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Idling Women: The Domestic Bildungsroman and the American City, 1830-1900

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IDLING WOMEN: THE DOMESTIC *BILDUNGSROMAN* AND THE
AMERICAN CITY, 1830-1900

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by

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“When a girl leaves her home at eighteen, she does one of two things. Either she falls into saving hands and becomes better, or she rapidly assumes the cosmopolitan standard of virtue and becomes worse.”

“She gazed and gazed, wondering, delighting, longing, and all the while the siren voice of the unrestful was whispering in her ear.”

- Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie*

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ABSTRACT

In *Idling Women: The Domestic Bildungsroman and the American City, 1830-1900*, I explore urban narratives of female non-development. In city novels featuring female protagonists, there are two normative arcs of development: either women find new opportunities for marriage, work, and, in some cases, independence in the city, or they fall prey to threats of seduction, poverty, and even death. However, these two plotlines fail to accommodate stories of women who wait to develop, fail at it, or otherwise resist what might be considered character growth. By problematizing distinctions between idleness and the American “work ethic” often tied to the industrialized city, I challenge existing feminist scholarship, which often equates non-normativity with active rebellion, focusing instead on rather negative character qualities such as dullness, vapidness, and procrastination.

Depicted in texts ranging from Catharine Sedgwick’s *Clarence* (1830) and Fanny Fern’s *Ruth Hall* (1854) to Henry James’s *Washington Square* (1880) and Theodore Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie* (1900), female characters show upward mobility until their promising plots stall out; others passively wait in the aftermath of failed domestic plots; some refuse to engage in any development whatsoever; and still others navigate common urban pitfalls (including seduction and death plots) by remaining staunchly vapid, self-interested characters. Sometimes dull, often disappointing, these protagonists beckon us to reexamine women in the urban *Bildungsroman* in order to counter the “marry-or-die” narratives of urban progress and, at the same time, resist more redemptive feminist celebrations of these protagonists’ active resistance.

INTRODUCTION

In *Idling Women: The Domestic Bildungsroman and the American City, 1830-1900*, I begin by asking a seemingly basic question: How do we read female characters who frustrate narrative expectations of progress and development? These might be individuals who procrastinate or wait to develop, those who bore the narrator and perhaps even their readers, or those whose plots of urban development are co-opted by others. How do we read these characters and their strange lack of urgency? When examining representations of female experience in the city, scholars often observe two broad narrative arcs. Women who go to the city either find success—through marriage or financial stability—or they meet their downfall. By focusing on these two plots, I maintain that scholars often overlook idleness or recast female inactivity as a proto-feminist act of resistance (which it not always is). Reading authors including Catharine Sedgwick, Fanny Fern, Henry James, and Theodore Dreiser, I work at the intersection of genre, feminist, and place/space theories in order to argue that idle female characters—and their quieter affects—embody a crisis of progress in the mid-to-late 19th-century U.S.

More often than not, definitions of the *Bildungsroman* center on the life-phases of a protagonist who develops through early education, travels, ordeals, and experiences in society. Often about young men, these narratives have frequently been mistaken as fictive accounts of all “human” development. In *Season of Youth*, Jerome Buckley contends that the *Bildungsroman* normally revolves around two or three basic elements that include a child raised in the country who will eventually leave home to make his own way in the world. For Buckley, the hero’s transformation occurs through his “search for a vocation and a working philosophy” (18). Attaining a position in society through an occupation completes the protagonist’s transition from adolescence to adulthood. Likewise, Franco Moretti, in *The Way of the World*, maps the genre

according to recurring milestones in the plot in order to construct a network surrounding the male protagonist's development. Less interested in the appearance of specific character or hero types, Moretti outlines thematic elements (the hero's early education, first rebellions, reluctant socialization, and ultimate acceptance) in order to highlight the defining features of the genre. Additionally, he goes on to make the astounding point that the nineteenth-century *Bildungsroman* managed the effects of modernization by coupling youth with maturity; by representing the beginning and, most importantly, the end of development; by making a form of progress.

Using Moretti's emphasis on youth as a jumping off point, Jed Esty has recently focused on the way modernist writers depicted perpetual youth, or arrested development, as a way to critique colonialism and imperialist modes of development. He contends that while novels of development permeate across cultural, national, and literary traditions, the twentieth century brings with it a "subset of youth novels, the stories of *failed* maturity" (213). In these texts, readers witness suspended development, or, in other words, a departure "from the eschatologies of identity formation, and toward a never-ending story of social transformation within the capitalist world-system" (213). Situating the protagonist's development in relation to capitalism, Esty highlights a subtle link between personal growth and production. Moreover, development becomes a mark of progress so that without it protagonists may seem to transform but, in reality, never really progress or move forward.

However, these models focus primarily on masculine milestones of development thereby overlooking relevant gender concerns when defining the genre. The protagonist's growth depends on experiences cast as stereotypically masculine such as pursuing a career, becoming an active member of the public sphere, which suggest that the genre itself speaks mostly to

masculine concerns. In *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*, Elizabeth Abel claims that “the sex of the protagonist modifies every aspect of a particular *Bildungsroman*: its narrative structure, its implied psychology, [and] its representation of social pressures” (5). As a result of Abel’s claim, we see how the central character’s sex permeates every facet of their development plot making it nearly impossible to accurately map the genre without taking into consideration how a female protagonist departs from a male tradition. Without accounting for these differences, “critics have assumed that society constrains men and women equally” when in reality “male protagonists struggle to find a hospitable context in which to realize their aspirations, [while] female protagonists must frequently struggle to voice any aspirations whatsoever” (6-7). As Abel rightly points out, there are different milestones at stake for male and female protagonists in the *Bildungsroman*; especially for women it seems difficult to even imagine a path of their own design. Not only does this disconnect alter a female character’s ability to articulate her own growth, but it also highlights a significant gap in the way the genre has heretofore been studied by scholars.

Before Abel, Nancy Miller discussed the conflict between self-possession and sexual possession for female characters in the marriage plot. By focusing on the marriage plot, she reveals the extent to which female protagonists are often bound by heteronormative goals in nineteenth-century fiction. In her work, *The Heroine’s Text*, for instance, Miller charts a close relationship between the heroine’s plot and the *Bildungsroman* of female autonomy that naturally concluded with the heroine’s marriage, effectively “silencing” her voice. Abel and others introduce gender into the genre by identifying two recurring thematic plots for female fictions of development—the first following a girl from childhood to womanhood, culminating in her

marriage, and the second beginning with a woman's awakening "after fulfilling the fairy-tale expectation" of marriage and motherhood (12). Neither plot addresses the search for an occupation or establishing an independent identity, which remain two of the most important milestones for the male protagonist. Furthermore, rather than external markers of growth, many of these changes for the female protagonist take place on the inside in the way she thinks or feels about certain people and things. While Buckley and others see a young man's development as a "public" evolution in a social, urban sphere, feminist scholars instead pinpoint a woman's development as a private, interior, and relational experience as a way to distinguish it from a masculine one.

Oftentimes, the mid- to late-nineteenth century narratives of female development frequently depart from the masculine milestones that dot the literary landscape of *Bildungsromane*. It is not that the developmental goals for men and women are so vastly different but more so that masculine growth has traditionally been charted through a series of outward or public accomplishments (education followed by a profession and a powerful position in society), while feminine development is commonly characterized as a journey inward (a maturity of the mind, spirit, and sensibility or sexuality). While many critics often accept these different definitions for the male versus female *Bildungsroman*, there are certain characters and novels which disrupt these simple gender binaries and complicate the anticipated path of inherently masculine or feminine growth. As a generic form, the *Bildungsroman* emerges not through the patterns of specific types of characters, but through the reappearance of certain thematic elements in the novel's plot.¹ Thus, its driving force—the pursuit of self through

¹ Bakhtin and Moretti each define this genre according to plot rather than character development. Bakhtin crafts a taxonomy of the novel's differing historical plots, claiming, "No specific historical subcategory upholds any given principle in pure form; rather, each is characterized by the prevalence of one or another principle for

education, work, and social status—is designed to favor these male goals of development over the female interior journey. While the central conflict for young men may be their struggle for self-actualization through a career and their place in society, for young women the problem proves entirely different as gender roles historically limit women’s access to these things, thus precluding their ability to “develop” in similar ways.

Despite such differences, there remains one common trait shared between both masculine and feminine plots of development: their tendency to be productive. The plots themselves become productive when specific events within them compel the protagonists to grow up and find ways to become useful, contributing members of their community through their work marriage. The characters are similarly expected to be productive in the sense that their individual growth depends on how well they work on themselves, fashioning their character. Within this larger genre, I maintain that we find gendered examples of these development plots. For example, oftentimes the plots which drive “woman’s fiction,” including the sentimental novel, the novel of awakening, and novels of seduction and ruin, are not always characterized in relation to the *Bildungsroman* genre, despite some being exemplary of the form. In *Woman’s Fiction*, Nina Baym identifies the plot guiding sentimental fiction as a “dilemma” that requires the heroine to overcome “mistreatment, unfairness, disadvantage, and powerlessness, recurrent injustices occasioned by her status as female and child” only to see this conflict eventually resolved once she “accept[s] herself as female while rejecting the equation of female with permanent child” (17). Thus, the heroine works to conquer any adversity by eventually accepting the part of herself she cannot change (her sex) and changing the part she can (her

formulating the figure of the hero” (10). Thus, for Bakhtin, the “travel novel,” “the novel of ordeal,” “the biographical novel,” all serve as foundations for the appearance of the *Bildungsroman*, and the narrative’s plot itself determines the extent to which the character develops or remains fixed.

position as child-like). By electing to “grow up” during the course of these novels, the heroines manage to escape at least one form of oppression working against them—their adolescence. By the novel’s end, they may still be female, but at least they are no longer children. Even the sentimental novel’s ending, marriage, points to further productive roles for women when they become wives and mothers. As a result, sentimental novels such as Catharine Sedgwick’s *A New-England Tale* (1822), Susan Warner’s *The Wide, Wide World* (1850), Maria Susanna Cummins’s *The Lamplighter* (1854), and Augusta Evans Wilson’s *St. Elmo* (1866) seem to uphold the important tenets of the *Bildungsroman*, where the female protagonists’ physical and moral development take center-stage. At the same time, these works and others find ways to be ironic in their treatment of this development plot. A female character may overcome her adolescence (and its imagined limitations) only to then find her dreams of autonomy thwarted by an ill-fated marriage. Of course, since most sentimental novels conclude with the heroine’s marriage, it takes the imaginative work of something like the novel of awakening to show how these seemingly happy endings can sometimes go awry for a woman.

In the novel of awakening, heroines undergo a similar maturing but this time of the mind rather than body. According to Susan J. Rosowski, the novel of awakening follows a protagonist who “attempts to find value in a world defined by love and marriage” (49). And, as a result, her “movement is inward toward greater self-knowledge that leads in turn to a revelation of the disparity between that self-knowledge and the nature of the world” (49). Characteristically, these texts focus on discontent protagonists who move forward in both positive and negative ways after marrying. While Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* perhaps offers the bleakest example of negative growth for its protagonist, considering that Edna Pontellier kills herself after her “awakening,” others like E.D.E.N. Southworth’s *The Deserted Wife* (1850) reveal a protagonist,

Hagar, who manages to become self-sufficient, financially successful, and incredibly productive after her husband leaves. Even stories that do not broach marriage as a reality for the protagonist, or leave her otherwise “unmarriageable” as a fallen woman, still serve as useful examples of feminine growth. While Susanna Rowson’s *Charlotte Temple* (1791) and Stephen Crane’s *Maggie* (1892) are just two examples where young women must pay for their youthful indiscretions with their lives, these stories nonetheless remain “productive” texts, since their heroines’ actions serve as cautionary tales for readers.

When reading these nineteenth-century heroines, feminist scholars tend to underscore the extent to which a female protagonist works around or outside the generic expectations of normative plots while, I suggest, overlooking their more unappealing qualities that might impede or even halt this work altogether. As a result, scholars tend to celebrate the proto-feminism found in “sentimental,” “domestic,” and “woman’s” fiction and recast it as radical, revolutionary, and progressive. Having established the presence of such themes, scholars then focus on how to underscore these moments of female autonomy and self-sufficiency in these novels in a way that will sustain the sentiment of these themes long after the heroine has married and her adventures have come to an end. As Susan K. Harris contends, “nineteenth-century women readers shared an interest in, and admiration for, outstanding women”, and, moreover, they found themselves “intensely attracted to fictional heroines who learned to develop themselves professionally ... or who learned, painfully, emotional self-sufficiency” (30). Undoubtedly these “outstanding women” realize all they did because they were industrious, and their narratives of development reflect these achievements in their productive plots. Juxtaposing these women to others though, it seems almost as if a woman has to be productive, in a broad sense, or run the risk of being

forgotten entirely. Inherently, the *Bildungsroman* is a narrative of progress and with it comes the expectation that the protagonist will grow in certain ways.

In this project, I am concerned with narratives set in and around city spaces that disrupt these notions of progress through female characters who manage to remain unproductive in or even become counterproductive to their various plots. That is, I intend to explore the connections between gender, urban space, and idleness in nineteenth-century American literature. From Rip Van Winkle dozing and Bartleby refusing to work, to Walt Whitman leaning and loafing and Henry David Thoreau retreating to Walden Pond—nineteenth-century American literature is replete with male idlers (Knighton 3). Often inheriting the Romantic tradition of contemplative repose, these fictional and historical figures often call into question narratives of American industriousness. In *Idle Threats: Men and the Limits of Productivity in Nineteenth-Century America*, Andrew Lyndon Knighton demonstrates how idleness remains counterintuitive to the American work ethic. More specifically, “the nineteenth century tends to be plotted as an epochal triumph of industriousness—a national application of elbow grease that settles the frontier, erects the metropolis and builds the infrastructure, holds the nation together through war and panic, and forges an indefatigable identity sometimes taken to be synonymous with both American ideals and modernity itself” (2). As Knighton points out, America has a long and studied history equating progress with notions of productivity. The Protestant work ethic at the heart of the new nation’s Puritan roots cultivates the expectation that progress is not possible without work. Taking it one step further, Knighton observes that progress remains indicative of an American identity, so those who counter it also stand in opposition to this national ideal. Thus, being modern and American meant being productive, and while this narrative often made room for women and gave them opportunities to become industrious in

their own right (producing and raising the new nation for instance), history seems far more forgiving of men who challenge these notions of progress through their “unproductivity” (3).

However, representations of women have rarely been discussed in the same way. It appears that neither the nation nor scholars have much use for useless women. Of course, idle women are not *really* useless; they serve vital purposes and, most importantly, possess the potential for movement (both forward and backward) even if they remain, for the purposes of the plot, idling. In part, their absence from critical attention stems from the fact that such representations of women often extend, or get interpreted through, a success-or-ruin kind of framework. We see this most often in the domestic *Bildungsroman*, where—instead of the journeys or quests most often associated with ostensibly masculine narratives of development—questions of marriage, motherhood, personal relationships, and interior development separate characters into those who find happy endings and those who do not. These two plotlines are often inextricably connected. As in the case of Chopin’s *The Awakening*, a single character might even manage both plotlines, as sexual awakening and development lead first to Edna’s liberation and then to her death. For my project, I am interested in how idleness in female protagonists not only gets misconstrued as a conscious act of resistance, or a refusal to participate in the various plots expected of them, but in some cases overlooked entirely. In this way, I am interested in a narrower conceptualization of “progress” rather than the broad, cultural one explored by Knighton. Focused on the *Bildungsroman*, I necessarily consider progress through character and plot development while nonetheless exploring the broader understandings of socio-economic growth or decline especially in regards to the American city in the mid-to-late nineteenth century.

Female idleness does emerge in some forms in the nineteenth century, specifically in relation to travel writing. As we will see, it also takes on significance in our contemporary moment. The following examples—all British—reveal the fluidity of a term like “idleness,” the way in which it can be uttered in tongue-in-cheek fashion in order to underscore particular kinds of female productivity. In 1871, Frances Minto Elliot, an English writer, published her travelogues: *Diary of an Idle Woman in Italy*, which recounted her time abroad as well as her visits to Spain, Sicily, and Constantinople. Through her travel writing, she attempts to show how her wealth and leisure time afforded her the opportunity to ascertain the truth of each of the specific places she visits. For, as she states at the beginning of her diary about her time in Italy, “I have all my life steadfastly proposed to tell the truth, and have rendered myself unaccountably unpopular by doing so. I also propose to tell the truth in this rough Diary—its only merit” (1). Initially, Elliot feigns humility by acting as if her work has little merit while revealing how, by means of her leisurely strolls through Western and Eastern Europe, she has become a dispassionate and *idle* traveler, attaining a level of truthfulness only hoped for by her male counterparts. For Elliot, then, idleness cannot be separated from productivity and, more specifically, with a specific interpretation of women’s writing or “work” more generally as fundamentally critical of patriarchy. It is no wonder that, just this past year, two entrepreneurs (who refer to themselves as “caretakers”) by the names of Rachel Anderson and Cis O’Boyle founded a contemporary art organization known as *Idle Women*. During WWII, the British government advertised the need for women to operate canal boats in order to ship supplies up and down the country’s water channels. Due to the fact that their unit badges were composed of two letters—IW—which stood for Inland Waterways, these supply workers were also known by a particular misnomer: idle women. They were anything but, and through their tireless effort

they not only supported the national war effort but also called into question the established gender dimensions of home- and war-fronts. Anderson and O'Boyle have converted one of these canal boats into a work and living space for female artists. Like Virginia Woolf who, back in 1929, expressed the dire need for literary women to have two things—sufficient income and rooms of their own—these two “caretakers” provide artist-in-residence support for women and their families in order to “suppor[t] and initiat[e] the new generation of work with an expansive diverse network of women.” Idle women work, and the work they do often resists or overtly challenges patriarchal power structures.

Spanning nearly a century-and-a-half, these two examples (or three if including Woolf) reveal idleness-as-productivity in a specifically British context, but the same idea could quite easily be shown in the context of nineteenth-century American literature. Turning for a moment to a rather starkly different American example of female idleness, I consider Harriet Jacobs, a runaway slave who later recounted her seven-year tenure concealed in her grandmother's attic in her autobiographical work, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861). Jacobs describes her experiences as a fugitive slave in hiding for many years until she eventually managed to escape to Philadelphia and then New York. As a precursor to feminist writers such as Woolf, and as a woman whose experience living in a garret too small for her to stand fully erect, Jacobs turns the idea of “a room of one's own” on its head. With such restrictions placed on her physical movements, Jacobs spent a significant portion of her time lying down listening to and observing the scenes going on below her and outside the house. Her idleness remains importantly different from the idleness described in the three British examples above. First, Jacobs's position is mediated by her status as a runaway slave and a black woman. Her race and class play a major role in complicating notions that idleness is always in some way the result of leisure and

privilege. In Jacobs's situation, her forced idleness atrophies her body while, nonetheless, inspiring her mind. Nowhere close to as physically and financially comfortable as the upper-class Woolf claims women must be in order to create lasting art, Jacobs transforms her claustrophobic living quarters into the birthplace of a literary masterpiece. Her ability to turn this extended period of physical "idleness" into a productive work of art, which illuminated the physical and emotional horrors of slavery for many northern readers, demonstrates one way that idleness can operate devoid of leisure. More importantly, this example highlights exactly how idleness can become productive in an American context even devoid of the inherent privilege of race, class, and liberty.

In this project, I am more interested in idleness that feels neither as productive nor as redemptive. As I will show, it often emerges in fictional accounts of white women of privilege and occurs in narratives of "development" that take place in or around the American city. In nineteenth-century narrative accounts and in literary and cultural scholarship, the city has often been identified as the epicenter of progress. In many novels, the city serves as a significant site for these narratives of development for both male and female protagonists and functions as a significant threat to idleness. According to Burton Pike, "[D]uring the nineteenth century the literary city came more and more to express the isolation or exclusion of the individual from a community" (xii), while the *Bildungsroman* traditionally concentrates on the hero's transition from isolation to eventual acceptance in a community. Thus, the *Bildungsroman* and the city emerge as a natural union of plot and setting in the novel. As novels such as *The Awakening* and *Maggie* suggest, city space becomes crucial to many narratives of development, independent of whether the protagonists are female or male. After all, Moretti describes the main character of the *Bildungsroman* not only in masculine but also in urban terms: "[T]his new novelistic hero—

young, male, just arrived in the city, socially mobile—is the typical representative of that middle class, in vertiginous growth, which shapes the public opinion of the metropolis” (165). For Moretti as well as for Buckley, the city helps to introduce the hero’s education, rebellion, socialization, and acceptance—all thematic elements often crucial for narratives of development as they characterize them. Likewise, in novels that explore female development, the city either contributes to “awakenings,” or it becomes the setting for a cautionary tale about the vices and eventual downfalls of its protagonists.

By the 1830s and the years to follow, the city would fall under suspicion for its artificiality and depravity and for the particular threats it posed to its inhabitants both women and men. As Dana Brand notes in *The Spectator and the American City in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, the United States has a significant “antiurban tradition” (64). Following the War of 1812, the rise of northeastern cities as America’s commercial centers was met with mixed reactions at best. While the early colonial period witnessed Thomas Jefferson’s far-reaching agrarian passions contrasting with the industrial city’s possibilities, as the century wore on, others like Ralph Waldo Emerson would remain far more entrenched in their anti-urban attitudes. In fact, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Thoreau all had “bad dreams of the city” (White 36). They imagined the city encouraged a dangerous mixing of vices and lacked the nurturing, edifying qualities that made the country so restorative for the human spirit.

Other writers such as Edgar Allan Poe and George Lippard saw the city for what it was—dangerous—yet full of narrative possibilities.² Poe’s narrator in “The Man of the Crowd” (1840)

² It is important to note that there were positive responses to cities too. Herman Melville always considered New York City his home and, according to Wyn Kelley, harbored “hopes of the city as a place where he could move and thrive” (38). Melville’s treatment of New York in *Pierre* (1852) and “Bartleby, The Scrivener: A Story of Wall-

spends copious amounts of time observing a London crowd before narrowing in on one particular man, which he then follows all around the city because he assumes, though he has little evidence to support it, that the man must be a murderer. Here, Poe reveals how it is not the city but how it affects our perception of reality that we should fear. In this way, his deluded narrator actually becomes the thing he has feared all along to be true about this stranger, a mad man stalking a random person around the city. Similarly, in *The Quaker City, or The Monks of Monk Hall* (1845), George Lippard fully embraces Philadelphia's underlying sordidness as he depicts a city and its inhabitants overrun with murder, crime, and conspiracies. Capturing the tawdriness running rampant in the nineteenth-century city in literary form was without a doubt a profitable decision on the part of several American writers. Charles Glaab points out, "sensational works on the sinful metropolis [. . .] began to find a wide market [. . .] developing in near pornographic fashion the story of the innocent country girl who is led into evil ways in the city (63). Women made for popular victims in the city both in fiction and life. While threats to female security and propriety made the various urban ills an easy scapegoat, these temptations result in a further critique of modernization.

The nineteenth century was a period of profound change where increased modes of transportation, communication, technology, and industrialization would all ultimately alter men and women's private and public lives. The city's changes invariably affected its residents, their relationships, and work as the rise of city "sites" characteristic of urban life—the apartment house, the boarding house, the hotel, the theatre, the department store, the street, the public park, etc.—altered people's interactions. In *Gender, Identity, and Place: Understanding Feminist*

Street" (1853) present a dark and gloomy picture of urban life, but they do not tell the whole story, since "Melville did feel distaste for the city, but he also embraced it and returned to it again and again" (15). Similarly, Walt Whitman famously sings the city's virtues over the country in *Leaves of Grass* (1865).

Geographies, McDowell suggests that “Civil society was defined as consisting of a public and a private domain; it...maintained that women chose their role in the latter as wives and mothers and so had power and fulfillment in this private arena” (175). Whether nineteenth-century women elected to remain in the domestic home or society made the choice for them, the fact remains that the city was seen to have separate, relatively fixed, gendered zones with the larger metropolis. Yet, at the same time that rigid gender roles developed within the home, the space of the home itself was changing as a result of the evolving nature of the nineteenth-century American city. Klimasmith explains, “As opposed to the stability and order associated with the sentimentalized rural home, urban spaces were characterized by motion, randomness, change, connection, and repetition” (5). America’s nineteenth-century cities were evolving, fluid, permeable spaces.

While the city’s apartment and boarding houses served to break down privacy barriers between families (and women) and renegotiate divisions of labor, city streets illustrate a similar permeability with the forced mixing of people of different sex, race, and class. This fluidity threatened and thrilled the middle-class masses if the increasing popularity of dime novels, penny presses, with their urban tropes and city figures are any indicator of this interest: “The penny press engaged a populace excited by the possibilities and dangers of the increasingly diverse industrial city, and narrativized by the very elements that lay outside bourgeois social order: unpredictable loss or inheritance, crime, illicit sex, and cross-class romance, all of which threatened to blur class boundaries” (Enstad 33). These formulaic tales always kept a young, susceptible woman at their center. Her seduction, downfall, sometimes death or rescue represented everything most feared about the dangers of American cities.

While the city may have presented new opportunities, or in some instances tragedies, for women, it also reinscribed traditional gender roles in certain ways and prevented women from being entirely lost in the throngs of people walking the streets. The city may have given birth to the *flâneur*, an urban dweller who wanders the streets in a state of anonymity, but it is important to remember that the *flâneur* is always and forever male. In the follow-up to her groundbreaking essay, “The Invisible Flâneuse” Janet Wolff explains, “the *flâneur*, the central figure of modernity, was inherently gendered male. And the account of urban experience, now seen through the eyes of the *flâneur* and his cohorts, instantly renders women invisible or marginal” (19). Wolff contends that it was nearly impossible for women to go unnoticed on an urban street, since their very presence was suspect and suggestive of wrongdoing. While an element of idleness remains connected to the masculine figure “who strolls aimlessly in the modern city, observing people and events” (18), women in the city, “particularly women apparently wandering without aim, immediately attract the negative stamp of the ‘non-respectable’” (19). The ever-elusive *flâneuse* becomes so difficult to pin down because she embodies an aimlessness only to be found in non-respectable women such as prostitutes who could easily wind up in cautionary tales that use their idleness in productive ways.

In *Idling Women*, I take up idleness as a kind of arrested development, and therefore as a problem for narratives of progress, while also focusing on questions related specifically to gender, which remains rather peripheral in other critics’ works. Recently, feminist scholars such as Linda McDowell and Betsy Klimasmith have emphasized the unprecedented opportunities made available to women in the nineteenth-century city and have shown how the city reinforces the two paths—success or ruin—for women. If, in Moretti’s terms, the *Bildungsroman* opens up and closes down modernization in order to give form to progress, narratives about female

development seek closure through marriage, financial independence, poverty, seduction, and even death. Paralleling the way that cities themselves were seen as privileged sites of progress, such narratives productively celebrate characters' virtues and caution the reader against other characters' vices—with female characters remaining both central and instrumental to the genre.

With so much overlapping motion and progress happening in the city, representations of idleness have rarely found a place in such discussions, partially because they are often co-opted by these two broad ways of thinking. That is, many times idleness gets characterized—in narratives and in their critical reception—as ruinous for women or as an act of feminist resistance. Women who marry, have children, and run a home become marked by productivity as we see in countless sentimental novels including Lydia Maria Child's *Hobomok* (1824), Caroline Kirland *A New Home—Who'll Follow?* (1839), and Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868). Similarly, even single women and “old maids” are expected to be industrious and make substantive contributions and serve their communities, evidenced by characters in Catharine Sedgwick's *Married or Single?* (1857) and Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896). Often these narratives of female industriousness are taken a step further when female “usefulness”—the foundation for Republican Motherhood—becomes a rationale for women's increased access to education, suffrage, and a certain degree of autonomy. As such, these often edifying plotlines of progress fail to accommodate stories of women who wait to develop, fail at it, or otherwise decline to contribute to what might be considered character growth. In other words, the very seductiveness of normative, industrious, or feminist plots conceal the various idling women who proliferate the pages of nineteenth-century novels of development set in the city.

In my project, I fill this gap by exploring a number of idling female characters who appear in Catharine Sedgwick's *Clarence* (1830), Fanny Fern's *Ruth Hall* (1854), Henry James's *Washington Square* (1880), and Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900). In these texts, female characters show upward mobility until their promising plots stall out; others passively wait in the aftermath of failed domestic plots; some refuse to engage in any development whatsoever; and still others navigate common urban pitfalls by remaining staunchly vapid, self-interested characters. Sometimes dull, often disappointing or even just plain boring, these protagonists beckon us to confront what Sianne Ngai would call our "ugly feelings" about the novel of development. Rather than powerful or dynamic emotions, these middle-of-the-road affects embody the qualities of complacency, resignation, and ambivalence so unattractive in female protagonists. Accounting for these affects and the protagonists associated with them, however, allows us to push at the borders of the *Bildungsroman* genre—to include non-development—while also showing how idling women embody a crisis of progress in the mid-to-late nineteenth-century United States.

I refer to this as a crisis rather than just a critique because, in the end, the narratives discussed offer neither positive nor negative approaches to progress. In other words, the city becomes an engine of progress in the nineteenth century. The rapid growth of the industrialized urban space resulted in these changing notions of public and private space, American identity, and gender roles for men and women. On a much smaller scale, the *Bildungsroman* is a genre rooted in an individual's progress and development. Moving away from an ideology of "progress" in the nineteenth century and especially what those notions meant for the American city, I consider how an individual's particular narrative of progress can be disrupted by moments of non-development or idleness in the nineteenth-century American city novel. At the same

time, female characters often represented better examples of ways for the nation to develop. Through concepts such as Republican Motherhood, married women were charged with the essential task of birthing and raising the new nation, whereas unmarried women were supposed to live exemplary lives in service to others.³ Intended to correct the social ills of modernization especially those ills found in the city, representations of industrious women offered better ways to progress. Idle women, on the other hand, do neither; they neither critique nor advance ideas about progress. Whereas other narratives might “work” to celebrate or censure these plots, the novels I discuss remain decidedly “unmotivated” by these goals. Ultimately, my project offers new ways to explore the relationship between the city and these idling female characters’ non-normative plots of development in the nineteenth century.

In the first chapter, “The Idle Heiress: Domestic Economy in Sedgwick’s *Clarence; Or, A Tale of Our Own Times*,” I begin with the traditional opposition between city and country. Initially, I address how Sedgwick distinguishes between her country-dwelling protagonist, Gertrude Clarence, and New York City’s flippant “idlers of fashionable life” (138). In fact, Gertrude’s father removes her from the negative influence of the materialist culture found in the city, bringing her instead to their rural family home in order to educate her to become a virtuous and financially astute individual. However, throughout the course of *Clarence*, Gertrude’s seemingly masculine education coupled with her female development, which disrupts the patriarchal line of wealth and power, ultimately stalls out when she is used to cement the economic union between her father and suitor, securing the patriarchy and allowing her new husband to buy back his family’s city home with the inheritance from his father-in-law. As a

³ Nancy Miller’s foundational work *The Heroine’s Text* discusses several eighteenth-century variations on the female *Bildungsroman*. Elizabeth Abel also suggests two recurring thematic “plots” in female fictions of development—one where a young woman’s coming-of-age ends with her marriage (12).

result, her development in the country, which prepared her to become her father's partner, actually results in her being made idle in her return to the city and subsequent marriage.

If the opening chapter sheds light on Sedgwick's narrative about the city-country dialectic, which begins with the promise of female independence but ultimately incorporates the protagonist's desire for autonomy into a finale about marriage as a commodifying practice in the literature and culture of the 1830s, then Chapter Two begins where that novel ends. In "Between Plots: The Passivity of Pseudonymity in Fanny Fern's *Ruth Hall*," I trace a failed *Bildungsroman* in Fern's novel where the main character achieves developmental milestones like marriage and motherhood only to have her husband die, compelling her to leave the family's tranquil country home for a city boarding house. Ruth works her way up in the world and gains financial independence and celebrity as a pseudonymous newspaper writer, but her story is not quite the celebration of her escape from the traditional domestic plot it appears to be. While scholars normally read Fern's novel either as floundering in an attempt to correct course and return to the domestic plot or as a celebration of the protagonist's escape, I suggest it is not nearly as redemptive in these traditional or feminist ways. Living in the wreckage of a domestic plot that has ended too soon, Ruth comes to realize that life persists in these gaps between romances and all narratives of development must inevitably end. Although Ruth makes her living as the pseudonymous "Floy" by writing about fleeting and romantic plots women, her reality subsists of an existence in the space after one plot ends and before another begins. As Floy, she sells stories that perpetuate the myth of romantic bliss while, in the broader novel, she writes against that idea by exploring pseudonymity as challenge to female identity and thus to the plot of development. Ultimately, Fern's novel highlights complacency that bespeaks an interminable waiting rather than a celebration of female development. This waiting breeds an indifference,

even idleness, in Ruth who resigns herself to whatever the future may bring because she rests assured, whether it be good or bad that without a doubt it will end.

Whereas Fern focuses on her protagonist's resignation throughout the novel, and especially in the closing scene, James depicts a main character who, plagued by a similar inactivity, also resembles Sedgwick's upper-class heroine. In Chapter 3, "Henry James's *Bartleby: Female Stasis and Urban Progress in Washington Square*," I turn to Henry James's novel in order to discuss how James's narrator contrasts his interest in the rapidly changing city with his disinterest in the novel's static heroine Catherine, a woman who never moves out of her father's home, never marries, never ventures outside her small social circle, and by the end, refuses to even leave the city. An interesting paradox, Catherine's failure to do anything is likened to a city where everything happens but nothing really progresses. Elaborating on this paradox, I focus on how the novel becomes a fictive critique of new New York at the same time that it also calls into question the customs of Old New York. That is, if likening the dull Catherine to the ever-changing city leads the narrator (and James) to reminisce about an older way of life in the city, then not only does the protagonist's inactivity reflect such a backward glance but it also opens up a space to critique Old New York as a crucial setting for the protagonist's development into the insufficient character she eventually becomes.

In Chapter 4, I expand upon the interest in narrative voice and character-narrator relationships that is important for but by no means central to the previous chapter. Throughout "The Idle Narrator: Desire and The Limits of the Cautionary Tale in Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*," I explore a sweeping narrative about a female protagonist who traverses both Chicago and New York and who pursues and participates in almost any and every experience presented to her. Initially I show how the masculine narrator moralizes by casting the narrative as a

cautionary tale about a female protagonist who privileges shallow consumer goods, money, and fame over character growth and reform, which would lead her to desire marriage and a stable home life. Despite the fact that the narrator attempts to show how men and women experience the city in gendered and irreconcilably different ways, throughout the book he becomes mesmerized by the materialist trappings of the city in the same way that he hopes to show Carrie's decline into the world of consumerism. Whereas the other three chapters explore female characters as idle, here I show how the female protagonist actually creates a situation where the narrator, based on his own logic of gender distinctions, becomes "feminized," causing his narrative of development to effectively stall out.

In stalling out, the story most accurately reflects the particular type of idleness characteristic of many of these female characters. They are not idle in the sense that they refuse to move or think. Rather they idle the way an automobile might. Women such as the heiresses Gertrude and Catherine and the ever-resourceful Ruth and Carrie work hard in ways that ironically keep themselves from moving forward or backward. Their stories refuse to be easily categorized as narratives of outright development or as cautionary tales. Of course, many may rightly revolt against any imagery that equates women and cars, and rightly so. A project that examines female characters as unproductive women, especially one that recasts the narratives of women sometimes lauded for their hard work and autonomy, might easily be mistaken as an outpouring of anti-feminism. Yet, I find "stalling out" and the metaphor it suggests thought-provoking ways to understand these female characters in the nineteenth century, an age that witnessed the debut of the first automobile during its penultimate decade. On the whole, I show how narrators and even male characters have attempted to capitalize on perceived failures of female characters by forcing heroines out of their idling positions and into more negative,

cautionary storylines. At the same time, I seek to address perceived oversights in feminist approaches that tend to focus solely on examples of female empowerment in the nineteenth-century domestic *Bildungsroman*.

**THE IDLE HEIRESS: DOMESTIC ECONOMY IN
CATHARINE MARIA SEDGWICK'S *CLARENCE; OR, A TALE OF OUR OWN TIMES***

In a letter mailed from New York City in 1821 to her sister Frances, Catharine Sedgwick confessed, “I am, it is true, in a city where Fashion maintains her Empire, and has her willing and unwilling subjects” (Dewey 118). In the same way that Boethius might personify Fortune, Shakespeare Fate, or Emily Dickinson Death, Sedgwick alludes to the way fashion reigns supreme over antebellum New Yorkers but also goes on to anticipate and dispel her sister’s imagined concerns: “We have nothing to do with the fashionable gayeties of the city. Our visiting is all of a familiar and domestic kind” (Dewey 118). In this moment, Sedgwick was likely unaware that these remarks would form the basis of her later work,⁴ but her words, nevertheless, convey her careful understanding of a city like New York’s wayward pull. Here, she differentiates between the fashionable and the domestic, between the city and what lies outside her “empire;” that juxtaposition finds its realization most fully in the novel of manners—and Sedgwick’s only city novel—*Clarence; Or, A Tale of Our Own Times*.

Throughout the novel, Sedgwick critiques urban consumerism and depicts progressive forms of female development found in the country. Deriding city-dwellers as idlers rather than the reasonable and productive individuals the new American nation needs, the narrator positions the protagonist, Gertrude, as a woman groomed to become the heir and executor of her family’s fortune. For Sedgwick, the idlers are in the city, where industry is concentrated, rather than in the more rural spaces that in previous centuries were the imaginative sites of otium and leisure. As Patricia Kalayjian claims, the novel is a “critique of contemporary urban America that

⁴ See Melissa Homestead’s Introduction to *Clarence*. She states that “Sedgwick left no definitive traces of the origins and composition of *Clarence*, in contrast to the research for and writing of *Redwood*, *Hope Leslie*, and *The Linwoods*...Nevertheless, one can glimpse the seeds of *Clarence* in her letters and journals of 1827.” (Broadview Press, 2011), 19.

appraises a new society principally interested in material goods and profit making” (104). Yet, if Sedgwick does set urban consumerism against the social and religious virtues of country life, then—as Raymond Williams and others have pointed out—the country, as a changing idea, also covers a multitude of sins, including environmental and economic exploitation.⁵ That is, by likening country and city life, Sedgwick explores the porous boundaries between idleness and productivity.

The novel is in dialogue with many other books that examine such permeability. In *Walden* (1854), for example, Henry David Thoreau talks about how others might consider his vigorous activity at Walden and in his bean field inconsequential and therefore idle. As well, the protagonist of Richard Henry Dana’s novel *The Idle Man* (1821) claims to possess so many different passions that his pursuit of each is leisure. Despite *Clarence*’s draw as a “tale of our own times,” it remains one of Sedgwick’s least known works both in her time and in the decades of scholarship that followed. While the novel received mostly favorable reviews, several critics agreed that in comparison to Sedgwick’s previous works, *Clarence* “is quite of another character” (*American Monthly Magazine* 2.4 July 1830, 280). Its position in the Sedgwick *oeuvre* remains distinct, not only for its relative lack of success compared to the novels that preceded and succeeded it—*Hope Leslie* in 1827 and *The Linwoods* in 1835,—but also for Sedgwick’s shift to a contemporary setting. The sharp-witted satire in her only contemporary city novel presents a poignant, yet, at times, unflattering portrait of America’s urban classes. In a letter to a close friend, written shortly after the book went to print, Sedgwick asserts that it “treats of the present times, topics that concern every body, and the follies of the day. The scene is chiefly in New York, hazardous ground I am aware, but, at the same time, it seems to me of

⁵ In *The Country and the City* (1975), Raymond Williams says that rural exploitation has “dissolved into a landscape.”

more popular interest than a tale of the olden time” (Dewey 207). A departure from her own historical romances and those popularized by Sir Walter Scott and James Fenimore Cooper, *Clarence* stands as the first American novel of manners⁶ and Sedgwick’s most notable attempt to capture her modern times.⁷ Moreover, Sedgwick examines the effect of the city’s rapid growth, consumerism, and rising aristocracy on the domestic.

Later writers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Edgar Allan Poe were quite vocal in their reservations about American cities. While this suspicion does not define the era entirely, it nevertheless pervades several nineteenth-century literary works that highlight urban dangers and depravity. In *The Intellectual Versus the City*, Morton and Lucia White situate these anti-urban anxieties in relation to some of the nation’s earliest intellectuals, citing Thomas Jefferson’s divided loyalty between an agrarian utopia at odds with Europe’s sprawling cosmopolitans and the new nation’s growing need for its own manufacturing centers. Similarly, Ralph Waldo Emerson would claim that “Whilst we want cities as the centers where the best things are to be found, cities degrade us by magnifying trifles” (qtd. in Whites 27). Focusing on authors who dedicated a significant portion of time to cosmopolitan themes, characters, and settings, the Whites argue that Melville, Hawthorne, and Poe suffered from “bad dreams of the city,” where they feared that America’s commercial centers “would go the wicked way of London, Liverpool, and Rome” (36). More than anything they, like Jefferson, Emerson, and even Sedgwick, at times, were suspicious of the city’s “artificial operations” (26), fearing something disingenuous in its activities and inhabitants.

⁶ See Carolyn Karcher’s “Catharine Maria Sedgwick in Literary History” where she proposes a new lineage for the “homegrown novel of manners tradition” that begins not with James Fenimore Cooper but instead with Sedgwick. *Catharine Maria Sedgwick: Critical Perspectives*, Eds. Lucinda Damon-Bach and Victoria Clemens, (New Hampshire: UPNE, 2003), 5.

⁷ “*Clarence*...with one exception, the only one of Miss Sedgwick’s larger works whose scene is New York in the modern time” Ed. Mary Dewey, *Life and Letters of Catharine M. Sedgwick*, (New York: Harpers & Bros.) 1871, 204.

Her letters to her sister Frances and others reveal her acute awareness of the prevailing metaphysical and political anxieties about urban life, but her 1830 novel is not plagued by these same fears, since in Sedgwick's portrait of New York it is the people, not the city, who are artificial. In *Clarence*, the heroine's father, Mr. Clarence, becomes the primary mouthpiece for these critiques. A man easily persuaded by anti-urban arguments, he fears that city-dwellers consumed by fashion and vain pursuits will impede his daughter's growth as a rationale, reasonable person. Although she contrasts the country with the city, Sedgwick refuses to link urban experience with a woman's downfall as other authors had done and would come to do.⁸ When the Clarences leave the city for the country, Gertrude is only a young girl, but upon returning to New York as a young woman, she does not go the way of George Lippard's Mary, or, later on, Stephen Crane's Maggie, but meets a seemingly felicitous and conventional domestic end. In a way, Gertrude's unfettered intellectual and physical growth in the country preparing her to take on the position as the head of the family makes her idle position at the novel's end all the worse. Through Gertrude's role as an object of exchange between men, Sedgwick highlights the kind of gender commodification that transforms Gertrude from an active participant in the marriage market to a product of it. She moves from her powerful position as an upper-class woman, almost her father's partner, who does not need to marry for either fortune or status and can instead marry for love, to a wife whose husband has now replaced her as her father's partner.

Starting off as antithetical to the city's modernization, Sedgwick's forward-thinking *Bildungsroman*—that in many ways positions Gertrude as central to the Clarence family

⁸ Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* (1791) follows a young woman who after being seduced is left pregnant and alone in New York. Later figures, such as Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1892), would similarly meet their death in the city after sexual transgressions that left them ruined women.

lineage—makes a similar point. Published on the cusp of significant changes for women (as authors such as Lydia Maria Child’s and Margaret Fuller’s activism launch them into the political sphere), the novel appears at the dawn of an emerging nineteenth-century proto-feminism in women’s writing. Child’s *An Appeal in Favor of That Class of Americans Called Africans* would appear in 1833 and encourage the emancipation of slaves. And, by decade’s end, Fuller would serve as the editor of the Emerson’s transcendentalist journal *The Dial* and go on to publish “The Great Lawsuit” which she then turned into her renowned work *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845). Sedgwick addresses neither slavery nor abolition with *Clarence*, but she does offer an alternative form of female development that finds its foundation in Gertrude’s masculine education by her father. In short, the plot of Sedgwick’s novel is as follows. The Carrolls live a quiet, middle-class life in New York City when they unexpectedly receive a large inheritance and learn their proper name Clarence. After the mother and only son die, Mr. Clarence and his daughter, Gertrude, leave the city for the country in order to escape various urban ills. Away from the city, Gertrude grows to be a strong, rational, and kind young woman so that when she returns to New York and is confronted with the pressures of high society and a tedious family, the Laytons, who use their daughter as a pawn in the marriage market, she is able to see the situation clearly and respond appropriately. During her time in the city, she conceals her true identity from the man she loves, wanting to be sure that his affection is genuine. Eventually, after rescuing her friend, Emilie Layton, from a dubious suitor blackmailing her father, the novel ends with a double wedding between Emilie and her *beau ideal* and Gertrude and Roscoe. Raised and educated in the country, Gertrude’s productivity leads paradoxically to an eventual unproductivity—through the commodification of the domestic—just as her seemingly beneficial and progressive country life returns her inevitably, and in very real ways, to

the city. In other words, I argue that the active plot of Gertrude's education in domestic economy gets disrupted—or better yet disrupts itself—when she becomes a passive object of exchange between her father and his new son-in-law.

As a sentimental novel and as “cultural critique,”⁹ *Clarence* seems a perfectly intriguing tale of love, family, money, and friendship all set amidst the excitement of an up-and-coming metropolis; however, by deviating, for a time, from the sentimental plot in favor of a masculine plot of development akin to a traditional *Bildungsroman*, Sedgwick weaves two plots—one economic, one domestic—in order to show how the city space conflates the two and ultimately becomes a site for the commodification of the domestic. As the narrator aptly observes, “The heroines of our times live in a business world” (Sedgwick 326), but as we see in Gertrude's case, her development becomes determined by this world when it is co-opted by others, used for their purposes rather than be useful for herself. In *Invented Cities*, Mono Domosh's “‘new’ cultural geography” gives insight into the relationship between urban landscapes and “each city's particular economic, social, and cultural factors” that helped to determine its development (8). If nineteenth-century New York was a city “of extremes and excess,” its changing “landscape” reflected this dynamic (7). As Cathy Davidson contends in her pivotal essay “No More Separate Spheres!,” scholars often replicate problematic (and perhaps nonexistent¹⁰) binaries when it comes to men, women and nineteenth-century notions of public and private space. Davidson observes that this “binaric version of nineteenth-century American history is ultimately

⁹ My work is indebted to Melissa J. Homestead and Ellen A. Foster for their edition of *Clarence* from Broadview Press, 2011. Also to Patricia L. Kalayjian's essay “Disinterest as Moral Corrective in *Clarence*'s Cultural Critique” in *Catharine Maria Sedgwick: Critical Perspectives* and one of the few critical works to date to focus entirely on Sedgwick's fourth novel.

¹⁰ Davidson claims: “I emphasize the metaphoric and explanatory nature of the separate spheres because it has never been clear to me that these spheres actually existed in anything like a general, definitive, or, for that matter, ‘separate’ way in nineteenth-century America or that they existed in America any more than in other countries or in the nineteenth century more than in earlier centuries” (445).

unsatisfactory because it is simply too crude an instrument...for understanding the different, complicated ways that nineteenth-century American society or literary production functioned” (445). Although Davidson is correct in her critique that exploiting this duality perpetuates a “one versus the other” mentality that minimizes the complexities of space, work, and gender, it is nonetheless useful to consider public and private spheres in relation to masculine and feminine roles, especially in urban settings where the division of labor regularly separated the sexes.

A more nuanced approach to the way shifting spaces in the city impacted gender roles and dynamics for men and women brings about a clearer picture of the way women’s wage work outside the home impacted narratives of female development and, most importantly, imagined new avenues of growth for women in the public sphere. In *Gender, Identity, and Place*, Linda McDowell insists that as a result of “industrial capitalism” urban spaces, in particular, were divided by “home and waged work—a so-called private arena associated with women, and a public world of men,” a development that “had a huge impact on women’s lives and status” (73). Mono Domosh’s work on historical geography and urban landscapes similarly shows how prevailing gender ideologies in the nineteenth century affected urban landscapes. She explains that “work on the built environment must incorporate an understanding of the individuals who shape that environment and the socioeconomic context in which those individual decisions are made” (5). For Domosh, individuals play a significant role in shaping their environment at the same time they may be shaped by it. Turning back to Sedgick, we see the ways that Gertrude’s strong sense of character is informed by her life in the country, while at the same time she becomes more self-assured as a result of her ability to command and make changes to her father’s country home entirely at her own discretion. As the only woman in her father’s household after her mother’s death, Gertrude takes on an active role in shaping the Clarence

domestic space. She oversees the servants and handles the family's social engagements, but her duties extend beyond the domestic as she manages her father's affairs, and even reads aloud his mail and business correspondence over the breakfast table (143). Understanding these divisions at work in the social, cultural, and geographical landscapes, I will attend to the complicated way public and private spaces and seemingly rigid gender roles mingle and overlap in Sedgwick's *Clarence*.

The novel troubles the distinction between the private family home and patriarchal lines of power, wealth, and influence, revealing a loathsome commercialism that drives the city. Most strikingly, the novel's complex sentimental heroine, Gertrude, moves with very little trouble between these rural and city spaces, public and private worlds, and economic and sentimental plots throughout the novel. While Gertrude's ability to seamlessly transition between normally disparate spaces may be unusual for a woman, Sedgwick seems to underscore that it was her father's careful education that led to her being able to proficiently navigating these spaces. As the model of reason and generosity, she appears to possess the power to shape the social architecture of New York City's upper-class world. In this chapter, my discussion is focused on the way Gertrude, as a middle- and then upper-class white woman of fortune, is able to renegotiate gender roles and the boundaries of public and private spaces in the city. As a woman of financial means with the freedom it tenders, Gertrude can afford to pursue her own path without being beholden to the burden of marrying well to ensure her financial and social status. Others in the novel are not so lucky, such as the case of Emilie Layton who is compelled by familial debt and social expectations to become engaged to a man whom she does not love in order to protect her father's reputation. In this way, the sentimental nature and epistolary structure of Sedgwick's only city novel undermines the male-dominated economic plot with

which the narrative begins, only to foreshadow the way in which female development succumbs to an urban marriage market by the novel's end. In this way, narrative voicing and the novel's generic structure parallel the female character's journey from a quiet child to a business-minded partner in her father's affairs, ending with her exchange as "gift" in the repaired patriarchal line from father to son-in-law. Furthermore, Sedgwick exposes marriage in this context not as a private domestic alliance between a man and a woman but as a public business transaction between men that restores a patriarchal home.

Sedgwick's novel of manners begins on the streets of New York where the narrator relays an arresting, detailed portrait of a city waking up to a bustling scene of people, movement, and commerce on Broadway Street, but it ends with two personal letters between friends that celebrate marital felicity and neatly tie up the plot. Rather than establish herself as a tender maternal voice from the start, the narrator instead displays her keen understanding of urban life. She speaks authoritatively in the first few paragraphs, leading the reader to believe she has observed a scene like this many times before and can therefore recognize that *this* time is different: "The atmosphere was a pure transparency, a perfect ether; and *Broadway*, the thronged thorough fare through which the full tide of human existence pours, the pride of the metropolis of our western world, presented its gayest and most brilliant aspect" (51). Observing all sorts of characters, she chronicles the day's events from the "pale seamstress hastening to her daily toil—the tormented dyspeptic sallying forth to his joyless morning ride" to the merchants and lawyers heading to work and the ladies on their way to shop (52). Most importantly, through this extended description the narrator reveals that she *sees* everything, and not just the agreeable moments that remind readers what cities are good for in terms of the nineteenth century ideal: commerce and capital. Almost buried within her account of these pleasant moments that include

children heading off to school and dandies walking down the street, she captures the depressing, threatening, and even dismal sights that Broadway brings: “blanketed Indian chiefs from the Winnebagoes, Choctaws, and Cherokees, walking straight forward, as if they were following an enemy’s trail in their own forests...a bare headed Greek boy with a troop of shouting urchins at his heels...and, not the least jolly or enviable of all this multifarious multitude, the company of Irish Orangemen stationed before St. Paul’s” (52). The narrator makes a subtle nod to Manhattan’s sober founding and the new nation’s reprehensible treatment of America’s native tribes followed by a grim reminder of the threat of ethnic, religious, and political violence already plaguing the city, while also managing to slip in a veiled reference to the metropolis’s lost children—the street urchins. These unexpected glimpses of the bleak side of urban life imbue the novel with realism and reveal the narrator’s ability to speak candidly about the city, capturing its faults without harsh critique or excessive moralizing. In turn, this opening sidetracks the reader’s expectations for a traditional sentimental novel. By beginning on the streets of New York the feminine narrator shows that she can indeed know the city.

For the first hundred pages or so, the novel traces an intricate family lineage of male Clarences; Gertrude, the novel’s protagonist, does not even appear until chapter five. It all begins when Gertrude’s younger brother Frank bumps into an old man on Broadway Street. The pair form an unlikely, yet fortuitous, friendship, and grow so close that when the old man, Mr. Flavel, falls ill, he is invited to recover in the Carrolls’ home. This overture proves important when it is revealed that Mr. Flavel is actually Frank’s long-lost paternal grandfather, looking to reconnect with his son and leave him a large inheritance. By reuniting his father and grandfather, Frank not only reclaims the family’s proper name, Clarence, but also restores his father’s rightful legacy, elevating the middle-class Carrolls (now Clarences) into the realm of

New York's wealthy social elite. However, the grandfather's death disrupts this recently repaired male line, and when an exhaustive legal battle over the family fortune leads Mr. Clarence to neglect his son's injury (a nail through the foot), Frank, too, dies of tetanus. Other scholars such as Melissa J. Homestead observe how Sedgwick delays the conventional marriage plot in her sentimental work by "embed[ding] her heroine in a decades-long Atlantic family history,"¹¹ a history traced through three generations of Clarence *men* from grandfather to grandson.

Why devote so much time to a family history traced through three generations of Clarence *men* only to kill off the only son? While a nail is probably one of the least offensive things one might step on on a bustling New York city street in 1830, it serves as a subtle reminder of the hasty building projects that could not keep pace with the population boom. More to the point, Frank's death makes him the novel's first casualty of urban progress. However, this extensive genealogy does far more than merely postpone the sentimental narrative. Rather, Sedgwick uses this all-male family history to underscore the true nature of the traditional marriage plot. Especially in *Bildungsromane* about women, marriage was normally considered the *telos* of the narrative and of women's lives.¹² Yet rather than this pinnacle moment of a woman breaking from her father and mother in order to take her new place as eventual matriarch of her own family, Sedgwick shows how marriage actually functions to prolong or restore patrilineage and family name—in other words, a history of men. Whereas the "classical *Bildungsroman*...always concludes with marriage" where it serves "as a metaphor for the social

¹¹ Melissa J. Homestead, introduction, *Clarence: A Tale of Our Own Times* (1830), eds. Melissa J. Homestead and Ellen A. Foster, (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2012) 11.

¹² Nancy Miller's foundational work *The Heroine's Text* discusses several eighteenth-century variations on the female *Bildungsroman*. Elizabeth Abel also suggests two recurring thematic "plots" in female fictions of development—one where a young woman's coming-of-age ends with her marriage (12).

contract” that establishes the male protagonist as a full member of society (Moretti 22), in fictions of female development, marriage often subverts the protagonist’s place in society, or in Gertrude’s case, the family. In this way, Frank’s death perhaps hints at a perverse and subtle optimism on Sedgwick’s part—maybe the patriarchy cannot survive in the nation’s new modern city, and maybe the deaths of these sons will make way for the daughters to take their place. Yet, for all the hope such a feminist re-reading of *Clarence* might offer, it does not hold, since Sedgwick, despite playing with these social, political, and gender boundaries throughout the novel, still returns Gertrude to her expected sentimental end for a nineteenth-century heroine.

Moreover, the novel’s opening scenes echo the fears of urban modernization embodied most overtly in Gertrude’s late mother and her upper-class friends. The narrator describes these characters as “flippant idlers of fashionable life” and Gertrude’s father goes on to elaborate:

It can never be for the interest of our children...that they should sacrifice their independence of characters for the sake of associating with those to whom the mere accidents of life have assigned...a different station. I have no ambition that my children should move in fashionable society; I do not believe that in any country it includes the most elevated and virtuous class; certainly not in our city, where the aristocracy of wealth is the only efficient aristocracy. No, I thank God that there is a barrier between us and the fashionable world; that we cannot approach it near enough to be dazzled by its glare: for like the reptile that fascinates its victims by the emission of a brilliant mist, so the polite world is encircled by a halo fatally dazzling to common sense. (78-9)

Mr. Clarence finds no redeemable qualities in the members of the city’s fashionable society who are driven by wealth and above all else lack quality of character. In the novel, one of the worst kinds of fashionable idlers turns out to be the mother of Gertrude’s friend Emilie Layton. Mrs. Layton is driven by “meaningless social gatherings and a compulsion to buy unnecessary goods” (Kalayjian 109). Wholly consumed with purchasing the latest fashions,¹³ no matter the cost and

¹³ Referring to Veblen’s notion of “conspicuous consumption,” I refer to how dress and even leisureliness in the “fashionable world” evidence various kinds of idleness. Mott *A History of American Magazines: 1741-1850*.

despite her husband's severe financial problems and gambling debts, Mrs. Layton spends her last twenty-five dollars, meant for her maid whom she has not paid in weeks, on a cape. Mrs. Layton's purchase is irresponsible and demonstrates a complete lack of common sense, since logically she should feel compelled to spend the little money she has settling the debts she already owes to her employee rather than on the frivolous purchase of a fashion item.

The barrier Mr. Clarence alludes to erecting between his daughter and fashionable society turns out to be the border between the country and the city. Reversing the sensational fiction plot structure, then, he wastes no time moving his daughter far away from the influence of conspicuous and ultimately idle consumption and setting up home at his rustic abode aptly named Clarenceville. Added to this movement from city to country, Frank's death clears the way for the narrative to not only focus on Gertrude's development but also to show how her education in domestic economy liberates her from a confining female sphere and establishes her as a matriarch-in-the-making.

I.

Despite the male-centric economic plots that bookend the novel, its middle presents an innovative treatment of the nineteenth-century narrative of female development. While *Clarence* is filled with sentimental conventions (e.g. mistaken identity, midnight meetings in the woods, forbidden love, attempted kidnapping, and a double marriage at the end), Gertrude remains noteworthy in her handling of the trials that normally plague a sentimental heroine. She does not want for fortune or status because she already possesses both; men do not rescue her, but she

rescues several women and men throughout,¹⁴ and unlike the frivolous, fashionable, urban women her father despises, Gertrude is reasonable and responsible. Rescuing others rather than being the one in need of rescuing becomes one of the many features that mark her difference from the women who live in the city. As the sole heiress to her father's immense fortune, her education and development become her father's primary concern. Intending to curtail any lasting effects of her deceased mother and city society's negative influences, Mr. Clarence moves with his daughter out of the city in order to instruct and inspire in her "moderation and humility" (Sedgwick 136-7). Mr. Clarence's prescriptive education in the country equips Gertrude with the necessary skills and virtues to reenter society upon reaching marrying age, and successfully navigate its hazardous fashionable avenues, while remaining above its corrupting pressures.

Overlaps between Mr. Clarence's education plan for Gertrude and Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Emile* are almost immediately visible.¹⁵ Rousseau's *Emile* offers a meticulous pedagogical approach for cultivating man in his natural state, away from society's corrupting forces. In Book IV, when Emile reaches "the critical age" (230), Rousseau presents a scheme for tempering an adolescent's frivolous passions:

When the critical age approaches, furnish young people with sights which restrain them and not with sights which arouse them. . . Remove them from big cities where the adornment and the immodesty of women hasten and anticipate nature's lessons, where everything presents to their eyes pleasures they ought to know only when they are able to choose among them. Bring them back to their first abodes where rustic simplicity lets the passions of their age develop less rapidly. (230-1)

¹⁴ Gertrude rescues Louis Seton, her art teacher, from his own attempted suicide. She rescues Emilie Layton on several occasions from a fall off a cliff, from kidnapping by her would-be suitor Pedrillo, and most importantly, from a bad marriage her father arranges to cover his own gambling debts.

¹⁵ It also bears striking similarities to Anne Radcliffe's *Udolpho* as another important model of female education.

Rousseau advocates a youth's removal from cities until he is of a mature age to respond with reason and clarity to the city's many temptations. Of course, he also believes that the country has the power to slow the development of these passions. Mr. Clarence mirrors Rousseau's aversion to the city and its society by attempting to distance his daughter from their ills after her mother and brother's deaths. With the Clarence line entirely dependent on one woman, Gertrude's father prepares her with "a knowledge and right estimate of the just uses and responsibilities of the fortune of which she was to be the dispenser" (Sedgwick 137), a knowledge and responsibility cultivated in the Clarences' "rustic" country home. Mr. Clarence goes to such great lengths to raise his daughter in a suitable environment clearly conveying his desire that she will one day succeed him as the fortune's sole "dispenser" and take his place at the head of the family, a spot traditionally reserved for a son.

In the same way that he himself "had no heart for immediate change" (91) upon inheriting his father's money, Mr. Clarence expects his daughter to adopt his own sensible approach to wealth and the new society it attracts. Mr. Clarence prefers the more modest group of friends he had before coming into great wealth, which contrasts sharply with his wife's overzealous need for "good" (meaning rich) society (seemingly only ever found in cities). Sedgwick exposes Mrs. Clarence's shameless pursuit of fortune, when she is still the middle-class Mrs. Carroll and extravagant wealth is only a dream. According to Mrs. Carroll, she *only* desires to "live in a better house—to have more servants and furniture—in short, to live genteelly...[and] be able to move in good society on equal terms" (78) and hopes that with more money she can finally expunge the "hateful, vulgar phrase" we "*can't afford it*" (90) from her

vocabulary. Of course “good” society remains a relative term for husband and wife.¹⁶ While she was still alive, Mrs. Clarence would enjoy the company of a woman like Mrs. Layton, whereas Mr. Clarence declares his wife’s “good society” akin to keeping company with a “reptile that fascinates its victims by the emission of a brilliant mist, so the polite world is encircled by a halo fatally dazzling to common sense” (79). Clearly articulating his aversion to and thinly veiled disgust for the fashionable world of which his wife longs to be a part, Mr. Clarence wastes no time moving his daughter far away from the clutches of the “‘dear five hundred friends’ she had inherited from her mother” (78-9) and setting up home and school with her in the country.

With a careful plan in place for instructing the new namesake, Mr. Clarence makes his daughter’s education “the first object of his life” (136). In the country, she learns to commune with nature. Of her own volition, she begins to “love nature from an acquaintance and familiarity with its sublimest forms” (137). She discovers simple pleasure in her intimate interactions with their carefully selected circle of neighbors and develops an appreciation for the “power of her wealth only in its wise and benevolent uses” (137). Gertrude’s time away from the city proves edifying, since her father instills in her a nuanced sensibility and sensitivity to people and things around her (qualities notably absent in her own mother), a seemingly impossible feat within the dazzling confines of the city. In “Disinterest as Moral Corrective in *Clarence’s* Cultural Critique,” Kalayjian claims that Sedgwick’s emphasis on the “potentially destructive qualities of capitalism, consumerism, and commodification in *Clarence* suggests her dis-ease with the current moral state in the new republic” (107). Kalayjian notes a link between Gertrude’s early removal from the city and her more enlightened (and moral) character upon re-entering fashionable society. Thus in several ways, Mr. Clarence’s patrilineal education proves

¹⁶ We see other examples of this coupling (the rational husband/father and the vapid or overeager wife/mother) in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (1813)

to be a success—his daughter is neither spoiled or selfish, silly or shallow; rather her compassionate and generous natures prevail, making her in others' eyes a “fit heroine for the nineteenth century; practical, efficient, direct, and decided—a rational woman” (Sedgwick 197).

Through the novel, Sedgwick seems to celebrate what I term a patrilineal education, which prepares Gertrude to move between the sentimental and economic worlds in the novel. For all intents and purposes, Mr. Clarence subscribes to a masculine model of education akin to Rousseau's ideal model in *Emile* for his daughter. Mr. Clarence molds Gertrude to reflect not her mother, but himself, in order to prepare her to become the next “heir” to the Clarence name and fortune. Of course, there is one minor detail that disrupts this seemingly ideal (patriarchal) lineage—Gertrude is not a man but a woman. While Sedgwick attempts to present not a masculine heroine but a heroine capable of masculine feats¹⁷ within the generic conventions of sentimental fiction, this patrilineal education actually helps to reassert the patriarchy, since it is only through the mediated position of the “educated” Gertrude that Mr. Clarence can pass his wealth (and male line) on to his new “son” Roscoe. Thus, what appears initially to be a subversion or redirection of the original goal of Gertrude's education actually turns out to be part of Mr. Clarence's plan all along to attract a masculine heir who can replace his daughter as his partner.

Gertrude's model of development prepares her for the roles she must play in both the country and the city—first as her father's tutelage and mistress of his house and then as a woman of marrying age in the city. Studies of the rise of the *Bildungsroman* in the eighteenth and

¹⁷ Throughout the novel, Gertrude continually finds herself in positions traditionally reserved for a male hero. She saves her art tutor, Seton, a sensitive man with feelings for her, from suicide; she saves her friend, Emilie, from a precipice over a waterfall, and saves the entire Layton family from financial ruin and embarrassment when she settles Mr. Layton's debt to Pedrillo. On the whole, Gertrude acts the hero and saves other far more often than she finds herself in need of saving.

nineteenth centuries typically trace a narrative akin to the one Jerome Buckley charts in *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding*. In this model, a child grows up in the country, experiences some discontent with his parents, schooling, or daily life, and then leaves home to make his way in the world (17); ultimately developing a working philosophy through “his direct experience of urban life” (17). Rather than a site of anxiety for the male hero, the city represents a social, public realm where he becomes an adult, while his childhood is intimately connected to the domestic, private space of a romantic, rural, or secluded home. In some ways, Buckley offers a modernized, updated version of Rousseau’s model of male education in the country, but unlike the latter, Buckley identifies the male’s return to the city as a natural part of his progression and maturity on his way to adulthood. Franco Moretti refers to this as the genre’s “perfect circle,” since through his work the male protagonist secures his place in the public realm, and oftentimes through marriage reconciles with society (22). Although Moretti offers a useful generic framework, Elizabeth Abel responds to this and other critical models that predominantly chart the protagonist’s course in the *Bildungsroman* according to masculine developmental goals. Abel asserts that “critics have assumed that society constrains men and women equally” and while “male protagonists struggle to find a hospitable context in which to realize their aspirations, female protagonists must frequently struggle to voice any aspirations whatsoever” (6-7). Oftentimes, interaction with or too much knowledge of the public realm will lead to the downfall of young women. Narratives of female development often follow a heroine’s interior voyage where she articulates a feminine self through sentimental, virtuous, and moral reflection, culminating with her marriage and presumed mothering as distinct models of womanhood. But, other times, especially in nineteenth-century women’s writing, we witness narratives comparable to the masculine model of “alienation, adventure, and reconciliation,” that

for women come in the form of “abandonment, adventure, and redemption” (Harris 20). Since Gertrude Clarence’s story is neither solely “interior” nor resulting from misguided sexual promiscuity and abandonment, I contend that her developmental narrative crisscrosses these models to reflect themes of both the masculine and feminine modes. Not only is Gertrude’s education by her father entrenched in a Rousseauvian guide for young men, but also women (and even some men) frequently appeal to her as a voice of reason and authority on matters of both business and the heart. Despite the ease with which Gertrude crosses these gendered social boundaries, moving through private, feminized and public, masculine spaces in the city, she still meets the sentimental heroine’s traditional developmental end—marriage with its inevitable obscurity for the *femme couvert*.

II.

Gertrude’s education transcends traditional forms of female education in that her father intends her to be not only a Republican Mother capable of running a household and raising her eventual family (a symbol of the new nation), but a rational woman equipped with the astute mind and virtuous heart to *be* the head of the family. For Mr. Clarence, the only “real” or “permanent distinctions” between people in America “are created by talent, education, and virtue” (Sedgwick 79). Therefore, through her education Gertrude develops exemplary “feminine” characteristics (a sentimental and virtuous nature) and traditional “masculine” ones (reason, intellect, and a superior understanding of money and economy). In a way, it seems to echo Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) championing sensibility and reason in female education in order to make women appropriate companions for men. Yet, her father appears more eager that Gertrude should be his partner than companion,

and so his primary focus remains on her development of these traditionally masculine traits. However, despite Sedgwick's move toward educational gender equality, one problem remains with this masculine education model: it requires Gertrude to become like her father or, to a certain extent, "man-like" in her mind. Compared to the novel's other notable female characters (Mrs. Clarence, Mrs. Layton and her daughter Emilie), none of these women come close to approaching Gertrude's reason and intellect.

In fact, female characters such as Mrs. Layton (the woman with whom Gertrude stays after returning to the city) proves again and again to be one of the worst *kinds* of "flippant idlers." One particular exchange between the two women reveals the disparity between Gertrude and Mrs. Layton's views on both money and people. Wholly consumed with purchasing the latest fashions, no matter the cost and despite her husband's severe financial problems, Mrs. Layton spends and spends until she has no good credit left with any of the dressmakers in town. When a milliner's girl brings several new pieces to the Laytons' home, she reminds Mrs. Layton in front of Gertrude that her mistress, Madame, has "told me not to leave the articles unless [Mrs. Layton] paid for them" (311-12). The girl's remark only briefly tempers Mrs. Layton's enthusiasm, and she still goes on to select the "Gabrielle" cape for herself parting with her last twenty-five dollars (312). A short while later, Mrs. Layton's poor failures at domestic economy are exposed when her maid's elderly mother comes to collect the unpaid wages:

Mrs. Layton had indeed at the first glance too perfectly recognized the old woman, and anticipated her claims. She had, after a hundred broken promises to Justine, her maid, to whom she owed a much larger sum, told her, not two hours before, that she had twenty-five dollars ready for her; and she now felt all the mortification—not of failing to perform her contract, to such trifles she was accustomed—but of an exposure before Gertrude, and while the Gabrielle. (313)

In a blatant show of conspicuous consumption, Mrs. Layton disregards her financial responsibilities and indulges herself, which as the narrator reveals, is part of the woman's

customary behavior. Even worse, her embarrassment stems not from her selfish mismanagement of money but the fact that Gertrude is witness to her compulsive spending and failed economy. Moreover, she spends money she does not have on herself when it is her daughter Emilie who is in need of new clothes for her impending nuptials. Gertrude is not afflicted with these bouts of excessive spending that result in “Mrs. Layton’s extravagant expressions of feeling, and her utter neglect of duties” (326). Instead, Gertrude’s education prepares her to properly manage money, so she can respond reasonably to the same situations that overwhelm a woman like Mrs. Layton.

When Mrs. Layton subtly requests Gertrude’s financial assistance, she appeals to Gertrude in the same way she will later appeal to a man—Pedrillo. In a manipulative act that proves futile, Mrs. Layton tries to convince Gertrude to pay the bill for some remaining clothing items:

[Mrs. Layton] gave the money to the girl, who was re-folding and replacing the articles she had first lain aside, “Stop, I keep those,” she said, and turning to Gertrude, added, in a half whisper, “they are for Emilie—you know it is indispensable she should be prepared for a certain occasion—what *shall* I do about them?” Gertrude felt embarrassed; she perceived Mrs. Layton expected she would offer to relieve her from her dilemma...by advancing the money; but this she was resolved not to do, and she replied coldly, “I really cannot advise you.” (312)

Mrs. Layton hopes that Gertrude will pay her outstanding bill in the same manner a certain kind of wealthy husband might pay his wife’s. She appeals to Gertrude’s affection for Emilie and contrives that Gertrude will see her “dilemma” as entirely unforeseen and beyond her control despite it being very clear that the situation is one of Mrs. Layton choosing to live beyond her means. Gertrude’s “cold” response to Mrs. Layton’s request shows that not only is she refusing to play the feminine role in support of her friend’s excessive spending habits, but she is also rejecting another kind of masculine model, that of the husband who placates his wife with shiny new things. Kalayjian comments on women like Mrs. Layton, who are overcome by

consumerism and idleness: “Scanning the social landscape of the city, the narrator finds that the role of middle-class women is eroding into a round of meaningless social gatherings and a compulsion to buy unnecessary goods” (109). When the milliner’s girl arrives at Mrs. Layton’s home with these goods, the shop owner has already instructed her to not leave any items without first receiving payment. Having already exhausted her credit and with no way to pay, Mrs. Layton still manages “with the utmost eagerness [to] select some of the most costly articles” from the new collection (312). She is a woman with no qualms about living beyond her means and rationalizes her excessive consumption by claiming to buy the items for her daughter.

Gertrude, as a result of her father’s education, is not this same kind of consumer. So when she unexpectedly responds to Mrs. Layton’s dilemma, not as a fellow “shopaholic,” but dispassionately by refusing to cover the cost of the remaining items, Mrs. Layton takes her efforts to a new level. She advises the shop-girl to take the bill along with a note from her to Pedrillo (Mr. Layton’s blackmailer and Emilie’s betrothed). Asking Pedrillo to pay for Emilie’s *trousseau* is an intimate request any contemporary reader would recognize as an affront to propriety and decorum, especially among the city’s upper classes. Under these circumstances, Gertrude finally agrees to cover the bill in order to prevent the public embarrassment Mrs. Layton promises to cause over a few dresses (312-3). Mrs. Layton first appeals to Gertrude by explaining that the dresses are for Emilie and her upcoming nuptials; when Gertrude declines to pay, Mrs. Layton then intends to use this same persuasive technique (“they are for Emilie”) on Pedrillo to make him pay. In this scenario, she aligns Gertrude with Pedrillo, appealing to both through their masculine willingness to provide for Emilie because of their affection for her. Gertrude resists her attempts because, as the narrator tells us, “Miss Clarence had been too long intrusted with the responsibility of pecuniary affairs, to fall into a feminine obliviousness in

matters of expense” (326). Even with her superior command of finances, she still remains compassionate to those in need. In addition to covering Mrs. Layton’s bill to the dressmaker, she also loans Mrs. Layton an additional twenty-five dollars for her maid (313). Throughout these scenes, the narrator makes clear how Gertrude’s upbringing provides her with the best of ostensibly feminine and masculine qualities; that is, the ability to stay financially conservative while at the same time remaining sympathetic enough to protect a friend from a social *faux pas* and come to the aid of those less fortunate.

III.

Gertrude’s education prepares her to balance both economic and domestic responsibilities, so in instances where the two overlap, it seems as if she would be at the height of her abilities. However, her command of this particular skill-set ultimately leaves her not in control of her own future but part of an economic exchange that allows two men in her life to secure their futures. As an heiress to an immense fortune, Gertrude’s education and development remain her father’s primary concern. Intending to curtail any lasting effects of her mother’s, or city society’s, negative influences, Mr. Clarence intends to model her after himself by instilling in her “a knowledge and right estimate of the just uses and responsibilities of the fortune of which she was to be the dispenser” (Sedgwick 137). He goes to such great lengths to raise his daughter in a suitable environment clearly conveying his desire that she will one day secede him. As such, Gertrude’s upbringing departs from established modes of progress when it transcends traditional forms of female education. Having been raised and educated by her father, Gertrude is not like *all* men but rather like a particular kind of upper-class, economically astute, and principled consumer.

Although, Gertrude is unequivocally the most important Clarence throughout the novel, she remains marginalized at both the beginning and the end. Initially overshadowed by her brother Frank, who reclaims the family's past, she ends overshadowed by a different man who symbolizes the family's future. While Mr. Clarence's training points to Gertrude becoming the fortune's sole dispenser and the family's head, she becomes none of these things but instead the wife of Gerald Roscoe—her father's partner and new possessor of half the Clarence family fortune. The marriage functions to prolong or restore patrilineage and family name—in other words, a history of men. While Sedgwick delays this bait-and-switch until the novel's final pages, she does foreshadow it much earlier. In Book I, as Mr. Clarence adjusts to life without a son, the narrator reveals the elder Clarence's hope that Roscoe will one day fill this void as his son-in-law. "It was natural that Mr. Clarence, in looking forward to the probable contingency of Gertrude's marriage, should in his own mind fix on Roscoe, as the only person to whom he would willingly resign her" (Sedgwick 139). Even at this stage, when he has only just begun Gertrude's education in the country, Mr. Clarence has already fixed on a new male heir. Having already settled on Roscoe as his hoped for son-in-law, it seems strange that Mr. Clarence still educates his daughter in a way that emphasizes qualities far superior to the ones that would be necessary to make her a good wife to Roscoe.

Gertrude proves to be less like her father's apprentice and presumed heir to the Clarence name and more like a person with similar attitudes who can serve as his mediator and do his economic housekeeping. Yet Gertrude's role as mediator goes far beyond letter writing and pecuniary affairs; she actually exists as the mediator for her father's desire for a male heir. In her book *Between Men*, Eve Sedgwick discusses the nineteenth-century woman's role in male, homosocial relationships as they play out in battles between men over a woman. Building on

Gayle Rubin's concept of "traffic in women," Sedgwick argues that these relationships between men result in a "structure of male traffic in women—the use of women by men as exchangeable objects, as counters of value, for the primary purpose of cementing relationships with other men" (Sedgwick, E. 123). Gertrude's progressive development, which imbues her with a combination of feminine and masculine traits, brings together business and marriage plots. Thus, while Gertrude's patrilineal education sets her apart from other women in the novel, establishing her as a reasonable woman able to manage a family fortune (a revision of the traditional patriarchy), in reality this education re-inscribes patriarchy since Mr. Clarence uses her to cement the relationship between Roscoe and himself. Consequently, she attracts a potential suitor who, just as financially astute as she is, takes her place. So careful with money, she ironically ends as an object of exchange between men. In this way, the novel's ending is purposefully ironic in the way it highlights the disjuncture between the bookended male inheritance plot and the middle section rich with Gertrude's masculine development.

Right before the wedding ceremony occurs, both Roscoe and Mr. Clarence use economic language to emphasize Gertrude's passivity. Mr. Clarence states:

"You and I, my dear Gerald, in pecuniary affairs, are hence forth equal partners." He put into Mr. Roscoe's hands papers which transferred to him the half of his fortune. Roscoe...soon recovered himself, and replied, in his own frank and pleasant manner, "This gift, sir," and he kissed Gertrude's hand, "has exhausted my gratitude; I cannot even make a return of words for an inferior proof of your generosity." "Generosity! my dear fellow," said Mr. Clarence, "you know not with what joy I devolve half the burden and responsibility of my wealth upon you—with what gratitude I regard the benign Providence that has granted the dearest wish of my heart, in giving me a friend on whom I repose this trust." (Sedgwick 409-10)

In the work of a moment, Mr. Clarence signs half his fortune to Roscoe and grants him his daughter's hand in marriage—never once conferring with his original partner in all this—his daughter. The conversation takes place entirely between the two men, and the only mention of

Gertrude is not even of her whole person, but merely her hand as her future husband kisses it. Although it seems as if the plot has corrected course with Gertrude's story concluding exactly as one might expect—with a marriage—in reality, Sedgwick's return to the domestic brings with it all the idle concerns Mr. Clarence always feared. Business language—including words such as “pecuniary,” “partners,” “transferred,” “fortune,” “return,” “burden,” “wealth,” and “trust”—overwhelms the passage. In fact, the exchange stands in stark contrast to an earlier scene in the novel when Gertrude arranges with Mr. Layton to buy Emilie out of her impending marriage to Pedrillo. On this occasion, she even consults her father before entering into the financial arrangement with Mr. Layton, a courtesy Mr. Clarence does not extend to her in this scene (352). Responding to Mr. Layton's request for a much smaller loan to cover his gambling debts, Gertrude initially refuses and instead asks how much it will be to save Emilie stating:

“[W]e money-dealers, Mr. Layton, are all calculators—we require an equivalent for our money. Emilie's redemption from this deep misery is worth to me any sacrifice I can make. Her emancipation from this engagement is the equivalent I demand, the only return I wish. No, this is not all; you must promise me not only her freedom, but that she shall be at liberty to give her hand to Randolph Marion, on whom she has already worthily bestowed her heart. If you accede to my terms, you will furnish me with a statement of the amount of Pedrillo's claims.” (355)

In this scene, Gertrude displays her shrewd understanding of economic affairs, even going so far as to detail the terms of her contract with Mr. Layton should he choose to accept her offer. And by making arrangements for Emilie's marriage, Gertrude proves that she is more than capable of taking an active part in the economic arrangement between her father and new husband, which makes her strange passiveness during that scene all the more stark. Aided by her feminine graces and financial sensibilities, Gertrude has been able to find a man worthy enough to take charge of half the Clarence family fortune and replace her as her father's partner so that her own business acumen is no longer needed.

If Gertrude's development in domestic economy subverts her own business ventures, then it seems to at least offer her marital benefits. Through marriage, she can achieve new levels of development through motherhood. At the end of the novel, for instance, Gertrude actually writes a letter to a friend, describing at length how married life offers a supreme blessing by sparing her the "perils" of her wealth (286). However, as the new heir to the family money, Roscoe sees the marriage in distinctly consumerist terms. Through "gift" language, he attempts to set up a contrast between his relationship with Gertrude and the kinds of relationships produced in a market economy; however, less a gift and more an object exchanged, Gertrude comes with strings attached. Marrying her means taking over "half the burden and responsibility" of Mr. Clarence's wealth. After spending years training to become her father's partner in money matters, she now finds herself a mere, though substantial, detail in that financial arrangement—and remains markedly idle throughout the scene. The narrator focuses on her passivity in a number of ways. Gertrude never acts or, for that matter, joins in conversation, whereas Roscoe grabs and kisses her hand while the gracious and joyous language that abounds gets directed, not to the woman marrying him, but—more often than not—to her father. With the marriage, Mr. Clarence settles his remaining economic affairs passing both his daughter and his fortune on to a new male partner—securing both the Clarence and Roscoe families' futures. Gertrude has served her purpose as the object of male desire and another has replaced her as her father's partner and equal.

IV.

While the most pivotal scene in the novel in terms of a transformation from

active protagonist to idler, this is not the first time Sedgwick explores how Gertrude's domesticity gets commodified. In an auction house scene that takes place prior to the wedding, she gets sold off to the highest bidder. Throughout the scene, we discover how public auctions give middle- and upper-class women the opportunity to actively participate in the city's market economy where they can bid, compete, and even scheme for the best deals, while justifying their participation in this economic spectacle with the pretext of furnishing their own homes with top-shelf goods acquired at bargain prices. Furthermore, while these business proceedings are in every sense a public event and strikingly similar to the fierce competition of New York's stock exchange, these transactions take place *in* private homes. More importantly, these goods for sale also come from private homes, placing the domestic squarely on the auction block.

Industrialized urban centers changed the nature of the home and the self through the shifting relationship between public and private space. Betsy Klimasmith contends, "the city's new organization of space was bringing private and public spaces together, changing the social landscape along with the physical" (7). While to a remarkable degree cities dissolved the line between domestic and public space brought about by the rise of hotels, apartments, boarding houses, and tenements, Klimasmith highlights an emerging domesticity in urban homes. Through her notion of "urban domesticity," which lacks the stability, order, and natural rhythms of its rural counterpart, she demonstrates how changes in social relations and gender roles find their way into the nineteenth-century urban home site. In particular, Klimasmith suggests that the close proximity of private and public spaces meant that "[m]obility, agency, and mutability were central to urban homes in ways that the literary historical narrative of separate spheres has obscured. Urban dwellings and their inhabitants changed social relations and helped to shape ...public subjectivities" (8). While in some cases female inhabitants were empowered by these

porous borders that allowed them to take more active roles in the public sphere, in other instances women gained little new power over their lives. In *Clarence*, where the economic pressures of securing a new male heir at times drives the sentimental marriage plot, this infiltration of the public in the private actually results in female disempowerment. While Sedgwick shows the way education and business endeavors empower women, she also demonstrates women's extremely insecure position in the public sphere even after they gain entrance. For example, Roscoe, Gertrude's husband, easily displaces her, even though for the bulk of the novel she is her father's partner in family fortune and name. Rather than depicting a female protagonist fully "at home in the city," *Clarence* presents a character who originally moves easily between private and public spaces, but for whom the home site becomes a symbol for the family line, a place of patriarchal power that threatens female autonomy.

One particular scene at a public city auction articulates these complex relationships at work better than all the rest. While visiting a friend from her old neighborhood, Gertrude finds herself unexpectedly accompanying the woman to a midday, off-season auction event. The narrator takes this opportunity to comment on not only the strange confluence of commercial and business affairs being transacted in a private home, but also the radical mixing of bargain hunters from every social class.

Our heroine had no very definite idea of an auction. She knew it was an occasion on which commodities were bought and sold; but she was quite unprepared for such a scene as is exhibited at a sale of fashionable furniture in a private house, and astounded by the crowd, the pushing and jostling, the smiling impertinence of some, and the nonchalance and hardihood of others, she dropped her veil and followed her companion timidly... The sale had begun, and the ladies... the ladies were hovering—brooding better expresses the intentness of their attention—brooding over a table filled with light articles. There stood the hardy pawnbroker mentally appraising every article, as was evident from her keen glances and compressed lips, according to the standard of her own price current. Next were old housekeepers, familiar spirits there, their unconcern and tranquil assurance contrasting well with the eager, agitated expression of the novices, who had come with the honest intention to buy as well as bid, and whose eyes were riveted to the elected

article with that earnest look of appropriation that marks the unpractised [sic] purchaser—then there were young ladies leaning on their fathers' arms, their wishes curbed by the parental presence, and old ladies made prudent by experience—troops of young married women, possible buyers; and troops of idlers, who loved better to see this slight agitation of hope and fear, than to stagnate at home. There were but few persons of fashion present, and they seemed to disdain the element in which they moved, though they condescended to compromise between their pride and their desire to obtain possession of a costly article at an under price. The pervading spirit of trade and speculation spares neither age nor condition in our commercial city. (277-8)

The auction brings together a great variety of characters. From the experienced to the novice, each person poised to play a particular role in the event, and it is important to note that women overwhelmingly outnumber the men, making the auction house for all intents and purposes their domain. Gertrude is initially overwhelmed by the scene's strangeness (a bunch of women picking over items throughout several rooms of someone else's home all the while discussing goods, price, worth, money, value, and *bargains*) and has already declared before going that she will not purchase anything. Gertrude's reluctance to participate in the bargain-hunting of the other women and her "timid" movement through the crowd reflect how uncomfortable she is with the economic exchange taking place in this private home. She continues to move cautiously through the crowd where she can go "unknown and unnoticed" and survey the market scene (278). The narrator's account focuses on the variety of women present, although men are there as well; the spotlight on women suggests their role as "the families' principal consumers" (Kalayjian 109). And on several occasions, Gertrude has shown her skills as a principled consumer for her father's home—purchasing goods and managing her wealth with discretion. As Kalayjian notes, women's domestic duties have almost always required them to act as consumers for the home. And through these series of scenes, we see how public auctions give women the opportunity to extend their role as consumers for the home and actively participate in the city's market economy.

Rather than a female consumer, Gertrude—who, needless to say, could easily prove herself exemplary at this intersection of domestic and economic affairs—finds herself consumed. While walking through the open house, she discovers a portrait of herself up for sale and, horrified, flees just as her future husband bids on it: “Miss Clarence left the auction room, overpowered and confused by painful feelings. The mortification of seeing her own portrait, however disguised by the romantic position in which she was placed, exposed at a public sale, and bid upon by Roscoe, at first blunted every other sensation” (284). Gertrude’s vulnerability and violation in this scene is far more pronounced. To add insult to injury, the piece initially receives only mediocre interest from buyers so that the auctioneer must invite the ladies to offer more bids, romanticizing the “unknown” lady’s figure as “something out of Scott or Byron” (283). Unable to see the picture from their position in the room, Roscoe and Gertrude initially laugh “at the ingenious conjecture of the man of business” (283), but once the picture comes into view, the situation takes a decidedly sober turn as Gertrude recognizes herself on full display for the crowd.

The picture was instantly raised, and presented to them both, a scene too deeply impressed on their imaginations ever to be mistaken or forgotten. It was indeed Trenton Falls; precisely as they appeared on the night of their adventure with Seton. The moon just risen above the eastern cliffs, tipped the crests of the trees with its silvery light, played on the torrent that foamed and wreathed in its smiles, and concentrated its rays on the figure of Gertrude, who appeared kneeling on the rocks, her arms folded, and her eyes raised. There were no other figures in the picture, but imagination instantly supplied them; and it seemed to Roscoe, that he again stood on those rocks—again saw Seton unclose his eyes, and Gertrude raise hers to Heaven, with the fervent expression of a beatified spirit...Roscoe’s eye was riveted to [Gertrude’s] retreating figure, but instantly recovering his self-possession, he assumed the air of an ordinary bidder, and called out to the auctioneer, “fifty dollars.” (283)

Initially, Gertrude’s embarrassment remains a private affair when no one in the crowd, except Roscoe, recognize the similarities between the moonlit female figure on canvas and the painting’s living subject standing nearby. However as the public auction-goers begin to note

similarities between Gertrude and the woman in the picture, she can stand it no longer and flees the house in shame. Accosted, Gertrude sees her private life on display and, what is worse, affixed to a price tag.

Gertrude's shock and humiliation played out before a public audience surprisingly unfolds with minimal commentary from the narrator. While most narrators in sentimental novels would be only too eager to transform a heroine's misstep into a moral lesson for the reader, in this moment Sedgwick's narrator holds back any well-intentioned lectures about letting amorous men paint you by moonlight near a waterfall. Instead, the narrator returns the reader's attention to the auction:

No competitor spoke. The picture was knocked down to Roscoe. The amateurs, the pawnbrokers, the bargain-buyers, the whole host of veteran auction *tenders*, exchanged nods and smiles of derision and pity, for there were kind-hearted creatures among them, at the *gullibility* of the novice. Even the auctioneer himself could not suppress a complacent smile, when he transferred the picture to Roscoe, who, deviating from the ordinary mode of business, gave a check for the amount, and requested immediate possession. Curiosity spread through the rooms. The picture was at once invested with a mysterious charm and a factitious value. Half a dozen voices, in a breath, begged another view. Roscoe very politely regretted that it was not in his power to oblige the ladies, said he paid an extraordinary price for the exclusive right to look at the picture—coolly rolled up the canvas, and withdrew; envied at last, as the possessor of a secret, and a *bargain*. (284)

The narrator offers a precise description of the auction-goers' response to Roscoe's outrageous yet winning bid, but this unexpected turn of events ignites speculation among the crowd. In the span of a short paragraph, the narrator expertly captures the changing tenor of the mostly female crowd from their initial amusement at the high price paid for an unknown piece to consuming curiosity about the picture's "mysterious charm" and the subject's great worth concluding with their envy and admiration of the man who strategically snatched up such a great bargain (284). Although the narrator is not outright in her critique, she demonstrates how quickly the auction-goers, who originally deemed the piece worthless, are now convinced of its great value once

someone else has shown a vested interest in it. At the very least, the narrator reveals the attendees to be shallow, and at worst exposes them as ill-informed consumers who easily fall prey to the pitfalls of materialism and fashion.

Nearly two decades after *Clarence*, Sedgwick would publish a short story entitled “An Auction Sale” (1846) in *The Columbian Lady’s and Gentleman’s Magazine*. In this decidedly cosmopolitan magazine designed to compete with the wildly successful Philadelphia-based *Graham’s Magazine*,¹⁸ Sedgwick’s story depicts two women who witness the ugly side of bargain-hunting when their friends’ home goes up for sale. The first-person narrator begins by inquiring of the unknown reader: “Did you ever attend an auction, my dear friend? a domestic auction—if that word domestic (of happiest associations) does not in this combination imply a contradiction in terms. I mean a sale of household furniture, held in a deserted home” (126). The opening line calls attention to the disturbing image of a domestic space made desolate and violated by urban consumerism. The almost conspiratorial opening line calls attention to the disturbing image of a domestic space made desolate and violated by the pecuniary affairs of a market economy. Women are so often intimately linked to, defined by, reflected in, and subject to their domestic spaces that an intrusion on this privacy can be likened to a physical violation of both the space and the woman. In Sedgwick’s short piece, we see the extent to which this breach of the private, which happens during an auction, tempers the narrator’s initial zeal for the event. When the narrator and her friend attend the public sale of another friend’s possessions whose husband has decided to sell off everything in the house after she has taken ill abroad, both women suddenly find the circumstances of auctions most appalling. The women intend to save as many of their friend’s cherished items as they can, as if securing these things will save the

¹⁸ Mott *A History of American Magazines: 1741-1850*.

ailing woman. The narrator recalls how they shrewdly surveyed the other auction-goers, disapproving of “the sound of [their] feet careering up and down our friend’s house...desecrating the places that she...had made sacred to us” (128). The event loses its excitement for the women now that it is personal, and the narrator reflects on her friend’s “seeming recklessness with which she bought on the right hand and on the left, to save her friend’s property from sacrifice or vulgar possession” (128). What was once a thrilling, consumer contest—acquiring someone else’s goods second-hand and for a fraction of their original price—is now a crude stripping of their friend’s home, a violation the narrator likens to “money changers” in the Temple (128). The women no longer see bargain-priced sofas and paintings and spoons but their friend in each thing, so that each item hastily sold is like losing a small piece of her. They “buy on the right hand and on the left to save her [...] property from sacrifice or vulgar possession” (128). Here, the women see their fellow attendees in a new, unfavorable light. Any camaraderie they previously felt for the other auction-goers (so like themselves at the story’s beginning) disappears so now they can only see greedy strangers with vulgar intentions in their friend’s beautiful home. In this way, Sedgwick underscores the disturbing reality of public auctions in private homes where the mixing of commercial and domestic can be a vile encounter for some.

With this new understanding, it seems reasonable that Gertrude would rather remain a passive observer than an active participant in the auction she attends. The competitive bidding and overzealous consumption as a private home is stripped and parceled out piece-by-piece serves as an unsettling example of the commodification of the domestic. Once a sanctuary, a private home turned over to an auctioneer’s hands serves to ruin it as a domestic space leaving it desolate, or as the story’s narrator describes—“deserted”. Read alongside *Clarence*, this story reinforces the fact that Sedgwick remains critical of the novel’s happy ending. Although by no

means a *bad* marriage in the context of 19th-century marriage plots, Roscoe and Gertrude's relationship brings together domesticity and consumerism—what Sedgwick would call a contradiction in terms.

Whereas the novel begins by setting up a barrier between the country and the city, between business acumen and fashionable idleness, that barrier eventually breaks down. Rather than a restorative for urban ills, the domestic economy plot set in the country leads Gertrude back to the city, where the auction house scene unfolds and, most importantly, where her fortune allows Roscoe to buy back his own family's home. The Roscoe home is "old-fashioned" (412), and Gertrude describes her desire to preserve it by making only modest alterations in order to resist the passion for "change and novelty" that seems to drive the city's inhabitants. In a final letter to her friend, Gertrude describes married life as a respite from city society:

"In a city of the multifarious character of New York, it is a difficult art to select our society. [...] Do not imagine, my dear friend, that I have become a devotee to society, even though it be of the most elevated and attractive character. No, I am too rich in my own private blessings [...] to be in any danger of forgetting that the family circle is the inner temple" (416).

The letter echoes the one with which I began this chapter: Sedgwick's cautionary epistle to her sister about the empire of fashion. Similar to that letter, and to her own earlier statements about marriage as a kind of salvation from the "perils" of wealth (417), here Gertrude describes her city marriage as a blessing that protects her from the dangers of the city itself; however by describing her protagonist as "too rich in my own private blessings," Sedgwick subversively allows monetary language to infiltrate these closing lines that reinforce the extent to which a commodified domesticity has come to bear on the once active but now idle protagonist. Once a matriarch-in-the-making, Gertrude devotes the bulk of her letter to describing the "elevated" and "attractive" society she keeps, in ways ominously reminiscent of how her mother might speak of

her dear five hundred friends in the city. Although, in so many ways, she remains unlike her mother, Gertrude nonetheless retains a family likeness by occupying a similarly idle position at the end.

For the 1849 edition of the novel, Sedgwick would remove even this final act of letter writing so that, following her marriage, Gertrude's part in the story stalls out entirely. The absence of Gertrude's final letter in the revised edition in a way underscores how easily eclipsed she is at the novel's end. For that later edition, Sedgwick ends with the letter that comes before Gertrude's in the earlier version. Emilie's letter to her new sister-in-law, Augusta Marion (who happens to be the same woman to whom Gertrude writes), offers details of the double wedding between herself and Randolph and Gertrude and Roscoe and also recounts the scene where Roscoe inherits half the Clarence family fortune. With the removal of Gertrude's letter, Sedgwick slightly revises Emilie's in order to offer readers a glimpse of their heroine's marital bliss. Emilie reminds the reader that, despite her many advantages, Gertrude is not a pretty woman but has been made beautiful by her actions and giving spirit (1849, 513). Moreover, as Emilie explains, Gertrude now "has everything without and within—she has secured the infinite blessing of Gerald Roscoe's affection. She has escaped the perils of *a fortune*. To her mind it is rather sadly associated with the trials of her life, and she holds it, and all that she possesses, her husband's love, her own faculties, meekly, and as a trust from her Father in Heaven" (1849, 514). In the same way that Gertrude describes her marriage in glowing terms to Augusta, thanking "[God], who has given me wealth, and saved me from its perils" (417), Emilie now too remarks that marriage—rather than stripping Gertrude of a family fortune of which she has been prepared to take control—has saved her from the many dangers of money.

To this end, Sedgwick preserves in the vastly different endings of the two editions the idea that the best possible outcome for Gertrude is the life of an idle married woman. In this position, her most important tasks include furnishing her husband's father's old home, selecting art for the walls and books for the library, and, above all, else curating the city society she wishes to keep. Certainly, her education and experience prepared her to do far more, and it is clear she will complete these tasks better than, say, a Mrs. Layton-type. So, while her education will help her to be a good wife, its intended purpose—to prepare her for her position as the head of the family—goes unfulfilled. On the other hand, for Roscoe, who has received no training or preparation for how to manage the vast Clarence wealth, the inheritance is not a peril but a blessing; to that effect, the narrator describes him as “fortunate” (412). No longer a partner in the exchange, Gertrude's idle position is made far worse by the fact that she becomes just one of the many fortunate blessings her father bestows on Roscoe, a man who does not have the education but only, evidently, the gender identity to take charge of Clarence fortune.

For readers who come to *Clarence* excited by the way Sedgwick starts off challenging the traditional gender roles of the *Bildungsroman*, it remains troubling that Sedgwick returns Gertrude, in both editions of the novel, to a traditional, sentimental end. In one sense, Sedgwick writing in the 1830s attempts to reconcile incongruous views of female identity—presenting both the possibilities available to women but also the very real limitations still in place. One might argue that, as valuable as emerging ideas about female progress might be, in 1830s New York they also need to be tied to more established ways of thinking about such identity. In this case, real, meaningful progress occurs at a painfully slow, nearly imperceptible pace, as characters like Gertrude seem to take two steps forward only to take one step back. In contrast—and the point I have argued in this chapter—is that, for Sedgwick, Gertrude's progressive development must end

in idleness. Rather than take only one step back, she takes the full two, ending up in the expected happy marriage befitting a sentimental heroine. For Sedgwick, as the borders between the country and the city, the private and the public, the domestic and the economic become more porous, it becomes difficult for a woman like Gertrude to fully progress in this changing world. Containing all the potential for progress, she becomes the victim of that potential and ends the novel happy about it.

**BETWEEN PLOTS:
THE PASSIVITY OF PSEUDONYMITY IN FANNY FERN'S *RUTH HALL***

Fanny Fern's semi-autobiographical *Ruth Hall: A Domestic Tale of the Present Time* (1854) begins where most female novels of development traditionally end—with a wedding. In fact, Fern's novel bears little resemblance to a conventional *Bildungsroman*. While Sedgwick's *Clarence* and other sentimental novels follow a heroine's development through her debut on the social scene and eventual marriage before she retires to domestic life, Fern's novel inverts several of these milestones so that the heroine leaves her childhood home in the city for married life in the country only to return to the city alone with two children following her husband's death. Penniless with very little help from her family or in-laws, Ruth works hard to maintain some semblance of family domestic life in the city. Not a conventional *Bildungsroman*, *Ruth Hall* is not even a typical *Künstlerroman*, since Ruth's journey as an author is not a gradual artistic awakening as much as it is a paying job born of necessity. Whereas other narratives of an artist's awakening such as E.D.E.N. Southworth's *The Deserted Wife* (1850) and later Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) feature women who resist (or even rebel against) their "social limitations" (Rosowski 15) in order to nurture an artist within, Ruth's desire is spurred by monetary needs and a desire to provide for her children, rather than a suppressed inner muse. She writes because it is her only means of sustainable income. Ultimately, *Ruth Hall* is about beginning again in the wake of a failed domestic plot and the ways in which the city serves as a space for Ruth's new beginning. However, the novel is set in the gap between the untimely end of her first marriage and the uncertain promise of her second. Despite her unexpected success as a newspaper and magazine writer under the androgynous pseudonym "Floy", Ruth's story does not become one about how the city aids in female development and empowerment but rather about how all development (whether good or bad) ultimately comes to an end.

Fern inverts the narrative form of the *Bildungsroman* so that it begins rather than ends with the protagonist's marriage in order to propose an alternative narrative of female development. In *Season of Youth*, Jerome Buckley outlines the genre's principle characteristics where usually a male "child of some sensibility grows up in the country...where he finds constraints, social and intellectual, placed upon the free imagination. His family...proves doggedly hostile to his creative instincts or flights of fancy...He therefore, sometimes at a quite early age leaves the repressive atmosphere of home...to make his way independently in the city" (17). For Buckley, the male protagonist's growth is articulated in a public, social space like a city and not the "repressive" privacy and domestic space of the home. This experience results in his transformation occurring in his "search for a vocation and a working philosophy" (18) through "his direct experience of urban life" (17). In contrast to this predominantly masculine plot, Susan Rosowski identifies a pattern of delay where a woman's "awakening" or evolution occurs "only after fulfilling the fairy-tale expectation" (12) of marriage and motherhood—milestones she ultimately finds lacking in some way. In Ruth's case, her fairytale is not lacking so much as it is disrupted by the death of her first child, and then her husband, losses that eventually lead to the protagonist's disillusionment with "happy endings."

Whereas other novels of "awakening" highlight women who desire to break free from the shackles of domestic life, Ruth works diligently to keep her domestic world intact even after she must leave her home for more affordable accommodations in a city boarding house. In *Boarding Out: Inhabiting the American Urban Literary Imagination, 1840-1860*, David Faflik claims that "Read domestically, *Ruth Hall* would appear to fall short of its imagined destination, since Fern's book abandons the idealized aspirations toward home that inform its opening chapter" and that it "nevertheless finds a functional form in the genre of urban *Bildungsroman*" (97). Ruth

does not abandon aspirations of home but is forced to begin again when her quiet domestic life is turned upside down. Moreover, by returning to the city where she grew up, Ruth must find a way to manage herself as a widow with two small children in the shadow of her adolescence.

Subtitled a “*Domestic Tale of the Present Time*,” the novel draws on a particular set of readerly expectations. Nineteenth-century sentimental, domestic, and women’s fiction prominently feature female protagonists whose development is often linked to their ability to make their own way in the world.¹⁹ In addition, these texts often explored on a more basic level the relationship between female experiences, family life, domestic homes, and the various urban sites of those experiences. Feminist scholars frequently discuss this subgenre in relation to domesticity, sentimentalism, the home, female morality, and women’s roles as mothers of the new nation. A tradition popularized by non-fiction works such as Lydia Maria Child’s *The American Frugal Housewife* (1829) and Catharine Beecher’s *Treatise on Domestic Economy* (1841), these texts advise women on their most sacred duties as wives and mothers within the home. Thus, Fern’s marker of a “domestic tale” engages an entire history of women’s writing with discourses on gender roles in relation to the private sphere. More importantly, these texts were particularly apt at guiding young girls toward their future roles as wives and mothers. To put it another way, whereas domestic tales often prepared young women for where they would end up, Fern’s novel explores what happens when this “end” does not turn out as one might expect. Although *Ruth Hall* begins with all the working parts of a domestic tale, it actually offers readers a distinct view of a woman’s life after the fairytale ends when death and poverty derail the traditional sentimental narrative of marriage, homemaking, and motherhood.

¹⁹ See Nina Baym, *Woman’s Fiction* for a studied exploration of the nineteenth-century female protagonist in American women’s writing (19) .

Precipitated by a reversal of the usual events in a *Bildungsroman*, the narrative proposes an alternative narrative of women's development. The novel itself takes place in the gap between two domestic/sentimental plots—between the untimely end of Ruth's first marriage and the promise of her second one. For some scholars, the novel then becomes an exercise in synching these plots and finding a way to move from one to the other. However, many feminist scholars desire to read this alternate narrative as a kind of feminist epistle where Ruth overcomes her failed domestic plot in order to find success and financial independence as an urban working woman. Betsy Klimasmith implies that Ruth is “forced to develop the skills that allow her to succeed and eventually prosper [in the city] as a single mother” (17). For Klimasmith, Fern's narrative goes above and beyond when “Ruth's engagement with the artistic and commercial world of the city nets her personal, artistic, and financial profit” (17). Still unmarried by the novel's end and living as a successful newspaper columnist who, with her daughters, has left the boardinghouse behind for a hotel, Ruth has triumphed over her life's failures and achieved victory as a woman in the city. While there is no denying Ruth's financial and personal successes by the novel's end, she does not celebrate the new path she has managed to follow despite so many odds, but instead remains resigned both to her current state and to whatever future challenges or victories may come.

In addition to subverting the plot of the domestic novel, Fern also relied on her pseudonymous identity as a way to explore some of the darker and more unfavorable depictions of domestic and family life in the novel. Sara Payson Willis, believing her authorial persona and pseudonym “Fanny Fern” would protect her real identity, drew heavily on her own life experiences for her first novel. Fern, like her protagonist Ruth, lost her husband and had to find a way to support herself and children, ultimately capitalizing on her success as an urban

newspaper columnist for her debut as a novel writer.²⁰ Whereas Willis writes under the pseudonym Fern, Ruth writes using the name “Floy.” Despite her novel’s popularity, Fern came under criticism for the “negative treatment of her father, brother, and in-laws...[who]...she had sharply satirized in the novel. However unkind her relatives may have been, the critics insisted, it was not proper in a woman to be so unfeminine as to criticize them” (Warren xvii). Much of the criticism levied against Fern stems from her decision to satirize her family’s ill treatment of her in a work of domestic fiction—a novelistic form known for its celebration of felicitous families. Not only does the novel’s beginning bring about the end of Ruth’s felicitous marriage but also portrays that domestic life, with its climax of motherhood, is not always as harmonious as one might expect.

Pseudonymity has been both a persistent and much overlooked topic in scholarship on Fern and her novel. Scholars often fail to address the complex relationship between Ruth and Floy. They either conflate author and pseudonym or skip over Floy’s presence in the novel entirely. In *Writing with Scissors*, for instance, Ellen Grubar Garvey notes the way Ruth’s newspaper columns get “scissored” into a publishable and profitable book: “[I]f the writer’s name remained with the work, the exchange system could generate publicity for an author or even a product. In Fanny Fern’s 1854 *Ruth Hall* the indication that Ruth is achieving acclaim as a writer is in the number of her pieces that are copied into exchanges” (34). Even though Garvey discusses the importance of authorial identity for the cultivation of literary success, she ironically misses the point that it is not Ruth’s name attached to the writing at all but, rather, Floy’s. She foregoes discussing pseudonymity entirely, perpetuating an overarching trend in scholarship on

²⁰ In her introduction to the new edition of the novel, Joyce Warren comments on the success of *Ruth Hall* as a *roman à clef* after Willis’s identity became known, particularly among nineteenth-century readers “eager to see the author’s portrait of her famous brother, N[athaniel]. P[arker]. Willis” (xvii).

the novel by focusing all attention on the female protagonist as the author and on Floy as just another name for her.

Of course, Garvey's treatment of the novel is understandable in the historical context in which it was published and set. In *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834-1853*, Meredith McGill argues that, by the early part of the 1850s, reprint culture had begun its decline and, with it, the widespread employment of anonymous and pseudonymous authorial identities. In the two decades prior, magazine proprietors often made profits—and skirted newly emerging copyright laws—by reprinting writing already published elsewhere. Editors poached and pirated pieces from the U.S. and from abroad. Often, they declined to attribute or misattributed texts to their writers. As McGill explores, Edgar Allan Poe's famous story "The Fall of the House of Usher," which had originally been printed by the London-based journal *Bentley's Miscellany* was republished in the *Boston Notion* "under a heading that suggested British authorship—'From Bentley's Miscellany for August'" (198). Whereas the misattribution for Poe, a writer so intent on leading the charge of antebellum literary nationalism, was a supremely negative experience, as a practice, anonymous and pseudonymous writing gave many women authors an opportunity to explore themes they would not have otherwise been able to. In *Uncommon Women: Gender and Representation in Nineteenth-Century U.S. Women's Writing*, Laura Laffrado argues that Louisa May Alcott used her "ungendered" pseudonym, A.M. Barnard, in order to "write about sex without anyone knowing it," and that her thrillers "show her experimenting with gender and literary forms" (80).

By the 1850s, this was all changing as the culture of reprinting began drawing to a close because "structural changes in the book trades," specifically more efficient publishing and transporting technologies, made reprinting and, with it, the fragmentation or altogether erasure of

authorial identity a thing of the past (McGill 270). Due to McGill's assertion that this shift took place in the early years of the 1850s, *Ruth Hall* consequently occurs at an important middle point where significant changes in print technology and culture entailed a profound transition from unstable anonymity or pseudonymity to more stable authorial identity. This is not to say that authorial masking would not take place in later antebellum or post-bellum periods but that the practice became less prevalent, a cultural shift that has in many ways affected the way we read the novel without mention of pseudonymity or with reference to the way it helped its female protagonist achieve a level of autonomy—as also observed in the case of Alcott—otherwise unavailable to her.

In regards to the latter, various scholars have made Ruth's penname central to her ability to couple the sentimental and capitalistic through her success as a female columnist. In *Uncommon Women: Gender and Representation in U.S. Women's Writing*, Laura Laffrado shapes her discussion of Ruth through the way "Fern employs periodical writing to address topical subjects as well as self-construction" (14). She goes on to say that "all women engaged in autobiographical practices...negotiate a complex web of gender and genre constructions in their attempts to locate a momentary coherence of self" (14). Similar to Laffrado, Maria Sánchez captures that impulse toward self-coherence through Ruth's strategic employment of Floy. In "Re-Possessing Individualism in Fanny Fern's *Ruth Hall*," she discusses the way Fern uses "displacement and deferral" through Floy as a way to preserve Ruth's propriety: "Fern implies that at some level, Ruth never publicly condemns her family. 'Floy' does... 'Floy provides Ruth with an alternate, perhaps more plainspoken persona, one whose identity as a lady might be questionable" (50) so that Ruth's ladylike behavior remains above reproach. For Sanchez, Ruth is not the one who seeks revenge on her family; rather, Floy's writing becomes an instant success

in part through its thinly veiled critiques of Ruth's family. Her pen name is able to enact justice, at least indirectly through print and, therefore, seemingly does Ruth's dirty work in full view of the public through the newspapers.

In a slightly different way, Gale Temple supports Sánchez's interpretation of Ruth and Floy as distinct entities that couple sentimental and capitalistic goals. Whereas, for Sánchez, the division imbues Ruth with a gendered identity achieved through her deployment of the androgynously named Floy, Temple reverses the binary so that, through her use of Floy, Ruth dissolves any semblance of feminine identity and role within the domestic *Bildungsroman*. In "A Purchase on Goodness: Fanny Fern, Ruth Hall, and Fraught Individualism," she begins by discussing the way Ruth develops and, in turn, becomes popular and wealthy through a philanthropic and traditionally feminine desire to help the disempowered. In terms of this kind of interpretation, Temple describes Floy "only as a voice for [disempowered individuals] feelings of frustration and anxiety at the hands of a seemingly heartless and alienating public sphere." She goes on to add that, because Ruth's popularity depends on her anonymity, "The only identifiable social group that champions Ruth are the 'earnest and sorrowing,' for to them she has given an empowered voice, providing a cathartic outlet for their 'burdened hearts'" (152). Through a narrative arc from "rags to riches," the novel "justifies and familiarizes market capitalism by portraying Ruth's transcendence as a triumph both for Ruth as an individual, and for the system itself, for it suggests that the best people will succeed no matter what race or sex or income level encumbers them at the outset" (153). Importantly, for Temple, the division between "Ruth" and "Floy" suggests the fact that, in the American public sphere, socio-economic problems such as poverty and misogyny occur as private experiences that must be resolved before one gains entrance into "the national public sphere, which is a homogenized

space evacuated of historical, political, racial, and gender specificity” (155). The point becomes even clearer when we note that, by creating her pen-name, Ruth bridges these two zones: the public sphere and the more “specific” space beyond it; for she, Ruth, remains in that sphere whereas Floy, despite her more androgynous name and ambiguous identity, takes part in a gendered occupation. Unattached to historical, political, racial, or gender markers, Ruth embodies a “fraught individualism,” what Temple refers to as the void at the heart of the utopian American Dream.

Whether skipping over the fact that Ruth employs a pseudonym or interpreting pseudonymity as a strategy to promote ideal identities and conditions—such as femininity and the American public sphere—within a plot that weaves sentimental and capitalistic plotlines, scholars such as Sánchez and Temple also point toward a more problematic understanding of pseudonymity and its bearing on female development. In describing Floy as a mere writerly tool for Ruth, Sánchez also alludes, intentionally or not, to the pen-name as a kind of alter-ego, as another aspect of the protagonist that troubles her sentimental identity and thus the narrative as a whole. Likewise, Temple’s “fraught individualism” points to the problems that lurk at the top of the social ladder when, progressing from rags to riches, protagonists such as Ruth finally achieve entrance in to the public sphere where gender identity, for instance, no longer reassuringly anchors individuals down.

Robert Gunn expounds upon this “fraughtness” as a condition of Fern’s “strategy of pseudonymity.” For Gunn, “[Fern] showcases in her work the stories of anonymous degraded, and forgotten women, empowering them by aligning them with [a] cunningly evasive writerly identity.” Although the space for self-creation affords writers, their characters, and hopefully their readers the opportunity to “virtually redra[w] the expressive boundaries of domesticity

within the confines of the bourgeois household,” it also comes at a cost: “[Fern’s] intervention on behalf of her readers neither identifies nor defends an idealized model of private selfhood within those scenes of domestic containment that characterize the lives of her readers and the lives of her texts; instead, Fern works to promote the experience of publicity as an antidote to the fiction of idealized and always limited models of selfhood” (25). In order to explore this theme, Gunn discusses Fern’s essay “How I Look” in which she recounts going to an opera where it has been publicized that she will be in attendance. Throughout the performance and essay, she revels in eavesdropping on attendees pointing out different female opera-goers, surmising whether these women are Fern. Although the title of essay promises to give at least some kind of description of Fern’s appearance, she never does; throughout the piece, she declines to offer any sense of how she looks at all. In light of “How I Look,” the fact that pseudonymity “neither identifies nor defends an idealized model of private selfhood” (25) does not mean that it opens up a space of radical possibility for female writers and characters to push beyond boundaries by normative development. Just as Fern leaves her own identity a mystery, her strategy of pseudonymity leaves identity a mystery in a more general sense.

Occurring at the end point of the traditional *Bildungsroman*, the novel is rife with possibilities for female development. Although Floy becomes an authorial vehicle that ostensibly transports Ruth from widowhood to independent, success as a female columnist, the novel follows a trajectory quite similar to the one I have already explored in my chapter on Sedgwick’s *Clarence*, where female productivity actually—and quite tragically—leads to inactivity. In *Ruth Hall*, the creation of Floy affords the protagonist not only the ability to write freely and become quite wealthy and popular by doing so, but also the inability to choose between the myriad paths of urban development set before in the novel. Moreover, Ruth’s view

of writing as work ultimately leads to her feelings of resignation and indifference as she looks ahead to all the new possible paths of development. Fern consequently elucidates the link between the pseudonymous Floy and Ruth's own passive desire to remain anonymous. Writing as an unknown entity, Ruth also remains unknown, even to herself, a phenomenon that inhibits any chance for self-development.

I.

Ruth Hall is an outgrowth of the domestic *Bildungsroman* and similar to Sedgwick's *Clarence* in the sense that it engages a similar question of what happens when a female character's development, and in some cases productivity, ultimately leads to her own idleness. Most scholars agree that *Ruth Hall* is not a typical domestic or sentimental novel despite its subtitle. In her study on urban domesticity, Klimasmith highlights the city's overwhelming influence on Ruth's development, citing Fern's more positive depiction of the city where she "rewrites the familiar tale of moral decay in the city" and in turn reveals it "as a space where a new connective individualism could emerge" (17). Klimasmith reads Ruth's return to the city as the primary force behind her development as a writer. Despite her initial setbacks in the domestic plot, she ultimately finds an alternative path where her "engagement with the artistic and commercial world of the city nets her personal, artistic, and financial profit" (17). Faflik extends Klimasmith's focus on the relationship between urban space and domesticity. Rather than interpreting domesticity's integral importance to Ruth's upward mobility and the way her personal, financial, and artistic success become interdependent, he claims that the novel "fall[s] short of its imagined destination" (97). He goes on to outline its limitations as a novel by saying that "the text strains to fulfill generic expectations, since it lacks the introspection of

romance and mostly omits the exterior details of literary realism” (97). With his primary interest in Ruth and her children’s time spent living in an urban boarding house, he seems to suggest that the novel changes course after its first few chapters from an idealization of the domestic home to a far more critical assessment of urban space and its limitations for domestic ideals, thus undercutting its intention to be a “domestic tale” of any sort. For Faflik, *Ruth Hall* finds its place instead as an “urban *Bildungsroman*” (97) but one disconnected from Ruth’s experiences leading up to her return to the city. For him, Ruth’s failure to live out the domestic plot of wife and homemaker ultimately informs her later development as an urban writer and single mother.

Although Klimasmith and Faflik astutely read Ruth’s desire to succeed in the city as a response to the sudden loss of her husband and her need to reclaim financial and domestic security, they fail to explore the ways the novel moves beyond a mere course correction after the failure of one sentimental plot. Ruth’s development in the city and manufacturing of a new self is most noticeable in her creation of the androgynous authorial persona “Floy”. This public persona is never quite reconciled with Ruth’s other private identities as a widow and mother, and in fact aids her in keeping these parts of her life separate to an extent. She even seems to struggle early on with her initial new identity as a wife when, after her marriage, her in laws force her to remain in a marginalized and adolescent state.

By inverting the traditional *Bildungsroman*, Fern, like Sedgwick, seems to suggest that the culmination of female development in marriage does not always lead to empowering women in their new positions as wives. Upon marriage, Ruth departs her childhood city home only to be returned to a childlike position in her in-laws’ country home. On the eve of her marriage to a man she loves, Ruth lies awake imagining her future domestic bliss. She moves with her husband to a small rural community in close proximity to her in-laws, which leaves Ruth with

very little privacy. Under their constant, watchful gaze, Ruth falls prey to endless lessons on how to improve herself. As the victim of her mother-in-law's surveillance, rigid household rules, detailed lessons on being a "lady," and frequent critiques of her household skills, Ruth quickly learns that she is not the domestic wife her mother-in-law dreamed of for her son. In reality, Ruth's upbringing in the city has left her without some of the more necessary skills for raising a family in the country. Her mother-in-law questions:

“Can you make bread? When I say *bread* I mean bread—old fashioned, yeast riz bread; norie of your sal-soda, salaeratus, sal-volatile poisonous mixtures, that must be eaten as quick as baked, lest it should dry up; *yeast* bread—do you know how to make it?’ ‘No,’ said Ruth, with a growing sense of her utter good-for-nothingness; ‘people in the city always buy baker’s bread; my father did’.” (Fern 20)

Ruth matter-of-factly explains the convenience of city living to her mother-in-law at the same time she feels inadequate under her mother-in-law's scrutiny. Mrs. Hall's lessons in domesticity and femininity for Ruth do not end there. Rather ironically, while Mrs. Hall continues to treat Ruth like a child she also insists that as a married woman, her daughter-in-law give up all her childish and fanciful things from silk stockings (20) to novel reading (21) to Ruth's naturally curly hair. Mrs. Hall cautions, “you should avoid everything that looks frivolous, you must try and pomatum [your hair] down...if you should feel the need of exercise, don't gad in the streets. Remember there is nothing like a broom and dust-pan to make the blood circulate” (20). Moreover, the old woman's daily seminars on domestic economy and gender roles feel anachronistic for the already married Ruth. Yet the frequency with which her mother-in-law instructs, scolds, and corrects the grown Ruth reflects the reversal of her position and “development” upon marrying.

Rather than freeing her from adolescence, Ruth's marriage returns her to a suspended state of development where she fails in her responsibilities as a homemaker and her authority is

constantly called into question. When Ruth and her husband finally move into their own home in the country, she desperately hopes for increased autonomy and a chance to escape her mother-in-law's scrutiny.²¹ Even living apart from her in-laws, Ruth is still at the mercy of their endless litany of "do's" and "don'ts". However, in another move that highlights Ruth's childlike position, her mother-in-law frequently visits the home when she can be certain that the occupants will be out. Mrs. Hall has no more respect for her son and daughter-in-law's privacy and moves liberally through their house looking through their drawers and cabinets at her leisure. Fern's narrator even draws attention to Mrs. Hall's outrageous actions by sarcastically recounting the woman's pastimes. When it seems like Mrs. Hall has too quickly passed over some of the features of the house the narrator interjects, "Not so fast, my dear madam. Examine closely. Those long, white curtains, looped up so prettily from the open windows, are plain, cheap muslin" (33-4). In similar fashion, the narrator can also anticipate Mrs. Hall's restlessness to examine every inch of Ruth's house: "But, my dear old lady, we beg pardon; we are keeping you too long from the china closet, which you are so anxious to inspect" (34). The narrator's commentary reveals how little Mrs. Hall respects Ruth's right to manage her house and conduct her own affairs. Normally, this level of intense scrutiny, invasions of privacy, and forced education, would be reserved for children and lauded as a crucial stage of their development. For Ruth, a married woman, her mother-in-law's actions merely stunt her development so that Ruth, upon leaving her father's house, finds herself in a similar state of dependency in her own home which all—for better or worse—form a crucial part of their development.

²¹ The narrator emphasizes the seclusion of Ruth's married home: "Ruth's new house was about five miles from the city... You can scarce see the house, for the drooping elms, half a century old, whose long branches, at every wind-gust, swept across the velvet lawn" (28). Moreover, Ruth relishes the chance to live beyond her in-law's purview and finally be herself: "She could give an order without having it countermanded; she could kiss little Daisy, without being called 'silly;' she could pull out her comb, and let her curls flow about her face, without being considered 'frivolous;' and, better than all, she could fly into her husband's arms, when he came home, and kiss him, without feeling that she had broken any penal statute" (28-9).

Mrs. Hall's severest criticisms of Ruth revolve around her mothering abilities. She continually belittles her daughter-in-law's authority, and when her only grandchild dies, Mrs. Hall places the blame squarely on Ruth's shoulders. Discussing the girl's death with a neighbor, Mrs. Hall confides, "It is *my* opinion the child's death was owing to the thriftlessness of the mother. I don't mourn for it because I believe the poor thing is better off" (46). On this occasion, even Ruth's father-in-law sees fit to level his own criticism of Ruth claiming, "the amount of it is, that the mother always thought she knew better than anybody else how to manage that child...as Mrs. Hall says, the child is better off, and as to Ruth, why the Lord generally sends afflictions where they are *needed*" (46). The Halls not only attribute little Daisy's death to her mother's spending habits, but even go as far as to suggest the child's death is just form of retribution for Ruth. Their desire to see their daughter-in-law punished further illustrates the extent to which they see her as a child who needs to be taught a difficult and costly lesson.

By inverting the traditional structure of the *Bildungsroman*, *Ruth Hall*, in this way, does not trace a young woman's coming-of-age but her return-to-young-age. This reversal represents, or at least foreshadows, Ruth's queer non-development and complacency at the story's end. In *Feeling Backward*, Heather Love explores the relationship between queer identity and its development in relation to heteronormative growth, which is nearly always forward-moving. Although Love focuses more on twentieth-century writers than their nineteenth-century counterparts, her framework is useful for examining social responses to suspended, or even idle, states of development. "Whether understood as throwbacks to an earlier stage of human development or as children who refuse to grow up, queers have been seen across the twentieth century as a backward race. Perverse, immature, sterile, and melancholic: even when they

provoke fears about the future, they somehow also recall the past” (6). While Fern’s Ruth does not “refuse to grow up,” her experience is similarly queer in the way marriage actually inverts her development rather than completes it.

Picking up where Sedgwick leaves off, with a happy marriage, Fern initially shows the ways marriage can return a “grown” woman to a childlike position. As a result, Ruth’s new beginning, as a married woman, becomes merely a false start. Marriage and motherhood, often lauded as the pinnacles of development for women, are for Ruth mere experiences that give her mother-in-law new opportunities for instructing and educating the girl. Similarly, Ruth relishes in her moments of freedom where she can behave as she likes: “She could give an order without having it countermanded; she could kiss little Daisy, without being called ‘silly;’ she could pull out her comb, and let her curls flow about her face, without being considered ‘frivolous;’ and, better than all, she could fly into her husband’s arms, when he came home, and kiss him, without feeling that she had broken any penal statute” (28-9). Ruth takes pleasure in these minor acts of rebellion. Whereas a fully developed woman, confident in her own authority, would recognize her right to behave and love her husband and child any way she pleased, Ruth remains acutely aware of her mother-in-law’s criticisms and, as a result, highlights her mediated position.

II.

Ruth has already experienced one “ending” at the novel’s start with the end of her youth, she experiences a second shortly after with the end of her marriage, and so the bulk of the novel becomes about new beginnings for Ruth. After the loss of her husband and oldest child, Ruth determines to begin again in the city. And, while it may initially appear that the failed domestic plot has managed to open an avenue for a new kind of progressive female development, Ruth’s

progress in the city remains achingly slow. Economics motivates her return, since she can find more affordable urban housing and a potential means for financially supporting herself and two daughters. Upon her husband's death, her in-laws and even some of his friends take advantage of the situation and remove every last item of her husband's personal effects from his clothes and shoes to his canes and hats, even his bible from Ruth's possession. The executor of her husband's will even muses, "The law is on [Ruth's] side, undoubtedly, but luckily she know no more about law than a baby; she is poor, the doctor is a man of property" (76). The executor easily bends to Dr. Hall's request to have all his son's things sent, since he too views Ruth as a "baby" rather than a woman with the full rights of and adult. The perception of Ruth as childlike or young continues to work against her as she seeks legitimate employment in the city. However, she struggles to find steady work and maintain a stable home life for her children. Each advance Ruth makes seems to be accompanied by some new setback so that her narrative as a single woman in the city is peppered with all its own challenges. Ultimately, Ruth overcomes these challenges and finds success as a newspaper writer, and for a time, it appears the narrative has heralded a new tale of working-class female development. Yet, rather ironically, the fact remains that Ruth returns to the place she grew up because it is the only way she can move forward.

City living turns out to be an intensely isolating and difficult experience for Ruth and her daughters on their initial arrival. Neither her father nor in-laws will help the family significantly with finances, so Ruth sets up home in a boarding house. Her loss of status and subpar accommodations makes it difficult to maintain her prior social relationships, and her need to find work and make a decent wage occupies nearly all her time. Moreover, an urban boarding house

by its very nature attracts transients and is not quite where one would expect to find a mother and her children. Even the narrator takes issue with Ruth's new living arrangement:

In a dark narrow street, in one of those heterogeneous boarding-houses abounding in the city, where clerks, market-boys, apprentices, and sewing-girls, bolt their meals with railroad velocity; where the maid-of-all-work, with red arms, frowzy head, and leathern lungs, screams in the entry for any boarder who happens to be inquired for at the door; where one plate suffices for fish, flesh, fowl, and dessert; where soiled table-cloths, sticky crockery, oily cookery, and bad grammar, predominate; where greasy cards are shuffled, and bad cigars smoked of an evening, you might have found Ruth and her children" (73).

The narrator quickly cycles through the many things wrong with a typical boarding house and its occupants taking particular issue with the heterogeneity and pitiable domestic standards. While this standard of living may be suitable for singletons just starting out, it appears decidedly unsuitable for a woman who was for a time already "settled". Having become accustomed to her mother-in-laws frequent invasions of her privacy, the permeable space of the boarding house with its frequent population change-over actually shelters Ruth, giving her more privacy than she ever had while living so near her in-laws. As Klimasmith explains, "Urban dwellings thus exemplified permeable architecture; once inside a building, inhabitants could pass from place to place, entering and sharing interior spaces that would have been shared only by family members in the cottage home" (5). The boarding house breaks down traditional boundaries of privacy, and as Fern's narrator seems to suggest, propriety between its guests. And so, Ruth's position in a crowded, shared boarding house mirrors the equally close quarters she had to withstand while living so close to her in-laws in the country. Although she can hear her neighbors, see into the windows of other apartments across the street (Fern 89-90), and even has a landlady who sometimes enters her room without knocking (84), Ruth is permitted for the most part go about her business relatively undisturbed.

Living in such close proximity to others makes Ruth acutely aware of the way other people's lives continue to go on around her while she remains stalled in her attempts to rebuild her life after her husband's death. From her apartment window she can see into the windows of the tenements across from her and the comings-and-goings at the brothel down the street (90). She spends so much time sitting and watching the various families that she becomes familiar with their habits. Her observations are tinged with a keen awareness of the ongoing struggles facing her fellow neighbors. She watches as the tailor across the street works diligently making garments for "the small clothing-store in the vicinity, whose Jewish owner reaped all the profits" and in another window sees "an old woman, feebly trying to soothe in her palsied arms the wailings of a poor sick child. And there, too, sat a young girl, from dawn till dark, scarcely lifting that pallid face and weary eyes—stitching and thinking, thinking and stitching. God help her!" (90). For the forlorn Ruth, these people's struggles, as well as her own, seem unending. She takes on piecework sewing but finds that the amount of work it takes for a mere fifty-cents pay makes the work futile. Thinking to herself "I have labored diligently too, every spare moment, for a fortnight; this will never do" (96), Ruth resolves to find other employment and entertains the possibility of becoming a schoolteacher. The proximity with which Ruth lives to her neighbors makes it far easier to draw comparisons between the progress of their life and her own.

Adding to Ruth's burdens, she is abandoned by her friends and family when they do not approve of her decision to start over in the city with her children. Her family pressures her to give up her children and ease her financial burden by going to work full-time. Similarly, her friends judge her for how low she is willing to sink on the social ladder in order to keep her daughters with her. On one occasion, two of her former friends come to visit her, shrinking from

her place of residence in a boardinghouse. Commenting to one another they remark, “Just look at that red-faced Irish girl leaning out the front window on her elbows, and see those vulgar red bar-room curtains; I declare, Mary, if Ruth Hall has got down hill so far as this, *I* can’t keep up her acquaintance...’Tis a dreadful change for her, I declare; if it were me, I believe I should cut my throat” (81). The women ultimately depart without calling on their poor friend after having agreed that they would elect death over the current state of Ruth’s life. Her more financially well-off family members also avoid her acquaintance in the city, wishing she would go back to the country so as to be even further removed from them (97-8). When her daughter Katy meets her cousin in the street, he later relays the encounter to his mother, Mrs. Millet, complaining, “I wish you would give [Ruth] a lesson or two, about those children of hers. The other day I met her Katy in the street with the shabbiest old bonnet on, and the toes of her shoes all rubbed white; and she had the impertinence to call me ‘*cousin* John,’ ...I could have wrung the little wretch’s neck” (98). Not only does this scene highlight the family’s desire to distance themselves from Ruth and her visible poverty, but it also reveals the way her isolation upon her return to the city is forced upon her. Cousin John desires to pass by his shabby cousin in the street and ignore her as any other urban stranger in the crowd might.

It may seem like Ruth and her daughters may have more success starting over somewhere with a clean slate where no one knows them or their tragic circumstances, but as their experience reveals it is perhaps just as hard to start fresh some place new as it is to begin again still in the shadow of their past. In fact, when considering the other widows she knows who have had success working and supporting their children, Ruth realizes it is all the result of their families’ continued support. When she approaches her cousin with her new idea for employment, Mrs. Millet responds, “yes—other widows support themselves, though, I am sure, I don’t know how

they do it—I suppose there must be a way” before quickly switching topics to discuss the money she plans to spend to improve her daughter’s newest gown (97). Her family’s disregard for her very real struggle makes it difficult for Ruth to turn the tide in her favor. She tries to recruit pupils so she can work as a schoolteacher but discovers that “people are not apt to entrust their children with a person of whom they know nothing” (98). Even worse, when a vacancy opens for a teacher at a public primary school, two members of the school committee who know Ruth and are “both aware how earnestly she longed for employment” (99) actually vote against her for the position (103). With a family unwilling or reluctant to “claim” her as their own, Ruth suffers as a result of having no clearly defined relations or social connections in the city.

Despite Ruth’s valiant efforts to find work and begin again, her friends and family are at best indifferent and at worst interfere and sabotage her efforts. As a result, Ruth’s slow progress to move forward as a new woman is a direct consequence of the people in her life wishing she would just disappear along with her problems—through either death or a retreat to the country. In a way, this desire to wish her away is more damaging than her in-laws treating her like a child, since the intent is to obscure the woman’s existence entirely rather than merely retard her growth as an adult. Nevertheless, she remains in the city, and it seems as if the adversity Ruth must endure will eventually give way to a deluge of success. After the failed domestic plot, Fern seems poised to have her protagonist triumph over her critics and chart a new narrative of upward mobility as an independent, self-sufficient woman. Throughout the nineteenth century, there are several examples of working and middle class women who, through hard work, perseverance, and moral virtue, manage to turn fate in their favor and succeed. Published the same year as *Ruth Hall*, Maria Susanna Cummin’s *The Lamplighter* (1854) presents a female *Bildungsroman* where a young Gertrude Flint endures abuse at the hands of her guardian before

eventually being rescued and rewarded for her sufferings with a desirable marriage. Similarly, Southworth's *The Deserted Wife* traces a woman, Hagar, who sets about making her own way in life after her husband abandons her. In this case, Hagar's efforts not only lead to her success and fame as a performer, but also, in the novel's final pages, an implied reconciliation with her estranged husband. These are just two examples of this trope in women's narratives that seem to promise that hard work and strife will be rewarded with contentment and a happy ending.

The fact that Ruth must struggle in order to succeed makes the novel like so many others of upward mobility where it is necessary for the protagonist to overcome a great deal of adversity in order to be fully deserving of her happy ending. Yet, it is important to remember that Ruth has already had her happy ending—only hers came at the novel's beginning. Her first life in the city concluded with her contentedly moving to the country with her new husband, so her second try and life in the city is made more challenging by the fact that none of her former companions want to "know" her anymore and force her into isolation. Despite its network of people and activity, the city allows its inhabitants relative anonymity by the sheer number of people living and working there. Linda McDowell insists that the "very anonymity of the urban crowd may protect women, while at the same time that edge of danger is a lure to explore the city landscape" (156). Urban life offered some women a protective anonymity where they could be *seen* but not *known* by the figures in the nameless crowds through which they moved. Although in Ruth's case she does not necessarily desire anonymity as a result of this forced isolation from her family and friends, ultimately her ability to leverage this anonymity in the form of a pseudonymous authorial personal becomes the source of her professional success.

Ruth turns her forced isolation and obscurity into a powerful and useful anonymity. After several unsuccessful attempts to secure work as a shop-girl and teacher through her limited

connections to her family, former friends, and acquaintances (all who know very well the realities of her situation), it becomes obvious that her name and past in no way help her achieve the financial independence she needs to start over. Looking out her window alone one morning, she notices a newspaper carrier placing the morning papers under the door of the house across the street and thinks, “A thought! why could not Ruth write for the papers?” (115). After writing to her brother, an editor, for his assistance in starting her literary career, he responds not only to say that he will not help her but also to advise that she “seek some *unobtrusive* employment” (116). His request echoes nearly everyone else’s desire that Ruth find a way make herself as least obtrusive or present in their lives as possible. Following her brother’s dismissal, Ruth’s resolve strengthens not only to become a successful writer without his help, but also to do it in such a way that when her triumph is revealed: “*Hyacinth shall yet be proud to claim his sister*” (116). For the time being, Ruth decides to acquiesce to her family’s implied request and conceal her identity, and so she begins to write and publish under the pseudonym “Floy”.

By publishing under another name, she not only protects her brother from his perceived shame of having a scribbling sister, but also crafts a kind of public persona that will protect her private self from further ridicule, while also allowing her to work toward improving the city and achieve financial independence. Floy’s fame as a writer grows, while Ruth maintains her anonymity and quiet domestic life as a single mother in the city. The anonymous author and her writing sparks countless rumors and speculations about the ambiguous Floy:

“some [readers] maintaining her to be a man, because she had the courage to call things by their right names, and the independence to express herself boldly on subjects which to the timid and clique-serving, were tabooed. Some said she was a disappointed old maid; some said she was a designing widow; some said she was a moon-struck girl; and all said she was a nondescript.” (133)

None of the readers suspect Ruth for what she really is—a widowed, single mother working to support her children any way she can. Yet, the letters Ruth’s publisher forwards to her address the mysterious Floy in a variety of ways from salutations such as “To the Distinguished and Popular Writer, ‘Floy’” (153) to “Mrs., Miss, or Madam Floy” (163). This range reveals the extent to which Floy’s ambiguity in content, tone, and style perplex the readers. Through the mystery surrounding her true identity and the quality of her writing, Ruth develops quite the readership as Floy.

Her popularity and wide readership not only enables her to improve her and her daughters’ lives, but also bring attention to some of the city’s suffering underclasses. Although Fern never “reprints” any of Floy’s columns or stories in the novel itself, she does include the transcripts of readers’ letters to Floy as well as other characters’ comments about the stories, which shed some light on the content and focus of Floy’s work. In letters from her readers, Ruth learns how her writing has been a comfort to others in similar states of ruin. One woman, Mary Andrews, confesses that in Ruth’s writings she “see[s] sympathy for the poor, the sorrowing, and the dependent” (165) and asks “Floy” to be the mother to her child should the woman die in childbirth. She receives other similar letters where the authors detail their long list of misfortunes, asking Ruth to give voice to their stories and even believing that when filtered through her “magic pen” (164) their misfortunes might miraculously improve. What is certain about Floy’s stories is that they challenge the status quo and compel her readers, whether they enjoy the themes of her writing or not, to respond to it. Even an unhappy reader still takes the time to write to Ruth and tell her that “You may startle and dazzle, but you are fit only to throw people out of their orbits” (166). Ruth’s ability to displace people from “their orbits” by

illuminating the poverty and suffering in the city is one of her greatest strengths. She manages to improve the public space of the city by drawing on her own private struggles.

As Ruth's success grows she achieves financial stability and popularity. With the help of her editor Mr. Walter, she finally earns a salary worthy of her hard work and talent and even has the opportunity to coolly walk away from the newspaper editor who has taken advantage of her from the beginning. She scoffs at his empty threats to publish his own collection of her work before she can to which she carefully responds, "Mr. Tibbetts, you have mistaken your auditor. I am not to be frightened, or threatened, or *insulted*" (157). With her long sought-after financial security, Ruth rests assured that she has made the right decision in betting on her own merits. Her show of strength and newfound fame seem to suggest that she has managed to find her way onto a successful path following her many setbacks and struggles. Floy's popularity and far-reaching influence is aided in part by the culture of reprinting or "scissoring" where publications from separate regions exchange content with one another as a way to introduce new writing to their local readership. In *Writing with Scissors*, Ellen Gruber Garvey explains, "Exchanges both reflected popularity and generated publicity from that popularity. Book publishers also noted an author's popularity in newspaper exchanges as a sign that the writer's reputation was substantial enough to carry a collection of the pieces into a book" (35). Once Floy becomes a household name, Ruth has offers from publishers for a book in order to showcase her best work. She manages to hold out for one willing to pay her a percentage of the profits rather than a lump sum (Fern 163).

Moreover, Ruth gains popularity and financial success because she remains authentic and committed to her task. In these moments, the novel seems to tie together capitalistic and sentimental themes as Ruth resolves to work as hard as she can despite her struggles for the sake

of her children. Even before she starts writing, she is confident in her success. When her brother warns her that her stories will never be read outside of her own “little provincial city”, Ruth resolutely decides otherwise:

“But they shall be heard of;” and Ruth leaped to her feet. “Sooner than he dreams of, too. I *can* do it, I *feel* it, I *will* do it,” and she closed her lips firmly; “but there will be a desperate struggle first,” and she clasped her hands over her heart as if it had already commenced; “there will be scant meals, and sleepless nights, and weary days, and a throbbing brow, and an aching heart; there will be the chilling tone, the rude repulse; there will be ten backward steps to one forward. *Pride* must sleep! but—” and Ruth glanced at her children—“it shall be *done*. They shall be proud of their mother.” (116)

In this passage, the words “can” and “will” highlight the strength of Ruth’s determination as it is tied to her ability to become a successful writer, but it is important that these words evoking strength and confidence are broken up by the more sentimental and qualified “feel,” which introduces emotion into a statement that is otherwise concerned with reason and logic. Focusing on the practical components of becoming a writer—when she will find the time to write, how she will adjust her household budget until she can sell her work—highlight Ruth’s all-business attitude toward her tasks. In “An Expenditure Saved Is an Expenditure Earned: Fanny Fern’s Humoring of the Capitalist Ethos,” Julie Wilhelm even goes as far to call Ruth a “heroine-turned-capitalist” (202). However, interspersed between her capitalistic strategizing about how to effectively and efficiently manage herself and her time are fleeting glimpses of her sentiment and feelings. This is why it is important that she “feels” she will be successful rather than “knows” it. Her economic desire to succeed as a writer is connected with her desire to prove her brother wrong and make her daughters proud. Affirming this point, Sánchez explains that the novel “traverses the separate spheres of the home and the marketplace to conjoin them in a fantastical rendition of that affective family” (28). By virtue of her commitment to both spheres, Ruth remains a committed mother capable of supporting her family at the same time that she

crafts an androgynous pseudonym as part of her strategy to make a living as a popular newspaper writer. Thus, Fern's novel actually unites its capitalist and sentimental features through the virtue of Ruth's success that comes from simply being true to herself. She does not alter who she is but rather more fully realizes a version of herself and remains constant. The more comfortable she becomes in her own skin and the more outspoken she becomes in her journalistic writings, the more readers flock to her candid portrayals of poverty and other social ills in the city and, consequently, the more money she makes from her growing readership.

After the failure of the sentimental plot, Floy emerges as a feature of Ruth's successful development, but ultimately the novel does not celebrate this course correction by moving the protagonist toward marriage again after she has made her way as an independent woman. Her popularity and success are the fruits of her hard labor, and yet, a closer examination of her mask as Floy reveals that Ruth has become rather antithetical to development. Stephen Hartnett suggests "as Ruth Hall climbs the social ladder she becomes increasingly enamored of the public status, consumerist possibilities, and life-style freedoms made available to her by fame and fortune" (1). While Ruth is decidedly relieved by her influence and security as Floy along with her ability to support her children, she is less enamored by her fame and more prepared for her newfound happiness to come to a sudden end, much like it did the first time.

III.

Ruth's success as Floy actually foreshadows an unanticipated kind of idleness. By crafting a pseudonymous identity in order to become the kind of person she wants to be, an individual who can apparently say what she *really* thinks about her family, Ruth does not so much develop but remains anonymous, even to herself. Writing from New York in 1841, Lydia

Maria Child similarly confessed that the city managed to make her feel unknown. Her journalistic endeavors appearing first in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* (of which she was editor) eventually were collected in book form as her *Letters from New-York*. On 21 October 1841, Child affirmed, “There is something impressive, even to painfulness, in this dense crowding of human existence, this mercantile familiarity with death. It has sometimes forced upon me, for a few moments, an appalling night-mare sensation of vanishing identity; as if I were but an unknown, unnoticed, and unseparated drop in the great ocean of human existence” (44). In the city, Child’s fleeting feelings of anonymity overwhelm her in what she describes as a nightmarish scenario where she no longer knows herself. For Ruth, the outcome is quite different or at least more complex, since the city allows her to escape who she really is and in some ways become who she wants to be as Floy; yet, as we will see, her “vanishing identity”—evidenced in the creation of a pseudonym—actually becomes a “night-mare sensation” that haunts Ruth, hindering her ability to fully develop, relegating her to an interminable middle-zone between two potential paths of development by the end of the novel.

In the aftermath of her success as a writer in the city, the narrator begins to couple Ruth’s reliance on pseudonymity with passivity. Later, it becomes clear that in the same way Ruth resigns herself to widowhood, she accepts the burden of her occupation as a writer. Fern couples Ruth’s resignation with her conflicting emotions about her role as Floy, her literary fame, and her upward social mobility in the city. By now, Ruth idly entertains all different kinds of development because any option has both good and bad, and, therefore, any one mode of development is just as good as another. With several new paths of development open to Ruth as a result of her success, she ultimately becomes somewhat indifferent—unconcerned with any of the possible new beginnings because she is forever fixated on each path’s inevitable end. This

all gets explored most fully at the end of the novel when Ruth returns to the cemetery where her husband and first daughter are buried, and in a sense, the place where the novel and Fern's inverted *Bildungsroman* begins.

Throughout the novel, Fern associates Ruth's pseudonymity with passivity. As public attention grows around the mysterious Floy, the protagonist remains disconnected from her fame, which means she is never the one to show either her friends or family that she is Floy. In some ways, to reveal herself as Floy to her in-laws, father, and brother would mean to actively respond to their earlier aggression and possibly open up a narrative space for argumentative dialogue between the two opposing parties—Ruth on one side, her family on the other. By revealing her brilliant success, Ruth would necessarily be actively seeking a kind of revenge, showing her family that, despite their best efforts to keep her down, she has risen to the top, in a sense, as a popular and wealthy columnist and as the chief breadwinner for her family. Even in a particular tense moment with her in-laws where they imply that she has earned her money through less reputable ways, Ruth remains steadfast and silent about her writing career. “‘The law says if the mother can't support her children, the grand-parents shall do it.’ ‘The mother *can*—the mother *will*,’ said Ruth. ‘I have already earned enough for their support.’ ‘Well, if you have, which I doubt, I hope *you earned it honestly*,’ said the old lady. Ruth's heightened color was the only reply to this taunt” (185). Indeed, her in-laws dreadful treatment of her and suggestion that she came by her money dishonestly seem to be almost begging Ruth to throw the truth of her success in their face. No matter how much she might want to do just that—and how deliciously appealing it would be for us readers to see her at long last duke it out with her family—Ruth never identifies herself as the writer behind Floy, thus disclosing any narrative space for active revenge and only making it possible to redress injustice in a *passive-aggressive* way.

Without Ruth's assistance, her immediate family and in-laws all manage to learn the truth about her work as a writer. Mrs. Hall, a chief critic of everything her daughter-in-law has ever done, is completely enamored by the peculiar Floy's writing. She eagerly loans her copy of the book out to friends telling them the volume is "one of the best and most interesting books" she ever read (203). Unsurprisingly, it comes as quite a shock to her when a neighbor's son, a man who "knows everything" and probably learned of Ruth's work as Floy from his time spent in her city (202), excitedly reveals that the Floy Mrs. Hall loves so much is in fact her very own daughter-in-law, Ruth (202). Upon learning this information, Mrs. Hall recoils and attempts to temper her praise by weakly explaining, "there are several things in [the book], now I think of them, which I consider highly immoral" (203). Whereas Ruth's mother-in-law turns up her nose to the writing when she finds out who the real author is, her brother does the opposite, by claiming Ruth as his sister now that she has received heaps of praise from the literary world.

Hyacinth acutely feels his mistreatment of his sister only as much as it negatively impacts his own literary reputation. He casually reveals to his friend Mr. Lewis that the mysterious "Floy" is his sister to which Lewis responds: "'The ——!' *your* sister? '*Floy*'—your *sister!* why, everybody is going mad to know who she is... Why the deuce didn't you tell a fellow before?'" Hyacinth weakly explains that he kept his sister's secret because "'Floy' had an odd fancy for being *incog.*, and I, being in her confidence, you know, was on honor to keep her secret." (176). Of course, the reader knows that quite on the contrary, Ruth has resisted revealing her identity to her family, especially her brother after his initial dismissal of her. He then goes on to make the not so subtle implication that her success was due to being "*literarily connected*" through him (177). Thankfully, Mr. Lewis sees through his lies pointing out to Hyacinth that he simply could not be the one responsible for Floy's literary fame given the fact that "nobody knew she *was*

your sister, when she first published the pieces that are now collected in that book” (177).

Despite his feeble attempts to align himself with Floy now that Ruth has achieved literary fame, Hyacinth is unsuccessful owing primarily to the fact that his sister wishes to maintain her anonymity and remain in obscurity—embracing the very features her family was so eager for her to adopt when she first moved back to the city.

All of this revulsion and coattail-riding leads to criticism leveled against the family members for their egregious behavior toward Ruth; however, it comes not from the protagonist but from her kind and caring editor, Mr. Walter. When asked whether or not Hyacinth Ellet supported his sister from the beginning, he candidly responds:

“[Hyacinth] did no such thing, sir; but he wrote her a cool, contemptuous, insulting letter, denying her all claim to talent,...and advising her to seek some unobtrusive employment (*what* employment he did not trouble himself to name,) and then ignored her existence; and this, too, when he was squandering money on ‘distressed’ actresses, etc...she struggled on bravely and single-handed, with the skeleton Starvation standing by her hearth-stone—she who had never known a wish ungratified during her married life, whose husband’s pride in her was only equaled by his love. She has sunk fainting to the floor with hunger, that her children might not go supperless to bed. And now, when the battle is fought and the victory won, *he* comes in for a share of the spoils. It is ‘my sister “Floy,”’ and ‘tis *his* ‘literary reputation which was the stepping-stone to her celebrity as writer.’” (179)

Ruth is not even present for this exchange between Mr. Walter and Mr. Lewis; nor does she breathe one critical word about her brother’s mistreatment. Instead Mr. Walter gives voice to how well Ruth braved almost insurmountable struggles, while her brother set idly by refusing to help.

It seems that Ruth is not so much weary of, but more indifferent to this kind of conflict and, therefore, resists engaging in it when it can be at all helped. This is not to say that she shrinks from or is easily intimidated by the villains in her life. She is quite capable of standing up for herself as she does on one very important occasion with her editor at *The Pilgrim*, Mr.

Tibbetts, but her approach is always very matter-of-fact without unnecessary outbursts of emotion. When she informs Mr. Tibbetts (who has repeatedly taken advantage of her limited knowledge of the publishing world as an excuse to underpay her) that she will no longer write for *The Pilgrim*, she responds calmly to his outrage:

“‘Ah! I see—I see,’ said Mr. Tibbetts, growing very red in the face, and pushing back his chair; ‘it is always the way young writers treat those who have made their reputation.’ ‘Perhaps *your* making my reputation, may be a question open to debate,’ answered Ruth, stung by his tone; ‘I feel this morning, however, disinclined to discuss the question; so, if you please, we will waive it. You have always told me that you were constantly beset by the most talented contributors for patronage, so that of course you will not find it difficult to supply my place, when I leave you.’” (156)

Through Ruth’s measured reply we see how although she is affected by Mr. Tibbetts’s insult she tempers her response by being “disinclined to discuss the question” of whether she is a self-made author or has her devious editor to thank for her success. Her response to her brother, at least by Mr. Walter’s account, is equally even-tempered. After hearing Mr. Walter’s report of how Hyacinth subverted his sister’s efforts to succeed, Mr. Lewis concludes that it is quite natural Ruth would be outraged and “at sword’s-point” with her brother, but Mr. Walter again quickly corrects him replying, “She is not at sword’s-point with him, . . . She simply chooses to retain the position her family assigned her when she was poor and obscure. They would not notice her then; she will not accept their notice now” (179). Through this exchange, we see Ruth’s rather idle position throughout this experience. It is important to note that she is not choosing to ignore her family, and she is not actively refusing to acknowledge their existence, instead she simply does not “accept their notice”. In the same way Ruth is not too invested in her fame and fortune, neither is she overinvested in making a big show at every opportunity to prove her brother, father, and in-laws wrong. Upon her husband’s death and return to the city, she became all but invisible to them in her poverty, and for Ruth, her newly acquired status and money, are not

reason enough for this dynamic to change. She seems secure in remaining “obscure” to them and so maintains her anonymity by never directly confronting them with her authorship as Floy.

It would seem natural that Ruth would feel anger and resentment toward her family, especially her brother, in this instance, but even here her willingness to remain passive trumps her need for revenge. Indeed, Ruth’s desire to remain passive and only act *passive-aggressively* toward them at times is tied to her desire to act anonymously, even once other characters have managed to discern out who she really is. Although in one sense, these actions could be interpreted as Ruth taking the higher road, it really shows her resistance to disrupting the status quo as a result of her change in fortune. With a keen awareness of how fleeting happiness and success can be, Ruth remains conservative and unwilling to become too invested in her current situation, since she knows how quickly it can change. Moreover, her desire to maintain her pseudonymous identity—even though by narrative’s end nearly everyone knows her to be Floy—ultimately suggests her indifference to her fame and apathy toward the more shallow features of her success. She will not even let her daughters reveal that their mother is the famous writer about whom everyone in the city seems to be talking. They misread their mother’s desire to maintain her anonymity as humility: “‘We are proud of her,’ said the talkative Nettie; ‘if she is not proud of herself. Don’t you think it is too bad, Mr. Walter, that mamma won’t let Katy and me tell that ‘Floy’ is our mother?...oh, isn’t it *too bad*, Mr. Walter, that mamma won’t let us tell, when we want to so much?’” (209). Ruth prefers to remain anonymous because success and fame, in the long run, mean very little to her. What matters most is her ability to independently provide for her daughters’ welfare, and so she finds it difficult to celebrate the more trivial benefits of being a famous author. Even in moments of elation, she is always the first to return to reality. When Mr. Walter tells her that she made the right decision by holding out for a

percentage of her book sales rather than accept the publisher's lump sum, he assures her: "You are correct in thinking that your book will be popular, and wise in keeping the copyright in your own hands. In how incredibly short a time you have gained a literary reputation, Floy." And Ruth responds, "'Yes...it is all like a dream to me;'" and then the smile faded away, and she shuddered involuntarily as the recollection of all her struggles and sufferings came vividly up to her remembrance" (163). Having just been assured of her book's success, her joy is oddly brief and fades quickly when she begins thinking about the past struggles that led to her current fortunate state.

For Ruth, her seemingly endless toils do not make success all the more sweet but only remind her that any happiness she might achieve will always be tenuous and in danger of being taken away, which more fully develops in her this sense of resignation. Much of Ruth's work ethic is driven by her primary goal of making enough money so she can bring her oldest daughter, Katy, back home to live. She hopes her book will quickly become a success, not for the fame, but to have enough money "for little Katy's sake!" (175). She works hard for several months waiting on the sales of her book to have enough to reclaim Katy from her in-laws. Finally, not long after their happy reunion as Ruth is still relishing having both her girls under the same roof after a long time apart, the apartment building catches on fire and the three nearly perish. The timing is almost cruel in the sense that any peace for Ruth is always followed so closely by panic.

Indeed, Ruth appear content to remain anonymous in her work because at the end of the day that is truly what writing really is to her—work. As an author, Fern does not present a *Künstlerroman*, where the narrative showcases Ruth discovering her muse and developing as an artist. Unlike Hamlin Garland's *Rose of Dutcher's Coolly* (1895), which traces the title

character's growth as she makes sacrifices for her poetry, or even Willa Cather's portrait of an artist in *The Song of the Lark* (1915), Fern's Ruth characterizes her writing as her work. She resigns herself to the task as the only way she can provide for herself and make it in the city. As a result, she remains relatively indifferent to her literary fame and the fanfare surrounding her work. When a reader writes asking for a bust of Floy to display alongside other "distinguished female writers," Ruth reflects on the request, ultimately deciding "No, no, . . . better reserve the niche destined for 'Floy' for some writer to whom ambition is not the hollow thing it is to me" (182). Her resignation means that she approaches her work cautiously and strategically, since her end goal differs from other authors striving for greatness through their pen. When an early offer comes to publish a collection of Floy's writing, Ruth soliloquizes: "Well, well . . . business is accumulating. I don't see but I shall have to make a book in spite of myself; and yet those articles were written under such disadvantages, would it be *wise* in me to publish so soon?" (Fern 153). There is not even a fleeting moment of flattery at the prospect of a book as she carefully weighs the benefits and detriments of publishing a volume "in spite of" herself. She views her writing and publications as business not personal (despite their deeply personal contexts) and is more mindful about whether or not the book will sell than whether or not she can produce real art in her writing.

Through the narration, we see how even Ruth's landlady discerns the drudgery in her tenant's daily tasks: "Pressing business that Mis. Hall must have . . . I don't understand all this flying in and out, one minute up in her room, the next in the street, forty times a day, and letters by the wholesale . . . *She* goes scratch—scratch—scratch" (174). By characterizing Ruth's actions as akin to any other repetitive task, an endless series of "scratch—scratch—scratch", the landlady highlights the day-in, day-out toil of Ruth's work as a writer. Moreover, in the same

way she resigns herself to her work, Ruth views Floy not as a rewarding feature of her development as a new, independent woman, but as a by-product of her difficult, and often, trying labor and suffering. In a way, Floy is her response to the failed domestic plot that brought about the end of her marriage and her attempt at charting a new path of development in the city. Thus, if Floy's birth, as Sánchez contends, "supposedly heralds a new Ruth, a possessively individualistic Ruth who conquers the market" (50), it also refashions the existing Ruth into a woman fixated on inevitable ends and apathetic toward new beginnings, since they too, no matter how they start, will eventually come to an end.

It is important to explore how Ruth characterizes Floy as her mask, rather than a persona or alter-ego because it shows how they are both the same thing despite being contradictory at times. Reflecting to herself, "and still 'Floy' scribbled on, thinking only of bread for her children, laughing and crying behind her mask" (133). Ruth's contradictory behavior, "laughing and crying" reveals her fluctuating condition and her ability to embody contradictions. She does not flit between laughing or crying but manages to laugh and cry while wearing the mask of Floy. In reality, these fluctuations serve as an act of resignation because either way, really *any* way, is just as good as another, so why not do both at once? The passage's ambiguity, which complicates the inside/outside notions muddles the distinction between Ruth and Floy. When she has a phrenological examination done, it most notably reveals that Ruth is but a composition of contradictions. Although her "unusually even head" means that there "are not necessarily any extremes in [Ruth's] character" (167), the professor tells her that her "happiness or misery depends very much on surrounding influences and circumstances" (167), and she is "liable to be a very happy, or very unhappy, woman" (171). This examination highlights one very important truth for Ruth's character—that she has very little control over her ability to be either happy or

miserable, since those things depend on her “surrounding influences and circumstances”—a truth which ultimately explains why Ruth resigns herself to her work and is rather indifferent to choosing one thing over another. Why choose, when you can laugh and cry? Or better yet, why choose when it will not matter whether your laugh or cry because eventually both will come to an end. Ruth is a composition of contradictions because like the professor’s examination shows, if an infinite number of possible paths exist for her (some good, some bad, some even good and bad), then any choice she makes is rather negligible because, without a clear sense of self, she is inundated by a sheer number of possibilities.

Not only does Ruth’s ability to embody several contradictory attitudes at once also evoke the way that she has a fragmented sense of self, it also reveals a problem with identity, which inevitably entails a problem with development. Her husband’s death propels Ruth toward a new plot of development as a working woman in the city; however, she only achieves success and independence as a writer under a cloak of anonymity. As a result of these new developments, Ruth does not see herself as a self-contained, fully formed self but instead as a widow and mother wearing the mask of “Floy”. There is little to suggest that Ruth wants to discover the “self” behind her pseudonymous mask but instead identifies herself with the pseudonym. In other words, the mask does not disguise a face or an individual who uses the anonymity to achieve some sense of self-determination; instead face and mask, inside and outside become one and the same. Indeed, it is interesting that Floy is the mask Ruth wears in the publishing world in order to be successful by relaying stories inspired by her own true experiences—begging the question who is the real Ruth Hall. In this way, Ruth, like Floy, is not really an authentic individual so that she remains a mystery even to herself and that brand of fragmentation shows up in the way she responds to her writing. Fern emphasizes Ruth’s contradictory response in the

way she is “laughing *and* crying” (133; emphasis mine). The ending scene reveals that Ruth is in no rush to articulate a new sense of self or begin a new path of development.

The closing scene of the novel further illustrates why, for the protagonist, there is no urgency but only a profound sense of resignation as she stands in a literal cemetery and at a figurative intersection of various, contradictory pathways of development. In the final chapters, Floy’s fame and Ruth’s success are secured through her acquisition of one hundred shares of bank stock and she anticipates the day she can move out of the hotel and away from the city because as she explains, “I long to be settled in a permanent comfortable home” (193). Ruth, once again, finds herself “standing as it were on the threshold of a new epoch in her changing existence” (210). Looking ahead to the possibility of another series of new beginnings, she returns to the beginning of her first ending—her husband’s grave. Visiting the cemetery with Mr. Walter and her daughters, Ruth is “oppressed...by the rush of thoughts, retrospective and anticipatory” (210). The scene explores different paths for Ruth as she stands and observes the cemetery and reflects on her past and future:

Old memories were thronging, thick and fast, upon her;—past joys—past sorrows—past sufferings;—and yet the heart, which felt them all so keenly, would soon lie pulseless amid these mouldering thousands. There was a vacant place left by the side of Harry. Ruth’s eye rested on it—then on her children—then on Mr. Walter. “So help me God,” reverently murmured the latter, interpreting the mute appeal. As the carriage rolled from under the old stone gateway, a little bird, startled from out its leafy nest, trilled forth a song as sweet and clear as the lark’s at heaven’s own blessed gate. “Accept the omen, dear Ruth,” said Mr. Walter. “Life has much of harmony yet in store for you.” (211)

As Ruth’s gazes moves from her eventual grave next to her husband, first to her children, and then to Mr. Walter, she seems to be weighing and comparing two different paths. She could continue on as a single, working mother with her children, financially secure with the proceeds from her writing, or it seems implied, she could marry Mr. Walter. His murmured plea, “So help me God” sounds reminiscent of a wedding vow, and his final invocation that Ruth “accept the

omen” of the lark’s song reveal his commitment to a new beginning and life at her side. In fact, the lark’s story here mirrors Ruth’s own experience throughout the novel. The sudden death of her husband startles her “from her leafy nest” and quiet domestic life in the country forcing her to change course and find a way to support herself in the city, and just when it seems that Ruth will fall or fail, she rises up and “trill[s] forth a song” (210). Indeed, the lark, based on Renaissance and Romantic imagery, is often associated with dawn. Therefore, Mr. Walter’s suggestion that Ruth accept the bird’s omen becomes a way for him to urge her to embrace the dawn or a new day, or in this case, another new beginning.

At the same time, Ruth knows that either path will ultimately lead to her eventual death. Just like her husband, she knows that “the heart, which felt [joys, sorrows, and sufferings] so keenly, would soon lie pulseless among these mouldering thousands.” On the whole, and not unsurprisingly given its setting, the final passage focuses extensively on death imagery. When the group arrives at the cemetery, just as setting sun “struggl[es] faintly” to illuminate the area, the narrator offers an elegy for all the dead buried in the ground: “Hushed, holy, and unprofaned was this Sabbath of the dead! Aching hearts here throbbed with pain no longer; weary feet were still; busy hands lay idly crossed over tired breasts; babes, who had poised one tiny foot on life’s turbid ocean brink, then shrank back affrighted at its surging waves, here slept their peaceful sleep (210-11). The narrator draws attention to the various kinds of individuals who have passed away: the heartbroken (“aching hearts”), the belabored (“weary feet” and “busy hands”) and the innocent (“babes”). The use of the past tense of words like “throbbed”, “crossed”, and “poised” remind the reader of the death that replaced those actions with stillness and idleness. In addition to the death imagery used to characterize the setting, the narrator similarly portrays the protagonist as strangely still and idle while things change around her. In one instance, the

narrator describes how the “[t]he moon had silvered the old chapel turrets, and the little nodding flowers glistened with dew-drops, but still Ruth lingered” (211). She remains fixed, resistant to moving, while the moon and flowers—possibly including the ones decorating tombstones—shine and move with the passing of time. Most importantly, the scene and thus the novel close without Ruth uttering the final word. After Mr. Walter pleads for her to “accept the omen,” she gives only what he interprets as a “mute appeal” (211).

The novel ties the cemetery to Floy and thus Ruth’s death-like passivity in the face of self-development to the creation of her pseudonym. As Ruth confesses earlier in the novel, after the publication of her book, “no happy woman ever writes. From Harry’s grave sprang ‘Floy’” (175). After the death of her husband and the unexpected end to her “happy ending,” Ruth creates Floy out of financial need and as a response to the possibilities for female success in the city. At the same time Floy represents a new beginning, it also remains a sobering reminder of her first ending. In the cemetery scene, Ruth also alludes to the connection between death and writing when she refers to deceased individuals as those with “busy hands;” not just a phrase demarcating an unspecified, laboring individual, it also could refer specifically to writers, especially those such as Ruth who have resigned themselves to the relentless task (“scratch, scratch, scratch”) of producing ever more, and ever more profitable, pieces of writing. Just as in the mask imagery that defines the relationship between Ruth and her pseudonym, the indifference she feels in the closing scene stems from the multitude of possible paths, or new beginnings, available to her; for, if there is no inside or outside to Ruth, if she is just as anonymous as her authorial identity, then no path of development can be said to be right or wrong. She can choose to carry on as she learned to do after her husband’s death a successful, independent woman, or she can get married again and reclaim a semblance of the domestic

security she lost when she moved as a widow to the city. In fact, the reader leaves the protagonist at this moment of indecision while she eyes the various options available to her: “There was a vacant place left by the side of Harry. Ruth’s eye rested on it—then on her children—then on Mr. Walter” (211). In the closing sentences, Mr. Walter—just like a man—attempts to take over the final moments of Ruth’s story by interpreting his potential fiancée’s “mute appeal” and the lark’s omen in a way that tries, however in vain, to nudge her toward acceptance. Despite his assertiveness in the final moments, Ruth’s final action is far more telling. Eyeing her presumable gravesite, her daughters, and Mr. Walter, Ruth’s shifting, rather than any decision-making, becomes the protagonist’s final action that virtually closes out the book. Ultimately, she remains indifferent to making a decision, since choosing one over the other will make very little difference to where she ends up since, not only does any path out of the cemetery eventually lead back to death but it also begins with Floy and, therefore, with the understanding that Ruth remains anonymous even to herself. With a novel that begins where the sentimental development plot normally ends, the story continues to be populated with various “ends.” If, for Ruth, all development comes to an end, then one path is just as good as another.

**HENRY JAMES'S BARTLEBY: FEMALE STASIS AND URBAN PROGRESS IN
*WASHINGTON SQUARE***

"Catherine, are you changed?"
"No; I am the same."
"You have not swerved a line?"
"I am exactly the same."²²

During a brief respite from drafting what would become his celebrated novel, *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), Henry James began and completed *Washington Square* (1881). A shorter work, often praised for its masterful, accessible prose and familiar plots,²³ the novel has received far less critical attention than the more popular *Portrait* that brackets its composition history. Whereas in the more well-known novel James explores the idea of a woman coming-into-being through Isabel Archer, James adapted the plot for *Washington Square* from a story Fanny Kemble told him about her own brother jilting a girl whose father threatened to disinherit her (Edel 398). Expanding on this anecdote, James focuses on a condensed network of four central characters: a wealthy doctor, his young daughter, his widowed sister, and the handsome fortune-hunter who seeks his daughter's hand. Following the death of his wife and son, Dr. Sloper takes minimal comfort in his daughter's presence, but when Catherine comes of age and her overly romantic aunt, Lavinia Penniman, begins encouraging a match with the wayward Morris Townsend, the doctor vows to disinherit his only daughter if she ever marries without his consent. To a degree, Catherine acquiesces to her father's demand. While she refuses to promise not to marry Morris or someone else, she ultimately remains single, even after her father's death. The narrator lowers the curtain on a much older Catherine, still living in her late

²² This exchange comes near the end of *Washington Square* following the protagonist, Catherine Sloper's, return from a trip abroad (a trip orchestrated by her father to help her get over an undesirable suitor). Her aunt, who meddles in Catharine's affairs throughout, wants to know whether the time away, the change in scenery and environment, have changed her niece or her outlook on things at all (204-5).

²³ Colm Tóibín suggests that James "underestimated" *Washington Square*, which is "certainly his best short novel and remains among his best books" (252).

father's home in Washington Square, having just cast aside Morris's final "marriage" proposal—a woman practiced in the art of spinsterhood.

Unlike James's extended exploration of Isabel Archer's lively intellect in *The Portrait of a Lady*, in *Washington Square* he actually risks telling the story of a woman who might just be too boring for words. On several occasions, the narrator and other characters stress that Catherine is a "plain, dull" girl (*WS* 14). Despite her privileged position as the daughter and heiress of a well-off city doctor, Catherine is never quite charming or fashionable enough to keep up with her more interesting peers, paling in comparison to the other young ladies in her social circle. Often the narrator even resorts to contrasting the city's fascinating changes and rapid evolutions with the stasis of the heroine. She never moves out of her father's Washington Square home, marries, or ventures beyond her small, social circle, and by the end, refuses to even leave the city. Like Herman Melville's *Bartleby*, Catherine incessantly prefers not to. Seemingly inheriting the legacy of a famed literary character who manages to be "simultaneously indifferent and not indifferent" (Emery 175), Catherine's story is one of non-development that circles around her desire "to wait and see" and her request that every one around her do the same.

In a letter to William Dean Howells in January 1880, James called *Washington Square* "a poorish story in three numbers—a tale purely American" (*HJL* 268). Yet, in a letter to his brother William, written in November of that same year, James professed his preference for Catherine: "The only good thing in the story is the girl" (*HJL* 316). In this declaration, James seems to beg the question: how can a heroine whom even the narrator finds tedious be, in the author's eyes, the only worthwhile aspect of "a poorish story"? Such a conundrum plagues the reception of the novel where scholars attempt to reconcile James's appreciation for Catherine

with a story about a character that pales in comparison to his more striking studies of female development and his other explorations of a changing New York. James contrasts the heroine's stasis to the city's rapid growth in order to complicate notions of progress. Catherine's remarkable dullness turns the narrator's—and the reader's—attention away from the protagonist and toward the more exciting setting, but only to critique nineteenth-century urban “progress” as somehow similar to the heroine's non-development. As a product of Old New York, Catherine reveals James's nostalgia for a way of life quite different from the rapidly evolving new New York; however, specifically through her stasis, the protagonist embodies James's critique of new urban change *and* of older modes of progress. In other words, Catherine's inactivity (or lack of change) oddly resembles the modern city's abundance of change without real development while, at the same time, calling into question the nostalgia that the narrator, characters, and even James himself feel for Old New York that drives the protagonist to take up such a static position in the novel.

Washington Square has received scant critical attention overall. When scholars do discuss it, many normally cite James's uneven feelings about the novel or contextualize it alongside the author's other short fiction. Notably, Andrew Lawson in *Downwardly Mobile* highlights James's apparent dislike of the story, explaining that “James felt that he had to exclude *Washington Square* (1881) from the New York edition of his work (1907-1909). ‘I have tried to read over *Washington Square*,’ but ‘I *can't* and I fear it must go!’” (107). While in *Henry James: A Life*, Leon Edel briefly discusses James's feelings about the text before moving on to focus on the principal financial role it played for James. The story's serialization alongside *Confidence* and *Hawthorne* would ultimately generate the necessary funds to support him while he finished writing *The Portrait of a Lady* (252). For those scholars who do examine the novel,

and particularly the protagonist's role in it, interpretations often revolve around the idea that, though a self-confessed "dull" woman, Catherine enjoys a rich inner life and a defiant character. The tendency of a few scholars to exaggerate Catherine's qualities perhaps stems from what many have come to expect from James even in his shorter works—sustained investigations of complex and varied female characters. More than thirty years ago, James Gargano completed what many considered to be the most comprehensive study of Catherine, despite some critics such as Merle Williams noting that it is "dated" and in need of "careful critical reassessment" (25). In the essay's most telling moment, Gargano reveals his desire to re-ascribe Catherine's apparently boring features to those around her: "It is hard to write off as dull a young woman with such vivid 'contact' with her own development. I am sure that James intended the dullness to be ascribed to the bright people around her who never even glimpse her hidden abysses" (358). Even writing in support of Catherine, his description of her development remains decidedly vague and stunted. In fact, rather than claim the ways the protagonist develops in the novel, he simply claims she comes into "vivid 'contact'" with development (358), an intriguing way to sidestep a discussion of any actual development she undergoes and instead emphasize the way she approaches the prospect of developing.

Though correct in his assessment that Catherine is deeply misunderstood, a stranger to those closest to her, Gargano cannot so easily elevate the protagonist by simply downplaying the impressive cast around her. From a father obsessively disappointed by his only daughter's torpidity, to a sentimental aunt living vicariously through her niece, to the handsome, yet insincere, suitor willing to go to great lengths to engage both the girl and, strangely enough, her widowed aunt (despite little encouragement from the former and far too much from the latter), such characters do not so much reveal their actual dullness as emphasize that quality in

Catherine. Perhaps, we can more easily perceive how Gargano's earnestness—"I am sure that James intended" (emphasis mine)—betrays his own perplexity over Catherine Sloper's unarticulated inner-life. Moreover, his assessment of the girl as "almost a void at the outset, [who] is only fully created at the end of *Washington Square*" (360) suggests not only character development but creation from almost nothingness to somethingness at the end. Even if Catherine's personality has indeed become something, or better yet interesting, by the novel's end rather than the "void" she began with, she, on the whole, remains seemingly unchanged. Consistent in her unwillingness to become anything more or less than what she has always been.

Edel provides a succinct discussion of *Washington Square* in his biography on James explaining that while the author "has made [Catherine] rather simple and plain...she is an image of himself as victim of his brother's—and America's—failure to understand either his feelings or his career" (250-1). As a result, Edel affirms that the "novel is concerned above all with a struggle for power, a will to freedom, and the refusal of a simple soul to bow before the domineering spirit of another" (251). Reading an intense power struggle into the relationship between Catherine and Doctor Sloper. Edel imbues the protagonist with a Jamesian determination, a thing of which there is very little evidence in the text to suggest that she possesses. In fact, he does not really say much about Catherine before quickly relating her to James, making his final observation that the story is about an individual's struggle for power and freedom seem like it is more about the latter than the former. While Catherine is indeed misunderstood and may embody the victimization James felt at that point, her strange marginality even while at the center of the text, stems not from other characters who overshadow her but from the city taking precedence in the narrator's descriptions.

More recently, Judith Butler's fascination with Catherine's spoken and silent refusals in the text echo Gargano's and Edel's claims that there is more going on with her than meets the eye. In a close examination of Butler's argument about the female protagonist of *Washington Square*, Denis Flannery maintains, "For many readers, Catherine's (non) act is perceived, often with visceral immediacy, as one of defiant, silently raucous, and rebellious heroism. Butler attributes a certain inviting agency to *Washington Square*...and she finds that the ending is a kind of happy impossibility" (15). Far more interested in Butler's use of James than in James's use of Catherine, Flannery is quick to note that not all readers find the protagonist's inaction frustrating. Most notably, of course, is Flannery's point that it is Butler who "attributes a certain inviting agency" to Catherine's actions rather than merely reveal or unearth the character's agency already present in the text. In her own discussion of *Washington Square*, Butler seizes on Catherine's unwillingness to promise her father that she will never marry Morris Townsend as an empowering act of refusal that leads to another daring act when, finally free to marry, she declines to enter into a union with anyone. As Butler states, "And then the father does die, and Morris arrives, and he banters, and he appears to mean what he says...and she shows him the door, which is her act...Morris can't understand and asks, well, why didn't she get married all this time, assuming she was waiting for him. And we ask, well, if she wasn't going to marry old Morris, why didn't she make the promise to her father?" (207). Butler insists that Catherine's "refusals" at the novel's end, more than anything else, "make her virtually incomprehensible to everyone" (208). She refuses to be the kind of woman her father and her possible suitor want her to be, and as a female characters seemingly resists hetero-normative expectations for a nineteenth-century heroine, and even appears to shrug off the requirement that main character in stories are supposed to develop and "do things" altogether. Although it may be tempting to

characterize Catherine's uneven and inexplicable non-acts as active, proto-feminist resistance or at least as the negative signs of a rich inner life, such redemptive feminist interpretations do not account for the novel's contrast between an unchanging heroine and a city that manages change so easily.

Few, if any, scholars discuss the narrator's vested interest in the city as it compares to his peculiar aversion to Catherine. In his book *Washington Square: Styles of Money*, Ian Bell explains that the novel's project "is to explore the forms of abstraction and human paralysis detectable in the onset of corporate America during the 1830s and 1840s and in the origins of a consumer culture during the 1870s" (66). Bell remains intensely interested in the way the city's capitalism and economic history is present in the novel. Whereas the title, *The Portrait of a Lady*, clearly emphasizes James's aesthetic interest in the story of a singular female protagonist, *Washington Square* references a city place and points, more specifically, to an urban home site as central to the text. As a neighborhood symbolic of Old New York, Washington Square offered James a rich space for exploring its familiar features alongside the emerging unknowns of a rapidly changing urban space. James's story is populated with narrative digressions that seem to describe the New York of his childhood despite being so far removed from his boyhood home at the time of writing. Having spent several years living in New York after traveling, the family went abroad again in 1855 when James was twelve and when the family returned they would settle, for a time, in Newport, Rhode Island rather than return to New York City. While the young James may have come-of-age while traveling across Europe and in Newport, a "European outpost" (Edel 45), his childhood remained chiefly shaped by his experiences growing up in the American city of New York.

Succinctly summing up James's experiences as a child in the city, Colm Tóibín explains, "James's New York...was situated between Fifth and Sixth Avenues down to Washington Square, where his maternal grandmother lived" (248); and, already living in London at the time of writing, he "did not know enough about [New York] and the society in which he had set the novel...[H]e had not grown up in that world enough to know its wider personality" (252). Similarly describing James's patchwork memories and childhood impressions of Old New York, Cynthia Ozick contends that he had to "absent" himself from home abroad and the "castles and ivied ruins" that surrounded him in order to write *Washington Square*, making it "a novel of absences" (54). Furthermore, by considering where these "absences" might take shape in the text, it becomes easier to understand how Catherine's consistent nature is important as a point of contrast to the constantly changing city.

On some level, these narrative passages on the city, seemingly out of place for a story that primarily unfolds in the front rooms of a brownstone, are most easily accounted for as a way for James to recapture the city of his childhood. Tóibín characterizes them as James's attempt to resurrect "his own lost territory...which belonged now merely to his dreams, to Old New York, whose contours he had barely made out before he was removed from it" (253). And yet, James's practiced description of New York's streets and of the former neighborhoods that take up so much space in this comparatively short novel suggest a far deeper engagement with and anxiety over his changing city. In *The Art of the City: Views and Versions of New York*, Peter Conrad claims, "Defensively, [James] names *Washington Square* after the place, not the characters. There's an analogy between the square, an enclave of obdurate gentility in the vulgar commercial city, and the enforced domesticity of Catherine Sloper, incarcerated for life with her fancywork" (23). Observing a distinct parallel between the neighborhood's reassuring

consistency and the expectation that Catherine will remain there, Conrad characterizes the Washington Square brownstone as her own personal prison. Yet, if James intended to immortalize the Old New York neighborhood and upper-class families of his youth by likening the place to Catherine, it is not the most flattering comparison, since she is consistently portrayed as lackluster and unfashionable. Therefore, the compelling descriptions of the neighborhood must mean something that the protagonist cannot. Far more excited by Washington Square than the uninteresting heroine who spends her whole life there, the narrator underscores the city space as protagonist. Yet, despite the narrator's appreciation for the dynamic evolution of the city in comparison to Catherine, it seems that, for James, this rapid change should never be mistaken for worthwhile development or progress. His distress over the new, overly commercialized New York that no longer resembled his boyhood home remains evident in the great lengths he goes to in order to draw a comparison between the changing city and the always-unappealing Catherine. Despite existing at opposite ends of the spectrum, Catherine's stasis and New York's evolution each reflect their own particular brand of non-development. Of course, James cannot rely on nostalgia for Old New York either since it, much like Catherine, becomes disappointing by the very fact that it too has managed to pass away to the new and, more importantly, has produced a rather unappealing individual like the protagonist herself. My argument for the remainder of the essay proceeds in a three-fold way. In the first section, I open by examining Catherine's dullness, arguing that she develops as a particular symbol of what does not change even though her father and narrator already find her incredibly trying. In the middle section, I use this idea to show how the narrator effectively substitutes the city for the heroine, elevating urban place and space as the more interesting feature of the novel. In this section, I focus specifically on the ways the narrator allows the city to effectively usurp Catherine's narrative for a time. Finally, in

the third section, I show how as a static figure, a relic of the past, the non-developmental Catherine actually reflects the new city's lack of development. At the same time that she calls to mind a better, pre-modern period in the history of New York City, the protagonist ultimately creates problems for even that more optimistic—if nostalgic—image of Old New York.

I.

The generic features of the *Bildungsroman* often depend on the protagonist's achievement of certain milestones including a childhood education, a transition from adolescence to adulthood, entrance into the public world of work, and eventual success and acceptance in society.²⁴ For the nineteenth-century female heroine, navigating the marriage market in order to find financial security and a stable position in society often replace those last two.²⁵ The narrator opens *Washington Square* by describing the life of a successful New York City doctor who, following the death of his wife and son, is left with only his daughter; it seems as if the narrator will not only emphasize the girl's importance to her father, but will also trace her development and, most importantly, her father's important role in it. While in Sedgwick's *Clarence*, the surviving father and daughter cling to one another, forming an unconquerable duo as partners for a time, the doctor and Catherine do no such thing. Little is said of the girl's early life following her mother's and brother's death, and there is nothing to suggest that her father takes an avid interest or active role in her education. Instead, the narrator highlights the father's intense disappointment in her very existence. Her only redeeming quality stems from her predictability,

²⁴ Jerome Buckley (*Season of Youth*) traces the hero's coming-of-age through his "search for a vocation and a working philosophy" (18).

²⁵ In *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development* Elizabeth Abel and other scholars outline the specific ways gender and sex alter the developmental goals for female protagonists in the *Bildungsroman*. Here, marriage and motherhood serve as significant milestones for a woman's transition to adulthood and acceptance in society.

and the comfort her father finds in it: “he proposed to himself to make the best of her...such as she was, he at least need have no fear of losing her,” an admission quickly qualified by the narrator’s own addition, “I say ‘such as she was,’ because, to tell the truth—But this is a truth of which I will defer the telling” (*WS* 8). Doctor Sloper possesses a strange affect toward his daughter in the way that he does not fear the loss of her to a lover or marriage because, as the subtext seems to suggest, if her own father must resign himself to being with her, who else would possibly want her? Undoubtedly harsh, the Doctor’s focus on his daughter’s flaws is mirrored by the narrator who promises to reveal some secret “truth” about the girl, a promise which makes her far more compelling for a time. Briefly, the narrator’s delayed telling of this truth builds suspense for the reader who anxiously awaits to learn it. Yet, as the story progresses, the truth deferred—that Catherine does not change but rather remains remarkably the same—stands at odds with development narratives that are marked by growth and progress.

James’s heroine remains unrelenting in her ethos of non-development. She grows up in Washington Square, debuts in New York City society, and for a time, remains a passive participant in a romantic relationship encouraged fervently by her aunt, Mrs. Penniman. An heiress at the novel’s start, Catherine does not need to marry for financial or social security, and so with no need for further upward mobility, her position in the city’s social circles remains rather unchanged throughout the novel. While her friends marry, keep up with the latest fashions, and chase the next new thing the city has to offer, Catherine queerly remains unable to live in or be wholly part of that world. As the narrator and her father frequently observe, any lukewarm attempts on her part are often spectacular failures.²⁶ She is quite simply unable to be that kind of girl. Other suitors pursue her, but she either refuses them or ignores them entirely

²⁶ In Chapter One, the narrator details at length Doctor Sloper’s conviction that his daughter is and will continue to be a disappointment.

(*WS* 266-67). Though her love life may lay fallow, she becomes industrious in her social affairs and takes an interest in various charities, but none of these pursuits manage to eclipse the fact that according to the narrator, “There was something dead in her life, and her duty was to try and fill the void” (268). However because she remains the same, the void is never quite filled. Although she continues to “stiffly maintain[n] her habits (268), her society’s younger generation begins to take a liking to her as an “admirable old maid” (267). Of course, as one might expect of the unchanging Catherine, even before she reaches forty, she has come to be “regarded as an old-fashioned person” (269). In many ways, Melville’s *Bartleby* is the closest cognate to James’s Catherine.

Melville’s 1853 tale subtitled “A Story of Wall Street” situates the title character’s idleness within the economic context of urban production and exchange. Preferring not to participate in the Wall Street world of his boss and coworkers, Bartleby is not driven by an active resistance to rebel against his position but merely a predilection *not to* do one thing or the other. Andrew Lyndon Knighton calls Melville’s protagonist “one of the most widely beloved of nineteenth-century idlers,” claiming that the story “explores how the problem of unproductive activity constitutes a limit for the imperatives of the work ethic” (26). While in the story and in American culture at the time, the city’s—and nation’s—growth depends upon economic development, the notion of an idle laborer—a contradiction in terms—who refuses to participate in this system of production also bucks progress itself. Of course, Bartleby’s rebellion does not start out antagonistic, which makes it difficult to read him as a radical antihero rebelling against notions of labor and production, since rather than refuse to work, he merely expresses a preference not to work. Similarly, Catherine’s refusal to develop should not immediately be read

as a proto-feminist act of resistance by submitting to neither her father's nor her suitor's will. Much like *Bartleby*, her preference remains to refuse action rather than assert herself.

In the following pages of this first section, I intend to show how James's narrator develops a conspicuous dislike for the passive Catherine who fails to take make good on the sentimental expectations set before her. As we will see, she neither embraces the love relationship with Morris nor refuses him entirely. Frustrated with his protagonist's hampering of the generic norms central to the romance plot, recasts his negative reaction to Catherine as a critique of the newly emerging city space that stands in stark contrast to customs of Old New York. By the end of the first section, I allude to that transition from Catherine to city, from one protagonist to another, before examining how the narrator's—and James's—split between new and old city space have unintended consequences for understanding character and urban development, or the lack thereof.

What is perhaps more remarkable than James's creation of such a passive heroine—even though he maintained she was “the only good thing” (*HJL* 316)—is his invention of an implied masculine narrator who appears to harbor such a palpable dislike of her. From the start, the narrator closely mirrors the doctor's own feelings of dissatisfaction toward his daughter. When the narrator declares matter-of-factly that the “little girl was a disappointment” (*WS* 7) it is unsettling, but it is far worse that her father shares this opinion so early on. Doctor Sloper appears at a loss over what to do with his daughter: “she was not what he had desired, he proposed to himself to make the best of her...he had on hand a stock of unexpended authority, by which the child, in its early years, profited largely” (*WS* 9). His detachment from her, evidenced in his reference to her as an “it” is similarly felt in the narrator's treatment of her and his difficulty relaying her experience without filtering it through her father's in some way. The

narrator catalogues at length the doctor's early success as a professional, celebrating his industrious dedication to his work even after coming into his wife's family money, describing his position as a sort of local celebrity, and endlessly praising him as a "clever man...very witty...[who] passed in the best society of New York for a man of the world" (*WS* 4). The narrator's devotion to the doctor reflects a kind of masculine camaraderie that is further cemented in their shared disappointment in Catherine. Much like her father, the narrator seems "to make the best of her" (*WS* 8) through storytelling. Throughout the novel, his subtle critiques classify Catherine's life as thoroughly unexceptional and relatively uneventful in every way, gradually revealing these to be the qualities that make up her "truth" (*WS* 8). He critiques her lack of growth in other ways, informing, "As a child she had promised to be tall; but when she was sixteen she ceased to grow, and her stature, like most other points in her composition, was not unusual" (18). He seizes every opportunity to add to this list of disappointments. Adding to these slights, the narrator also relays other descriptions from those in her social circle who call her a "dull, plain girl" or more softly assess her as "a quiet, lady-like girl" (18). Despite these observations, the narrator quickly points out that "by neither class was she very elaborately discussed" (18). The narrator brings up these other characters' descriptions of the protagonist, only to then suggest that her very dullness makes her a fleeting topic of conversation. As such, her social circle helps corroborate the narrator's view of Catherine all while allowing him to again emphasize the fact that he alone tells the story of a girl whom few bother to discuss.

For her own sake, Catherine possesses some self-awareness and is not naïve to the fact that she lacks both intrigue and charm; however, as a result of the narrator's detachment and distaste for her choices, it is difficult to learn the real effects this knowledge has on her. Briefly tracing her transition from a disappointing but nonetheless healthy child to an unexceptional

young lady, the narrator details her attempts—in the realms of fashion and love—to compensate for her shortcomings. For example, discussing her sense of fashion, the narrator states:

When it had been duly impressed upon her that she was a young lady...she suddenly developed a lively taste for dress: a lively taste is quite the expression to use. I feel as if I ought to write it very small, her judgment in this matter was not by means infallible; it was liable to confusions and embarrassments...Doctor Sloper would have been glad to see his daughter present herself, with a classic grace, as a priestess of this mild faith. It made him fairly grimace, in private, to think that a child of his should be both ugly and overdressed (*WS* 19).

Although the narrator rightly assesses the embarrassment of the situation, which explains his compulsion to “write it very small” that she was a poor dresser, but the shame is not so great that it keeps him from recounting father’s feelings that his daughter was “both ugly and overdressed” (19). In this instance, the narrator appears almost as embarrassed for Catherine as her father is, and once again aligns himself with the doctor’s critiques of the daughter’s flaws. Through a strategic use of “both,” “child,” and “his” the narrator suggests that Catherine, the woman, contains all the same ugly features of Catherine, the child, only now her bad taste is reflected in her poor sense of style. Like her father, the narrator only briefly empathizes with Catherine, and instead spends far more time highlighting her unsuccessful attempts conceal her flaws beneath layers of fabric: “Her great indulgence of it was really the desire of a rather inarticulate nature to manifest itself; she sought to be eloquent in her garments, and to make up for her diffidence of speech by a fine frankness of costume. But if she expressed herself in her clothes, it is certain that people were not to blame for not thinking her a witty person” (19). Rather than excusing Catherine’s poor taste “liable to confusions and embarrassments” as an effect of her motherless condition, the narrator instead excuses to other people who are above reproach for thinking she is both dull and dumb. James’s narrator seems to want to appear reluctant to discuss Catherine’s flaws, but this posturing is always short-lived as he consistently reveals the many ways she

manages to be a spectacular failure—as a daughter and socialite. As a result, the narrator actually underscores her tendency to disappoint those around her as the recurring theme, and even defining feature of her character.

The introduction of a seemingly sentimental love story, which unfolds primarily in the house on Washington Square and surrounding streets, appears to return the plot, for a time, to a traditional narrative of female development, but after establishing the protagonist's proclivity to disappoint, it is difficult to imagine any suitor feeling such genuine affection for her. Catherine and Morris Townsend's short-lived, "forbidden" romance may resemble other star-crossed lovers' plots but seems rather one-sided and ultimately never develops much. In fact, the conventional romance plot is complicated by not one but two rather unorthodox love triangles: the first between Morris, Catherine, and her father, and the second between Catherine, Morris, and Aunt Penniman. Of course, the problem remains that by the time the narrator introduces this love interest, it is rendered nearly unbelievable as a result of everything he has revealed about Catherine up to this point. From the start, Doctor Sloper fears the suitor's dishonorable intentions. As the sole heir to his as well as her late mother's fortunes, Catherine's impending wealth is, in his eyes, the only thing attracting the vapid, unemployed Morris to his daughter. When Doctor Sloper finally questions why Morris has taken such an interest in his daughter, the young man easily replies that he finds her a "charming girl" (*WS* 96). Of course, neither the Doctor nor the reader really believes him. The Doctor shrewdly responds with a measured reply: "My dear young man...you must be very susceptible. As Catherine's father I have, I trust, a just and tender appreciation of her many good qualities; but I don't mind telling you that I have never thought of her as a charming girl, and never expected any one else to do so" (96). Here, the Doctor's unfavorable perception of his daughter's character actually emerges in his attempt to

protect her. When seeking to confirm his suspicions, the Doctor goes to visit Morris's sister, the woman he has been unashamedly living-off of while unemployed, and confirms his doubts about the young man's dishonorable intentions. Rather than emphasize the ways his daughter is too good for the woman's brother, whom she also detests, he, once again, relates Catherine's many weaknesses in order to elicit sympathy:

I am sure that if you were to see Catherine she would interest you very much. I don't mean because she is interesting in the usual sense of the word, but because you would feel sorry for her. She is so soft, so simple-minded, she would be such an easy victim! A bad husband would have remarkable facilities for making her miserable; for she would have neither the intelligence nor the resolution to get the better of him. (111)

Qualifying the exact way in which his daughter can be considered "interesting," the Doctor presents a pitiable image of a young, "simple-minded" woman not cunning enough to elude the machinations of a practiced suitor and too passive to escape the confines of the potentially disastrous and unhappy marriage that would result. Thus, while the father demonstrates genuine care for his daughter's well being, it is communicated in such a way that forces other characters, and the reader, to confront the girl's many flaws.

In turn, the narrator mirrors the father's disapproval of Morris's and Catherine's limited abilities, and in an attempt to temper her first favorable impression of him, overlays his own more studied assessment of Morris's deft maneuvers. While the narrator may call her "my heroine" (23) and claims that the story is hers, not her father's, both the father and the narrator indicate several times that she is a quiet, plain, boring, and often badly dressed, girl. In this way, the narrative must rely on a suspension of disbelief in order to make sense of the romance between the handsome and cunning heartthrob Morris and the love-struck but lackluster object of his desire. Through third-person limited narration, a common feature of several Jamesian narrators, the reader briefly experiences both Catherine's and the narrator's impressions as they

intermingle in the passage. During their first meeting, Morris's affable nature sets the nervous and uncomfortable Catherine at ease, and though she initially wonders "what she ought to say," she ultimately remains silent, letting him happily carry on a one-sided conversation, "only listen[ing] and look[ing] at him" (*WS* 27). While she feels quite happy to passively listen and hang on his every word, the narrator makes sure to point out that Morris makes several empty promises during their conversation that "*We* will talk," but in reality, "he still did all the talking" (29; emphasis original). When Catherine admires his classic, handsome features thinking that his strong presence made him "loo[k] like a statue," the narrator counters this flattering observation with a subtle critique claiming, "But a statue would not talk like that" (29). In later scenes, when Morris's beautiful eyes remind her of a handsome "young knight in a poem," and again the narrator interrupts, reminding the reader, "His talk, however, was not particularly knightly" (*WS* 47). At each turn, the masculine narrator narrows in on what he believes to be Morris's flaws, and by constantly correcting Catherine's impressions, he further belittles her emotions, experiences, and judgments as deficient in comparison to his own.

By stressing Morris's questionable motives from the start, the narrator highlights Catherine's naïveté when it comes to accurately gauging her suitor's interest; moreover these narrative acts add to his unflattering portrait of her as an uninspiring heroine quite "out of touch" with the ways of fashion and men. Not only is Catherine unaware of the ways of the world, it seems both the narrator and her father believe that her passive and apparently old-fashioned nature will ultimately endanger her chances at future happiness. Whether Morris harbors any true devotion for Catherine beyond her wealth matters not, since by now through the narrator's manipulations all the details in the text point to any real, romantic affection for this poor girl as practically impossible.

Any feelings Catherine may have about the promise of a forbidden romance, clandestine marriage, and parental rebellion—all potentially thrilling plotlines—are never made fully clear in the novel, illuminating her passive nature about the whole affair. Her feelings toward Morris (and her father) remain markedly more opaque than the other characters' feelings toward one another in the novel. She enjoys Morris's affection for her and to an extent returns it but not enough to commit to the man and defy her father. Even her father, having recently banned Morris from his home, comments that "her attitude at this sentimental crisis seemed to him unnaturally passive" (121). Her father, while a tough critic of his daughter's character, finds her attachment to the whole sentimental affair oddly reserved, which he reads as her indifference.

Yet, Catherine's passivity does not manifest itself so much as indifference to the situation as it does in her overwhelming desire to wait and see. During this period, she sends only one letter to Morris asking him for time to "make up her mind" but making no promises to commit to him or advance their engagement (123). When he confronts her and restates his offer, she once again asks, "Isn't it better to wait?" to which he responds, "'To wait for what?' She hardly knew for what; but this tremendous leap alarmed her" (162). More strange than Catherine's measured response to her lover's impassioned pleas is the fact that at no point during this period of being "good" (123) and obeying her father does she appeal to him in her grief with an inventory of Morris's admirable qualities, or at the very least, confess the depth of her feelings and devotion to her supposed lover. She does not behave the way, either her father or her aunt expect, like a girl in love. Her aunt finds her inactivity especially troubling imploring her to "do something striking. 'You must *act*, my dear; in your situation the great thing is to act'" (126; emphasis original). At this point though, Catherine has already resigned herself to wait patiently for "Heaven [to] invent some way of reconciling all things" (125). She waits and waits, and only

once does her father's dismissals of the whole thing "spark...anger in her grief" and incite in her a "vague" idea that she "might do what she chose" (185). Of course, the mere "spark" combined with only a "vague" concept of things she "might do" naturally results in no new action on her part at all. She never goes on to make a choice, and on the occasions where she does meet with Morris, she flirts with the prospect of a forbidden marriage but never moves forward with it and in turn, continues to wait and remain with her father. Neither Morris nor her father understand her propensity for waiting, and it is not clear to the reader whether she waits hoping that perhaps her father will change his mind at the same time hoping that Morris won't. In these moments, her inaction and reserved response to the demands placed on her by both father and lover seems eerily measured and detached and not at all like the sentimental expressions one would expect of a young girl suffering such intense romantic grief.

Catherine's inaction and seeming unwillingness to participate in either spurring or stalling the love affair leaves a void in the novel's romantic plot. Here, the narrator allows Mrs. Penniman, the doctor's widowed sister, to fill the void left by her niece's lack of development. As the heroine's main female influence, she is vocal in her devotion to Morris and her commitment to what she imagines to be a potentially great love affair between him and her niece. It appears that Mrs. Penniman's involvement becomes troublesome for many reasons, least of all that she offers her niece contradictory, "incoherent counsel" from one day to the next (126). During the period where Catherine sends only one letter to Morris, her aunt "was in daily communication with the young man, whom she kept informed by letters of the state of affairs in Washington Square" (127). She even goes so far as to arrange a "tryst at dusk" with him, an appointment to which she arrives dramatically dressed and "enveloped in an impenetrable veil" (127). Given over to such theatrical and sentimental acts for a man who is not even her own

lover, Mrs. Penniman embodies the reckless, over-wrought romantic feeling expected of Catherine.

Neither the narrator nor any one else praises Mrs. Penniman and her unflinching commitment to the forbidden romance plot. Her efforts are depicted as the immature compulsions of someone more concerned with securing a center role in the drama playing out before her than considering the real consequences for those involved. Even the narrator remarks that she “took too much satisfaction in the sentimental shadows of this little drama” (125-26). Morris’s reluctant interest in his only ally further spurs the aunt’s affection for the young man and her desire that he should become part of the family. She fantasizes about carrying covert messages between the lovers, dreams of secret marriage vows exchanged in subterranean chapels, and of a whole series of other romantic acts that will help the “plot to thicken” (126). As a result, Mrs. Penniman becomes the driving force pushing Catherine into a traditional romance *Bildungsroman* plot that the girl seems both unable, and even a little unwilling, to pursue. And when her niece does not step up to the role with the intensity of emotion she would like to see, the aunt takes her place. A move which ultimately results in the odd age-reversal evident in the two women at the novel’s end where the narrator explains how quickly and seamlessly Catherine became old-fashioned while still young, as the perpetually “girlish” Mrs. Penniman “grew younger as she advanced in life” (269).

Catherine’s disengagement with the whole affair pales in comparison to her aunt’s thrill over the romantic drama, yet the extremes of both women’s reactions appear deficient in the text. While Mrs. Penniman feels the affair between Morris and Catherine more acutely than her niece, the narrator is as unforgiving of her devotion as he is of Catherine’s vague inaction. While Catherine appears chastised because she remains emotionally conservative with Morris, Mrs.

Penniman suffers for her over-indulgence in the emotional melodrama. The sentimental, hopelessly romantic Mrs. Penniman comes across as hyper-feminine, while Catherine, who refuses to act or react to either her father's demands or her lover's advances thus appears less feminine, and in some ways, less like a protagonist accustomed to being at the center of the plot.

The expectations traditionally placed on sentimental heroines usually require them to express some sentiment and engage with the narrative's melodrama both as a part of their central role in the plot and as a symbol of their femininity. However, Catherine's characterization as a disappointment throughout the novel, along with her inactive and noncommittal predisposition call into question her real interest in these traditional developmental goals for women. She makes no move to marry Morris despite loving him, or to leave and defy her father despite their uneven relationship, and at no point in the text does she seem eager to become the mistress of her own home, despite being grown. In many ways, she remains content to wait, stable in this form of idleness. Gargano reads the "indirectness" of her feelings and actions as James signaling "the origin in Catherine of private, unstereotyped thought and a nascent sense of selfhood"...a selfhood that those around her fail to see because she has turned inward to find her own "autonomy, beauty, and rewards" (357). While narratives of female development are sometimes born out of an "awakening" of the mind when the accomplishment of traditional heteronormative goals (marriage, motherhood, etc.) leave the heroine wanting,²⁷ it is unclear whether Catherine—who does not experience marriage, motherhood, or even a break from her childhood home—undergoes this interior awakening. While Gargano ultimately calls Catherine "an early portrait" (355) of the more deeply complex and familiar Jamesian heroines, she is still a protagonist

²⁷ In "The Novel of Awakening," Susan J. Rosowski examines the female *Bildungsroman* in relation to novels where the female protagonist's development pattern is one of delay. She states, "First the protagonists grow significantly only after fulfilling the fairy-tale expectation that they will marry and live 'happily ever after.' Because [this kind of novel] frequently portrays a break not from parental but from marital authority, the novel of awakening is often a novel of adultery" (12).

defined by non-development. Unlike the reader's access to Isabel Archer's carefully articulated growth in *Portrait*, the reader never gains sustained entrance to Catherine's mind through the narrator in *Washington Square*. Moreover, Thomas Jeffers, when discussing James's interest in "the growth of fine female sensibilities" (89), goes on to claim that what makes Isabel's *Bildungsroman* so provocative "is the *use* she wants to make of her spiritual independence...to be 'planning out her development, desiring her perfection'" (111; emphasis original). In comparison, Catherine stands as a fixed point (not one reflecting strength or resolve), remaining in the same place while everything changes around her.

II.

The narrator, who finds Catherine's narrative of non-development so unfulfilling, actually turns to the changing city as one of his chief points of interest in the novel. Rather than contrast the growing city to his female protagonist, though, the narrator employs her lack of development as a lens through which to perceive the non-developmental aspects of the city's rapid activity and changing nature. At the same time, the narrator splits the city along temporal lines between new and Old New York, nostalgically promoting the latter as the site of actual development, if the present-day city dwellers could only recapture the customs of the past. Yet, by the end of the chapter, I show that the narrator cannot ultimately sustain any hope of old New York precisely because his idle protagonist calls into question the newer city space while simultaneously representing the older way of life.

In *The Image of the City in Modern Literature*, Burton Pike affirms, "Technically the city is an ideal mechanism for the writer, especially the novelist...The image of the city is a figure with profound tones and overtones, a presence and not simply a setting" (8). As a competing

presence, the city becomes far more compelling, with its vivid changes and evolutions, than Catherine. The novel is filled with extended narrative descriptions of and reflections on the city. he repeatedly notes his heroine's dull, ugly, and even gaudy appearance, the narrator more eagerly depicts the "riper, richer, more honorable look" of Washington Square (24). As Ian F. A. Bell notes, Washington Square's "newness" is actually downplayed in the novel as James "is proposing a retrospective history with the warm flow of a backward glance" (45) at the neighborhood. While In the first chapter, he gradually introduces the reader to the neighborhood's charms through a series of repeating phrases, beginning: "It was here that you..." (*WS* 23). He recalls moments and experiences in the city space with a studied reverence from early childhood activities ("it was here that you took your first walks abroad") to the way the trees smelled, and finally to the way the place "enlarged the circle both of your observations and your sensations" (22-3). Notably, the narrator only introduces this second-person address during his descriptions of the city, developing an intimacy between the reader and this urban neighborhood that never quite enters into the narrator's relationships with anything or anyone else in the text. He then vaguely concludes this succession with, "It was here, at any rate, that my heroine spent many years of her life; which is my excuse for this topographical parenthesis" (23). His derisive "at any rate" and feeling compelled to excuse the passage as a "topographical parenthesis" indicate his restlessness upon returning to Catherine's story rather than tell the story of the more lively, engaging, and changing city.

Since the novel cannot sustain itself as a domestic or romantic *Bildungsroman*, it instead becomes an urban one where the city's narrative is substituted for Catherine's. If in describing the *Bildungsroman*, we use terms like growth, progress, and development those are often synonymous with how we describe cities, especially when discussing population growth, urban

sprawls, etc. In the same way that the city's rapid growth initially contrasts with Catherine's non-development in the narrative, the central family home in Washington Square similarly stands for (and to an extent replaces) Catherine's feminine role in the text for a time. After barring Morris from their home, the doctor decides to take his daughter on an extended trip abroad, leaving behind his sister, Mrs. Penniman, who so eagerly encouraged the deeply unfavorable match. In a peculiar move, the narrator does not "go with" the doctor and Catherine either, but instead remains behind to relate the happenings in Washington Square.²⁸ With Catherine and her father away, Mrs. Penniman eagerly opens the house on Washington Square to Morris Townsend who, having always been restricted in his access before, found this invitation and the home "singularly attractive" and the "most frequent visitor" (189). Here, we witness the effects of Catherine's failed romance leading to Mrs. Penniman's proxy one that, also ridiculed by the narrator, provides narrative space to describe different aspects of the city in feminized terms.

For Morris, the grand house always served as a visual reminder of the wealth and opulence he might gain if only he could marry the girl inside it. In his brief time with her, he spends more time admiring the home's exterior than he does pining for its occupant. He lingers "at the foot of Doctor Sloper's white marble steps, above which a spotless white door, adorned with a glittering silver plate, seemed to figure for Morris the closed portal of happiness" (136-7). The careful description of the "spotless" white steps and door leading up to the "glittering" silver portal, a gateway to the home's private interiors, attributes a virginal purity to the structure.²⁹

²⁸ The narrator insists, "It does not enter into our scheme to narrate in detail Doctor Sloper's proceedings in the Eastern hemisphere. He made the grand tour of Europe, travelled in considerable splendor, and...found so much in art and antiquity to interest him, that he remained abroad, not for six months, but for twelve" (188-9).

²⁹ See Sharon Marcus's *Apartment Stories: City and Home in Nineteenth-Century Paris and London* for a comprehensive study of the feminization of urban homes, particularly the Paris apartment house. Marcus maintains that "For the young, unmarried male sexual adventurers featured in many of the *tableaux's* sketches, access to

Furthermore, the father who guards the portal to this, Morris's supreme "happiness," only further compounds the young man's desire to appropriate this innocent space. The feminization of the Washington Square home and Morris's attraction to it is another case of the narrator using the story's urban setting to usurp the novel's heroine. Morris visits the home constantly while Catherine is away, becoming acquainted with its comfortable rooms, and boldly entering its most private spaces and setting up camp:

He had his chair—a very easy one—at the fireside in the back parlor (when the great mahogany sliding doors, with silver knobs and hinges, which divided this apartment from its more formal neighbor, were closed), and he used to smoke cigars in the Doctor's study, where he often spent an hour in turning over the curious collections of its absent proprietor...as a young man of luxurious tastes and scanty resources, he found the house a perfect castle of indolence. It became for him a club with a single member (189).

The attention to detail here with descriptions of the materials and metals making up the interior structure of the home conveys to the reader just how deeply Morris has settled into the home's most privileged spaces. He invades the Doctor's study and smokes cigars, a clear violation of the sacred space of a man who wishes to keep him out, and he is reluctant to give up these rooms he has taken as his own. Morris spends far longer lusting after, courting, and finally, settling into the house on Washington Square (nearly an entire year), then the few months he spends briefly pursuing Catherine after their first meeting. In fact, he spends so much time in (and with) the house during the course of that year while Catherine and her father are absent that upon their return Mrs. Penniman even confesses, "I may almost say *I* have lived with him" (200; emphasis original). Of course, the reader knows that it is not Catherine's aunt but the house with which Morris has become intimately acquainted.

women in the city's apartment buildings had all the hallmarks of the urban: it was deliberately transient, the result of a cultural understanding of the city as a place for sleeting, chance sexual contacts, yet all the more vulnerable to interference because of its very ephemerality...Apartment buildings were assimilated to female bodies: they were 'girls of stone'" (39).

Morris's easy affinity with the home compared to his often awkward and strained interactions with Catherine present a different coupling, even a strange inversion. Rather than woman-as-property, Washington Square becomes a kind of feminized property that overshadows the protagonist's role in the novel. Within the novel's larger framework though, this swap feels expected, almost inevitable. It preserves the pattern established by the masculine narrator who seems more excited by telling the story of Washington Square than that of the female protagonist who happens to live there. The house and its material goods are not capable of returning Morris's affections, but then again, neither is Catherine, who remains reluctant to change the rhythms of her home life or upset the relationship with her father that marriage to Morris would inevitably entail.

For the narrator, Washington Square's feminized coming-into-being replaces Catherine's, since her own reluctant, and mostly reticent, participation in the novel's romantic love triangles makes her seem far less sentimental and inclined to develop. More importantly, by making Washington Square, another example of Old New York but this time one that is in the process of changing to become part of new New York, James questions the gender stereotypes inherent in narratives of female development at the same time he underscores his uncertainty about his changing city. In the nineteenth century's final decades, numerous authors including James were reflecting on New York's past, its present, and its inescapable future. In essence, treating a city like New York, "which seems continually to be transforming itself physically, demographically, and socially" (Strauss 26), as capable of its own coming of age places a particular capital on the city's ability to not only change but also progress. At a lecture before the Mechanics' Society of New York City in 1881, President of Columbia College, Charles King asked, "What has New-York done since 1850?" and would go on to affirm, "I have faith that the answer will be given in

a City still advancing in population, wealth, morals and knowledge—in a City free, and deserving, by her virtues, her benevolent institutions, her schools, her courts and her temples, to continue free, and still part and parcel of this great and glorious Union—which may God preserve till Time shall be no more!” (80). King’s lecture reveals the desire to feminize the urban. As a city, she is changing, gaining knowledge about the world, and most importantly, is capable of new experiences. Yet with all the ways the city may be gaining and advancing, King never once makes a qualitative judgment about her growth. He does not explain whether or not what New York “has done since 1850” has made her better only that she continues to be free. Thus, while a city may advance in many things, it is not clear for King whether or not these advancements always mean that the thing is better as a whole. Whereas King leaves the question unanswered, James explores the juxtaposition of heroine and city in order ask, “To what extent does a city actually develop in the midst of all this constant change?”

By substituting the city’s story for Catherine’s, James actually equates lack of change and rapid change as forms of non-development. While other scholars read the narrator’s engagement with the city as departures from the plot, or even authorial intrusions by James, reimagining his childhood in New York,³⁰ these moments are at once integral to the plot and, more importantly, representative of James’s subtle critique of the urban *Bildungsroman*, and the questionable development of a rapidly changing nineteenth-century American city. For some, what is simultaneously attractive and threatening about the city space is its unreliability, its propensity for change, and its capacity to surprise those who know it best. According to Strauss, the only way to feel “comfortable” in a city is to adapt to its fluid nature, but even then, an individual will

³⁰ In his study of Henry James’s American spaces, Merle Williams observes the way James sketches the “rapid commercial growth of the city” with his “autobiographical intrusions, which bypass[s] the functional role of the narrative voice [in *W/S*], initiates the process of overlay, appropriation and rewriting which is to shape and repeatedly displace the text” (26).

still “discover new facets of the city from time to time” (17). Yet change does not equal development or progress for James, especially when it is spurred on by a vapid pursuit of the next new thing.

III.

While Catherine becomes quite happy to remain where she is, the novel is populated with others only too eager to change as quickly as the city around them does. We encounter the poster-child for this kind of superficial growth in Arthur Townsend, Morris’s cousin, a man married to Catherine’s own cousin, Marian. At a dinner party, he relates his recent purchase of a new home in the city. Satisfied with his purchase for the time being, he does his best not to appear too overly attached to the house, explaining as he does that any good city home should always be a temporary arrangement:

It doesn’t matter...it’s only for three or four years. At the end of three or four years we’ll move. That’s the way to live in New York—to move every three or four years. Then you always get the last thing. It’s because the city’s growing so quick—you’ve got to keep up with it. It’s going straight up town—that’s where New York’s going. If I weren’t afraid Marian would be lonely, I’d go up there—right up to the top—and wait for it. Only have to wait ten years—they’ll all come up after you...I guess we’ll move up little by little; when we get tired of one street we’ll go higher. So you see we’ll always have a new house; it’s a great advantage to have a new house; you get all the latest improvements. They invent everything all over again about every five years, and it’s a great thing to keep up with the new things. I always try to keep up with the new things of every kind. Don’t you think that’s a good motto for a young couple—to keep “going higher” (*WS* 38)

For Arthur, keeping pace with the city means changing with it, even if that means uprooting his family every few years. Again, his discussion lacks any assessment of the quality in that it is not important to have the best thing but simply the “newest” or the “last” thing. He has no attachment to his home but a seemingly futile attachment to the fleeting concept of the “new,” whatever or wherever that might be. Yet this constant pursuit of “new things of every kind,”

even when carried out incrementally, appears shallow and unfulfilling, especially when “the latest” thing may be no better, and in some cases, even worse, than the current. James draws a subtle comparison between Arthur, and his frivolous desire to keep up with the city’s upwardly-mobile class and Catherine who, throughout the novel, remains decidedly fixed in her father’s Washington Square home. Arthur’s shameless capitalist desire for the newest, highest, and latest thing also seems to echo the masculine narrator’s fascination with the city’s rapid modernization that wants for substance. He laments Catherine’s disappointing lack of development at the same time that he privileges the city’s dynamic change and growth, even while very little progress seems to be made.

Ultimately, James displays a strange fascination with the one character that so many others in the work, including the narrator, find disappointing, inadequate, and inherently unlikeable. He contrasts the changing city to the stasis of his bourgeois heroine perhaps to offer a subtle critique of the “city novel” as genre, but more importantly to evaluate the randomness, motion, and change for which cities are often celebrated. A heroine in the city whose secret truth is that she never changes seems almost a contradiction in terms, since cities are so often defined by their changes as characters rise and fall within them. Strauss characterizes the city through its variability; he argues that any “symbolic representations of an urban milieu...are inherently unstable...[because]...Cities change, forcing those who live in them to face the inadequacies of what once were tried and true conceptions” (17). A city may change, but for James it seems these changes do not always equal development or progress. James lamented the loss of his “Old New York” and despised the “newness” that replaced it.³¹ With this in mind, we might perceive

³¹ Tóibín cites the narrator’s in-depth description of Washington Square and Arthur Townsend’s speech on chasing the city’s latest thing as prime examples of James’s disgust with the city’s constant changes, especially its “next generation, who were too ready to eschew social history for the blight, as James saw it, of newness” (253).

how James seems to have found something appealing in the novelty of a heroine who stays the same and cannot change with the city. An odd girl who is never quite charming, fashionable, clever, or quick enough to keep pace with the developmental milestones of her peers offers an important contrast to a city run amok with quick changes propelled by frivolousness and vanity.³²

In contrast to the character of Arthur Townsend, James also wants to show the stability of Old New York and its values through a protagonist who, as we have seen, also represents the non-developmental aspects of that newer New York. As a static figure in the text, Catherine remains a guiding point for what has passed away. Her old-fashioned nature and tendency to always be out-of-step with those around her reflect her position as a product of Old New York living in a city now chiefly concerned with the new. In this way her desire to perpetually wait actually reveals a deeper unwillingness to change with the things around her. Perhaps, this is why James takes so much comfort and even pleasure in her character in the novel. Unlike the more modern city, she does not change, and he can rely on her to remain the same in a way similar to the streets and avenues of his youth.

Before examining that idea further in regards to the novel, I want to turn quickly to another James text. Upon returning to New York in 1904 and collected and recorded his experiences in *The American Scene* (1905), James took the changes to his childhood home of Washington Square particularly hard, claiming that the new “scene” so severely altered “the view of the past, that the effect for me...was of having been amputated of half my history” (*The American Scene* 88). Likening the loss of his childhood home to loss of limb, James invokes this

Tóibín goes on to characterize these textual moments as “part of James’s deeply irrational response to the New York he had known and to what had replaced it” (254).

³² See Thorstein Veblen’s *Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899) for an in-depth examination and critique of upper-class vanity and the society of manners.

height of physical trauma to describe his experience of walking down city streets with which he is no longer familiar. He describes how a “commemorative mural tablet” on the wall where his former home stood might offer some consolation to the absence of the original structure.

Although he initially intends to memorialize the old, he acknowledges, in the same moment, that unlike European cities New York is not one for dwelling in the past. According to James, “we not only fail to remember, in the whole length of the city, one of these frontal records of birth, sojourn, or death, under a celebrated name” but that it takes only a moment for the keen observer to realize that “any such form of civic piety is inevitably and forever absent” (89). While James may yearn for a better way to remember the “ancient graces” of Old New York, he recognizes that the city’s new structures and constant changes are not conducive to this kind of memorializing. For instance, he aptly asks a rhetorical question: “where...in a façade of fifty floors, does one ‘see’ the pious place recording the honor attached to one of the apartments look down on a responsive people?” (89). In other words, just as the rising sky-scrapers cause the hypothetical city dweller to memorialize the past, the fundamental changes to urban space make such acts of remembrance fundamentally impractical. The dawn of a new New York inspires nostalgia in James for the old one; at the same time, though, it is a desire that calls into questions whether such an idealization of the past can actually be maintained—whether the way-back-then can even be acknowledged much less celebrated in the here-and-now of the late nineteenth century.

Like the static plaque that no one can truly appreciate even if it does exist, the idle Catherine emerges alongside the new city while simultaneously—and nostalgically—representing an older way of life that ultimately fails to receive the appreciation it might deserve precisely because the protagonist becomes its representative. As a symbol of what does not

change, she actually makes the preservation of the “old” unappealing in equal measure to the way James finds the “new” disappointing. In a circular fashion, the novel’s end parallels its beginning, emphasizing the fact that in the narrative Catherine’s story really goes nowhere. As the narrative approaches its conclusion, Catherine prepares to give up her father, fortune, and social status for Morris, who, naturally, disappears from New York, confirming the Doctor’s suspicions, that without money, Catherine is of no consequence to the man. Yet, it is the narrator’s final portrait of her, after her father’s death, still living in the Washington Square home with her insipid aunt, remaining in the city each oppressive summer while others in her class flee, that proves most unsettling. In a city, where the only way to *be* is “to move every three or four years [so] you always get the last thing” (38). Catherine remains in the same house, meaning the same place she begins. She maintains her minimal participation in the same social circles in the city becoming a kindly “maiden-aunt” to younger girls (268), but she never marries, never breaks from the routine of her life. Her physical fixedness in the city mirrors her unchanging nature in the novel.

According to the narrator, Catherine never got over Morris’s betrayal. And so, his final appearance in the Washington Square home, which does not come until her fortune is secured, reveals him, an aged fortune hunter, coming back after all this time in hope that the two “might still [be] friends” (290). In what most readers desire to be a profound moment of vindication for their heroine, she has only one clumsy reply: “I meant to tell you, by my aunt, in answer to your message—if you had waited for an answer—that it was unnecessary for you to come in that hope” (290). Catherine’s fumbling response to Morris, the serpent, underscores once again that *waiting* is all that’s given because a chiefly witty and biting retort to his pitiful offer of friendship would be out of character for her. She is, after all (as the narrator has firmly established),

incredibly awkward in these situations. From the first pages to the last, the narrator consistently portrays his heroine not as clever and confident but deeply dull and self-effacing, and so it is natural that she falls short in her one chance to insult Morris. Although she does reject (in a roundabout way) his offer and send him away, the reader yearns for so much more than the stumbling reply she gives, making her, in one sense, the disappointment the narrator always said she would be. In fact, the narrator's final comments closely resemble his first assessment of the girl. Following Morris's huffy departure, "Catherine, meanwhile, in the parlor, picking up her morsel of fancy-work, had seated herself with it again—for life, as it were" (291). Paralleling the first chapter's end with its soft refrain of "such as she was," the novel's end reveals the secret "truth" (8) about Catherine, which lies in the narrator's two lines "such as she was" and "for life, as it were." The past tense "was" from the beginning and "were" from the end forge an odd, undeniable link between Catherine's starting and ending positions. From the beginning, the masculine narrator candidly reveals what she is, and this is who she remains. Her static nature stands out sharply against the changing features of "Washington Square" and the greater city. For the narrator, whose initial formulation of the character precludes any real growth, she was, is, and always will be not just *a* disappointment but also the *same* disappointment.

There is no doubt that *Washington Square* has driven many Jamesian scholars to the brink of reason in their attempt to make sense of it. Why tell the story of a woman who never changes and no one else bothers to talk about? Why spend so much time describing places in a city that no longer exists in that form? And why lay the foundation for an urban *Bildungsroman* that ultimately turns out to be a narrative of female non-development in the city? As Ozick finally declares: "But climax is anticlimax. There is no satisfaction in it. *Washington Square* is a novel about the abuse of imagination, the abuse of trust, the abuse of propriety and form; about,

above all, the absence of pity” (58). When we read *Washington Square* as a novel of abuse and absences, there is no satisfaction in it, just as there is no satisfaction when we attempt to separate the heroine from the city. The only way to understand the novel’s deeper complexity is to understand the relationship between James’s unchanging heroine who lives there and the dynamic urban space just beyond her doorstep.

In *The Art of the City*, Peter Conrad attests that “*Washington Square* means its title: it is a fable of urban development and an act of determined resistance to that development” (23). As a fable, the novel seemingly warns against what the city has to offer by way of its constantly changing nature. On the one hand, this resistance reveals the modern city to be too fast-paced and chaotic for any real development to take place, and on the other hand, it shows that James’s nostalgia for Old New York is ultimately fruitless. Conrad goes on to liken James to his protagonist, Catherine, claiming, “New York’s progress up the island becomes a confident self-reproduction, in which Catherine is prevented from joining and in which James himself also refused to join” (23). Avoiding the march of progress, James becomes like Catherine, making her after his own image, but he cannot escape the new New York that will inevitably come no more than she can, nor can he deny the myth and falsehoods of an Old New York that does nothing more or less than become the space that spawns characters like Catherine Sloper. Ultimately, *Washington Square* is a novel about waiting in vain—for Catherine’s father to change his mind, for Morris to prove he’s better than he seems, for the heroine to become more compelling, and for the city to develop with its changes or to return to an older version of itself that seemed able to do so.

**THE IDLE NARRATOR: DESIRE AND THE LIMITS OF THE CAUTIONARY TALE
IN THEODORE DREISER'S *SISTER CARRIE***

In his 1922 autobiography *A Book about Myself*, Theodore Dreiser looks back on his time in New York, confessing, “It was not a handsome city...there was much that was gross and soggy and even repulsive about it” (451). He freely admits that his youth colored his early experiences of the place: “Sensitive to the brevity of life and what one may do in a given span...I was swiftly being hypnotized by a charm more elusive than real, more of the mind than the eye perhaps, which seized upon and held me so tensely nevertheless that soon I was quite unable to judge sanely of all this and saw its commonplace and even mean face in a most roseate light” (451). The city possessed the power to hypnotize and charm its inhabitants, and even inhibit their ability to accurately assess its positive and negative qualities. For Dreiser, New York seemed to present unsurpassed possibilities at the same time it was weighed down by a tradition and history with which other American cities were not burdened. In Dreiser’s estimation, unlike New York, Chicago “was a city which had no tradition but was making them” (2). While Chicago was involved in the business of creating new paths for its inhabitants, New York remained defined by the contrast between “old” and “new.” On his first trip to New York to visit his brother Paul, Dreiser shrewdly observes the “seeming meanness of the streets” where cobblestone lined the “old and shabby portion of the city” (434). But Paul cautions him not to judge the city’s old-fashioned features too harshly and “think that they haven’t anything else.” Instead he explains, “This is just the New York way. It has the new and the old mixed. Wait’ll you’re here a little while. You’ll be like everybody else—there’ll be just one place: New York” (434). While outsiders may distinguish between the city’s old and new, Dreiser’s brother assures him that in time those distinctions will fade away so that to him there is only one New York. Dreiser’s own vested interest in the city’s ability to captivate its visitors informs not only his

journalistic but also his fiction writings.

In his first novel *Sister Carrie* (1900), Dreiser presents a heroine who experiences the many different opportunities for development that both Chicago and New York have to offer. In fact, the reader witnesses the consuming powers of fashion, society, and money as they overtake the young Caroline Meeber. Her story begins like many a young girl who leaves her small rural town behind for the big city in hopes of finding employment, love, and a better, more dazzling, version of herself. Carrie comes to Chicago to live with her sister and work in a factory, but her coming-of-age is accelerated when she is seduced by the charming Drouet and leaves her job and her sister's home to go and live with him. After falling for yet another man, Hurstwood, Carrie finds herself "kidnapped" by Hurstwood, who takes her to New York City. Resourceful and determined, she finds work as an actress, becomes famous, and eventually leaves the ailing Hurstwood behind in the wake of her success. In many ways, Carrie embodies the qualities of new New York and finds her way in the city by any means necessary, while Hurstwood, emblematic of the old, struggles to achieve even a fraction of her success before eventually resigning himself to death. In this instance, Dreiser's representations of new and old New York are embodied not only in the novel's characters but also the narrator who, unlike either Carrie or Hurstwood, reveals both old and new ideas about the city through his treatment of the protagonist.

Whereas I have noted that other sentimental, female *Bildungsromane* of the nineteenth century conclude by marrying or killing off the heroine, some scholars categorize Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* as a tale of the eponymous character's coming-of-age as a consumer—not specifically a woman—since she neither marries nor dies at the story's end. In the previous chapters, I examined narratives that resist that binary of marriage and death. At the end of *Ruth*

Hall, Fern leaves her protagonist prepared to die, so assured that any path in her self-development would inevitably lead her back to that end; likewise, James's heroine in *Washington Square* spends her life in waiting. Carrie, on the other hand, appears disinterested in either "idle" plot. She is neither patient enough to wait, nor does she think very much about her own mortality. Rather, Carrie is defined, first and foremost, as a desiring character.

Carrie is the product of new New York and what Henry James seems to characterize as its many flaws. Throughout the novel, she is constantly changing—occupations, living spaces, and suitors—but does not appear to develop in a way that is productive. To put it another way, she does not become a better person by learning from her past mistakes and reforming her attitudes. In "The Sentimental Revolt of *Sister Carrie*," Amy Kaplan links this "paradoxical sense of stasis in the text" to the power of desire (149). She insists that "Although desire in *Sister Carrie* propels constant motion, it also becomes a substitute for actively changing either the social order or the individuals within it...Carrie is constantly on the move up the social scale—from one city, one man, one job to the next—yet she always seems to end up in the same place, as the final scene suggests: rocking, and dreaming, and longing for more" (149). Kaplan accurately assesses Carrie's ability to change without really progressing, and I agree that these constant, sometimes frenzied, movements define Carrie throughout the novel. However, Kaplan does not consider the ways that Carrie's tendency to end up in the same place, despite her impressive social mobility, actually reflects an important feature of her non-development in the novel. Clare Eby elaborates on Kaplan's insights by arguing that Dreiser revises the classic terms of the *Bildungsroman* in his naturalist novel "so that Carrie's growth occurs not in 'knowledge' but in 'desire'" (118). Carrie's desires at the novel's beginning—wealth, fame, independence—are the same things she desires (and possesses) by the story's end. Her tastes do

not develop or mature as one might expect with her becoming a more thoughtful, considerate person, and in that way although her narrative is full of change, there remains something inherently idle at the center of the development plot. The protagonist does not gain a deeper understanding of herself or those around her as a result of her time in the city, but she does learn how to get the things she wants. Therein lies the central question pervading the novel's end: Has the girl who sits alone in her rocking chair, looking down on the streets of New York, learned anything more than how to cultivate an insatiable desire for *more*, whatever that may be?

Although the question seems to ask us to consider Carrie's consumerism as a lack of development, that is not the kind of idleness I wish to explore in this chapter. Whereas Philip Fisher characterizes the novel as a "familiar" nineteenth-century *Bildungsroman* because "Carrie is the one dynamic, unsettled figure in a world where everyone else represents terminal points" (170), I am more interested how the narrator too serves as a site of dynamic instability, and through these constant fluctuations that never lead to real growth similarly reflects the idleness found in Carrie. The real conflict exists not in Carrie's questionable development but in the narrator's own conflicting relationship with the female protagonist. He is at once reluctant to witness the young girl's unfulfilling pursuit of meaningless things in the city at the same time he finds himself swept up in a similar pursuit. Throughout Carrie's upward mobility, the narrator, on several occasions, pushes back against the city and society's consumerism that seem to corrupt the young woman, only to lament at the novel's end: "Oh Carrie, Carrie! Oh, blind strivings of the human heart!" (Dreiser 354). Consequently, Dreiser presents two productive plotlines—the first in which Carrie fosters her insatiable desire, develops as a consumer, and finds a way to achieve success (though not ultimate happiness) unlike other characters such as Hurstwood; the second in which the narrator openly reprimands Carrie for her naïve

consumerism. A closer examination of the novel, however, reveals a narrator struggling with far more than his dissatisfaction with what he perceives to be the lonely, unhappy end of his female protagonist. Early on, the narrator positions himself as a masculine, city-dweller able to provide a mature commentary on Carrie's ill-informed choices and the larger influences at work on human nature in a city like Chicago and then New York. He remains the chief critic of the fashion and materialism that seems to consume so many urban inhabitants and fears that Carrie will meet the same fate. Yet, for as many moments in the text when the narrator finds himself lamenting and satirizing Carrie's "material" development, there are just as many or more moments when he is similarly overcome by the conspicuous consumption he aims to critique.

The novel, as a genre, supports such multi-vocal utterances by its narrator and characters. Kiyohiko Murayama suggests that this polyphonic structure means "[s]uch characters as Carrie, Drouet, and Hurstwood are so inarticulate that they cannot formulate their own thoughts clearly...the narrative voice has to speak for them" (71). While, at times, Dreiser's narrator does speak for the characters, it is equally important to see the way he embodies disparate voices. As Mikhail M. Bakhtin suggests in *Dialogic Imagination*, "The novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types... and a diversity of individual voices artistically organized" working together to create the novel's *heteroglossia* (262). While Bakhtin focuses specifically on the ways the novel can contain many different voices through its many participants, the narrator in *Sister Carrie* becomes a *heteroglossia* in and of himself. The narrator seems to operate from a stereotypical binary where authority and reason are reflected by a masculine voice whereas sentimental and heightened emotional responses are characterized as feminine. When discussing the fate of man, for instance, the narrator adopts a masculine tone, while at other times softening his critique to reflect the compassion of a feminine voice. In moments of accidental cross-

dressing, his authoritative, masculine voice temporarily disappears echoing the desires of Carrie's own feminine one. While this not only results in "a novel in which the authors and the characters, if not overtly, contradict themselves and each other all the time" (Murayama 71), the narrative slippage also disrupts the masculine narrator's power and authority in the text, while also destabilizing the male self he creates in other passages. These moments of slippage not only complicate the narrator's identity but also illuminate the ways in which the city's "consuming" environment threatens everyone, from the newly arrived, naïve eighteen-year old girl to the self-assured man well-versed in the city's corrupting powers.

Dreiser's narrator oscillates between denouncement and desire, giving the same weight and attention to descriptions of Carrie's ill-fitting, cheap clothes when she first arrives in Chicago that he later gives to his impressive reflections on human nature. Sandy Petrey offers an extended examination of realist and sentimental language in Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* positing that the novel "juxtaposes two irreconcilable styles, intersperses a series of oleaginous moral mediations among passages of straightforward prose narration with no perceptible moral content" (102). For Petrey, this incompatible pairing makes the narrator's extended pontifications on morality seem pointless, a "parody," when compared to the "unpretentious dignity" of the realist prose (102). Despite the opposing styles and attitudes that Dreiser manages to embody in this dual narrative voice, it is difficult to read the passages on morality as any less fervent than the narrator's running commentary on city fashion and urban consumerism. Rather than a parody, Dreiser's narrator shoots for moral superiority regarding Carrie's consumerism and seems, at times, to fall far short of it—ending up, more often than not, window shopping in front of a department store alongside his protagonist.

In many ways, the narrator resembles Constantin Guys, the championed artist in Charles Baudelaire's "The Painter of Modern Life," who paints the trivial and eternal together. Through his sketches of manners and women's fashion, "he is the painter of the passing moment and of all the suggestions of eternity that it contains" (5). For Dreiser's narrator, the need to describe the eternal depends on attention to a particular moment. For example, Dreiser suggests that women have an enduring proclivity towards fashion as illustrated in his description of the fashionable New York world, which ensnares the narrator in the same consumerism he wishes to rebuke. When Carrie enters a Chicago department store to purchase a jacket with Drouet's money, her own excitement overlaps with the narrator's pleasure bubbling just below the surface. He confesses "There is nothing in this world more delightful than that middle state in which we mentally balance at times, possessed of the means, lured by desire, and yet deterred by conscience or want of decision. When Carrie began wandering around the store amid the fine displays she was in this mood...How would she look in this, how charming that would make her!" (49). In a sense, the narrator's contradictory dispositions that fluctuate between a kind of masculine rationalism and feminine sentimentality (as depicted by the narrator) also parallel the androgynous pseudonymity that takes place in Fanny Fern's *Ruth Hall*. Whereas Floy's androgyny makes it easier for Ruth to disregard feminine expectations of decorum and show her strength by righting wrongs with her pen, the narrator in *Sister Carrie* is weakened or made idle when he reveals himself to be not just a masculine judge of Carrie's one-dimensional desires but also in possession of those same consumerist desires run-amok in America's greatest cities.

In the first section of this chapter, I consider the narrator's moralizing tone, and its relationship to the female *Bildungsroman*. I argue that the narrator strives for lofty moral meditations because he ultimately desires to make the narrative one of traditional female

development. Consequently, he must rebuke Carrie's superficial desires and perceived promiscuity in an attempt to set her on a path toward virtue and marriage or—if she will have neither of these—punishment. In praise of this older, more traditional version of the female *Bildungsroman*, the narrator attempts to reconcile her consumerism and self-interest with a plot of either success or failure in the city. The narrator's didactic moralizing works to correct the heroine's course in the novel and contextualize her actions as either worth emulating or avoiding to certain degrees. If Carrie will not be reformed through marriage with the security of a sentimental happy ending, then it seems natural for the *Bildungsroman* plot that she must become a cautionary example for others through her death. In the second section, I follow the course of the narrator's moral perspective as it becomes enmeshed in—rather than distinct from—the consumerist impulse that the narrator works to condemn. I contend that it becomes increasingly difficult for the narrator to judge his protagonist since he too becomes enamored with a consumerist impulse, swept up by the city's endless offering of seemingly frivolous pleasures. In these moments, the narrative takes on a more open-ended and sympathetic exploration of female experience in the city and a less clearly defined critique of Carrie's lack of moral or virtuous development. Finally, in the third section I examine the way the narrator's fluctuating identity, and his attempts to align himself with male characters such as Hurstwood in the novel, ultimately reveals an idleness in him strikingly similar to Carrie's. Unlike the previous chapters on Sedgwick, Fern, and James, this final one on Dreiser will thus treat the idea of character development a little differently. Instead of solely exploring a female protagonist who fails to develop, I am also interested here in how the narrator's interactions with the heroine actually stall out a plot that had initially been conceived as a moralizing, cautionary tale.

I.

Throughout Dreiser's novel, the narrator attempts to package Carrie's narrative of development in the city as a cautionary tale of female consumerist desire by showing how easily the city's temptations can lead a once-respectable girl down a dangerous and wayward path. From the novel's first chapter onward, it becomes perfectly clear that the narrator makes only two possible plots available to his protagonist. He overtly outlines the fate that awaits a girl in the city: "When a girl leaves her home at eighteen, she does one of two things. Either she falls into saving hands and becomes better, or she rapidly assumes the cosmopolitan standard of virtue and becomes worse" (1). For the narrator, there is nothing "worse" than for a young girl to adopt to the ways of being in a city. He also suggests that despite (what we can only assume are) an infinite number of possible endings for a young man, there still exist only *two* for a girl—she can fall with her virtue intact, like any good sentimental heroine, into the "saving hands" of a husband, or she can conform to the "cosmopolitan standard" that will strip her of her morals, and, most likely, lead to her untimely death, to a different kind of fall indeed. Nancy Miller classifies these two endings as the euphoric and dysphoric, where the heroine either moves from "nothing" to "all" or, in the second from "all" to "nothing" (Miller xi). While Miller's *The Heroine's Text* focuses specifically on how these patterns emerge in eighteenth-century novels about women, Kaplan discusses how these sentimental themes play out in Dreiser's turn-of-the-century, naturalist novel. Kaplan argues that the novel operates on "two discordant narrative registers," the first being the journalistic account of Carrie's entrance to the city and the second being the "sentimental commentary on the moral ramifications of her venture" (Kaplan 140). While Kaplan concludes that this narrative dissonance reveals a larger conflict between Dreiser's realist motives and his allegiance to sentimental codes, in actuality, these moments of narrative

discord are far more revealing of the narrator's own adherence to a certain sentimental morality that he codes as masculine in the novel.

Out the outset, though, I need to point out that an attempt to pin down Dreiser's narrator to a distinct gendered voice proves problematic. According to feminist narratologists, such as Susan Lanser and Kathy Mezei, a reader almost always resists ambiguous narrators in novels because she feels compelled to identify the narrator by one of two gendered third-person pronouns available. Thus, a reader avidly looks for gender when she does not readily find it in the text in order to solve this seeming crisis of ambiguity. In "Queering Narratology," for instance, Lanser recognizes the reader's desires to "make meaning" and sort out narrative complexities by seeing narrators in terms of something already recognizable, such as normative gender constructions. She claims that when a narrator's sex is ambiguous, the reader will attempt to construct the narrator's gender through attitudes, statements, affinities, and other attributes revealed through "*narrative acts*."³³ Attuned to the difficulty of assigning gender to narrators—in part because of the strong readerly desire to do so—I want to show how, over the course of the novel, Dreiser's narrator both establishes gender binaries before, in the next section, examining how he slips between them.

The narrator critiques female susceptibility within the urban space and, at the same time, positions himself as a measured, mature, and masculine voice on the subject. At first, it is difficult to pinpoint exactly what seems so masculine about the narrator, but there remains something undeniably masculine in the way that he positions himself in relation to the female protagonist. Ascertaining the narrator's gender requires a certain level of inference on the reader's part, but it is work a reader is all too willing to do. When we consider how the narrator

³³ Lanser, Susan "Queering Narratology." *Ambiguous Discourse. Feminist Narratology and British Women Writers*. Ed. Kathy Mezei. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996. 253-4.

constructs gender in *Sister Carrie* and reciprocally how his gendered self(s) are constructed, the reader moves beyond certain limitations and begins to read “within the multiplicity of culturally-constructed codes and conventions by which narrative operates” (Lanser 135). Of course, narrators most frequently gender themselves through these “cultural” codes when they describe and judge different characters in a particular way, which ultimately allow readers to infer the narrator’s gender as a result of the presumed “masculine” or “feminine” viewpoint with which they approach the characters.

In *Sister Carrie*, the narrator, like James’s from *Washington Square*, carefully marks his difference and even distance from the young, inexperienced Carrie:

Sister Carrie... was possessed of a mind rudimentary in its power of observation and analysis. Self-interest with her was high, but not strong. It was, nevertheless, her guiding characteristic. Warm with the fancies of youth, pretty with the insipid prettiness of the formative period, possessed of a figure promising eventual shapeliness and an eye alight with certain native intelligence, she was a fair example of the middle American class—two generations removed from the emigrant. Books were beyond her interest—knowledge a sealed book. In the intuitive glances she was still crude. She could scarcely toss her head gracefully, Her hands were almost ineffectual... And yet she was interested in her charms, quick to understand the keener pleasures of life, ambitious to gain in material things. (Dreiser 2)

Through his description, the narrator articulates Carrie’s deficiencies in both mind and body. Portrayed as possessing everything from a rudimentary mind to an “insipid prettiness” and a “certain naïve intelligence,” Carrie appears to be anything but prepared for her entrance into the city with its seductive powers. Moreover, her “ineffectual” hands suggest that she is poorly suited for work at the same time she remains keen to “gain in material things” (2). A gendered subtext accompanies the narrator’s critique of her appearance and intellectual abilities. It is implied that unlike his own shrewd powers of observation and reason (demonstrated in the novel’s opening pages), Carrie lacks these abilities and is incapable of achieving any intellectual depth, since knowledge remains a “sealed book.” After effectively deeming her at best naïve and

at worst obtuse, the narrator in the same breath lusts after the “promising eventual shapeliness” of the young girl’s figure, revealing a distinct interest in her physical body. Even before she enters the city, the narrator has already passed judgment on her ability to be successful there. In addition, nearly all the qualities he describes that could be construed as faults are tied in some way to her youth, suggesting that with age would come a more mature, clever, and better-suited Carrie for the city.

In a period where displays of excess and the acquisition of goods gave birth to both Thorstein Veblen’s “conspicuous [and] vicarious consumption” and Dreiser’s own *Sister Carrie*, middle-class girls challenged traditional Victorian gender ideologies publicly through their fashion and buying power in the city. Urban spaces not only offered women and men of any age an opportunity to reinvent themselves, but they played a particularly important role in the coming-of-age of young girls who paraded up and down city streets in front of crowds of strange, grown men. In *How Young Ladies Became Girls: The Victorian Origins of American Girlhood*, Jane Hunter articulates the ways in which the nineteenth-century urban space, in particular, helped to transform the “new” American girl’s perception of herself and her sexuality. With a “fledgling peer culture” (Hunter 305) and a growing consumer culture, middle-class girls at the end of the nineteenth century found themselves walking back and forth to school and to shops downtown, and ultimately, spending more time outside the home than in it. This outside time seemed to compel many of them to throw off residual Victorian domestic ideals and define themselves “by the figure they cut stepping out in public, rather than simply by their domestic virtue” (305). With cities serving as the primary stage for the new “haute-bourgeoisie” of the Gilded Age (309), these public spaces gave way to new American girls who displayed the only object they possessed—their “newly adorned bodies” (309) created in part by imitating those around them.

For, just as Veblen identifies vicarious consumption as a distinctly feminine activity, Gabriel Tarde's *The Laws of Imitation* describes women as those most likely to imitate high-society fashions.³⁴ He outlines two motives for a woman imitating high-society fashions: either she longs to "raise herself a peg" or through a misguided sexual desire to please, she believes her attractiveness depends on "the adoption of some new style of dress or headgear" (212). Like the city women described by Veblen, Tarde, and Hunter, Carrie fashions her narrative of self-development through her actual and vicarious consumption of material goods and through her desire to imitate those she imagines to be better off or, at least, from a better class.

After receiving gentlemanly advances from Drouet on her train ride into the city, Carrie finds the young, leering men who call to her on the street despicable: "She felt as though she should be better served, and her heart revolted" (Dreiser 30). Herein lies one of the traits the narrator characterizes as a problematic feminine weaknesses—it is Carrie's "heart" not her brain that resists the catcalls from the strange men on the street. It is not only men on the street who manage to make her feel vulnerable but also other women. On her way to and from work, she feels "ashamed in the face of better dressed girls who went by" (Dreiser 30) and despairs when she realizes that her unkempt working-girl attire attracts the attention of young working-class men and not upwardly mobile men, like Drouet. Here, her desire for more luxurious material goods resonates clearly with her aspiration to catch the notice not of men from her own social class but of those, such as Drouet, in a class above. By presenting Carrie's role as a consumer in relation to these feminine desires (wanting to upstage the other girls and attract higher-class men), the narrator implicitly identifies the susceptibility to the city's consuming culture as a distinctly feminine trait.

³⁴ In Gabriel Tarde's *The Laws of Imitation*, he also claims, "Every social resemblance precedes from that initial act of imitation of which it was the subject" (43).

The narrator depicts Carrie's early experiences in the city in order to highlight her naïveté and shallow desires and to focus, in contrast, on his own mature knowledge and experience of the world, which make him a suitable judge of her. Carrie's early time in the city is peppered with a series of mistakes befitting her inexperience and youthful whims. After securing a job, she carelessly spends her meager wages freely and urges her sister Minnie and Minnie's husband Hanson to get out and do more in the evenings after work like go to the theatre. However, Minnie is deeply troubled by her sister's desire to spend money on a whim asking, "Unless Carrie submitted to a solemn round of industry and saw the need of hard work without longing for play, how was her coming to the city to profit them?" (23). As if Minnie's reservations were not clear enough, the narrator interjects additional commentary on her reaction to Carrie's spendthrift habits in order to contextualize the elder sister's response: "These thoughts were not those of a cold, hard nature at all. They were the serious reflections of a mind which invariably adjusted itself, without much complaining, to such surroundings as its industry could make for it" (23). The narrator's comparison between the two sisters offer the reader a sense of how "serious", well-"adjusted", and reasonable Minnie now is as a result of her time in the city, even though her focus remains narrowly focused on the harshness of city life. On the other hand, Carrie remains unable (or perhaps unwilling) to adjust her spending habits to align with her new financial realities and refuses to yield to the difficult realities she encounters as a working girl in the city.

At her job, Carrie experiences a similar fatigue with the monotony of her work and feels alienated by her sister and husband when they do not empathize with her perceived plight. While her sister works diligently at home, Carrie, when asked about her position in the factory, states, "it's pretty hard. I don't like it" (36). Her response confuses and unnerves Minnie and

Hanson who both work hard but do not think of their work as something they have the privilege to like or dislike. Carrie's discontent grows the more she realizes how different her aspirations are from those of her sister and brother-in-law. Spending her time daydreaming of "things she would like to do, of clothes she would like to wear, and of places she would like to visit" (37), Carrie takes to escaping the apartment each evening to "stand in the door at the foot of the stairs" (37). Of course the young Carrie, having only recently arrived in the city, does not realize that standing in the apartment house doorway all dressed up is not only what daydreaming girls do but also what prostitutes do to attract their clients. Therefore, while Carrie perceives her evening doorway lingering as entirely innocent, her sister and brother-in-law are acutely aware of the fact that this kind of female loitering could give the entire family a bad reputation (37).

The narrator goes even further to emphasize Carrie's limited experience and how easily enthralled she is by the comings-and-goings of people on the streets. He observes, "Her imagination trod a very narrow round, always winding up at points which concerned money, looks, clothes, or enjoyment" (37). Not only are Carrie's musings superficial focusing on material and pleasurable things, but in addition to lacking depth, they also lack growth. She endlessly cycles through her list of desires, a "very narrow round" never branching out or thinking on new things to pursue, which suggests her youthful affinity for change with little or no development. As Carrie spends more time in the city, it becomes clear that she eschews work in favor of more pleasurable pursuits while also inexplicably waiting for something better to come her way. Unlike James's Catherine who not only waits (for what the reader is never really sure) and asks everyone around her to do the same, Carrie remains confident that her waiting will be temporary and result in a vast improvement of status and fortune. Much like her original departure from her childhood home in Columbia City, which she left because she was

“dissatisfied,” she pursues a life as a newcomer in the city and claims her “destiny” as a shop girl, where she determines to wait, only a little in vain, “until—well, until something happened” (Dreiser 10). The narrator offers further insight into Carrie’s seemingly listless attitude and perplexing confidence that she is destined for something more by explaining that the predicament of this “waiting” period was the same for many shop girls: “Neither of them knew exactly what. They did not figure on promotion. They did not exactly count on marriage. Things would go on, though, in a dim kind of way until the better thing would eventuate, and Carrie would be rewarded for coming and toiling in the city” (10). She remains confident that eventually her fortune will change and something better will come along despite all evidence to the contrary. Living in Chicago, she observes firsthand the toll urban living has taken on her sister, as well as how hard Minnie and Hanson work for very little in return. Finding their life dull and tiresome, she longs to go to the theatre, walk around, and “see more of the city” (39), but she never connects the reality of their condition to the reality of hers, instead imagining something better.

The narrator’s commentary on the city shows how attractive and conquerable it might seem to a young girl like Carrie. He states, “In 1889 Chicago had the peculiar qualifications of growth which made such adventuresome pilgrimages even on the part of young girls plausible” (11). As one of these young girls, Carrie refuses to allow budgetary concerns to inform her spending. For instance, she spends her meager savings on a fashionable, new umbrella from a department store rather than continuing to use her sisters worn-out one. She resents Minnie and Hanson’s attempts to temper her spending because, rather than a sign of her lack of money management skills, it was crucial for the success that she envisioned: “She was not going to be a common shop-girl...they need not think it, either” (39). Carrie’s restlessness in her sister’s home

explains why she is so attracted to Drouet, the charming salesman she first meets on a train ride into Chicago. After losing her job, she meets him again and is easily won over with his promise to “loan” her money for new clothes, take her to the theatre, and buy her lunch (42-5). Whereas Minnie expects Carrie to work hard, pay room and board, and forego unnecessary (and even some necessary) expenses, Drouet promises to buy her trifles and luxuries, travel with her, and take care of her (50). Although, for a time, it seem that Carrie will remain cautious with her new acquaintance, even resolving to return the money he has given her for new clothes, she ultimately is swayed by his easy manner and the belief that with him she will finally be able to embark upon the next adventure (50).

Despite Carrie’s misconceptions about the nature of Drouet’s generosity, the narrator carefully captures his character type and motivations in order to underscore just how easily Carrie plays into his machinations, how quickly she miscalculates his true character. Emphasizing Drouet’s position in a new class of men, the narrator explains, “Here was a type of the travelling canvasser for a manufacturing house—a class which at that time was first being dubbed by the slang of the day ‘drummers.’ He came within the meaning of a still newer term...which concisely expressed the thought of one whose dress or manners are calculated to elicit the admiration of susceptible young women—a ‘masher’” (3). These early descriptive moves allow the narrator to subtly relay his knowledge of the “slang of the day” and show that even with his mature knowledge of the city’s past, he still remains aware of though unaffected by its continual changes. He goes on to comment on the characteristics of Drouet, revealing, “Good clothes, of course, were the first essential, the things without which he was nothing. A strong physical nature, actuated by a keen desire for the feminine, was the next. A mind free of any consideration of the problems or forces of the world and actuated not by greed, but an insatiable

love of variable pleasure. His method was always simple” (3). It is clear the narrator finds Drouet cunning because of his superficiality and manages to see through the man’s standard tricks for bringing people under his spell. By emphasizing the simplicity of Drouet’s approach, the narrator subtly criticizes Drouet for being so simple and Carrie for being so easily persuaded to leave the safety of her sister’s home behind and trust a man she hardly knows to give her money and a place to live.

Throughout the text, the narrator continues his adjudication of Carrie’s shallow desires and her growing discontent, which nearly always stems from the want of more material things. Here, the narrator seemingly contrasts Carrie’s fleeting desires to the fleeting state of Man as he stops being governed by his base desires and instincts and moves toward a more “human” state marked by reason. In the following passage, the narrator crafts a long introduction to this problem by equating his protagonist’s consumerism as akin to an unfettered instinct that will always be in competition with human rationality:

Among the forces which sweep and play throughout the universe, untutored man is but a wisp in the wind. Our civilisation is still in a middle stage, scarcely beast, in that it is no longer wholly guided by instinct; scarcely human, in that it is not yet wholly guided by reason... We see man far removed from the lairs of the jungles, his innate instincts dulled by too near an approach to free-will, his free-will not sufficiently developed to replace his instincts and afford him perfect guidance. [sic] (54)

This passage, which opens Chapter VIII, continues for more than double the number of lines quoted here. The narrator strategically uses “man” as an ostensibly universal stand-in for “human” while speaking to larger naturalist themes that highlight the rise-decline structure he has more often than not accorded to female protagonist. According to the narrator’s reflections on civilization, man exists in a liminal state between “scarcely beast” and “scarcely human” (54), but his underdeveloped reason leaves him ill equipped to navigate his changing surroundings. By placing this passage at the chapter’s beginning, the narrator frames the entire chapter within

this larger discussion on man's transient nature. As a whole, the rest of Chapter VIII deals with Carrie's unreasonable decision to leave her sister's and move in with Drouet, a man she barely knows, which the narrator then follows with an account of all the wonderful things the two now do together in the city—going to the theatre, the opera, restaurants, etc. Although Carrie experiences some brief reservations about her new life with Drouet and wonders if she will be able to find work, eventually these thoughts are pushed aside as “her head was so full the swirl of life” from the entertainment and shopping (57). In comparison to the chapter's weighty opening lines, these activities seem frivolous, and Carrie and Drouet similarly appear flippant for enjoying these things so much. And so, the narrator manipulates these structures within certain chapters in order to critique the city's consumerism he so loathes.

As one might anticipate, Carrie eventually becomes bored with Drouet and falls for the magnetic and powerful Hurstwood, who effectively steals her away from Drouet and takes her to New York where they live together. For two years, Carrie and Hurstwood reside rather contentedly in a small flat as man and wife. He has gone to great pains to keep her busy with domestic duties in the home, so busy that she remains unaware of missing anything in the city. As a young girl, she “accepted the things fortune provided with the most genial good-nature. New York, despite her first expression of disapproval, soon interested her exceedingly” (211). While Carrie develops an interest in the city, her experience of it remains rather limited since Hurstwood has no interest in drastically expanding her world beyond their small flat. Despite the rather dubious origins of their “marriage” (203), Carrie feels for the first time “settled, and somewhat justified in the eyes of society as she conceived of it” (211). As a result of this legitimacy, she remains blind to Hurstwood's inconsistent and ill treatment of her. While Hurstwood allows himself money for new clothes, attends the theatre, and spends time with new

friends (212-3), Carrie entertains herself their first year in New York mostly by looking out her window at the growing city (212). Despite the narrator alluding to a host of potential disturbances that should indicate Hurstwood's growing depression and resentment toward her and his new pitiable state in New York City compared to Chicago, Carrie remains clueless. Ultimately, the narrator explains that "Being of a passive and receptive rather than an active and aggressive nature, Carrie accepted the situation" (212). Jessica Lyn Van Slooten posits that Carrie so easily accepts the marital arrangement with Hurstwood as a result of her "unswerving allegiance to the sentimental convention" (259). Although Carrie desires the legitimacy marriage brings, the narrator, more so than Carrie, seems far more devoted to this sentimental end. While with Drouet, she repeatedly asks him when they might be married (68) before eventually coming to the conclusion that he never intends to marry her (96), and then during her time with Hurstwood, tells him outright: "I wouldn't stay with you, though, if you didn't marry me" (107). So, she accepts the arrangement with Hurstwood for a time until her desire for something different overwhelms her.

It is only when another upwardly mobile couple, the Vances, move into the flat across the hall that Carrie becomes upset with her current circumstances. Even then, the source of her unhappiness appears trivial in relation to the very real problems in her relationship with Hurstwood. While Van Slooten maintains that "She trusts too fully in the traditional romantic plot where love conquers all and marriage consecrates that love" (259), in reality, Carrie's discontent with Hurstwood stems not from his lack of love but his unwillingness to give her the standard of living others possess. In terms of the Vances, she first notices that they have a more "luxurious" flat than hers; then, after spending an evening playing cards with the husband and wife, she eventually comes to the conclusion that the Vances lead a far more fashionable life

than Hurstwood and herself. When Hurstwood returns from another evening out without her, she watches as he charms Mrs. Vance, and realizes in a rush that “she was not well dressed—not nearly as well dressed-as Mrs. Vance. These were not vague ideas any longer. Her situation was cleared up for her. She felt that her life was becoming stale, and therein she felt cause for gloom...The desirous Carrie was whispered to concerning her possibilities” (216). Rather than realize that she is unhappy with Hurstwood after spending the evening in the company of the happily married Vances, she instead links her unhappiness to her realization that Mrs. Vance is better dressed—a fact which seems to indicate that she is better taken care of by her husband than Carrie is by Hurstwood.

Of course, this is not the first time Carrie has ascertained a great truth about herself by way of fashion. Her first visit to a department store in Chicago leads Carrie to “a keen analysis of her own position—her individual shortcomings of dress and that shadow of *manner* which she thought must hang about her and make clear to all who and what she was” (17). Eby reads the scene as a crucial moment of self-identification: “This moment exemplifies invidious comparison and pecuniary emulation: Carrie compares herself and her objects to others and rapidly reconstructs a new self in her mind. Resolved to enhance her personal value, Carrie sets out to transform ‘who and what she was’” (119). So, for Eby, Carrie’s act of comparing herself to the better-dressed Mrs. Vance and then realizing she is unhappy with Hurstwood is the catalyst for her to once again begin creating herself anew. Without a doubt Carrie’s belief that she can change who she is by changing her clothes reflects, at least in the narrator’s mind, a juvenile understanding of self more commonly found in that of a young girl rather than a married woman. Yet clothes come to wield tremendous power in the narrative not only for Carrie—who achieves a semblance of upward mobility by moving from working-class Columbus roots to

success as a famous actress—but also her male counterparts, and even the masculine narrator himself.

It is important to note that while Dreiser's narrator does depict the consumerist excesses of certain male characters such as Drouet and Hurstwood, Carrie receives the brunt of his rebuke. The hypocrisy reveals an ongoing double-standard in the novel where concerns with fashion become distinctly feminine in some way, and a conscious choice on the narrator's part to describe fashion as capable of wielding tremendous power over Carrie, while the men manage to harness its power for their own gain and upward mobility in the city. The city itself as a site of unpredictability means the narrator must also manufacture relationships between similar bodies and spaces for the readers benefit. According to Anselm Strauss, this emerges through defining things in the city in relation to one another: "Urban complexity, which forces us to think in terms of unity or many-sidedness and personification, also leads us to conceive of cities as 'really' or 'essentially' like something else, something we already know and understand" (14). For Strauss, the city compels us to make sense of it by forging links between the familiar and unfamiliar. As a result, we come to understand features of this "urban complexity" only when we liken it to something we already know. In Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, the narrator attempts to understand the consumerism-run-amok among the city's inhabitants as he struggles to reconcile these base desires with the far-reaching power of their effects. Ultimately, though, the narrator likens these desires as primarily female afflictions, which only results in him essentializing consumerism in the city, rather than understand it. Dreiser's narrator relates this vapid pursuit of fortune to the capricious desires of a young, naïve girl like Carrie. In this way, he can make the urban consumerism into something he understands, marking it as fleeting, unimportant, and most of all feminine in some way. More importantly, this allows the narrator, for a time, to dismiss this

vanity as something that primarily afflicts those of a more feeble, or in this case, feminine mind. Dreiser's masculine narrator works diligently to establish his masculinity through his maturity and intellectualism so that he can serve as an adequate judge of Carrie's exploits in the city. However, by spending so much time talking about consumption in order to reprimand his protagonist, the narrator actually opens up space for a feminine voice to move seamlessly into the narrative in such a way that the narrator does not realize that "he" is now speaking about things as he assumes a woman would.

II.

If the narrator in Dreiser's novel can be classified as masculine—or as a literary device imbued with a masculine voice—then at certain moments in the narrative, he assumes an identity that he characterizes as distinctly feminine. These moments most often occur when the narrator discusses fashion, including Carrie's clothes, and her oscillating, romantic feelings toward Drouet and then toward Hurstwood. Dreiser's narrator uses his knowledge of the city to critique Carrie at the same time demonstrating a feminine understanding of the heroine Carrie. Consequently, the novel's central narrative conflict revolves around the protagonist's development in the city but the narrator's shifting stance on that development. Yet rather than promote this essentialist view and solidify the links between women and the world of fashion in comparison to men and the world of business, the narrator's variable tenor blurs the lines between these spaces so that both men and women are connoisseurs of fashion, fashion is above all else a business, and falling-out of fashion means the loss of status and power. When this happens, the masculine narrator's studied views on human nature are replaced in the text with thrilling and excited descriptions of the material and bodily pleasures the city has to offer—to

tones and feelings he has been critical of in his female protagonist all along. For all the narrator's critical assessments of Carrie's consumerism, naïveté, and vain pursuits, he frequently finds himself overrun with a similar desire for and fascination with the city's consuming culture. In fact, he remains just as (and, perhaps, at times far more) preoccupied with the attractiveness of urban conspicuous consumption when describing Carrie being. Consequently, at particular moments the narrator slips between a masculine voice that cautions his protagonist and readers against the threatening urban environment and a presumably more feminine voice that shares the protagonist's enthusiasm for the seductive fashions and charming men on offer in the city.

For all the narrative acts where the narrator laments and satirizes his heroine as a "material" girl, there are just as many instances when the narrator is similarly overcome by the seemingly feminine conspicuous consumption³⁵ he critiques. When the narrator expresses his own interest in this facet of the city, it appears as if the masculine narrator who critiques Carrie, gives way for a time to a presumably feminine voice that shares in Carrie's enthusiasm for the city with its seductive fashion and charming men. These intoxicating forces work on the narrator as he catalogs and immortalizes the city's department store:

The nature of these vast retail combinations, should they ever permanently disappear, will form an interesting chapter in the commercial history of our nation. Such a flowering out of a modest trade principle the world had never witnessed up to that time. They were handsome, bustling, successful affairs, with a host of clerks and a swarm of patrons. Carrie passed along the busy aisles, much affected by the remarkable displays of trinkets, dress goods, stationery, and jewelry. Each separate counter was a show place of dazzling interest and attraction. (Dreiser 16)

While this passage goes on to reveal Carrie's feelings about various department store items including "the dainty slippers and stockings, the delicately frilled skirts and petticoats" (16), the

³⁵ Thorstein Veblen makes famous this concept of "conspicuous consumption" in his work *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. It is important to note that Veblen's discussion emphasizes the gentleman of leisure whose consumption consequently creates "vicarious consumers in the persons of their wives and children, their servants, retainers, etc." (77).

narrator transitions in this moment from his masculine interest in the structure's commercial history to another perspective that is drawn in by the store's "bustling" nature and "swarm" of patrons similar to Walter Benjamin's appraisal, in *The Arcades Project*, of the department store as a site of seduction that becomes the "Function of commodity capital!" (40). While most sentences that describe the store's seduction trivialize Carrie as a woman enthralled by the merchandise and general shopping experience in contrast to the narrator who intends to communicate to the reader "an interesting chapter in the commercial history of our nation," the final sentence in the passage shows that one need not be a shopper or a woman to be equally affected by the enthralling goods. As such, Carrie serves as the narrator's personal shopper, since through her interior view he experiences this consumer-driven desire vicariously. The protagonist may be the one passing through the "busy aisles" admiring the displays, but the narrator calls attention to the "dazzling interest and attraction" of the shows in the store. The department store exists as a significant site within the city and the nation at large, and the narrator investigates the very makeup of these "vast retail combinations" exploring the store's complexities and celebrating its success much in the same way that he marvels at man's development and human nature at other moments in the text. Passages like the one above complicate the masculine narrator's seemingly fixed stance on the corrupting powers of consumer culture by highlighting his conflicted gender construction.

Although the topic of fashion is presented as gendered in the novel and usually results in the narrator's more feminine voice emerging, its appearance does not always coincide with a narrative slip from masculine to feminine voice. Whether the narrative voice is seemingly feminine or masculine is determined by the topic (e.g. fashion) that has been, in this case, gendered. Despite these differences, however, the slips do surface frequently enough that it is

possible to outline the masculine narrator's discussion of fashion and love as it compares to his feminine self and "her" views on these issues. Early on, he remarks: "A woman should some day write the complete philosophy of clothes. No matter how young, it is one of the things she wholly comprehends" (4). Here, the masculine-voiced narrator attempts to elevate the subject of fashion so that clothes are in need of their own "philosophy" at the same time he appears to belittle the topic altogether. However, he genders the topic, and, one might even argue, intends to diminish its importance, by delegating the task to a woman versus, for example, the more masculine pursuit of writing a chapter on the history of American commercialism. In the same way that our masculine narrator seems to naturally possess a wonderfully astute understanding of the human condition, women, appear to him to enjoy this same natural ability when it comes to the "philosophy of clothes" (4). More importantly, he implies that a woman enjoys the unique ability to discern the "indescribably faint line" (4) between an individual's personal fashion choices and the content of their character. Thus, at the same time that the narrator deems discussions of clothes to be feminine talking points, and therefore, less than their masculine counterparts, he also assigns an intense significance to a person's clothes with its ability to reveal intimacies about the wearer's personality, mind, and character. The latter, in fact, draws the discussion of a seemingly "feminine pursuit" ever closer to his own occupation as a weaver of stories replete with characters and, of course, references to the clothes they wear.

Despite his claims that clothing discussions require a woman's talent, the narrator proves equally capable of making these assessments based on fashion in the novel's opening line:

"When Caroline Meeber boarded the afternoon train for Chicago, her total outfit consisted of a small trunk, a cheap imitation alligator-skin satchel, a small lunch in a paper box, and a yellow leather snap purse, containing her ticket, a scrap of paper with her sister's address in Van Buren

Street, and four dollars in money” (1). The masculine narrator seems to underscore Carrie’s vulnerability by inventorying the meager contents of “her total outfit”. Everything she carries with her is “small” or a mere “scrap” of something, and even his precision accounting for every last dollar in her purse highlights his subtle desire to show that the young girl is quite unprepared for what awaits her in the big city. Yet, interspersed among this matter-of-fact masculine reporting of Carrie’s character is the odd aside to the reader that her small trunk is but “a cheap imitation alligator-skin satchel” and nothing more. In this moment, the narrator effectively “outs” Carrie and her poor imitation of a much nicer item. It seems a strange comment to make for a masculine narrator who, later, will go to great lengths to demonstrate that he is above caring about such frivolous things as clothes. Yet, it is important because it shows he wants to highlight Carrie’s infatuation with fashion, even though she cannot afford the high-end stuff, and how it informs her characterization from the beginning to the very end. More importantly, in this moment it is the narrator, not Carrie herself, who calls attention to her unsuccessful attempts at being fashionable. While the narrator realizes it much earlier, Carrie only learns that she lacks truly fashionable things after walking the Chicago streets with the dapperly dressed Drouet. She notices that her clothes appear mostly “shabby” and “worn” (4) in comparison to other women’s. The fact remains that the narrator reveals himself to be a connoisseur of women’s fashion when he points out the protagonist’s imitation handbag, highlighting her “cheap” accessories and clothes in a way that, as he apparently believes, only a feminine voice can.

Blanche Gelfant in “What More Can Carrie Want? Naturalistic Ways of Consuming Women” maintains that Drieser’s novel contains a “deterministic structure of desire underlying naturalistic novels” (179) that first becomes visible when Carrie learns to study the “semiotics of clothes” (181). So, if according to Gelfant, clothes can serve as signs full of symbolic meaning

for a particular society, then the narrator genders this assertion in *Sister Carrie* when he claims in a masculine voice that only a *woman* could write the “complete philosophy of clothes” (Dreiser 4). This assertion reveals the narrator’s initial view that studying clothes requires a distinctly feminine perspective and confirms, within his own internal logic, that the narrator must slip into a feminine voice in order to accurately study, and eventually, critique Carrie’s fashion choices. While this slip remains unintentional in the sense that the masculine narrator, at other points in the novel, pointedly relegates topics like clothes to the distinct category of “women’s knowledge,” the adamancy with which he genders the topic makes the slip possible in the first place since the masculine narrator must give way to the feminine voice in order to adequately discuss city fashions. These slips out of masculine voicing thus hamper the narrative desire to reprimand Carrie for her naïve consumerist desire because the narrator has, in fact, joined his protagonist in her sartorial pursuits.

Just like fashion, the narrator’s treatment of love also leads to queer moments in the text that challenge his desire to use Carrie’s development as a cautionary tale. For example, in another narrative episode, the narrator appears feminine when describing the relationship between Carrie and her new love interest, Hurstwood. Focalized through Carrie, the narrator reflects on her initial meetings with Hurstwood:

There had been something so personal, so subtle, in each meeting between them, both when Drouet was present and when he was absent, that Carrie could not speak of it without feeling a sense of difficulty. She was no talker. She could never arrange her thoughts in fluent order. It was always a matter of feeling with her, strong and deep. Each time there had been no sentence of importance which she could relate, and as for the glances and sensations, what woman would reveal them. (84)

The narrator moves to an “interior” view in this moment, relating Carrie’s conscious reflections on the differences between the two men in her life and the way Hurstwood, in particular, makes her feel. According to Wayne Booth, in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, these “inside views” in

narration, for however long they might be sustained, “temporarily tur[n] the character whose mind is shown into a narrator” (164). Yet Dreiser’s narrator remains protective of his poetic domain. The repetition of the third person pronoun “she” and the unspoken but implied “thought” before the verb convey the meaning “She thought she was no talker,” even though the text reads “She was no talker” (Dreiser 84), the implied “thought” pulls the reader inside Carrie’s head. Moreover, Carrie’s belief that she could not arrange her thoughts about Hurstwood in logical order contrasts with the narrator who is able to recount that belief quite logically. Taken together, these aspects of the passage remind the reader that the masculine narrator still exists distinct from Carrie even during focalized, interior moments.

By examining the passage’s content, or what Carrie thinks through at this point, we see how the narrator actually takes the opportunity to point out here that a woman, particularly Carrie, typically “feels” rather than “talks” about a thing. While the masculine narrator proves himself an expert at “talking,” Carrie’s talents exist in her ability to *feel* things “strong and deep” (84). Moreover, her ability to feel so much is intimately connected to her still youthful mind at this point. In “Cuteness and Capitalism in *Sister Carrie*,” Charles Harmon asserts that Carrie “fulfills cultural standards for a kind of childlike, wistful, self-involved beauty commonly known as ‘cuteness’ or ‘girlishness’” (126). She reflects these qualities in the way she privileges feelings over reason, and provides further evidence that feeling language in the novel remains undoubtedly a feminine trait. The subtext here implies a hierarchy that separates the masculine narrator who can, for the most part, arrange his “thoughts in fluent order” (84), while describing the stolen glances passing between Carrie and Hurstwood, while the overly emotional female character can only experience these passions, since she seemingly lacks the intellectual maturity to think through and describe these feelings.

Yet, why would he feel the need to subtly remind the reader again that Carrie lacks certain cerebral and communicative abilities? Or, to ask it more bluntly, what is the narrator trying to prove? The masculine narrator works to mark his distance from Carrie at almost any opportunity in the text in order to position himself above her and her frivolous desires. The narrator pushes back against Carrie's "feeling" language in the passage above, but in the very next paragraph his own "feeling" language takes over: "People in general attach too much importance to words. They are under the illusion that talking effects great results. As a matter of fact, words are, as a rule, the shallowest portion of all the argument. They but dimly represent the great surging feelings and desires which lie behind. When the distraction of the tongue is removed, the heart listens" (84). Lacking the distinct "she" from the early passage, the narrator's "inside view" into Carrie's mind has passed, meaning *she* is not the one speaking here. When she claims that words are over-rated, the narrator manages to subvert his previous work to distance himself from Carrie. Here, the narrator's voice echoes Carrie's own, and "she" (the feminine narrator) constructs a new gendered hierarchy that values the heart over the mind. In fact, despite all the narrative "talk" in the novel, the narrator argues that words but "dimly represent the great surging feelings and desires which lie behind" (84). This slip from a masculine to feminine voice here not only establishes a substantive feminine presence in the novel, but it also shows a certain degree of vulnerability in the masculine narrator.

Up until now, I have distinguished between a masculine narrator and a feminine narrator while discussing voice in *Sister Carrie*. In order to discuss the fluctuations between these two types of narrative voices, it is necessary to treat them, for a time, as almost two separate entities at war with one another for complete control over the narrative voice. However, my central point remains that these two different gendered modes exist and shift within *one* narrative

voice—it is not two narrators (one masculine and one feminine) but rather the feminine emerging as part of the masculine and the masculine being part of the feminine. Yet, another layer of complexity emerges for the narrator when the reader realizes that while she notices these gendered shifts, the narrator remains unaware of them. For instance, if the narrator was aware of this feminine element, most likely he would attempt to disavow his feminine side and exaggerate his critique even more of all these things in the novel—fashion, consumerism, love, Carrie, etc. What we discover in *Sister Carrie* is that the masculine narrator's lengthy reflections on human nature are not a disavowal of this other gendered side because he operates under a peculiar unawareness of this side for most of the novel. Ultimately, the existence of the intrusive feminine voice gets in the way of the narrator accomplishing his initial goal from the beginning of the novel—to move the protagonist (or at least the reader) onto some productive path of development by rebuking consumerist impulses. The feminine narrative voice interacts in important ways with the two main kinds of active or productive plots in the text: the judging narrator and the developing Carrie, who just happens to change in ways the narrator does not like. The addition of the feminine voice that parallels Carrie's own beliefs and feelings—about love and fashion—counteracts the masculine narrator's active attempts to set Carrie on a path to either reform or penance, resulting in the narrator, and not Carrie herself, becoming the idle one in the story.

III.

If the narrator ever acknowledges the idleness that results from his intermingling of ostensibly masculine and feminine traits, then it does not necessarily get communicated directly through a kind of self-realization but through his description of Hurstwood's downfall. Just as

Murayama asserts that Dreiser only reveals the make-up of the major characters through the narrator's discussion of them, the narrator likewise requires these characters to mediate revelations about his own identity and function in the novel, particularly when they exceed what he would consider to be the comfortable parameters of normative masculinity. For as much as Carrie's actions seem to frustrate the narrator, he finds a kindred spirit in the character of Hurstwood who, as I will show, not only initially embodies the masculinity the narrator prizes but also performs a minor narrative function in the novel. In fact, at times Dreiser's narrator almost identifies himself with Hurstwood's nature while marking his stark opposition to the showy Drouet. Yet, as I contend, the narrator comes to realize his own fluctuating identity through Hurstwood's extinction—and Drouet and Carrie's survival. It becomes increasingly obvious that Hurstwood, who represents the masculine reason the narrator values so highly, meets what I consider an "idle" downfall when his story comes to resemble that of a fallen woman, abandoned, alone, and penniless in the city. Specifically in the death scene and the final pages of the novel, the narrator must contend with a male character's demise at the same time that he cannot quite find a way to successfully reprimand Carrie or Drouet for the way they have succeeded where Hurstwood has failed.

In the same way that Carrie idolizes Hurstwood after their first meeting, the narrator similarly characterizes Hurstwood and even likens him to a talented wordsmith and narrator in his own right: "Hurstwood was in his best form, as usual...It was surprising—the ease with which he conducted a conversation. He was like every man who has had the advantage of practice and knows he has sympathy. He knew that Carrie listened to him pleasurably...he fell into a train of observation which absorbed her fancy" (84). Like the narrator, Hurstwood easily captures his listener's attention when describing his observations of "men and pleasures,"

explaining to Carrie where he had been and what he had seen (84). Hurstwood seems to represent a particular city man that the narrator admires with his ability to be at “ease” and “in his best form” with everyone around him. As well, Hurstwood seems gifted with the talents of description, observation, and self-reflection, which serves him well in his interactions with others, especially women. If the narrator likens himself to any character in the novel, the link seems to be made with Hurstwood.

The narrator opposes this man to Drouet, a male figure whose survival the narrator does not anticipate, but who nevertheless proves upwardly mobile and enduring. When first introducing Drouet, the narrator, in one of his few direct addresses to the reader, states, “Lest this order of individual should permanently pass, let me put down some of the most striking characteristics of his most successful manner and method” (3). Clearly, and sarcastically, the narrator believes that Drouet, a man of this new generation of “drummers” and “mashers,” will in no way outlast the “stout constitution” (31) of a man like Hurstwood. Of course, Drouet thrives in the city. He remains unaffected by Carrie’s betrayal and abandonment and manages to adapt to society’s growing consumerism in a way that makes him only more successful. Dreiser reveals how the Drouets of the world do not pass away as the narrator hopes they will. This reversal of expectations leads the narrator to question the masculine self he has created and to begin to come to terms with his own identity. That is, if Drouet succeeds, then the narrator comes to realize how Hurstwood—and the masculinity he represents—fails, thus making it possible for the narrator to begin to realize how his own nature has been imbued with both the masculine and feminine attitudes he has sought to describe and oppose throughout the novel.

Hurstwood comes to represent a dying breed. Despite his initial success in Chicago, moving to New York brings about Hurstwood’s downfall. His inability to adapt to the new city

exemplifies the determinism at work in the naturalist novel. As Fisher explains, “The plot of decline characterizes many of the central novels of the last decades of the 19th century... Their essential matters are youth and age, freshness and exhaustion. Behind the plot of decline is the Darwinian description of struggle, survival, and extinction” (171). The second-half of the novel slowly builds toward Hurstwood’s death as it becomes an, almost, inevitable reality. The family man, once so successful in Chicago, cannot manage to make his way in New York. His narrative becomes one of decline when he cannot adapt and is exhausted by the thought of starting over with Carrie in the city. This inability to adapt also becomes the main reason he has to die by the novel’s end. When discussing selective adaptation and the growth of institutions among men, Veblen similarly employs the laws of Darwinian survival and extinction at work within social classes. He first defines social evolution as “a process of selective adaptation of temperament and habits of thought under the stress of the circumstances of associated life,” and then goes on to note that as a result of these adjustments “Not only have the habits of men changed...but these changing exigencies have also brought about a correlative change in human nature” (213). Veblen’s observations capture a significant underlying feature of Hurstwood’s decline. It is more than his inability to find steady work and live in the manner to which he was accustomed in Chicago that drives him to suicide. He remains incapable of changing his habits, and it is this allegiance to the old way of doing things that results in him being left behind as the city, and other men and women capable of change in it, continue to progress without him.

Paradoxically, the fact that Hurstwood clings to archaic or outdated thoughts and actions actually makes him prone to adopt an infatuation with material goods and high society just like Carrie. When his ruined reputation prevents him from finding stable work, rather than toiling

away at a more menial job,³⁶ he eventually gives up, resigning himself to extinction instead of survival at a lesser state. A manager in Chicago, he initially looks for similar work upon arriving in New York and, for a period of three years, manages to keep things on an even keel. The narrator explains that during this period,

Hurstwood had been moving along in an even path. There was no apparent slope downward, and distinctly none upward...But psychologically there was a change...This was in the mere matter of the halt his career had received when he departed from Chicago. A man's fortune or material progress is very much the same as his bodily growth. Either he is growing stronger, healthier, wiser, as the youth approaching manhood, or he is growing weaker, older, less incisive mentally, as the man approaching old age. There are no other states. (230)

As the narrator subtly reveals, idling does not exist as a viable option for a man's survival. For Hurstwood, there is really no such thing as staying in the same place on an "even path" while possessing the potential for backward or forward growth. For him, life must take place in one direction or the other. And so, a man like Hurstwood is always either developing or disintegrating, and in his case, the latter finishes him off.

When Hurstwood leaves his business and family behind in Chicago to go to New York, he not only ruins any respectable reputation he might have in the business world but also loses his position and purpose as a family and business man. In *The Fabric of American Literary Realism*, Babak Elahi explains, as a "robust, well-dressed, middle-class manager with a family and a house in Chicago's upwardly mobile North Side," Hurstwood is "a function of his material surroundings rather than those material surroundings being an expression of his identity (87). With the loss of the things that make him important, he finds himself in a new city without purpose. Rather than amend his former habits in an attempt to adapt to the verities of New York,

³⁶ Hurstwood does work for a time as a motorman, a position he distinctly feels is beneath him, operating the trolley cars during a strike (288), but he only comes by this work because the real workers are on strike, and he quits as soon as strike becomes violent.

Hurstwood clings to his routines tighter than ever before—attempting to get as close as he can to the kinds of people he enjoyed and spaces he moved in before. That is, he takes to sitting in the lobbies of fine hotels and watching people come and go, vicariously consuming upper-class luxuries while repressing thoughts and feelings about his current condition. “Sitting still and looking out, he could take some slight consolation in the few hundred dollars he had in his purse” (244). Eventually Hurstwood’s desire to sit in a hotel lobby somewhere overshadows any desire, or compulsion, to find work. The narrator candidly describes the character’s deep attachment to this small act of leisure when he observes, “Like the morphine fiend, he was becoming addicted to his ease” (257). While, for a time, he concerns himself with keeping up appearances, eventually Hurstwood stops caring how he looks to Carrie or anyone else in society, for that matter, and takes to wearing his old, tattered clothes all the time (255). Elahi describes the symbolic importance of clothes in Dreiser’s novel and especially how “the loss of clothing or its deterioration threatens to reduce characters literally to nothing” (83). As Elahi suggests, Hurstwood’s declining appearance parallels his descent into complete uselessness and inactivity. In a way, his apathy in no longer feeling the need to dress up and look nice reveals a deeper resistance to a consuming society’s expectations; however, at the same time, his refusal to participate in maintaining his “image” as someone who can actively participate in the consumer culture (a buy nice things) results in him becoming entirely disposable.

As the story goes on and Carrie gains more and more success on the stage, Hurstwood’s activity level decreases even more and in proportion to his dwindling funds. He transitions from a people-watcher or vicarious consumer, to a “consumed” vagrant, and finally to a suicide. When watching people in fancy hotels becomes too much for him, he rents a small room in a cheap hotel where he “saw a hot summer out and a cool fall in, reading” (322). By the time he

comes to the very end of his cash supply, he is living in the Bowery, sitting in a bare common room, where “his preference was to close his eyes and dream of other days, a habit which grew upon him” (323). Sitting still and alone with his eyes closed, he ultimately descends into a completely idle existence. While his addiction to this kind of idleness contributes to his downfall, it is not the only reason he takes his own life at the novel’s end, since suicide is, after all, a very pointed act. After declining to a beggar’s state, Hurstwood spends his last fifteen cents on a room in which to commit suicide. The narrator recounts his sad state, his “leisurely” removal of his clothes (352), and his final words—“What’s the use?” (353)—spoken to an empty room. Here, “use” remains the key word, since it is Hurstwood’s uselessness and being without a *use* in New York that have consequently led him to this pitiable state. Moreover, the question, posed to no one but himself, as he lays on his cot waiting for death, highlights his idleness even in the act of killing himself. He ties no noose, fires no gun, but rather remains completely at rest and breathes himself to death (353).

Following Hurstwood’s death, the narrator seems to be the only one to mourn the loss of this man, so like himself, further illuminating the obscurity into which Hurstwood has fallen. While in his case, idleness leads to this “idle death,” his almost anonymous position at the novel’s end strangely mirrors the typical position of a fallen woman in many a nineteenth-century novel. For example, the protagonist in Stephen Crane’s *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1894) lusts after a man, gives up everything for him, is eventually abandoned by her lover and family and forced to recede into the shadows of the city and become a prostitute where she eventually dies down by the riverside. Whether she is murdered by one of her male clients or kills herself is never made clear in the text, since she even goes unnamed in the final passage of the book (77). Referred to by the narrator merely as “A girl of the painted cohorts of the city”

(76), a fallen woman, she dies a death of obscurity. Like Crane's Maggie, Hurstwood, after being "abandoned" by Carrie sinks into the obscurity of poverty and dies an anonymous man—known only by the narrator himself. The narrator remains deeply affected by the character's death, especially in the face of his protagonist's wanton success. He takes the opportunity to implicitly compare Hurstwood's destitute condition to Carrie's lavish excess, making sure to note that while she now had all of the dresses, money, furniture, and goods she could ever want, "of Hurstwood's death she was not even aware" (353-54). And, as the only one to "see" the "nameless body [carried] to the Potter's field" (354), he remains the once great man's sole mourner.

It is almost as if the narrator wishes the reader to grieve with him by subtly crafting so many parallels between Hurstwood's pitiable death and that of the fallen woman. There can be no doubt that Carrie, on the surface, seems to possess far greater potential than Hurstwood to become a fallen woman. As Marsha S. Moyer maintains there is a "close approximation to prostitution that Carrie represented...[and] The use of a young female to represent a search for the good life in a big city both confounds and clarifies the relationship between sex and class issues" (51). Yet, Carrie chooses to "live an unrepentant, sexually free single life" (51), and unlike the unfortunate Maggie, goes unpunished for it. Instead, Hurstwood is the one to die a lonely, and presumably unhappy, death while the famous, successful Carrie lives on. By highlighting Carrie's rise to fame at the same time that he reminds the readers of Hurstwood's steep decline and unacknowledged death, the narrator reveals two conflicting attitudes toward his protagonist. On the one hand, the masculine narrator makes every effort to make sure the reader knows that even though Carrie is still a collector of things, valuing feeling and wants above everything and everyone else, she is most definitely "unhappy" (354). On the other hand,

Hurstwood's rise-and-fall acts out the conclusion that the narrator initially anticipated for the heroine, thus leaving her free to enjoy a "happy" ending made possible by the consumerist desires that also entice the narrator.

If the man most like the narrator has died, and if the protagonist the narrator judges most severely for her materialist impulses has survived, what does this mean for the narrator who "survives" the novel alongside her? Similar to the reader's own ability to track the narrator's slips between masculine and feminine voice, she must recognize that the narrator charts Hurstwood's extinction and decline at the same time that he grapples with his own participation in the kind of conspicuous consumption that brings about Carrie's success and survival. By telling Hurstwood's story and, more so, by reveling in Carrie's unhappiness in the novel's final pages, the narrator becomes aware of his feminine voice through the story he tells. The narrator's abstraction and empathy suggest his awareness of his own implication in the frivolous society that he has critiqued throughout the novel. Instead of solely discussing Carrie, the narrator refers also to an abstract mankind that no longer differs from her. Unlike previous passages on human nature that separate her from "reasonable" man, his final cries "Oh, the tangle of human life!" (353) and "Oh, Carrie, Carrie! Oh, blind strivings of the human heart!" (354) universalize Carrie's struggle. So, if Carrie is no longer distinct from "mankind," and if throughout the novel the narrator has identified himself with that same abstraction, then he necessarily includes himself in his exclamation about "human life" and the "human heart." He maintains the old binary of thinking and feeling when talking about Carrie's dissatisfaction, declaring that "she was now an illustration of the devious ways by which one who feels, rather than reasons, may be led in the pursuit of beauty" (354). Yet, while this statement reads as if little has changed between the narrator and Carrie, just one page prior he has claimed that "in life

there is ever the intellectual and the emotional nature—the mind that reasons, and the mind that feels” (353). Statesman and politicians make up the former and “poets and dreamers” the latter but all are “artists”; and, after all, the narrator is far closer to a poet than he is a general, and Carrie is clearly a dreamer, making them both artists with emotional natures. Thus, the narrator who has admonished Carrie throughout the novel now finds common ground, realizing that he too has been caught up in the city’s “cunning wiles” (1). Therefore he drastically changes his tone from rebuke to understanding and even admiration for a protagonist who has taken New York City by storm. The novel does use masculinity and femininity as gendered markers for certain intellectual abilities and behaviors—such as reason and emotion, resistance and vulnerability—that are not restricted to either gender. However, none of these abilities seem to compare to the despair that an idle existence can bring in comparison to the powerful desire of a female protagonist who never has to change who she is in order to make her own way in the city.

In 1896, four years before the publication of *Sister Carrie*, Theodore Dreiser reflected on the draw of the American city. He states:

To go to the city is the changeless desire of the mind...The desire to attend and be part of the great current of city life is one that seldom bases itself upon well mastered reasons...Men do not ask themselves whether once in the great city its wonders will profit them any. They do not stop to consider whether the great flood will catch them up and whirl them on helpless and unheeded. They never consider that the life, and dash and fire of metropolitan life is based on something and not a mere exotic sprung from nothing and living on air...All is not gold that flitters, nor will anything that delights your fancy give you food. Certainly the city glitters, but it is not always your gold. (399-400)

The city attracts people because it promises the individual an opportunity to be part of something bigger than himself. New York, in particular, seems to promise hope, possibility, opportunity, optimism, and more than anything, progress. Yet, Dreiser seems to see beyond the city’s seductive pull for what it can really mean for its inhabitants. Although here he seems focused on how the city is “not always your gold,” for the materialistic Carrie, the outcome is very different

when she finds all the ways it can be for her. Similar to Dreiser in this passage, the narrator remains reserved toward and judgmental of this capitalistic mindset that overtakes his protagonist. For Dreiser's narrator, neither the city nor his female protagonist is exactly what he hoped they would be. Since he too gets pulled in by the seductiveness that he believes has trapped Carrie, the narrator ultimately realizes that his own city narrative in some ways glitters falsely because it cannot make good on its promises of development. The change in the narrator's tone is so pronounced in the novel's final pages that it is clear he can no longer fault Carrie for her lack of development anymore than he faults himself for being equally susceptible: "if the drag to follow beauty be such that one abandons the admired way, taking rather the despised path leading to her dreams quickly, who shall cast the first stone?" (354). In a final act, the narrator notes that his protagonist will be destined to remain in this suspended state: "Know, then, that for you is neither surfeit nor content. In your rocking-chair, by your window dreaming, shall you long, alone. In your rocking-chair, by your window, shall you dream such happiness as you may never feel" (355). The repetition reflects Carrie's unchanging state and underscores her inability to ever become more or less than who she is, and really always has been, in that moment. Similarly, the passage reflects the narrator's own inability to change despite his numerous failed attempts to set the narrative on a productive path. He still tries one last time to cast a shadow of unhappiness and foreboding over Carrie. Carrie's sins go unpunished, her lessons remained unlearned, and despite the narrator's fervent attempts in the novel's final pages, there is no remorse. In a city that changes, Carrie has managed to change with it, to make an art of idleness, an art that through slippages between feminine and masculine voice also leads Dreiser's narrator to idle despite his best intentions.

CONCLUSION

In his chapter on “The Symbolic Times of Cities,” from his landmark study *Images of the American City*, Anselm Strauss begins by asserting that representations of urban space and place depend upon a tri-partite temporal structure. He argues:

When anyone attempts to represent what a city is, he almost inevitably begins to interpret also what the city has been in the past and will be in the future. Thought and speech about cities are replete with temporal imagery. Cities and their citizens can be, and often are, represented as oriented toward the past, the present, or the future...An American vocabulary of urbanism is likely to be oriented toward the future, since the nation at large is committed to notions of progress; concepts of frontier and regional past are deeply embedded in urban imagery, too...Not all cities have borne out their early promises of greatness. (18-19)

Strauss differentiates the American city from others in the way that it always points toward the future or some concept of modernity. For him, American urbanism remains inextricably related to progress and forward movement. Throughout the nineteenth century, American cities had their own “coming-of-age” and served as privileged sites of progress, always promising new hope, possibilities, and opportunities. In reflecting on this temporal arc from past and present to future, Strauss also shows how cities often come to resemble people. For instance, when coupling “Cities and their citizens,” he identifies a subtle link between urban places and their inhabitants; similarly, if cities exist according to a past, present, and future structure, then they too possess the ability to grow, change, and develop. More importantly, like people, cities can also fail to develop, resist change, and as a result never quite reach their full potential and meet “their early promises of greatness.” By aligning the city not just with all humanity, or Strauss’s implied masculine “citizen”, but specifically with its female inhabitants, we see the ways urbanism is not always oriented toward progress in nineteenth-century American literature.

While progress depends on representations of the past and present in Strauss’s analysis, throughout this project I have shown how idleness also depends on the times outside of futurity

and the spaces beyond the city. Idleness is not always unproductive, and it is not always useless, especially when it offers ways to rethink Strauss's future-oriented advancement in narratives of non-development and to understand female experience in the nineteenth century. In Chapter One, I opened with Sedgwick's only city novel in order to focus on the central role urban life plays for the central protagonist. Focusing on the relationship between the city and what Strauss might refer to as the "regional past" of the country, Sedgwick highlights the corrupting ills of urban life and reveals the ways an adolescence spent in a rural setting gives Gertrude the skills and knowledge she needs to cope with the consuming culture running rampant in New York. Guided by her father's careful instruction, the protagonist develops into a reasonable, economical, and heroic woman. She puts herself in danger to save her friends, uses her wealth and power for just purposes, and pursues a suitor with the potential to be her partner rather than her protector. Yet, for all the ways Gertrude manages to be productive, her promising plot of development ultimately stalls out in the city when her new husband takes her place as "heir" and her father's partner. At the most pivotal moment in the chapter, I argued that, consequently, Gertrude's progress and each step she takes toward her future merely bring her closer to an idle position once she has been employed as a means to reestablish the lines of patriarchal power. She becomes the kind of woman no one expected her to be, as she stands silently by while the men in her life decide her future. Near the end, I examined the way she writes long letters to friends where her only topic of conversation are how she has decorated her husband's new house and the great variety of society they keep in the city.

In the next chapter, I turned to Fern's suspension of the sentimental plot in *Ruth Hall*. I discussed Ruth's indifference to development as a result of having achieved the milestones of marriage and motherhood only to have that reality stripped away from her when she is forced to

start over in the city. Adapting to her penniless life as a widow with two small children, Ruth's industriousness and ability to work her way up remains unparalleled when she achieves success as a pseudonymous newspaper writer. Although "Floy" comes to represent both the autonomy Ruth now possesses and success borne out of sentimental fiction and romantic plots that end happily and satisfy her readers, she nonetheless remains seemingly apathetic toward her current state of life. The novel ends with the hint of an impending romantic match between her and her editor, but she neither seeks to secure this marital union or fight to maintain her current autonomy and financial independence. If anything, Ruth has learned that all potential paths of development must eventually come to an end, and she appears content to wait and accept without complaint the things that come her way.

Whereas in the second chapter, I ended by showing how the riddle of Ruth's identity—foregrounded in her pseudonymous writing—leaves her stranded between two possible plots of development, in Chapter 3 I turned to a character who not only is compelled to wait but does so in ways that force the *Bildungsroman* to become at times quite dull and boring. In this chapter, I began with the quizzical fact that halfway through writing *The Portrait of a Lady*, an intimate and dynamic depiction of the protagonist Isabel Archer, James set aside that narrative in order to begin and finish *Washington Square*. This novel, about a protagonist, Catherine Sloper, whose father and narrator believe her to be devoid of nearly any and all compelling qualities, offers readers a far more thrilling portrait of an evolving New York City. In fact, the narrator appears far more invested in the city's changing nature than he ever seems in Catherine's unchanging one. The plot draws a rather intimate circle around its four central figures (Catherine, her father, her aunt, and her suitor) and explores the intricacies of the overlapping relationships and animosities between these figures. Pursued by a man who only wants her fortune and

encouraged by an aunt who only wants some drama in her life, Catherine must continually delay the requests made by those around her to *do* something. When her father requests her assurance that she will never marry Morris, Catherine never makes such a promise but neither does she disobey his wishes in his lifetime or hers and marry the man outright. While her aunt tries to help the plot along by encouraging Morris's affections and nudging Catherine toward mutiny, her inconsistent advice only really serves to urge her niece to *do* something. I claimed that the narrator similarly finds Catherine's continued inaction frustrating and thus, for a time, allows the city to take her place as the more compelling feature of the novel; however, James's own anxieties over his changing city ultimately result in an inconsistent portrayal of Old New York in comparison to the new. Not only does the change-less protagonist come to represent the fundamental problems with the ever-changing new New York, but she also spells problems for the older kind of city that the narrator and James seeks to nostalgically memorialize and celebrate.

Finally, turning to Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, I examined idleness in a way that connects both the narrator and the female protagonist whose story he wishes he could control better than he does. Here, Dreiser's narrator struggles against the vapid, consumerist fantasies of the young Carrie Meeber. Recently arrived in Chicago, she toils only briefly as a working girl before ascending the social ladder as a result of her romantic entanglements with well-to-do men. She eventually finds herself in New York City with Hurstwood, who gave up his entire life in Chicago in order to kidnap Carrie and run away with her. Without money, reputation, or connections, Hurstwood begins to waste away in the new city, while Carrie finds a way to thrive. Although the narrator does his best to critique Carrie's quest for fame and fortune, believing that these base desires cannot make her happy, she continues to be upwardly mobile throughout the

novel, while Hurstwood eventually sinks so low as to take his own life. As a result, I showed how Hurstwood's death and Carrie's success forced the narrator to come to terms with his own shallow desires for the things that glitter in the city. Although the narrator initially aligned himself more with Hurstwood than Carrie, by the story's end, only the narrator and Carrie remain meaning that he is more like his female protagonist than he would have hoped. In this way, the narrator initially sets out to construct a cautionary tale about materialistic desires and promiscuity only to find himself ensnared by the same kinds of impulses that he rails against in his moralizing account of the protagonist. As a result, the novel closes with a final picture of Carrie's idle nature, which allows her to be both "disillusioned" and yet "still waiting for that halcyon day when she should be led forth among dreams become real" (354). She manages to embody these contrasting attitudes in her idle state, never once moved to give herself over to either of them in the same way the narrator moves between both masculine and feminine voice, never quite managing to reform his protagonist despite all his efforts.

These female protagonists subvert expectations of growth and development in the way their stories offer alternative narratives to female development in the nineteenth century. They may grow and develop for a time, but ultimately, they find themselves in idle positions in the way they become unimportant or indifferent or remain unchanging and unapologetic. When discussing the city's impact on the history of American women, Christine Stansell affirms, "It led women astray; then again, it made something new of the ones who had gone bad. It was a place where the dialectic of female vice and female virtue was volatile; where, in the ebb and flow of large oppressions and small freedoms, poor women traced out unforeseen possibilities for their sex" (221). Nineteenth-century American city novels are rife with examples of female characters exploring these "unforeseen possibilities" for women in the city. Often their

narratives fall into a success or ruin structure, where female characters are expected to do one or the other; however, something intriguing remains in the stories where women do not follow one of these two paths laid out for them. Often these female characters manage to become stationary, almost fixed, points amidst the changing city. More so, they counterintuitively reflect the city, embodying urban anxieties about the crisis of an individual's progress within it.

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