her family's participation in the exploitation and oppression of black people. She does not seem to know why she is compelled to give this chicken a human burial, just that she must do it. But given her pre-established sensitivity to scenes which restage the conditions under which black people have been killed, and given the parallels the narration creates between the dead chicken, lynching victims, and Nannie's dead children, this scene suggests that what Miranda is attempting to bury is her family's complicity in Nannie's maternal losses and the deaths of black people.

But Miranda is unable to bury this anxiety. After she buries the chicken, she believes she hears "a very sad little crying sound" saying "weep, weep, weep" from

beneath the burial mound. Rather than ignoring the sound or assuring herself the chicken is dead, Miranda "pushed her bonnet off her ears and listened hard." This maneuver is instinctual for her, but by pushing off the very piece of headwear designed to protect her whiteness and secure her femininity, she attempts to make sense of what she hears and signals her willingness to absorb things other white women might ignore. She is called away in this moment, first by Nannie and then by her father, and though she leaves the fig grove because she "couldn't bear to be left," she immediately regrets it (*CS* 356). As she rides away in the wagon with her grandmother, her father, Nannie, and Jimbilly, Miranda feels a "dull round pain in her just under her front ribs" that recalls the physical pain she feels at the circus. She calls out "Grandmother, I've got to go back. Oh, I've *got* to go back!" and moments later adds, "I forg-got something important" (*CS* 357). Yaeger argues that the weeping Miranda hears represents "not only the child's individual loss" of her mother but also "her culture's predation." She interprets this weeping as a reminder of the other stories' depictions of enslaved people hiding in swamps, "black babies malnourished when their mothers suckle white children," and the frequent deaths of Nannie's children (Yaeger 19). Indeed, Miranda's sensitivity to the suffering of black people and her difference from the rest of her family are demonstrated not only by her concern about the weeping she hears but also by her preference for the black figs, her strong sense of attachment to a chicken whose circumstances recall those of Nannie's dead children, her attempt to bury the chicken properly, and her desire to return to investigate and relieve its possible suffering.

Nannie's maternal service to Miranda is again emphasized when she makes a thoughtful gesture in an effort to console Miranda. But instead of giving comfort,

Nannie's gesture forces Miranda to make an explicit connection between her despair and Nannie's exploitation. Sophia Jane is largely dismissive of Miranda's feelings when she begs to return to the fig grove, and Harry tries to distract his daughter. Then "Old Aunt Nannie leaned and held out her hand" as Nannie says "Look, honey, I toted you some nice black figs." This response suggests Nannie's obligation to provide Miranda with maternal care in her role as the family mammy has made her intimately familiar with Miranda's preferences. But Miranda then notices that Nannie's "face was wrinkled and black and it looked like a fig upside down with a white ruffled cap. Miranda clenched her eyes tight and shook her head." Nannie's face creates a visual connection between the black figs and black children that have been left behind, and the white cap she wears as part of her uniform serves as a reminder that her maternal labor has been devoted to the white children instead.[116] Miranda closes her eyes, trying to refuse whatever awareness she has, as a young child, of the connection these stories establish between Nannie's maternal losses, the dead chicken, the black figs, and Miranda's family's prosperity. And while Miranda is forced by Sophia Jane to thank Nannie for the gesture, the narration indicates "she did not accept the figs" (*CS* 358). Even if she does not fully comprehend a connection between the figs, the suffering of black people, and Nannie's maternal losses, Miranda experiences such a strong negative emotional and physical reaction to realizing the figs look like Nannie that she cannot accept them as comfort.

[116] "The Last Leaf" establishes the explicit connection between the white ruffled cap and Nannie's role as the family mammy. It suggests that while she works as the mammy, part of her uniform is "a white ruffled mob-cap," but after she moves into her own cabin, she "began wearing a blue bandanna wrapped around her head" (*CS* 349). Robertson does not address the role Nannie's dead children play in the *The Old Order* stories, but she makes a similar claim about this scene, suggesting that Miranda makes an uncomfortable "connection between the dark figs of home and Nannie's face" that relates to the role Nannie has played as a wet nurse for the white children (261).

When Miranda hears the weeping sound again at the end of the story, her response suggests that shifting one's interpretation of an unpleasant stimulus is a more effective means of burying one's anxiety about uncomfortable realizations than seeking a distraction. Once she arrives at the family's country home, Miranda doesn't think about the chicken because she is preoccupied with observations of her Great-Aunt Eliza's taboo habits, such as dipping snuff and performing scientific observations with microscopes and telescopes. But near the end, when Miranda looks through her great aunt's telescope, there is another subtle acknowledgement of Miranda's latent awareness of the sorrows of black people. She asks if the "other worlds" she believes she sees are "like this one." Eliza responds, "nobody knows, child." The narration then shifts back to Miranda, indicating she simultaneously "sang to a tune in her head" as she says "nobody knows, nobody knows" aloud and walks along "dazzled with joy" (*CS* 361). Given the amount of time Miranda spends around Nannie and Jimbilly, it seems likely that the tune she sings to herself is that of "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Had," a slave spiritual popular by the 1860s that prominently features a repetition of the phrase "nobody knows" (*Slave Songs of The United States* 55). Miranda sings this spiritual absentmindedly, using its description of the troubles endured by enslaved people to describe her own enthusiasm about the curiosities of outer space. This details suggests that her knowledge of black suffering exists on a subconscious level even when she feels pleasure in her circumstances.

The way Miranda changes the meaning of the slave spiritual also foreshadows her reaction to the return of the weeping sound. As she walks along thinking of these words and what she has seen in the telescope, Miranda enters a fig grove and hears "weep weep,

weep weep" "murmured" by "a little crying voice from the smothering earth, the grave." She is severely startled, but this time she is able to tell Eliza about the sound that is bothering her. Eliza gives what Miranda regards as an acceptable answer, explaining, "They're not in the ground at all. They are the first tree frogs, means it's going to rain" (*CS* 361). The story's conclusion provides a stark contrast to Miranda's reaction to Nannie's earlier offer of the black figs. Here, "Miranda finally remembered" to say "thank you" to her Great Aunt of her own volition, even from within "her fog of bliss at hearing the tree frogs sing, 'Weep weep…" (*CS* 362). Miranda's ability to enter a "fog of bliss" indicates she has found a narrative that successfully ameliorates the anxiety feels about the dead chicken. Much like Sophia Jane's choice to perceive Nannie as the willfully subservient family mammy, Miranda's willingness to accept her Great Aunt Eliza's scientific explanation for the weeping sounds relieves the discomfort she suffers due to her knowledge, even if it is subconscious, of Nannie's maternal losses, the deaths of black people, and the benefits she enjoys from those sorrows. Great Aunt Eliza's explanation, like Sophia Jane's complacent narrative, allows Miranda to change the context within which she understands what she has experienced. Both Sophia Jane and Miranda embrace narratives that make it possible for them to ignore reminders of the maternal losses endured by black women forced to provide maternal care for white children, and in so doing, bury the anxiety and complicity they feel as a result of those reminders.

"The Grave," the final story in the *The Old Order* sequence, creates a strong connection between the pregnant rabbit killed by Miranda's brother Paul and the family's exploitation of black mothers' reproductive bodies. Because this story, like "The

Witness," features Paul and a dead rabbit, it draws upon that story's evocation of the Uncle Remus figure. But unlike Uncle Remus's Br'er Rabbit, the rabbit in "The Grave" is female and pregnant, and Miranda's response to this incident indicates that her ideas about women's reproductive vulnerability are influenced by her family's exploitation of black women's bodies. It emphasizes that those who control women's bodies also seek to control the narratives within which the manipulation of those bodies is understood. But in so doing, the story also stresses that the details denied by these narratives are never fully buried. "The Grave" takes place after Sophia Jane's death, when Miranda is nine—several years older than she is in the other stories in the sequence. But she responds to the dead rabbit and its exposed fetuses with her characteristic curiosity and revulsion. She says, "Oh, I want to *see,*" and she "looked and looked" at "the wonderful little creatures." When she notices and speaks aloud that "there's blood running over them," Miranda "began to tremble without knowing why. Yet she wanted most deeply to see and to know" (*CS* 366). This exposure to the dead pregnant rabbit and the blood-covered fetuses serves as an initiation into the disturbing connections between menstruation, female reproduction, and death. But importantly, Miranda's reaction also relates to the earlier stories' descriptions of exploited black mothers and their children in significant ways.

The rabbit and her fetuses evoke Nannie and her maternal losses as well as the exploitation of black women who are impregnated by Sophia Jane's white male relatives. The rabbit fetuses are dead because Paul shoots their mother, which creates a parallel between these fetuses and Nannie's children, who die while she is forced to occupy the role of the family mammy, which almost kills her as well.[117] Robertson recognizes a "link

[117] Following the emphasis on dead babies left behind in "The Fig Tree," the opening of "The Grave" emphasizes Sophia Jane's privilege relative to Nannie by describing how Sophia Jane's husband's grave

between black bodies and the rabbit incident" both because Miranda thinks of Jimbilly as she watches her brother skin the rabbit and because, Robertson writes, the rabbit fetuses recall "Sophia Jane's careful watch over the color of the babies born in the 'Negro quarters'" in "The Journey" (258). Indeed, Miranda's perception of the rabbit fetuses as having "blind little faces almost featureless" (*CS* 366) does recall the description, narrated from Sophia Jane's perspective, of the newborn babies born to enslaved women as "pink" and "worm-like" in "The Journey" (CS 337). Those babies, like Paul's exposure of the rabbit fetuses, result from male manipulation of female bodies. Sophia Jane shares her knowledge of what amounts to rape committed by the white men in her family when she "told her eldest granddaughter, years later" about waiting anxiously "to see whether the newly born would turn black after the proper interval" (*CS* 337). This suggests that Miranda, too, may be familiar with this part of her family's history. Even the connection between the dead pregnant rabbit and Miranda's dead mother is complicated by the family's reliance upon black women's reproductive and maternal labor. "The Journey" suggests that Sophia Jane "had never approved of Harry's wife, who was delicate and hopelessly inadequate at housekeeping, and who could not even bear children successfully, since she died when her third was born" (*CS* 339). In this dismissal of Miranda's mother, Sophia Jane ignores that her own success at housekeeping and childbearing is dependent upon her ability to exploit Nannie's reproductive, maternal, and domestic labor.

As Miranda continues to look at the rabbit fetuses, she makes her own mental connection between them and human babies. She replies to Paul's claim that the fetuses

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has been disturbed three times, and his remains transported across the country, to ensure that he will be buried beside her (*CS* 362). This provides yet another stark contrast to Nannie's separation from her dead children, who are buried in Kentucky.

"were just about ready to be born" by saying "I know," "like kittens, I know, like babies." This realization makes her feel "quietly and terribly agitated" (*CS* 367), and her response follows the same pattern as her attempt to grapple with her guilt about the dead chicken in "The Fig Tree." Though she originally plans to keep the rabbit fur to adorn her dolls, Miranda is so agitated when she realizes that the rabbit fetuses look like babies that she says "I don't want the skin," and "I won't have it" (*CS* 367). Here again, as in with refusal to accept the figs Nannie offers her, Miranda rejects the object that serves as a material reminder of how she benefits from the exploitation of black women's reproductive bodies and the deaths of their children.

The story's emphasis on the gendered differences between Paul and Miranda draws attention to the fact that it is Paul who kills the rabbit, dissects it to reveal the fetuses inside, and hides it away afterward. His treatment of the rabbit mirrors the ways that black women's reproductive bodies are controlled and manipulated by white men. Critics including Mary Titus have focused on how the story details Miranda's desire to perform femininity (91-96), but Paul's performance of masculinity is also significant. After the siblings trade the treasures they find in their family members' excavated graves, Paul adopts masculine bravado, boasting "This is a screw head for a coffin! . . . I'll bet nobody else in the world has one like this!" (*CS* 363). His desire to be in control while he is hunting is also emphasized, with the narration indicating that "when he made a kill" he "wanted to be certain he had made it" (*CS* 364). The narration describes in detail how Paul "slit the thin flesh" of the rabbit multiple times to reveal the fetuses. This literal manipulation of the female reproductive body materializes the control men in the family have enacted over black women's reproductive potential. Robertson discusses Sophia

Jane's interest in the babies born to enslaved women only as evidence of her disdain for miscegenation (258), but the passage of "The Journey" she references is even more explicit in describing Sophia Jane's disgust with the men in her family who rape enslaved women. The narration suggests she believes "there was no accounting for [the men in her family] nor any way of controlling their quietly headstrong habits," and the fact that she has to wait to see if the babies are black or biracial "ended by giving her a deeply grounded contempt for men. She could not help it, she despised men. She despised them and was ruled by them" (*CS* 337). As "The Journey" and "The Last Leaf" also make clear, Nannie's reproductive potential is controlled not only by Sophia Jane, who uses her as a wet nurse and family mammy, but also by Sophia Jane's father, who purchases Nannie, forces her into a marriage chosen for its reproductive potential, and gives the couple as a wedding gift so that her body and her reproductive potential can be used to benefit his daughter's family.

Paul's fascinated manipulation of the dead pregnant rabbit also recalls the medical practice of J. Marion Sims, who was heralded in the early twentieth century as "the father of gynecology." He discovered the medical breakthroughs that earned him this title by performing surgeries on enslaved women and their reproductive organs in the 1840s and 1850s.[118] Sims's manipulation of enslaved women's bodies was known by those who

[118] It would be difficult to quantify what Porter may have known about Sims or other doctors who performed surgery on enslaved women. But Porter surely knew something about gynecology as a medical discipline because Unrue indicates that she had a relationship with Dr. Mary Halton, who treated her following her 1924 stillbirth and told her she would need to have her ovaries removed in 1926 (*Katherine Anne Porter* 107). Halton was a prominent figure in the practice of gynecology and in the birth control movement of the time, perhaps most notably because she was Margaret Sanger's friend and physician (Chesler 271). Porter's interest in medical history and practice is also demonstrated by books she owned and included in her collection at the University of Maryland. This includes two large volumes about the history of medical practice published by Howard Wilcox Haggard around the time she was writing the stories in the *The Old Order* sequence: *Devils, Drugs, and Doctors: The Story of the Science of Healing*

heralded him, but it only began to draw heavy criticism in the 1960s. This criticism has changed perceptions of his legacy and drawn attention to the connection between the establishment of gynecology as a medical discipline and the exploitation of enslaved women.[119]

Similarly, Paul's insistence that Miranda keep the incident with the dead pregnant rabbit a secret is representative of the ways that both men and women in Miranda's family seek to control the narratives about black women's reproductive bodies. After Paul takes the physical body of the rabbit and "hid her away," he tells Miranda "don't you ever tell a living soul that you saw this. Don't tell a soul" in "a confidential tone quite unusual in him, as if he were taking her into an important secret on equal terms" (*CS* 367). His attempt to keep Miranda silent by treating her as something of an equal relies on a strategy similar to Sophia Jane's attempts to disavow her exploitation of Nannie, with whom she believes she "fought on almost equal terms" (*CS* 333) by pretending to consider Nannie a member of the family. This approach is effective, and Miranda is successfully compelled to remain silent. The narration suggests "Miranda never told, she did not even wish to tell anybody" about what happens with Paul and the pregnant rabbit on that day (*CS* 367). Miranda's silence mirrors that of Sophia Jane, who "concealed" her "own doubts and hesitations" because she feels doing so is "a matter of

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*from Medicine-Man to Doctor* (1929) and *The Lame, the Halt, and the Blind: The Vital Role of Medicine in the History of Civilization* (1932).

[119] Dr. Graham J. Barker-Benfield first critiqued Sims's practice in his 1968 dissertation and elaborated on those arguments in his 1974 book, *The Horrors of the Half-Known Life: Male Attitudes Toward Women and Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century America*. Therein, Barker-Benfield himself compares black women to animals even as he critiques Sims for experimenting on them, suggesting Sims performed his experiments on "female slaves he had purchased as guinea pigs" (qtd. in Spettel and White 2426). Sims is celebrated by many within the medical community for pioneering surgery to repair vesico-vaginal fistulas, but his contributions to the profession, and the conditions under which they were discovered, have been questioned and critiqued by medical professionals and historians with growing frequency. See Spettel and White, Lerner, and Roberts 175-176.

duty" (*CS* 328), and who "learned early to keep silent and give no sign of uneasiness" about the men in her family who impregnate black women, only breaking this silence decades later with her granddaughter (*CS* 337). Like Sophia Jane, Miranda chooses silence to conceal uncomfortable realizations related to the exploitation of black women's reproductive bodies.

But "The Grave" explicitly utilizes the language of burial to indicate that remaining silent about the exploitation of black women's reproductive bodies is not the same as forgetting about it. Though the memory of the incident with the rabbit "sank quietly into her mind and was heaped over by accumulated thousands of impressions, for nearly twenty years," Miranda is surprised when "the episode of that far-off day leaped from its burial place before her minds eye." Traveling abroad as a young woman, she sees "a tray of dyed sugar sweets, in the shapes of all kinds of small creatures: birds, baby chicks, baby rabbits, lambs, baby pigs" (*CS* 367). The specific memory the sugar forms awaken is that of the dead rabbit fetuses, but the inclusion of "baby chicks" suggests that the sugar forms may also stir up the anxiety Miranda felt when she found the dead baby chicken. Miranda demonstrates the degree to which she has embraced the family's habit of burying anxiety, discomfort, and unpleasant associations when, as soon as she remembers the day Paul killed the rabbit, she shifts her focus back to how his face looked earlier that day. Even so, by closing the story and the sequence in this way, this passage suggests Miranda can never really forget what she saw when Paul opened up the rabbit's pregnant body. Nor can she forget the connections to the exploitation of black women's reproductive bodies and the deaths of their children that the incident created in her mind. She is like her grandmother, who maintains long silences about white relatives raping the

black women living on her property but does not forget about it. She is like her sister Maria, who cannot forget the way her family treats Nannie, and thus realizes "years afterward" that "they had not really been so very nice" to her (*CS* 348). Despite the success Sophia Jane and the men in her family have in controlling the narratives about their regulation and exploitation of black women's lives and reproductive bodies, none of the white family members can control when their knowledge of this exploitation will surface in their thoughts and stir their anxiety about their own complicity in it. This suggestion, indicated by the brief mention of Miranda's future documented in "The Grave," is examined in greater depth in the two short novels that feature Miranda's development into a young woman: *Old Mortality* and *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*.

## Miranda and the Knowledge of White Women's Reproductive Regulation in *Old Mortality*

In the short novel *Old Mortality*, Porter features the same extended family that appears in *The Old Order*, but the family's reliance on black labor is barely mentioned and their history of slave ownership is not addressed. When *Old Mortality* is read within the context established by the stories of *The Old Order*, however, the family's reliance upon the labor of enslaved and emancipated black people serves as a demonstrative example of what Morrison calls "ghosts in the machine," or the "active but unsummoned presences that can distort the workings of the machine and also *make* it work" ("Unspeakable Things Unspoken" 1014). *Old Mortality* depicts the family's regulation and manipulation of the reproductive potential of its female members at length, and Roberts's research invites analysis of how this control relates to the family's history of

controlling and manipulating black women's reproductive potential. Roberts argues that "the social order established by powerful white men was founded on two inseparable ingredients: the dehumanization of Africans on the basis of race, and the control of women's sexuality and reproduction." As a result, she shows why "studying the control of slave women's reproduction," significant enough in its own right, is also important because it "bears witness to the horrible potential threatened by official denial of reproductive liberty" more broadly (23).

When *Old Mortality* is read with *The Old Order*, it becomes possible to identify how the family's control of black women's reproductive potential and the narratives about black women's lives sets a precedent both for the family's control of the reproductive potential of the women in the family and for their control of the narratives told about those women. In *The Old Order*, Sophia Jane normalizes Nannie's exploitation, in part, by casting her in the role of the beloved black mammy. The narrative Sophia Jane creates about Nannie's role in the family attempts to justify the regulation of Nannie's reproductive potential and maternal labor, and it obscures proof of her suffering. In both these ways, that narrative facilitates the reproduction of the white family. In *Old Mortality*, the family again utilizes the control of women's reproductive potential and the narratives they tell about those women to ensure the reproduction of the white family according to patriarchal values. The short novel prominently features Miranda and her sister Maria's exposure to the family's idealized narratives about Sophia Jane's deceased daughter, Amy. The details included show that the family controlled Amy's marital options in an attempt to ensure that she would reproduce the family as they saw fit. They normalize the control of her reproductive potential and obscure the

role it plays in her death by crafting a narrative of her as a beloved, deeply mourned family member. This narrative also seeks to obscure the possibility that she conceives an illegitimate pregnancy, to minimize the threat her behavior poses to their notion of proper femininity, and to instruct her nieces Maria and Miranda to abide by the family's regulations. Ultimately, the narrative fails to govern Miranda's marital and reproductive choices because her sensitivity to women's reproductive exploitation helps her recognize her own vulnerability to her family's reproductive control. As a child, she witnesses a scene that evokes the family's reproductive exploitation of Amy and the black women documented in *The Old Order*, and her rejection of these conditions foreshadows her eventual elopement and intention to reject her family altogether.

*Old Mortality* is divided into three parts, and Part I describes how the family passes on their narrative about Amy to her nieces, Maria and Miranda. This narrative makes explicitly clear how the family exerts control over Amy's marital choices, and by extension, her reproductive capabilities. This control is characterized as proof of their love for her. Maria and Miranda are taught to think of Amy as "a sad, pretty story from old times," a woman who "had been beautiful, much loved, unhappy, and she had died young" (*CS* 173). The girls, ages twelve and eight in Part I, learn that when Amy insisted she did not want to marry her second cousin Gabriel, their grandmother Sophia Jane told Amy "marriage and children would cure her of everything," including her poor health (*CS* 182).[120] Sophia Jane also dismissed Amy's aversion to marriage by suggesting "young girls found a hundred ways to deny they wished to be married" (*CS* 183). Maria

[120] Lorraine DiCicco performs a compelling and thorough analysis of Amy's health that hinges on this reference to illness. Greensickness, also commonly called chlorosis, is linked to Amy's sexuality and reproductive potential because it was commonly understood to be a health condition which afflicted girls around the time of puberty. DiCocco indicates that Americans widely shared Sophia Jane's belief that this condition will be cured through marriage, by which she means sexual activity.

and Miranda also hear frequent discussion of the scandal surrounding a masquerade ball, when their father Harry "shot at" a "young man" who "was believed to have kissed Aunt Amy, when she was not in the least engaged to him. Uncle Gabriel was supposed to have had a duel with the young man, but Father had got there first" (*CS* 184). These stories are meant to convey to the girls that the family acted this way because they loved Amy and wanted to protect her, which normalizes their control over her choices. These stories about how the family regulated Amy's marital options also serve as a cautionary tale, warning her young nieces about how to behave and teaching them that they must abide by the family's regulations in order to be deserving of love.

Like portions of the narration in *The Old Order*, the narration of *Old Mortality* highlights details of Amy's story that the family narrative seeks to obscure. The family ignores Amy's cause of death, and in so doing, attempts to bury the connection between her death and the family's regulation of her marriage and reproductive potential. But the narration draws attention to this connection through the inclusion, at the end of Part I, of two letters that suggest Amy may have played a role in her own death. That narration indicates these letters "were packed away and forgotten for a great many years. They seemed to have no place in the world" (*CS* 193). In Part III, Amy's Cousin Eva challenges the family narrative while speaking confidentially to Miranda, who is now 18. Importantly, Eva is unmarried and not committed to the reproduction of the patriarchal family, even saying at one point that "the whole hideous institution should be wiped from the face of the earth" (*CS* 217). Eva contradicts the family's characterization of Amy by suggesting "not everybody, by a long shot" loved her, by insisting there "were plenty who did believe" that "Amy was an impure woman" (*CS* 211), and by indicating her

belief that Amy and her peers were so mentally fixated on "sex" that they "simply festered inside" (*CS* 216). Eva also openly speculates about Amy's cause of death. She says "I ask myself over and over again" what "connection" there is between Amy's disappearance from the masquerade ball, her marriage to Gabriel, and her death. Eva believes Amy "did away with herself to escape some disgrace, some exposure that she faced" (*CS* 214). Eva's whispered speculation about sexual transgression and scandal to the much younger Miranda recalls Sophia Jane's disclosure about miscegenation and rape to Maria in "The Journey." There, Sophia Jane does not explicitly tell her granddaughter that the men in their family rape the black women who live on their property. But she implies this by telling Maria she "held her breath for three days" to see if the babies born to black women "would turn black after the proper interval" (*CS* 337). Like Sophia Jane's disclosure, Eva's speculation about Amy's death demonstrates the family habit of speaking indirectly about transgressive behavior while stressing the details that can be interpreted in order to make sense of what is not being said.

When the connection between the scandal at the masquerade ball, Amy's marriage, and her death is considered, the possibility emerges that Amy married Gabriel and died shortly thereafter in order to avoid the exposure of an illegitimate pregnancy, conceived with a man the family treats as a threat. Gabriel was the family's choice for Amy's husband, and as a second cousin, he represented the possibility for Amy to reproduce with someone who shares the family's values, their cultural and social background, and their racial identity.[121] Conversely, all accounts of the masquerade ball

[121] *The Old Order* includes several suggestions that the family prioritizes the marrying of cousins. Sophia Jane's husband "was her second cousin and resembled her so closely they had been mistaken for brother and sister" (*CS* 334). Their wedding is attended by enough guests to fill "forty carriages" and "everybody present was at least fourth cousin to everybody else" (*CS* 333). Miranda picks up on this value system from

emphasize the foreignness of the young man with whom Amy disappears. Within the family narrative, he is described as "a young Creole gentleman" who came to the ball dressed "up as Jean Lafitte" (*CS* 186). Cousin Eva signals his outsider status both times she mentions him, referring to him first as "Raymond somebody-or-other from Calcasieu Parish, almost a stranger" (*CS* 212) and then as "this man Raymond from Calcasieu" (*CS* 214). The terms "Creole" and "Calcasieu" act as signifiers of national, cultural, and racial mixing, creating a strong association between him and miscegenation.[122] The family's perception of Raymond as a threat is demonstrated by their willingness to use violence to separate him from Amy. Even Sophia Jane asserts that Harry's choice to shoot at Raymond without notice is "not even decent" (*CS* 187). As a result, Harry was forced to flee to Mexico because the family, in keeping with their habit of concealing unpleasant truths, decided "the best way to avoid further scandal was for him to disappear for a while" (*CS* 188). Eva recounts an even more extreme version of events, suggesting Raymond "persuaded Amy to elope with him," and as a result, Harry "had to run him down to earth and shoot him," implying that Raymond died (*CS* 212). While Robertson does not address Raymond in her analysis of the Miranda stories, the family's willingness to resort to violence and to break codes of proper behavior to interrupt Amy's exposure to him further validates her claim that the family is motivated by a "fear of miscegenation"

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a young age. When she attends the circus and sees her celebrated cousin Miranda Gay, she notices and that the elder Miranda is seated beside two men "who might be cousins but who were certainly in love" with her (*CS* 343).

[122] The designation of "Creole" in itself conveys the mixing of populations across race and nationality. The Oxford English Dictionary indicates that in the Caribbean, "Creole" often refers to a person of "mixed European and black descent." In Louisiana, the term often refers to "a white descendent of French settlers" ("Creole.") Calcasieu Parish is also associated with racial and national mixing and conflict. The ownership of land that comprises the parish was disputed between Spain and the United States even "after France had ceded Louisiana to the American government in 1803." This conflict resulted in a diverse population that remains today: currently, the "population is mixed, consisting of Creoles, Acadians, Americans, and Indians" ("History of Calcasieu Parish").

(248).[123] And regardless of whether Raymond was actually killed in this interaction, Harry's willingness to shoot without warning at a man perceived as a racial and cultural outsider, in order to prevent him from violating Amy's sexual and racial purity, exists within the southern tradition of lynching. As Porter also addresses implicitly in "The Circus" and explicitly in the drafts of her unpublished lynching story, white men lynch black men in order to force them to live in fear and to make a spectacle of protecting white female sexual and racial purity. Furthermore, the family's manner of orchestrating Nannie's marriage serves as a precedent for their attempts to control Amy's marital options. The narration of "The Last Leaf" indicates that Nannie's forced marriage to Jimbilly is made "with an eye to the blood and family stability" (*CS* 350). All of the stories about the masquerade ball indicate that the family intervened in Amy's romantic prospects in order to ensure that she pursued a marriage that met the same criteria.

While it is unclear how long Amy and Raymond were alone together, it is immediately thereafter that she began practicing habits that were widely associated with preventing or terminating a pregnancy during this period. These clues have gone unnoticed by scholars interested in Porter's work, but they would have been conspicuous to contemporaneous readers accustomed to decoding the ambiguous references to reproduction, contraception, and abortion made necessary by the regulations of the Comstock Act. The day after the masquerade ball, Amy joined her brothers to escort Harry to Mexico on horseback even though she was suffering from a serious fever. The narration suggests, "it was a three days' journey, and when they arrived Amy had to be

[123]Robertson's analysis is not particularly interested in Amy's legend for its own sake, but she does briefly suggest that "the Amy myth, then, is an attempt to displace the black body" because glorifying her "serves to validate [the family's] whiteness and to deny both the fact of miscegenation and the black labor upon which the family depends" (252).

lifted from the saddle" (*CS* 189). In the middle and late nineteenth century, many women believed vigorous physical activity, including horseback riding and dancing, could prevent the conception of a pregnancy following intercourse and/or initiate the miscarriage of a fetus already conceived (Reagan 42; Browne and Kreiser 34). Medical manuals from the period indicate that doctors advised pregnant women against these habits for this reason (Garrigues 127, 269). Reagan documents the silence around these practices, arguing that abortions attempted at home were "most invisible to observers at the time and remain[] so to the historian now" but were nonetheless commonly practiced (42). While riding her horse was Amy's daily habit, a fear of pregnancy could explain why she embarked on such a long and rigorous trip on horseback in spite of her ill health.

The timeline of events thereafter suggests Amy may have continued to fear she was pregnant. Initially, Amy "went on refusing to marry Gabriel," so Sophia Jane convinced him to leave and Amy "had no word from him for more than a month" (*CS* 190). This window would have allowed Amy enough time to resume regular menstruation if she had not conceived, but the narration's indication that she then went "dancing all night three times in one week" suggests she may have still been attempting to initiate menstruation. Amy subsequently "woke one morning in a hemorrhage," which contextual clues suggest was a hemorrhage of the lungs. Thereafter, Amy "seemed frightened and asked for the doctor, promising to do whatever he advised" (*CS* 191). Reagan notes that many of home remedies for abortion involved the oral ingestion of foreign substances (42-43), which could have caused Amy's hemorrhage. Amy's fear and willingness to obey the doctor's order's about this particular hemorrhage are noted by the narration, and they are conspicuous for a defiant young woman who was accustomed to

being ill and who took long journeys on horseback in spite of her poor health. Amy's particular anxiety about bleeding in this case remains unexplained, but it is consistent with the fear a woman might feel if she believes she has harmed herself in attempting to terminate a pregnancy. It is also consistent with the anxiety about blood a woman might feel if she is fixated upon her failure to resume menstruation.

Fear of pregnancy would also explain why Amy called for Gabriel immediately thereafter and insisted on marrying him quickly, despite learning he had been cut off from his family and their fortune since her previous rejection of his proposals. Amy's explanation is also conspicuous, given that she had been declining his repeated advances for years. She said, "Gabriel, if we get married now there'll be just time to be in New Orleans for Mardi Gras. If we wait until after Lent, it may be too late." When he asked "how could it ever be too late," she replied, "you might change your mind" (*CS* 191). This quick marriage could have ensured the pregnancy would remain a secret until after the wedding and render its illegitimacy more difficult to confirm. Further, in suggesting the trip to New Orleans, Amy may have been hoping to find help in terminating a pregnancy. Reagan indicates that women hoping to induce abortions often resorted to consulting outside practitioners only when their home remedies failed (42-43), and many women believed abortions were much easier to procure in larger cities than in rural areas (17).

The possibility of an abortion attempt is raised in a letter Amy wrote her mother after she married Gabriel and traveled to New Orleans, as well. Therein, she disclosed that "I now have an eighteen-inch waist, thanks to Madame Duré" (*CS* 192). While this may be an innocuous detail, the reference to a waist so small that it would be

incompatible with pregnancy is precisely the type of covert language women used to discuss contraception and abortion privately during this period, when the termination of a pregnancy before quickening was widely accepted by women but rarely spoken about publicly (Gordon 42-43). The name of the woman responsible for Amy's small waist invokes the popular association between the French and contraception and abortion, and it establishes a parallel with Madame Restell, a woman who grew wealthy and famous in the United States during the nineteenth century by providing abortion services to women in major cities.[124]

If this is a covert reference to an attempt to terminate a pregnancy, the family's silence about the regulation of reproduction, about illegitimate children, and about miscegenation would help to explain why the family hides this letter away, despite it seeming to be the last communication they received from Amy prior to her death. The other letter that is packed away, written by the nurse who cared for Amy at the time of her death, suggests that Amy "did not know how much" of her medication "she was taking," that she "begged" her nurse for more medication, and that this "would not have done her any harm except that her heart was weak" (*CS* 192). If Amy died by suicide to avoid the exposure of a pregnancy, or if she died because the complications of an abortion attempt rendered her vulnerable to an increased dose of her medication, the

[124] The euphemisms used to sell contraceptives and abortificients during this period referred to them as "French" and "Portugeuse." While "French" was most strongly associated with contraception, and "Portugeuese" was most strongly associated with abortificients (Gordon 26), the idea that the French effectively practiced contraception and abortion appears in Madame Restell's advertisements (Gordon 33), was reflected by their low fertility rates comparable to similar countries (Gordon 96, 100), and served as a highly influential revelation for Margaret Sanger (Gordon 144). In her advertisements, Madame Restell suggested she learned to treat women at female hospitals in Vienna and Paris. Reagan calls Madame Restell "the most infamous abortionist in the country" (10) and Gordon suggests that the advertisements touting Madame Restell's foreign training brought her so much business that she "brought herself fame and fortune through a veritable abortatorium in a Fifth Avenue brownstone" (26). See also Weingarten on Restell, 109-114.

family's regulation of her reproductive potential played a considerable role in her death. By interrupting her interaction with Raymond and by stigmatizing reproductively transgressive behavior so heavily, the family pressured Amy to marry Gabriel and rendered risky medical treatments and/or death preferable to admitting she defied their reproductive control. The family narrative about Amy's life must obscure the relationship between her marriage and her death in order for that narrative to insist that the regulation of her marriage and her reproductive potential proves their love for her.

The regulation of Amy's reproductive potential is only implied as an extension of the family's control of her marriage in Parts I or III of *Old Mortality*. But in Part II, the events that provoke Miranda's rejection of female exploitation specifically address the inclusion of reproductive control in that exploitation. This transpires when Harry takes Maria and Miranda, now ages fourteen and ten, to the horse races. They meet Amy's husband, Uncle Gabriel, for the first time, and they are forced to bet their money on his horse, Miss Lucy. When they greet him, Gabriel makes clear the connection between Miss Lucy and his continued attachment to Amy, asking "remember Amy's mare, Miss Lucy? Well, this is her namesake, Miss Lucy IV. None of 'em ever came up to the first one, though" (*CS* 198). Despite facing unfavorable odds, Miss Lucy wins the race. But when Miranda sees Miss Lucy after the race, she is surprised to discover that the horse "was bleeding at the nose, two thick red rivulets were stiffening her tender mouth and chin." Gabriel indicates she has had "the nosebleed… since yesterday," but he has chosen to race her anyway. He continues by sharing his plans "to breed her" because "her heart's worth a million dollars, by itself, God bless her." He says "if anything happens to her now I'll blow my brains out. She's my last hope. She saved my life" (*CS* 199). Gabriel

makes explicitly clear that his prospects have improved through his willingness to race a vulnerable horse, and that his survival and livelihood depend upon his ability to control and benefit from her reproductive potential.

When read in context with the stories in *The Old Order*, Gabriel's treatment of Miss Lucy bears a striking resemblance to the family's sense of black women as chattel property akin to livestock, the family's treatment of enslaved black women including Nannie, and their exploitation of Nannie's reproductive and maternal labor. Indeed, "The Journey" creates an explicit parallel between Nannie and Sophia Jane's first horse. When Sophia Jane's father returns from "buying horses and Negroes" in "The Journey," Sophia Jane claims the young enslaved child who turns out to be Nannie immediately before her father gives her the horse he has purchased because, he says, its "high time you learned to ride." Sophia Jane names the horse after "Fiddler Gay, an old Negro who made the music for dances and parties" (CS 330). She reserves the name Fiddler for every horse she owns thereafter, just as Gabriel continues to use the name Miss Lucy for his horses in tribute to Amy.

Miss Lucy's nosebleed and Gabriel's treatment her thereafter also dramatizes his willingness to marry Amy following the bloody hemorrhage that scared her in spite of the years she spent denying him. His indication that he is on the brink of financial and emotional ruin before Miss Lucy's unexpected victory mirrors his loss of fortune and family connections immediately before Amy's unexpected marriage request. Gabriel's belief that Miss Lucy's heart is strong enough for breeding, despite her nosebleed, invokes Amy's hemorrhage and the suggestion from her nurse that the medicine Amy took killed her because "her heart was weak" (*CS* 192). But within the family, Gabriel's

treatment of Amy is celebrated, not criticized as manipulative or opportunistic. Maria and Miranda are taught to think of him as "Uncle Gabriel, who had loved Aunt Amy so desperately" (*CS* 180). The poem he writes about her, which suggests she benefitted from death because she no longer suffers "the griefs of Old Mortality" (*CS* 181), plays an important role in the family legend about Amy and is the source of the short novel's title.[125] Maria and Miranda are immediately aware that the man they meet is not consistent with the family narrative. His appearance as a "fat shabby man with bloodshot blue eyes" is so incompatible with the family's idealization of him as "Aunt Amy's handsome romantic beau" that the girls wonder "Oh, what did grown-up people *mean* when they talked, anyway?" (*CS* 197). His exploitative treatment of Miss Lucy, like his appearance, gives them reason to question the entire narrative about his relationship with Amy. His willingness to prioritize his own will over the health of his horse, *and* his wife, both recalls the family's exploitation of black women and reveals why Amy's inability to control her own reproductive potential makes her so vulnerable.

Given Miranda's sensitivity to scenes that evoke the exploitation of black women's reproductive potential in *The Old Order*, her visceral reaction to Miss Lucy's nosebleed is no surprise. Indeed, Miranda's response to the sight of the blood streaming from Miss Lucy's nose can be understood as a palimpsest of several rejections she enacts earlier in her life. The narration describes Miranda's reaction at length.

> Miranda stood staring. That was winning, too. Her heart clinched tight; that was winning, for Miss Lucy. So instantly and completely did her heart reject the victory, she did not know when it happened, but she hated it, and

[125] The degree of control Gabriel exerts over Amy's memory while he is still alive is further underscored by the fact that it is on their way home to his funeral that Cousin Eva whispers her alternative account of Amy's life to Miranda. The way that his death allows space for the narrative about Amy to be challenged bears similarity to the way Sophia Jane's death in "The Last Leaf" precipitates the changes which allow her grandchildren to recognize Nannie's exploitation.

> was ashamed that she had screamed and shed tears for joy when Miss Lucy, her bloodied nose and bursting heart had gone past the judges' stand a neck ahead. She felt empty and sick and held to her father's hand so hard that he shook her off a little impatiently and said "What is the matter with you? Don't be so fidgety." (*CS* 199)

In this moment, Miranda realizes that for Miss Lucy, winning the race means suffering for the benefit of others. She rejects this result and feels ashamed of the degree to which her earlier naïveté has allowed her to benefit from and celebrate it. This rejection recalls her rejection of the black figs Nannie offers her to mitigate the debilitating anxiety she feels when she believes she has buried the baby chicken alive. There, she is unwilling to be consoled about the despair she feels during an incident that evokes how Nannie and her children have suffered in what Sophia Jane thinks of as "their grim and terrible *race* of procreation" (*CS* 334, emphasis added). Miranda's rejection of Miss Lucy's bloody victory also recalls her rejection of the rabbit skin that has been separated from the "bloody heap" that remains of the pregnant rabbit and its fetuses, killed by her brother Paul (*CS* 367). This incident resonates both with Nannie's reproductive exploitation and that of the enslaved women impregnated by Sophia Jane's relatives. Like Gabriel's control over Amy's memory, Paul also demands control over the dead rabbit's narrative, emphasizing to Miranda the importance of remaining silent about what she has seen. In each case, Miranda's feelings of shame and anxiety, and her unwillingness to benefit from the exploitation of another, indicate that she is deeply troubled by the ways she benefits from the reproductive exploitation of those subject to the control of her family, even if her conscious ability to perceive the cause of her discomfort is limited.

Miranda's rejection of Miss Amy's victory also suggests that she is beginning to recognize that she, like Amy, will be subject to the family's reproductive regulations.

Gabriel repeatedly compares the girls to Amy in Part II, and Harry's treatment of Miranda warns her that her behavior is evaluated according to the family's standards. His unwillingness to comfort her when she recoils from Miss Lucy's nosebleed confirms he does not sympathize with her revulsion. Earlier, when she is excited about Miss Lucy's victory, he holds a handkerchief to her face and says "here, blow your nose" (*CS* 198). This small detail is loaded with meaning: it emphasizes that the visible proof of Miranda's excitement must be hidden, equates Miranda's excitement with Miss Lucy's vulnerability through the excrement of their noses, and emphasizes the degree to which Miranda's excitement and her vulnerability are subject to her father's control. When Miranda discloses, in Part III, that she has eloped from school without securing her father's permission to marry, her reasons for rejecting the family's regulation of her marital and reproductive choices are not stated. But the scene with Miss Lucy suggests her burgeoning awareness of the family's desire to control of her reproductive potential, which an elopement attempts to circumvent.

Miranda's decision to reject her role in the family at the short novel's end is motivated by their treatment of Amy, by her father's unwillingness to forgive her for her elopement, and by her recognition that the narratives the family tells "denied her the right to look at the world with her own eyes" (*CS* 219). But when the choice to denounce her family is read within the context of her behavior in *The Old Order*, it is significant that she makes this determination while seated "in the front seat with Skid, the Negro boy," after declining Eva's entreaty sit in the back seat by insisting "I'm quite comfortable" (*CS* 219, 220). Skid is the name of one of Nannie's great grandsons who appears in "The Last Leaf" (*CS* 350), and he is described in *Old Mortality* as "the handy man," suggesting he

occupies a role in the family similar to that of his great grandfather Jimbilly (*CS* 218). Miranda's choice to sit beside Sid, rather than beside the older white relatives, is consistent with her willingness to hear more about the suffering of enslaved people and her identification with the particular exploitations of black women and their reproductive bodies.

It is while Miranda feels "quite comfortable" sitting next to Nannie's great grandson that she comes to understand "why she had run away to marriage, and she knew that she was going to run away from marriage, and she was not going to stay in any place, with anyone, that threatened to forbid her making her own discoveries" (*CS* 220). Her behavior throughout the stories that feature her suggest this choice is informed not only by her disapproval of the way the family has tried to control her, or the ways they have controlled Amy, but also by the ways they have controlled black women, their reproductive potential, and narratives about their lives. Like her grandmother, Miranda has come to recognize "how much suffering and confusion" has been "built up and maintained" on the "foundation" of the patriarchal white family, but unlike Sophia Jane, who "concealed" her "own doubts and hesitations" out of a sense of "duty" (CS 328), Miranda attempts to reject that system and the narratives that sustain it. Miranda's "mind closed stubbornly against remembering, not the past but the legend of the past, other people's memory of the past." The narration qualifies Miranda's mental ruminations on the rejection of her family by indicating she makes these resolutions "in her hopefulness, her ignorance" (*CS* 221). But even if she does not recognize that her ability to reject her family is incomplete, her motivation for doing so is deeply rooted in her exposure to the black people her family has exploited, her desire to disavow the ways she has stood to

benefit from that exploitation, and her realization that she is subject to similar exploitation.

## Miranda's Survivor's Guilt and Distrust of Complacent Narratives in *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*

*Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, like *Old Mortality*, indicates that Miranda's family's history of exploiting the maternal labor and reproductive potential of black women has a long-term effect on its white family members. This short novel takes place when Miranda is 24 and living alone in Denver, having left her family and her life in Texas. Miranda grapples with the impending departure of the man she loves for service in the Great War and nearly dies of influenza. She recovers consciousness in the hospital at the same moment the armistice is announced, and after this she learns she has outlived her lover, who has died of influenza before he could be sent overseas. When her own life enters this period of crisis, Miranda continues to be influenced by her awareness that her family is responsible for the suffering of black mothers. She also continues to be caught in tension between, on the one hand, the family tradition of seeking solace in complacent narratives that obscure the suffering and exploitation of the disempowered and, on the other hand, rejecting those very same narratives and disavowing the ways she has benefitted from them. Of the short novel's conclusion, which depicts Miranda's survival, Elizabeth Outka insightfully argues that "the atmosphere of mourning here also presents an important addition to discussions of mourning in modernism" because Miranda's mourning results from the effects of the influenza pandemic as well as the war. As a result, Outka suggests Miranda experiences "a twofold (at least) sense of survivor's guilt" (950). When *Pale*

*Horse, Pale Rider* is read in context with *The Old Order*, the roots of Miranda's survivor's guilt can be recognized as much deeper. The resolution to keep on living that she makes at the end of the short novel, as well as her behavior leading up to that point, indicate that her experience of the war and influenza are significantly shaped by the role her family's treatment of black women has played in her life, particularly because this national conflict asserts that the exploitation of vulnerable individuals is regarded by many as inevitable.

Miranda learns that she has outlived Adam, the man she loves, near the end of the short novel, but she grapples with this possibility for the entire time she knows him. Her experience of what can be understood as anticipatory survivor's guilt resembles the anxiety she feels in "The Fig Tree." There, her behavior suggests she is haunted by the fact that she has benefitted from Nannie's maternal labor while Nannie's own children have died and been left behind. Even if her knowledge of the injustice and suffering Nannie endures exists only within her subconscious at that point, her attempts to bury the dead baby chicken indicate she feels compelled to make things right. But in so doing, she is plagued by her fear that "she wouldn't have time for anything" because her family will be rushing her to leave before the burial is properly completed (*CS* 355). Miranda feels similarly rushed in her relationship with Adam, whom she meets while he is waiting to be sent overseas to serve in the Great War. When the two friends she works with at the local newspaper discuss propaganda stories about the war, the narration enters Miranda's consciousness to indicate she "wished to think for just five minutes of her own about Adam, really to think about him, but there was no time" (*CS* 285). As she waits for a Liberty Bond salesman to finish his propaganda pitch during intermission of a play she

must attend for her job, Miranda thinks "oh, please do let the show go on and get over with. I must write a piece about it before I can go dancing with Adam and we have no time" (*CS* 293). As a child, Miranda feels like she has no time to work through the anxiety triggered by the dead baby chicken, because she believes her process will be interrupted by the family members who are responsible for the injustices that haunt her. As a young woman, the time she spends with Adam serves a purpose similar to that of the chicken burial. It is her attempt to handle the sadness and anticipatory survivor's guilt she feels about his impending death in a war she perceives as wrong. But the pro-war narratives she encounters everywhere she goes remind her that the war will go on regardless of how hard she tries to avoid being complicit in it, and as a result, Adam's departure is inescapable. Her anxiety results from the fact that she has no time to properly deal with her feelings about his impending death.

Miranda's anxiety intensifies once she realizes she has contracted influenza. At this point, rather than attempting to work through her feelings, she participates in her family's tradition of appropriating the suffering of black people and overwriting it with a narrative she finds soothing. In the scene from which the short novel's title is derived, Miranda suggests that she and Adam sing a song together while he takes care of her in her room. She says "I know an old spiritual, I can remember some of the words." Adam recalls hearing "Negroes in Texas sing it, in an oil field," while Miranda knows it because she "heard them sing it in a cotton field." They both remember the line "Pale Horse, Pale Rider, done taken my lover away," but struggle to remember the rest of the song (*CS* 303). The following exchange transpires as they endeavor to recall it.

> "There's a lot more to it than that," said Adam, "about forty verses, the rider done taken away mammy, pappy, brother, sister, the whole family besides the lover—"
>
> "But not the singer, not yet," said Miranda. "Death always leaves one singer to mourn. 'Death,'" she sang, " 'oh, leave one singer to mourn—' " (*CS* 304).

As they sing, they agree they should "go in Hut service" to "entertain the poor defenseless heroes Over There," after which they tell each other they love one another for the first time (*CS* 304). The way this song appears in Miranda's consciousness suggests that as an adult, she continues to carry within her the knowledge of black suffering that influenced her thoughts and behaviors as a child. But she is unable to remember the aspects of the song that do not directly correlate to her immediate circumstances. When Adam reminds her, she continues to emphasizes the song's applicability to her life rather than its origins, and she uses its lyrics to facilitate the progress of her relationship with Adam. In these ways, she demonstrates the same willingness to bury her knowledge of black suffering that she shows at the end of "The Fig Tree." There, she finds herself singing "nobody knows, nobody knows" in her head, but she forgets the slave spiritual's original meaning, applying it instead to a narrative about outer space she finds soothing. Thereafter, she enthusiastically embraces a narrative that dissociates the haunting weeping noise from the exploitation of black mothers and the suffering of other black people. As a young adult, Miranda again manages her anxiety by reorienting the meaning of a song borne out of black suffering to serve her own purposes.[126] Forced to consider

[126] Unlike "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Had," "*Pale Horse, Pale Rider*" is not a real song. In the Caedmon Recordings audio recording Porter created of the short novel, she reads the song lyrics in a singsong voice, but it does not sound as if she is singing an existing song she has heard others sing. Darlene Harbour Unrue indicates that her thorough research into the origin of this song yielded no original source, and after consulting with a scholar in this area of expertise, she became convinced Porter "made the song up" (DHU to ED 10 Sep. 2016). This suggests that Porter specifically wrote the song lyrics Adam and Miranda reference to suit her artistic purposes. Furthermore, in light of the way Miranda uses this song to

the possibility of her own death, she clings to life by embracing a soothing narrative, ignoring the suffering that her narrative obscures, and using the comfort of her own narrative to strengthen her connection with the man she is afraid to lose.

While Miranda is a naïve child when she applies the words "nobody knows" to her own experiences, her adult appropriation of the spiritual about the pale horse and pale rider is more complex. Her ironic suggestion that she and Adam should "go in Hut service" to "entertain the poor defenseless heroes Over There" indicates she is somewhat aware that she is seeking comfort in, and thus becoming complicit in, the same type of grand narratives she has otherwise condemned. Up to this point in the story, she has repeatedly rejected the pro-war narrative used to justify the United States' role in the Great War. Miranda's refusal to buy a Liberty Bond, her choice to stop visiting wounded soldiers at the hospital, and her disgust with the Liberty Bond salesman who appears during the intermission of a show are various manifestations of her rejection of the war and the narratives that dominate conversation about it. When she thinks about the notion that this is "the war, the *war*, the WAR to end WAR, war for Democracy, for humanity, a safe world forever and ever—and to prove our faith in Democracy and each other, and to the world, let everybody get together and buy Liberty Bonds and do without sugar and wool socks," she asks within her thoughts "What about Adam, you little pig?" (*CS* 293). She rejects this propagandistic narrative because she believes it is being used to pacify nonparticipants like herself while obscuring the fact that the war will lead to the deaths of men like Adam. Her rejections of the symbols of this pro-war narrative are consistent with her rejections of the scene at the circus that resembles a lynching, of the black figs

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appropriate the suffering of black people, it is worth noting that Porter avoids this maneuver in this case by creating a fictional spiritual as a point of reference.

Nannie offers her, of the skin of the rabbit Paul kills, of Miss Lucy's horseracing victory, and of the narratives her family uses to justify and normalize these events. Given her sensitivity to inaccuracies of these narratives throughout her life, it is not surprising that she bristles at the arguments used to justify the Great War. But when she finds herself in crisis, her desire to disavow her complicity in the exploitation of others exists in contradiction with her desire to escape her anxiety. In this moment, with Adam, she embraces a narrative that soothes her fears rather than resisting it.

Miranda's compulsion to seek solace by ignoring the suffering of others emerges yet again in the vision she has while suffering from influenza in the hospital. She visualizes herself in "a great company of human beings, and Miranda saw in an amazement of joy that they were all the living she had known." After recognizing these figures, Miranda pauses briefly "in the quietude of her ecstasy, stayed where she was, eyes fixed on the overwhelming deep sky where it was always morning" (*CS* 311). When she thinks back on this state after she regains consciousness, she considers it a state of "bliss which had repaid all the pain of the journey to reach it" (*CS* 314). This description recalls the "fog of bliss" Miranda experiences at the end of "The Fig Tree," when her Great Aunt Eliza convinces her that the weeping she hears comes from tree frogs rather than from the dead baby chicken that the story associates with the death and abandonment of black children. For Miranda, the ability to escape her sense of guilt about the conditions of her life creates a state of bliss. During her influenza vision, Miranda feels a similar type of ecstasy and bliss because she is surrounded only by the living. The joy she finds while occupying this state is consistent with her desire to suppress her

anxiety about her family's responsibility for black women's suffering and black children's deaths.

However, the bliss Miranda achieves by thinking of herself as soothingly surrounded only by the living is fleeting. Even this state, only briefly achieved, is haunted by her knowledge of the suffering of others that will not stay buried. She swiftly experiences a fall from this state, which is described as follows.

> Miranda felt without warning a vague tremor of apprehension, some small flick of distrust in her joy; a thin frost touched the edges of this confident tranquility; something, somebody, was missing, she had lost something, she had left something valuable in another country, oh, what could it be? There are no trees, no trees here, she said in a fright, I have left something unfinished. A thought struggled at the back of her mind, came clearly as a voice in her ear. Where are the dead? We have forgotten the dead, oh, the dead, where are they? At once as if a curtain had fallen, the bright landscape faded, she was alone in a strange stony place of bitter cold, picking her way along a steep path of slippery snow, calling out, Oh, I must go back! But in what direction? Pain returned, a terrible compelling pain running through her veins like heavy fire, the stench of corruption filled her nostrils, the sweetish sickening smell of rotting flesh and pus. (*CS* 312)

Here, the thoughts that interrupt her tree-less tranquility directly recall the thoughts she has as a child, when she believes she hears weeping coming from the grave of the dead baby chicken she has tried to bury in the fig grove. In that instance, Miranda despairs at being forced to leave, telling Sophia Jane, "I've got to go back. Oh, I've *got* to go back!" before exclaiming "I forg-got something important" (*CS* 357). In her influenza vision, the return of these particular anxieties makes her realize that her feeling of bliss depends upon the absence of awareness of the dead. Her sense that the dead cannot be forgotten, and that she must go back to them, indicates her unwillingness to remain in a state of bliss that does not reckon with the guilt she feels as a result of her knowledge of the dead. The moment she regains the ability to smell her own diseased body also recalls the deaths

of black children and mothers, by creating a linguistic parallel to the "mingled sweetness and corruption she had smelled" the day her brother kills the pregnant rabbit (*CS* 367). As the narration continues, it becomes clear that the physical pain Miranda feels in this moment corresponds with a life saving injection she is given, and as she is coming to consciousness, she hears bells that celebrate the armistice. Miranda's survival of the war, her survival of influenza, and her memories of her inability to resolve her feelings about dead black children and exploited black mothers occur at the same moment in time. Even before she knows Adam has died of influenza, coming back from this vision involves a complex version of survivor's guilt that is exacerbated by its long history in her life.

The final passage of *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* takes on particular meaning when it is considered as part of her conflicting lifelong desires to reject the ways she benefits from the suffering of others, to reconcile her family's responsibility for that suffering, and to accept narratives that harm others because she finds them soothing. Initially, she does seek comfort and solace about Adam's death. Rather than attempting to suppress her memories, she tries "by mere act of her will to bring [Adam] to sight before her" and thinks to herself, "if I could call you up from the grave I would." But then, significantly, she decides "oh, no, that is not the way, I must never do that" (*CS* 317). As Outka indicates, this "refusal of consolation" is a "way of expressing her guilt" about Adam's death (950), and the "deliberate ambiguity" Porter utilizes in this scene captures the "contradictory emotions" of the particular post-war moment (951).

But for Miranda, this refusal of consolation is an even larger gesture because it demonstrates her willingness to grapple with difficult feelings and memories. Rather than trying to bury anxieties and unpleasant associations by force, only to discover they will

always unearth themselves, she chooses to let go of her relationship with Adam, allowing him to stay buried despite the sorrow this causes her. By shifting her mental focus to the taxicab where her friend Mary is waiting, despite her feeling that what lays ahead of her is "the dead cold light of tomorrow," Miranda chooses to renounce the path of escapism in favor of facing a complex and difficult reality. While her previous experiences of anxiety and guilt about her own privileged position have been marked by a sense that she does not have time to address those feelings, *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* concludes with her realization that "now there would be time for everything" (*CS* 317). Miranda's mournful attitude toward an abundance of time in which to negotiate her guilt, anxiety, and loss provides a stark contrast to Nannie's sense, late in her life, that "she would sit in the luxury of having at her disposal all of God's good time there was in this world" (*CS* 351). Nannie, having achieved her own independence through the survival of the metaphorical illness of Sophia's control over her life, is weary in body but apparently at peace in her thoughts. Miranda's survivor's guilt, and her sense that the real work of survival lays ahead of her despite having survived the war and influenza, indicates both her awareness that survival means grappling with her role in the suffering of others and her unwillingness to bury that awareness by denying that suffering.

Katherine Anne Porter's reputation as a master prose stylist remains secure, and though she is far from a staple in studies of American literature, her most devoted scholarly readers continue to ensure and facilitate academic interest in her fiction. Though the stories that comprise *The Old Order* are among her least celebrated, they are worthy of being read alongside *Old Mortality* and *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, the two short novels that are considered to be some of her best work. Porter is often regarded as an

apolitical writer, and her later public and private comments prove her to be guilty of racial prejudice against black people. But the Miranda stories, taken as a whole, demonstrate Porter's sincere interest in attempting to ameliorate existing racial tensions by trying to make sense of the past. Indeed, her archive of correspondence indicates that she understood this to be a key aspect of her artistic process around the time she began composing the Miranda stories. In 1928, Porter wrote a letter to her friend and colleague Josephine Herbst in which she expresses sympathy for their mutual friend's difficulty in childbirth and describes the type of art she aspires to produce. She writes,

> as for me, I believe that we exist on half a dozen planes and in at least six dimensions and inhabit all periods of time at once, by way of memory, racial experience, dreams that are another channel of memory, fantasy that is also reality, and I believe that a first rate work of art somehow succeeds in pulling all these things together and reconciling them. When we deliberately ignore too much we make a fatal mistake. (KAP to JH Spring 1928)

When all of her Miranda stories are read together, they represent Porter's achievement in producing the sort of art this letter indicates she aspired to create. Importantly, her Miranda stories grapple with the past and its influence on the future by placing the blame for racial tensions squarely upon the institution of the Southern white patriarchal family and those individuals committed to the reproduction of the power and wealth of that institution.

With her characteristic focus on issues of maternity and reproduction, Porter's Miranda stories examine at length how the power of the Southern white patriarchal family depends upon and benefits from the exploitation of enslaved and emancipated black people, particularly the regulation and oppression of black women, their reproductive capabilities, and their maternal labor. Through the character of Miranda,

Porter traces the legacy of the regulation of black women and their reproduction, showing how these practices set the precedent through which the oppression and reproductive regulation of all women could be normalized. In so doing, Porter features scenes and characters unique within the literature written by white Southeners, even among those praised for their progressive depictions of racial issues. These stories feature a white woman transgressing racial and social expectations by nursing an enslaved black child, they acknowledge the rape of enslaved women by white men, and they prominently and repeatedly feature events which evoke the maternal losses of black women and the deaths of enslaved black children. Most importantly, these stories feature a remarkable character named Nannie, who not only claims her own agency following a lifetime of enslavement, oppression, and maternal loss, but who explicitly deconstructs the stereotype of the willfully subservient black mammy.

The Miranda stories also examine at length the role that narrative plays in the oppression and reproductive regulation of black and white women alike. Porter does not explicitly address contraception and raises the idea of abortion only in a highly ambiguous manner, ensuring that her fiction about reproduction would not be suppressed for violating the Comstock Act's definitions of obscenity. Nonetheless, she seems to have felt compelled to carefully encode her criticisms of white Southern women in her fiction, in ways that can best be recognized through attention to her use of shifting narrative form. Her Miranda stories grapple with how white women, oppressed in their own ways by the institution of the Southern white patriarchal family, can nonetheless gain power by adopting narratives that, like birth control activists' embrace of eugenic logic and arguments, conceal their complicity in the suffering of black women. Porter's

Miranda stories examine, in Toni Morrison's words, "what racial ideology does to the mind, imagination, and behavior of masters" (*Playing in the Dark* 12), insisting that even white female slave owners who identify with enslaved black women are guilty of exploiting them for their own benefit. Further, the Miranda stories insist that this practice influences family narratives and, like the exploitation of black women's reproduction and labor, haunts their family members for generations to come. Long recognized as a writer interested in maternity, the careful analysis of Porter's Miranda stories proves she must also be understood as an artist who conveyed unique and important insights about white supremacy and reproduction that bear considerable historic, cultural, and artistic significance.

# Coda— Recovering Reproductive Justice

While early twentieth century American birth control campaigns succeeded in legalizing contraception and establishing birth control clinics in large part due to the single-minded focus of their leaders, this strategy fell far short of ensuring that all women would be able to control their own reproductive potential. Instead, this approach led to greater reproductive regulation for many women, including poor women, immigrant women, women of color, unmarried women, and disabled women. Twenty-first century reproductive justice advocates have taken a markedly different approach, using their public platforms to draw attention to the intersections between American women's struggles to achieve their reproductive goals and the other struggles these women face in their daily lives. The fiction that Mary Hunter Austin, Josephine Herbst, and Katherine Anne Porter wrote and published in the early decades of the twentieth century begins to demonstrate that this more intersectional approach has a much longer and broader history, even among privileged white women, than has previously been recognized. Leslie Reagan contends that in the early twentieth century, American women "did not proclaim their abortions in open, political forums," though they "did speak of their abortions among themselves and within smaller, more intimate spaces." But Josephine Herbst's archive proves the extent to which women's attempts to speak about these issues publicly were regulated and suppressed. The fiction written by Austin, Herbst, and Porter affirm another of Reagan's assertions—that we desperately "need a more nuanced understanding of the ability of women to voice their concerns and of the limits on women's speech" (21).

*Resisting Reproductive Regulation* contributes to the ongoing effort to develop these nuanced understandings. Herbst's fiction shows that American women living in the early twentieth century *did* attempt to speak openly about abortion and its association with non-heteronormative sexual activity in public forums, despite the suppression, censorship, and marginalization they and their work suffered as a result. Austin's work shows that the same can be said about the relationship between disability and eugenic definitions of reproductive fitness. Porter's work shows that women of this period were willing to grapple with their own complicity in the oppression of others, including white women's culpability for the reproductive regulation and exploitation of black women.

Rather than abandoning their interests in reproductive difficulties and their critiques of reproductive regulations due to the risks of addressing these issues publicly, Austin, Herbst, and Porter turned to their craft as fiction writers to grapple with these ideas in inconspicuous and yet meaningful and perceptible ways. By paying careful attention to their depictions of reproductive issues in their fiction, and by recovering unpublished material from their archives, we can recognize them as writers who grappled with reproductive issues in ways that anticipate the intersectional analysis of reproductive justice that has grown increasingly mainstream since the late twentieth century. Austin, Herbst, and Porter are not outliers of their era. Further analysis of other American women writers of this period will reveal that they, too, depicted reproductive issues with nascent intersectionality. Djuna Barnes, H.D., Jessie Redmon Fauset, Pauline Hopkins, Edith Summers Kelley, Nella Larsen, Meridel LeSeuer, and Agnes Smedley are among those writers who challenged mainstream birth control advocacy in ways similar to those demonstrated by Austin, Herbst, and Porter. Their fiction demonstrates that attending to

the relationship between women's reproductive struggles and the other difficulties they encounter in their daily lives has a long history in the United States. And given the degree to which women's reproductive control remains under attack in the United States in the early decades of the twenty-first century, we have much to gain from recovering the insights and criticisms these women shared before any form of reliable reproductive control was legal or accessible.

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