FIGURING WOMEN'S WORK:
THE CULTURAL PRODUCTION OF CARE AND LABOR
IN THE INDUSTRIAL U.S.

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ABSTRACT

Scholars conventionally begin their investigation of U.S. labor history with industrialization, focusing on forms of industrial labor, union organization, and labor legislation, to the exclusion of work performed in the "private sphere": domestic, service, and care labor. But by presuming that these forms of "women's work" were outside the market and the interests of labor, scholars obscure a vast array of historical possibilities that precede our present economic and social order. This dissertation reads against this prevailing tendency in labor and working-class studies to pose the question: what if the antecedents of our present culture and economy may be found not merely in the industrial past, but in the nineteenth-century home? After all, whether in the gig and service economies, or in white-collar workplaces, the vast majority of working people now engage in some form of service, care, and affective labor. *Figuring Women's Work* seeks to denaturalize our relationship to work, revealing that labor is a historically contingent political concept in order to expand the scope of what counts as work and open further lines of inquiry into both working-class studies and U.S. literary and cultural studies.

To pursue its hypothesis, this dissertation performs a genealogical investigation of service labor, beginning in the antebellum period when housewives and their servants struggled over the meaning of domestic labor in a slaveholding republic, and continuing through the early twentieth century as forms of women's work were commercialized in the public sphere. In this context, social anxieties about the relationship among gender, race, economic dependency, and labor were articulated in literary forms like the seduction novel and servants' tale, by leaders of social movements, and in legal battles that sought to distinguish market from domestic relations. These social tensions, each chapter argues, found symbolic resolution in the cultural idealization of a figure of

labor—whether the celebration of the housewife as a pillar of democratic society, the Mammy as a selfless caregiver, the "office wife" as a model of industriousness and accommodation, or the sweated immigrant homeworker as a pitiable and romantic object of the philanthropic housewife's charity. Reading literature written by working women, including Catharine Beecher, Harriet Jacobs, Harriet Wilson, Willa Cather, Anzia Yezierska, and Alice Childress, I demonstrate how the figures of women's work were forged in relation to each other in order to apprehend the elaborate and racially segregated system of women workers engaged in the labor of social reproduction.

Whereas conventional approaches to labor treat domestic work and service as "invisible," *Figuring Women's Work* argues instead that the domestic labor relations that emerged in the antebellum home were described by a metaphorics of kinship, modeled on the myth of the "plantation family" that figured master and slave as parent and child. Within the cultural mythology that developed, housewives were imagined as "second mothers" to their childlike, foreign, and racialized charges, in a relationship of mutual obligation and affection. Even as women's work was commercialized, and the labor of social reproduction was increasingly performed outside of the home, the notion that women should perform out of a sense of duty to others, rather than in pursuit of economic self-interest, persisted. The metaphorics of kinship, the idea that workers should see themselves as a "part of the family" was adapted to public workplaces like offices, businesses, and retailers. Now, a century later, the cultural imperative to perform an affect of "self-denying benevolence," a demand first issued by nineteenth-century housewives to their slaves and servants, is widely felt by working people across industries and classes who, dominant cultural ideologies suggest, should labor out of "love" and love to labor.

For my family

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INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS WOMEN'S WORK?

> She was, by white standards, a kind person, but by our standards she was not a person at all because there was no way of knowing what kind of a person she was on her own. We never really talked about that whole business. If we talked about it she would have had to face the truth about the thing. Most people who have worked in service have to learn to talk at great length about nothing.
>
> — Hannah Nelson, *Drylongso: A Self-Portrait of Black America*

This is a project about the ideas, duties, and figures of labor conjured by the term "women's work." A concept that emerged in the early nineteenth century to distinguish feminine acts of care from masculine acts of labor, the term is, at once, an historical relic and a persistently influential ideology that has had the effect, scholars argue, of rendering feminized forms of labor "invisible." While scholars generally use the metaphor of invisibility to describe the exclusion of women's work from the market, or even the "immaterial" components that domestic and service work entail, domestic worker Hannah Nelson alludes to an additional possibility. The domestic scene of women's work, she tells anthropologist John Gwaltney in 1980, is characterized by the absence of persons and the emptiness of speech—persons who are "not persons at all," and conversations about "nothing." It is a scene in which both housewife and domestic, for different reasons and to different effects, sustain performances of self-effacement that conceal the "truth" behind "the whole business." The discussion that follows suggests that the invisibility of women's work is, therefore, not merely a consequence of the historical exclusion of care from the formal economy, nor the lack of social recognition

and stigma that have come to be associated with care and servility. Rather, I argue that the invisibility of women's work is achieved through its cultural production as an act of love and affective performance of what nineteenth-century domestic educator Catharine Beecher described as "self-denying benevolence" (*Letters* 75).

Figuring Women's Work recovers the literary and cultural texts that engaged in the production of women's work as a feminized act of care and self-effacement, those which participated in the cultural and political struggle to wrest notions of private and public, domestic and industrial, care and labor, as it occurred in industrial-era legal discourses, literature, and social movements. The chapters that follow situate literature written by working women, such as Harriet Jacobs, Harriet Wilson, Willa Cather, and Anzia Yezierska, in relation to a wide range of cultural artifacts such as congressional hearings and legal treatises; early sociological studies; campaigns, speeches, and literature of social movements; and the print culture of working women themselves, including stenography magazines and dime novels. In my reading of these texts, I consider not only how scenes of work and acts of labor are represented, but also how the form of the texts performs and parodies the deference and self-effacement expected of women workers that are differently positioned within the home and workplace. These readings demonstrate how prevailing notions of women's work informed the production of the literature itself, decisively shaping women writers' relationship to self-representation. Such a perspective hopes to introduce labor as a category for analysis by U.S. literary and cultural studies scholars, demonstrating how it has shaped both the material conditions of many contemporary forms of work, as well as scholarly assumptions about the relationship among writers, literature, and critics.

By reconstructing the cultural processes by which women's work was reframed as an act of care, *Figuring Women's Work* revises traditional approaches to the culture of labor. A vast body of scholarship has studied the nineteenth-century "cult of domesticity" that gave rise to the figure of the housewife and the metaphor of the "separate spheres," uncovering a set of social practices and an archive of cultural materials produced by and for women readers.[1] However, in approaching the domestic and care work involved in "True Womanhood" as a performance of gender and class, scholars take historical actors and texts at their word, perceiving the home as a space of leisure as opposed to labor, the work performed therein as "non-work" that occurs outside the market. U.S. literary and cultural studies of labor, too, have generally maintained the distinction between the private and public spheres, focusing primarily on the culture of labor that developed in the context of radical movements, and placing particular emphasis the forms of proletarian literature that circulated in the 1930s following the Great Depression. By approaching labor as a material act with transhistorical meaning, as opposed to a political concept and social construct borne of specific historical conditions, scholars risk naturalizing the cultural invention of the separate spheres. This elision not only has implications for our study of the past, but also in our approach to present forms of work. Although many contemporary studies of labor gesture towards the relationship between

[1] See studies such as: Nina Baym, *Woman's Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978); Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American* Culture (New York: Doubleday, 1988); Mary Kelley, *Private Women, Public Stage* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); Lora Romero, *Home Fronts: Domesticity and Its Critics in the Antebellum US.* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); Mary Ryan, *The Empire of the Mother* (New York: Harrington Press, 1985); Shirley Samuels, ed., *The Culture of Sentiment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Catharine Beecher* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973); Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

domestic labor and forms of service work, the study of service labor remains largely disconnected from historically unpaid forms of women's work. Effacing the domestic sphere as a site of labor, scholars treat the contemporary service economy as a new and unique phenomenon, as opposed to an iteration of a social and economic system that requires both labor and care.

Figuring Women's Work reads against these tendencies by applying a Marxist feminist theoretical framework of "social reproduction" to the study of U.S. literature and culture. According to this theory, capitalist society is sustained not only by "productive" forms of work, those which appear to directly contribute to the production of profit such as industrial labor, but also by the "reproductive labor" which sustains human life. This work might include cooking, cleaning, caring, and teaching, what scholars describe as "activities and attitudes, behaviors and emotions, and responsibilities and relationships directly involved in maintaining life, on a daily basis and intergenerationally."[2] Within this framework, the home can be apprehended as a space in which labor is performed and where labor relations distribute duties among working women. Moreover, it changes how we conceptualize and draw boundaries between labor not on the basis of *where and how*

[2] Quoted by Tithi Bhattacharya in her introduction to the 2017 collection, *Social Reproduction Theory,* this definition comes from Johanna Brenner and Barbara Laslett, whose essay distinguishes social reproduction from societal reproduction. The latter term they use to refer to Marx's notion of social reproduction, what he describes as the labor involved in the reproduction of the capitalist system as a whole. Contemporary feminist scholars have reclaimed the term social reproduction from Marxist theory to name both material and immaterial forms of labor that have come to be associated with women. Bhattacharya explains that social reproduction theory "displays an analytical irreverence to 'visible facts' and privileges 'process' instead. It is an approach that is not content to accept what seems like a visible, finished entity—in this case, our worker at the gates of her workplace— but interrogates the complex network of social processes and human relations that produces the conditions of existence for that entity" (2). *Figuring Women's Work* proceeds in this spirit, with the aim of uncovering the processes by which the material acts involved in creating profit and sustaining life become visible as either labor or care. Brenner and Laslett, "Gender, Social Reproduction, and Women's Self Organization: Considering the US Welfare State," *Gender & Society*, vol. 5, no. 3., 1991: 314.

it occurs, but on the basis of the *function* it serves. The labor of social reproduction occurs not only in the home, but in the public sphere as well, where it is shared among a range of workers, as in the case of service sector labor. In fact, many argue that the service labor should be understood as commercialized forms of the work formerly performed in the home.[3] In order to challenge the prevailing definitions of labor that have limited our study of women's work, therefore, my project begins its investigation in the context of early industrial capitalism when the distinction between productive and reproductive forms of labor initially emerged. Accordingly, I treat cultural and literary texts not as descriptive of women's work, but as actively participating in what Nancy Fraser describes as the "boundary struggle" ("Crisis of Care?" 25) to wrest public from private, work from home, and labor from care. Instead of distinguishing between paid and unpaid forms of women's work, I aim to show that the boundary between home and work is ever unstable by drawing out the continuities between the cultural production of figures like the unpaid housewife and the personal secretary, the enslaved Mammy and the domestic day worker. This approach reads labor not as a material act with self-evident meaning, but as a category made possible through the exclusion and suppression of alternatives, a social construct that undergoes transformations in relation to the broader social and economic contexts in which it is forged.

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[3] Silvia Federici's work is among the most influential here. In her essay, "The Reproduction of Labor Power in the Global Economy," explains: "rather than being technologized, housework has been redistributed on the shoulders of different subjects, through its commercialization and globalization. As it is well documented, owing to women's increased participation in the wage labor force, especially in the North, large quotas of housework have been taken out of the home and reorganized on a commercial basis, leading to the virtual boom of the service industry, which now constitutes the dominant economic sector from the viewpoint of wage employment. This means that more meals eaten out of the home, more clothes are washed in laundromats or by dry-cleaners, more food is bought already prepared for consumption" (*Revolution at Point Zero*, 107).

Scholars have insightfully observed the ways that early forms of women's work were given social meaning through cultural practices, arguing, for instance, that the cult of domesticity effaced housework as labor, reconceptualizing it as an "emanation of Woman," (Boydston 149) or that domestic service was symbolically racialized because of its apparent relationship to slavery. Likewise, scholarship has analyzed the ways that the clerical work was feminized in narrative forms featuring stenographers and secretaries, and how sweated labor was foreignized by sociological studies of tenement districts. However, most investigations of the cultural rendering of women's work focus on a single occupation, abstracting one form of reproductive labor from the broader economic and social network in which it occurred. As a result, forms of labor like clerical work, which was historically performed by white women, have been treated in absence of any consideration of their relationship to the social category of race. Moreover, scholars have not fully considered how the earliest distinctions between home and the industrial market were forged in the context of slavery, a political and economic system that offered a contemporaneous method of organizing reproductive and productive labor—through bondage, rape, the denial of parental rights, and the commodification of gestational labor. Unstudied, then, is the figurative relationship between the housewife, the bondwoman, and the domestic servant. My project demonstrates that the presence of slavery supplied imaginative fodder for housewives, and that the plantation system and slave economy offered a foil against which the "free market" was distinguished. David Roediger's *Wages of Whiteness* has persuasively shown that an emergent industrial working-class mobilized racial ideology to claim the title of "free labor," a category constructed in opposition to slavery, through the invention of whiteness. *Figuring Women's Work* aims

to uncover the implications that this development had on feminized forms of labor and workers of the serving classes, those who stood in uncertain relation to both the concept of free labor and slavery.

This approach to the study of literature, culture, and labor revises critical understandings of the relationship between class, gender, race, and cultural production, offering a new perspective on how definitions of work mediate the relationship between private identities and public representation. I argue that by figuring women's work as a performance of affective and emotional labor, the culture of domesticity and industrial-era racial discourses rendered reproductive labor an expression of one's gendered, raced, and classed body, making one's "place" in capitalist society an inherent part of their social identity. The metaphors of kinship, the language of love and affection, that described the relationship among housewives and their servants, constrained women's public representation. Nineteenth-century social anxieties about racialization, as well as the sexualization and degradation associated with Black women's laboring bodies found narrative resolution in the "sisterly" relationship between the figure of the chaste and queenly housewife and the contented, selfless Mammy. Women workers involved in social reproductive labor thereafter, such as the secretary, industrial pieceworker, and domestic day worker, negotiated the threat of racialization, sexualization, and proletarianization differently. While secretaries rendered clerical labor as professional and appropriately feminine, adapting the tenets of domesticity to develop a bourgeois professional culture that transcends crude market forces, domestic day workers and immigrant seamstresses were rendered as victims of their need to work. The cultural production of these figures, together, naturalized a sexual division of labor and the

racialization of forms of service labor that have been reproduced in new forms in contemporary society. This historical development has also had the effect of naturalizing a bourgeois aesthetic preference for those forms of artistic and literary work that best conceal the conditions of their production and appear to emanate from the artist, abstracted from the corrupting forces of the market. The classed distinction between high and low culture is, in other words, borne of a set of assumptions about the distinction between labor and care, and the value of women's work.[4]

Towards a Genealogical Approach to Affective Labor

When she coined the term "emotional labor" in 1983, sociologist Arlie Hochschild sought to give a name to the unrecognized labor that workers perform in order to, she writes, "sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others" (*The Managed Heart* 20). The now-ubiquitous demand that workers strategically suppress or perform aspects of their "individuality" and emotions to accommodate and make comfortable their customers, bosses, or co-workers has come to be known as the

[4] My understanding of the relationship between the social structures that sustain class differences and cultural aesthetics is informed by Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural production. Bourdieu argues that the field of cultural production is structured by an opposition between the field of "restricted production," which is valued by a "taste of distinction," and a field of "large-scale production" which is valued by a "taste of necessity." Critic Randal Johnson summarizes Bourdieu's theory: "Taste of distinction, of which artistic competence and the aesthetic disposition are part, implies freedom from economic necessity, the ability to keep necessity at arm's length, and permits the distant and detached relationship to works of art required by a pure aesthetic. The submission to necessity by those less endowed with cultural and economic capital corresponds, on the other hand, to a more functional and pragmatic aesthetic based on the schemes of perception of everyday life and the gratuitousness of formal experimentation" (24). While Bourdieu believes that the field of cultural production operates according to a logic that is the "inverse" of capitalist economics, *Figuring Women's Work* suggests that it might operate according to the logic of social reproduction. Just as literary and cultural critics have historically esteemed works of pure aesthetic, so too have housewives, customers, and bosses valued the convincing performing of a "labor of love," and "conversations about nothing."

"feminization" of labor, a process which occurred with the expansion of the service economy in the latter half of the twentieth century. It is no wonder that Hochschild's term has undergone what was recently called in *The Atlantic* a "concept creep," the expansion of the definition to include everything from everyday housework to the maintenance of romantic relationships, since it so aptly names the experience of women who, in professional, private, and public contexts, navigate the twin forces of patriarchal and capitalist structures which rely on their exploitation (Beck). And although Hochschild is avowedly "horrified" by the development of her original definition, the usefulness of this term for apprehending the experiences of women not just in the world of paid work, but in their homes, with their partners and families, gives one pause. It points to a felt relationship between the unpaid labor that women as wives and mothers do at home, and the paid labor that these same women do in public. More than an experiential affinity, the relationship between housewifery and paid emotional labor has historical and theoretical grounding: as feminist scholars have long argued, service sector labor might be best understood as a commercialized form of the domestic labor historically performed by housewives and their servants. What Hochschild points to as a relatively contemporary phenomenon that occurs in the "sphere of the workplace," (Beck) in other words, has historical antecedents in the home.

This is nowhere more evident than in the writing of Catharine Beecher, self-proclaimed expert in home economics and Anglo-American domesticity. In her 1842 *Letters to Persons who are Engaged in Domestic Service*, she details, from the perspective of housewives, the labor required of domestic servants in the antebellum period. As with the flight attendants that Hochschild takes as her example, Beecher's

domestics engage in physical, mental, and even, emotional labor, asked to "accommodate, and to govern her temper and her tongue," to "give up her own ease and time to promote the comfort of others" (*Letters* 75). Domestic servants were paid a scant wage for their accommodating attitude, but the real meaningfulness of the work, by Beecher's account, lies in that it is the "best training possible" for becoming a wife and mother. Beecher not only recognizes but incentivizes the felt relationship between women's paid and unpaid labor, claiming domestic service as pathway to social elevation and cultural status of housewifery. As more and more white women abandoned domestic service, Beecher's *Letters* offered this incentive to justify what was increasingly perceived as undesirable: working in a sphere governed by patriarchal authority. Such a historical example unsettles present ideas about women's role as self-sacrificing mother and accommodating worker. It points us to a diffuse set of historical possibilities and trajectories which defy the explanatory power of the binaries which divide paid from unpaid, productive from reproductive, and masculinized from feminized forms of labor. Not only does it suggest that women have long been paid to perform emotional labor, but also that the expansion of the service sector was not merely the unidirectional move of domestic labor from private to public. More aptly, this economic and cultural transformation may be understood as the expanded use of what I call "domestic labor relations" in formal economies, albeit in adjusted form. It is not only that the care work, housework, and social reproductive responsibilities of housewives are commercialized in the service sector economy, but that the labor relation between housewife and servant is reproduced among workers, employers, and customers in new forms.

The discursive continuities that we may observe between Hochschild's definition of emotional labor, and Beecher's demands of a good domestic servant refute prevailing accounts of the economic restructuring that has occurred in the context of late capitalism and globalization. In general, sociologists and labor historians have approached contemporary forms of work as unique phenomena, the result of the dissolution between the boundary that has historically distinguished productive from reproductive forms of labor. Hardt and Negri's *Empire,* for instance, makes such a claim as they advance a theory of affective labor that locates utopian potential in the production of social networks and forms of community, assuming that this reproductive labor is free from alienation and domination. But recent studies of domesticity and empire suggest instead that the domestic sphere, although ostensibly shielded from the sphere of the political, was deeply implicated in the processes of colonialism and imperialism. Amy Kaplan, for example, has shown that the discourse of domesticity that emerged in the antebellum era operated according to an imperial logic, circumscribing the borders between "civilized" and "foreign," and containing the foreign and "savage" within the borders of the home. Kaplan locates the designs of U.S. imperialism in the home where a classificatory system marked the "borders between the civilized and savage" (201). And Laura Wexler has drawn insightful connections between the domestic visions featured in antebellum sentimental fiction and those crafted by turn-of-the-century New Women photographers worked abroad at outposts of U.S. empire, suggesting a continuity between the way in which the sentimental aesthetic "normalize[s] and inscribe[s] raced and classed relations of dominance" (6). Postcolonial scholar Ann Laura Stoler has similarly argued that the "domains of the intimate" play an important role in shoring up imperial power by

"shaping appropriate and reasoned affect (where one's sympathies should lie), severing intimate bonds and establishing others (which offspring would be acknowledged as one's own), establishing what constituted moral sentiments (family honor or patriotic duty)" (2). My approach to the study of social reproduction is informed by these postcolonial frameworks, as well as feminist theories of capitalist development which suggest that it is more apt to treat the boundary that distinguishes private from public as a site of struggle, as a shifting and malleable invention, rather than a historical reality. Analyses of the "crisis of care" that has emerged in recent decades have insightfully suggested that the crises borne of shifts in the economy, or say, a pandemic, are acute manifestations of crises of social reproduction that are endemic to capitalism. Nancy Fraser, for instance, argues that the distinction that capitalist societies make between production and social reproduction contain potential instability, since the drive towards unlimited accumulation will inevitably exceed the means of sustaining human life. The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, we have witnessed, caused such a crisis as the state attempted to sustain modes of production—the "economy"—while exhausting the labor of social reproduction—healthcare workers, educators, care workers, and those that administer social welfare programs like unemployment.

At the same time, less apparent crises occur in the everyday lived experiences of workers involved in the "business of sustaining life."[5] Black feminist theorists have argued, for example, that the economic and cultural structure of the separate spheres deprived Black families of the labor of social reproduction, since mothers were

[5] Governor Tom Wolf and the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development developed a classification system in the wake of the pandemic in order to discern which were "essential," deeming those "life sustaining businesses." See here for examples: https://dced.pa.gov/download/list-of-life-sustaining-businesses-2020-03-19/

compelled to work outside the home in order to supplement the wages of underpaid husbands. Broadly speaking, Patricia Hill Collins explains how this has shaped U.S. social welfare policy: "To mask the effects of cuts in government spending on social welfare programs that fed children, housed working families, and supported other basic public services, media images increasingly identified and blamed Black women for the deterioration of U.S. interests. Thus, poor Black women simultaneously became symbols of what was deemed wrong with America and targets of social policies designed to shrink the government sector" (80). My project extends Collins' analysis of the relationship between what she calls "controlling images," those which perpetuated the myth of Black women's inferiority and servility, and changes in the distribution of reproductive labor. In my emphasis on Black women's culture, I draw on Darlene Clark Hine's notion of "dissemblance," (915) which I conceive of as a theory of affective labor. On the individual level, Hine argues that Black women's cultural texts give the appearance of disclosure, accommodating the controlling images that constrain their self-expression, in order to protect their inner-most selves. I interpret this form of affective labor as a manifestation of the crises of social reproduction created in a capitalist and white supremacist society, a labor performed, even in the context of paid work, in order to economically survive. Extending the work of theorists like Collins and Hine, my project aims to show how the crises of social reproduction that emerged in the context of the slave economy and early industrialization were managed by controlling images and figures of labor such as the housewife and the Mammy, those which offered symbolic resolution to the social tensions at hand.

Labor of Love, Love of Labor

Most historical accounts of industrial era labor history end their investigation of domestic service when it is rejected by white workers, and accept housework as "non-work" as soon as "free labor" describes it as such. The title of "free labor" was used by an emergent white working-class to distinguish their economically dependent position from the dependency of others who were differently "unfree": slaves, women, and servants. Free labor ideology claimed that workingmen, although they did not own property, were propertied in their labor, and therefore entitled to political enfranchisement. Even the wage contract, formerly taken as a sign of one's economic dependence, was re-coded by white workingmen as the "very token of freedom," (Stanley 21) reconceived as a market tool for facilitating formal equality between employing and working classes on the "free market." Apart from the domestic servants who increasingly demanded use of the wage contract in the home, dependents could claim access to no such privileges, since, per marriage and slave law, they could neither enter a contract nor take possession of their labor. The housewife-breadwinner cultural ideal further reinforced this distinction, marking the domestic sphere and all who labored within it as outside of and antithetical to labor.

This was achieved in part by the development of what David Roediger describes as a "language of labor." White wage workers distinguished themselves from both racialized slaves and other degraded dependents by, he argues, rejecting the terms "servant" or "hireling," and adopting titles such as "freemen" and "workingman." In doing so, the white working-classes shored up a class and racial identity by renouncing the unequal labor relation among masters and servants to claim their entitlement to better wages and

greater power in relation to their boss. This project pursues a line of inquiry into this historical development that Roediger's exploration of language gestures towards, but never fully explores: what language of labor developed among those that were, by this discourse, rendered degraded dependents, unable to claim formal equality on the free and supposedly disinterested market? How, precisely, was servility, an apparently anti-republication and despised category, reimagined as an acceptable and even ideal attribute of housewives and Black servants? The term "hireling," Roediger explains, refers to those that "behaved as the very opposite of self-sacrificing republican citizens" who made "reward or material remuneration the motive of their actions" (45). Hireling, according to the 1829 Webster's dictionary of American English, was synonymous with "prostitutes," denoting a person both "venal" and "mercenary" (412). The terms of service, therefore, pejoratively correlated feminine sexuality with economic dependency and were even integral to the processes of racialization. As Roediger shows, "servant" and "slave" were used interchangeably by masters to describe bondmen and women, and free servants preferred the term "help" or "hired hand." But Roediger's investigation of the titles that members of the serving class adopted to distinguish themselves from slaves and redeem their labor ends here. In the chapters to follow, I consider the language of labor that developed among workers in the antebellum domestic sphere—both that which the employing classes used to sustain a classed and racialized hierarchy, and that which workers invented for themselves.

Reconstructing this linguistic and cultural struggle, the project aims to track both the rhetorical strategies and narrative forms used by empowered historical agents to subject women workers, as well as those that workers themselves used to reclaim the meaning of

their labor and social identity. In their approach to the rhetorical processes that rendered women's work as acts of love, scholars have, in general, focused on its effacement as labor, citing this as a method that sustained women's exploitation. One cannot exploit what doesn't exist, they argue. Jeanne Boydston's influential study *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic,* for instance, argues that the culture of domesticity and separate spheres ideology enacted a "pastoralization" of housework, a concept she draws from Raymond William's analysis of the cultural function of the seventeenth-century pastoral in England. In both cases, Boydston observes, idyllic spaces are described as divine creations and efface the labor involved in their production. As she writes, "The pastoralization of housework, with its emphasis on the sanctified home as an emanation of Woman's nature, required the articulation of a new way of seeing (or, more exactly, of *not* seeing) women as actors, capable of physical exertion. Most specifically, this applied to women as laborers; but the 'magical extraction' of physical activity from the concept of Womanhood in fact proceeded in much larger terms and was most apparent in the recurring celebrations of female 'influence'" (149). But what Boydston describes as a method of effacing or *"not* seeing" the manual and affective labor involved in housewifery, I argue, is better understood as a rhetorical strategy for distinguishing white, middle-class women from their racialized subordinates. After all, the logic of Womanly influence is that which allowed Catharine Beecher to claim that housewives ruled over their servants as the "sovereign[s] of an empire" (*Treatise* 162). Expanding the scope of my investigation into the rhetorical strategies and narrative forms that figured women's work to include women that performed paid and unpaid reproductive labor, whether in the home or at the office, I aim

to show how pastoralization granted some women visibility as "queens" by rendering others as their child-like charges.

The language of love and affection, including the metaphors of maternal influence and kinship that figure women's work in the domestic sphere, constitutes a distinct rhetorical strategy that emerged to settle the apparent contradictions between notions of the private and work. The second part of this project shows how this vocabulary persisted in shaping professional labor relations that emerged in the twentieth century. Scholars have generally located the emergence of professionalism in the nineteenth-century "cult of science" that aimed to solve social and economic inequalities through objective modes of analysis, to create a rational, equitable society. Presuming the disinterestedness of the free market, scholars argue, professional culture attempted to cultivate a culture of impersonality in workspaces and among the workers therein.[6] However, my investigation into clerical labor suggests instead that the culture of professionalism adapted the tenets of domesticity in order to resolve the social tensions presented by the intermixing of workers of different genders and classes in offices. Professionalism, therefore, is founded on the self-same contradictory cultural myths that sustained domesticity and the separate spheres, what Nancy Cott has described as the "Janus-faced" domestic discourse that, at once, accepted and critiqued capitalism (8). The professional businesswoman appeared to transcend the concerns of labor: the best secretaries labored out of a passion for their work (and sometimes out of love for their boss), subordinating their economic interests to

[6] For examples of this argument see: Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The 'Objectivity Question' and the American Historical Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Thomas Haskell, *The Emergence of Professional Social Science: The American Social Science Association and the Nineteenth-Century Crisis of Authority* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977)

the greater good of the company. While this might have appeared to empower women workers, as with domesticity, professional culture offered social power to those that performed self-sacrifice or self-erasure. This ethos persists today in many different kinds of workplaces and industries in which work is rendered as an act of self-fulfillment, a site of passion, perseverance, and altruistic overwork.

The celebration of self-sacrifice as a work ethic emerged, I argue, in the domestic sphere through a cultural process which reconfigured married women's desires away from economic self-interest and towards domestic self-sacrifice. The industrial culture of women's work that emerged both represented the labor of social reproduction, and participated in the process of social reproduction—that is, it both featured images of women's work and served the cultural function of socializing women to perform as caregivers, whether in their capacity as wives, mothers, servants, at home or at work. To pursue this argument, I apply the lessons of Nancy Armstrong's *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, to the study of an array of cultural materials, both fiction and non-fiction, that represent women's relationship to work and each other. A work of novel theory that investigates the domestic novel's role in reshaping social relations among men and women, Armstrong's study argues that the celebration of marriage and the separate spheres, a bourgeois gender ideology, had the effect of setting domestic women in opposition to working-class attitudes. Turning women inward and creating a middle-class culture that confined care and social reproduction to the private sphere, the novels reinforced capitalist individualism and suppressed visions of proletarian collectivism. As such, the novels participate in social reproduction in both the feminist and Marxist sense, insofar as they reconfigure individual readers' desires *and* contribute to the reproduction

of the whole capitalist system and the social structures that sustain it. I follow in Armstrong's suggestion to read literary and cultural texts as not merely reflections of the social conditions under which they are produced, but as agents of history, articulating figures of labor into being; I part with her framework, however, to consider not only how narrative forms may facilitate an ideological shift, but also how women writers negotiated and subverted these pressures in the production of their own work. Accordingly, I treat the women writers that I study—those who work as both writers and servants, housewives, clerical workers, or industrial pieceworkers—as working women who negotiated the cultural narratives that constrained the terms of their visibility both at work and in writing. I approach their artistic work and the work of cultivating a public persona not merely as expression of false consciousness, but as subtle forms of compromise and subversion.

Each of the chapters that follows investigates a figure of labor that rose to cultural hegemony not because it so aptly described the material conditions of work, but in order to symbolically resolve the social tensions presented by the apparent contradictions between the concepts of "woman" and "work" in the industrial era. The first part of the project tracks how the metaphor of the separate spheres and the sexual division of labor emerged to resolve a crisis of social reproduction produced by capitalism. In three chapters, I trace the emergence of what I call "domestic labor relations" that came to describe the relationship among housewives, bondwomen, and domestic servants. Chapter 1 studies the historical forces that, together, created the conditions of possibility

for the housewife to rise to cultural hegemony. The figure of the housewife provided symbolic resolution to myriad social anxieties about the relationship between women and work, emerging as the "sovereign of an empire," and what I can a "missionary-mother," that reigned over the network of workers involved in the labor of social reproduction. I look to Catherine Beecher's conduct manuals and prescriptive writing about housewives' role in the domestic sphere, specifically focusing on how she describes and models appropriate forms of domestic governance and methods of controlling and caring for servants. Beecher's writing proposes solutions to the period's "servant problem," both by prescribing affective strategies for exercising feminized authority, and by modeling it for her readers.

Although it is commonly argued that the housewife emerged as a figure socially constructed in opposition to the masculine breadwinner, I argue that the housewife gained cultural esteem through her ability to claim power and superiority over serving class women and slaves. The rhetorical stabilization of the separate spheres, I show in chapters 2 and 3, was made possible by the racialization of service. Chapter 2 focuses on the Mammy as a figure of labor that assuaged social anxieties about Black women's place in the domestic sphere. The Mammy, I argue, emerged as the housewife's ideal servant, as an asexual, self-sacrificing surrogate mother that required no children of her own or compensation other than the family's affection. In this context, housewives North and South demanded from Black women affective and emotional labor, what Hannah Nelson would later describe as "conversations about nothing." I turn to Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, to consider how her use of the pseudonymous narrator, Linda

Brent, allows Jacobs to explore what this demand on bondwomen's affective labor meant for her ability to represent experiences of suffering.

The ability to meet these affective demands became the hallmark of Black women's capacity for care and continued to justify their role as servants even after emancipation. Chapter 3 focus on the narrative processes that made this possible, reconstructing the struggle to racialize service in the context of the rise of the housewife and Mammy. While not often granted access to public representation, the domestic servant was a powerful figure in antebellum political and social discourses—she represented that which no one wanted to be, a figure derided, mocked, and judged to be untrustworthy and disloyal. Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig* offers a satire of forced servitude in the North, narrating the experiences of her character, Frado or "our nig," through a wide array of genres that, together, culturally racialized service in the early national and antebellum periods. In so doing, Wilson's text demonstrates precisely how the cultural myths attending the figures of the housewife and Mammy would allow for the continuation of a coercive labor system that would outlast emancipation.

The second part of the project looks to feminized forms of labor that emerged in the antebellum period and underwent commercial transformation at the turn of the century in the context of increased industrialization, urbanization, and emancipation. Chapter 4 looks to women's clerical labor, a form of work that had all of the makings of degraded industrial labor, and yet, by the 1930s, was regarded as an ideal occupation for white women. I argue that this was achieved by the culture of stenographers and typists, as the women cultivated a shared racial identity in repudiation of their apparent proximity to either the immigrant working-classes or Black service workers. The figure of the personal

secretary or "office wife" became a coveted position, the achievement of a worker both highly skilled at her job and at courting the affection of her boss. I read Willa Cather's office fiction as a cynical critique of the notion that women would find liberation from patriarchal oppression in the office, as she stages a struggle among "True Women" and "New Women" that reveals the extent to which the mythology of the housewife-turned-office wife persisted in justifying women's economic exploitation even when she was paid for her work.

Chapter 5 takes up the case of the industrial pieceworker, focusing on the homeworkers of the garment industry who, in the early decades of the twentieth century, worked in tenement district sweatshops. A predecessor of the contemporary gig economy, piecework was a subcontracting system in which typically immigrant women completed sewing garments at home and were paid by the piece. While early representations had figured the seamstress as sexualized by her need to work, made vulnerable to the economic and sexual power of her boss, turn-of-the-century investigations suggested that the conditions of sweated labor were the result of immigrants' reluctance to assimilate. The foreignness of the home, interpreted as a sign of a corrupted domestic sphere, was taken as evidence of the workers' sexual and gender dysfunction—not the imposition of an exploitative system by U.S. corporations. Anzia Yezeriska's fiction contests this thesis, appropriating the form of the romance to undermine the romanticization of poverty that fixed immigrant women as suffering bodies, incapable of "elevation" except through the intervention of bourgeois reformers.

In the final chapter of *Figuring Women's Work,* I examine the simultaneous cultural revision of the figure of the Mammy, and the transformation of domestic service from a

lifelong appointment to casual day work. At the same time as domestic work became specialized, and then casualized, the figure of the Mammy took on new cultural significance in revisionist histories of the South and in mass culture that marketed the affect and love of the Mammy as a commodity in the form of Aunt Jemima pancake mix. These simultaneous events, I argue, ensured that Black domestic workers would appear as both insufficient in relation to the idealized domestic relations of the past, and therefore no longer the housewife's friend and responsibility. In protest of the figure of the Mammy and the idealization of Black subordination, Alice Childress' novel, *Like One of the Family: Conversations from a Domestic's Life* takes the form of a dramatic monologue that speaks back to the common rhetorical strategies used by housewives and tropes used by mass culture. Modeling for readers an alternative affective performance to adopt at work, Childress' protagonist, Mildred, advances an interpretation of domestic service as not inherently degrading nor racializing. Rather, rendering her work as a form of care on which the Black community is built, Childress reclaims Black feminine care, dissociating it from the image of the Mammy that subordinates her own self-interests to that of the white family.

The conclusion of the project gestures towards ways that we might use the findings of this dissertation to pursue investigations into present forms of work and their cultural production. I suggest how we might go about assembling an archive of cultural texts that participate in the production of service today. Whether we look to the restaurant industry in the U.S., or the transnational relationships in which consumers and customer service representatives are situated, we may see new iterations and adaptations of the language of love, the demand of self-effacement, and the reinscription of social hierarchies.

PART 1:

THE EMERGENCE OF DOMESTIC LABOR RELATIONS

IN THE ANTEBELLUM U.S.

CHAPTER 1

BECOMING HOUSEWIVES:

THE NARRATIVE PRODUCTION OF A DOMESTIC EMPIRE

In their 1869 conduct manual, *The American Woman's Home*, Harriet Beecher Stowe and Catharine Beecher advise their readers that "whether they like it or not, [they] have the duties of missionaries imposed upon them by that class from which our supply of domestic servants is drawn. They may as well accept the position cheerfully, and, as one raw, untrained hand after another passes through their family, and is instructed by them in the mysteries of good house-keeping, comfort themselves with the reflection that they are doing something to form good wives and mothers for the republic" (326-327). By this time, it seems, the role of the Anglo-American housewife was a certain, if lamentable, fact: "whether they like it or not," housewives were compelled to do the labor of social reproduction in two related senses. First, housewives were responsible for training a "class" of women in the domestic, affective, and emotional labor involved in performing as a good wife and mother. And second, as "missionaries," they were integral in the reproduction of a capitalist system that depended on the subordination of "dependent" workers. Yet the conduct manual must not be understood as mere documentary evidence of prevailing historical conditions. This very text, as well as the treatises, manuals, and fiction that Beecher and Stowe wrote over their lifetimes, constituted a central component of the nineteenth-century disciplinary structures that "housewifized" women.

Although Beecher and Stowe believed that the fate of Anglo-American women was sealed, the relatively new set of responsibilities to which they gave voice had only

just emerged during the early national and antebellum periods and were, from their inception, unstable and vigorously contested. In early feminist movements, battles raged against patriarchal and protective legislation that prevented women from owning property, collecting wages, and participating in formal political processes. Within the home, housewives and servants struggled over the terms of their relationship, bringing to the fore the impossibility of wresting home from the market. And though the concept of "separate spheres" came to be widely accepted as an ideal, and the "cult of domesticity" advocated for the sanctity of the family, many women remained skeptical of marriage. The duties of housewives that Beecher and Stowe describe were not, therefore, historical inevitabilities. Rather, it took decades of suppression and struggle to make some women into housewives and others into their servants. By 1869, when Beecher and Stowe published this advice manual, they seem resigned to their role but not fully satisfied. Without compensation, in a society that increasingly linked independence and power with the accumulation of wealth, housewives resented that their hard work was only rewarded with praise. By their logic, though, the "the duties of missionaries [were] imposed upon them" not by political and economic structures that institutionalized their dependency, but from below, by "that class from which our supply of domestic servants is drawn," a serving class woefully unprepared to aid in the maintenance of the home.

This conflict among Anglo-American housewives and their immigrant or black domestic servants was known as the "servant problem." And while it is often recognized by scholars as a class conflict inflected by nativist sentiments, I argue that the "servant problem" also names the crisis of social reproduction that occurred in this phase of capital. Housewives resented servants in large part because they exposed the

impossibility of separating the "spheres," a cultural myth on which their claim to social significance rested. Although housewives were supposed to be especially predisposed to domestic, care, and emotional labor, the excess of work involved in social reproduction meant that they required outside help. By bringing the market into the home, domestic workers transgressed the neat boundary that distinguished economic from personal relations, and undermined housewives' assertion of power. Women like Beecher, who seriously pursued homemaking, took on a lifetime of work dedicated to organizing social reproduction—systematizing it, distributing it among different women, and reconfiguring their own desires in order to "accept the position cheerfully." To make bourgeois Anglo-American women into housewives was no simple task. It was made all the more complicated, from Beecher and Stowe's perspective, by the introduction of non-kin, non-American, and non-white servants. Yet, despite the cultural preoccupation with the "servant problem," scholars have neglected to fully consider how this confrontation with the serving classes decisively shaped the making of housewives in the U.S. Though it has been well established that the housewife emerged as the counterpart to the breadwinner, my investigation into the process of housewifization shows that the housewife that Beecher describes was forged also in relation to other women categorized as inherently inferior: poor, working, immigrant, and Black domestic workers over whom the housewife exercised her "influence."

This chapter attends to this gap in scholarship by recovering the texts of what Maria Mies has named the "housewifization" of middle-class Anglo-American women.[7]

[7] A term drawn from Marxist feminists theory, "housewifization" generally refers to cultural and economic processes by which women were relegated to the private sphere and their labor reconceived as socially reproductive. My understanding of this process is based primarily on Maria Mies' argument from her seminal essay, "Colonization and Housewifization." Of the

In the decades before the rise of industrial capitalism, the relationship between home and work, and therefore husband and wife, were entirely different, since for many production occurred within the space of the home. In the case of agriculture or artisanal craft, married women were both regularly involved in family "business," and legally figured as their husbands' servants. With the rise of industrial manufacturing and urbanization, the relationship between home and work was transformed, and with it, newly gendered understandings of "private" versus "public" space that gave new meaning to the term "housewife." Housewifization, Mies and others theorize, may be understood as a historical process—at once cultural, social, and economic—that applies the logic of colonization to the nation by separating and subordinating "dependent" populations. After all, its logic, too, operated through a discourse of conquest, in the name of patriarchal and capitalist progress, by differentiating "civilized" from "savage" populations, "Man" from "Nature," to confine women to the "domestic sphere." Building on Mies' economic theory, I focus on the role of antebellum culture in disciplining women not only by compelling particular performances of gender, but also by positioning them within a reproductive labor system as it made them into housewives, or else servants. In this context, I examine literature and discourses from the early national and antebellum periods that document emergent gender and racial ideologies as they theorize a relationship among gender, race, labor, and class, including legal discourse, conduct manuals, domestic fiction, and the literature of the woman's, abolitionist, and labor movements. These various historical forces, I argue, created the conditions of possibility

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relationship between these two processes, Mies contends: "Without the ongoing exploitation of external colonies – formerly as direct colonies, today within the new international division of labour – the establishment of the 'internal colony', that is, a nuclear family and a woman maintained by a male 'breadwinner', would not have been possible" (110).

for the figure of the housewife to rise to cultural hegemony in a number of crucial ways: by naturalizing the separation of the "spheres," insisting on their necessity; casting women as vulnerable to victimization or corruption by market forces; and idealizing marriage and family as institutions where women achieved special significance and power. Together, these fictions enabled the housewife's rise to power, while simultaneously suppressing alternative possibilities by stigmatizing single women and constructing work as antithetical to femininity.

The second half of this chapter turns to the writing of Catharine Beecher, leader in the field of domestic education. I focus on Beecher's writing about the "servant problem" with an eye towards moments in which she attempts to explain its causes, manifestations, and possible resolutions. I compare the form of her address and the advice she offers in two texts: her *Treatise on the Domestic Economy*, written for housewives, and her *Letters to Persons Who Are Engaged in Domestic Service*, ostensibly addressed to servants. In an effort to resolve this crisis of social reproduction, I argue, Beecher attempts to persuade would-be housewives to internalize "self-denying benevolence" as an ethics through both direct instruction and by modeling for them the requisite affective labor involved in this sacrifice, as well as in the management of domestic servants. In her writing to domestics, on the other hand, Beecher stages the domestic labor relation that she most desired, adopting the affect and posture of a parent or even a "missionary" to explain why and how servants should perform deference, subordination, and self-sacrifice in their employment.

Taking its cue from Nancy Armstrong's seminal study of the social reproductive function of British Victorian novels, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, my investigation

considers Beecher's treatises as at once historical documents and agents of history, both representing new forms and figures of labor, and articulating them into being. Approaching British domestic fiction from a Foucauldian perspective, Armstrong argues that it served a disciplinary function, subjecting women by reconfiguring their desires away from economic independence. What Armstrong identifies as the disciplinary structures that formed gendered, classed subjects, I argue, also subjected women as workers, positioning them in a reproductive labor system in which housewives were granted the power to oversee and manage. I bring Armstrong's insights and framework to bear on the U.S. cult of domesticity as I reconstruct the historical emergence of the housewife in the context of a slaveholding republic. For it was not only the case that the cult of domesticity and the concept of the separate spheres *produced* housewives through a process of separation and subordination. By claiming the role of "missionaries," housewives, too, were agents, active in applying the logic of colonization to the internal design of the domestic sphere. Beecher's treatises align housewives with the interests of the employing and ruling classes, generating new images of labor through the classing and racialization of working women whom they separated and subordinated.

The Making of Housewives

We should locate the beginnings of housewifization in the early national period during what scholars have called the market revolution. A pivotal moment in the history of capitalist development, the market revolution transformed social relations and initiated a reconceptualization of the very terms of citizenship and freedom in the new republic. "Contract freedom," as Amy Dru Stanley calls it, celebrated "a cultural code that

identified contract with personal freedom and social progress, that found a metaphor for human relations in market transactions" (3). Yet the marriage contract persisted in enforcing unequal relations among husbands and wives, stripping women of their right to own property, collect wages, and even maintain an independent political identity. In this context, legal discourses, domestic literature, and the literature of social movements struggled to determine women's relationship to the economy. In order to justify what seemed to many women to be antiquated and unjust, antebellum domestic culture propagated two powerful ideas: first, that although marriage necessarily resulted in political and economic dependency, affection bound husband and wife to perform effectively as equals; and second, that housewives were a distinct class of women who did not so much serve as their husbands' subordinates as they did their allies and analogues within the domestic economy. In what follows, I show how these cultural myths reframed married women's disenfranchisement as a method for gaining access to distinctly feminized forms of power and freedom.

From the nation's founding, the marriage contract entailed the dispossession of women's labor and property based on the prevailing assumption that the market posed a threat to women who were vulnerable to corruption and exploitation. Coverture, a holdover from British colonial culture, was implemented by most state governments to subsume married women's identities to their husbands', a practice that law commentators claimed protected women from malevolent market forces.[8] With coverture, founding state governments instituted an understanding of married women as inherently dependent, and

[8] So says William Blackstone in his 1765 *Commentaries on the Laws of England, volume 1*: "By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband; under whose wing, protection, and cover, she performs every thing" (442).

therefore unqualified to participate in political life. As Tapping Reeve explains in his *The Law of Baron and Femme; of Parent and Child; of Guardian and Ward; of Master and Servant; and of the Powers of Courts of Chancery*, "The husband, by marriage, acquires an absolute title to all the personal property of the wife, which she had in possession at the time of marriage; such as money, goods or chattels personal of any kind. These, by the marriage, become his property, as completely as the property which he purchases with his money; and such property can never again belong to his wife…" (1). Once married, women were effectively erased from public life, transformed from *femme sole* to *femme covert*. Although legally recognized as a consensual participant in the marriage contract, coverture ruled that, post-matrimony, the *femme covert* could never again enter any contract or claim to own any property, not even her own labor—an irony oft-cited by early feminists who objected to the loss of rights incurred in the consent to marriage. Coverture denied married women access to economic independence, creating instead marriage as a state of dependency which, as Reeve's title suggests, socially positioned wives and servants as equally subordinated to patriarchal dominion. A far cry from the missionary housewife that Beecher and Stowe described in their 1869 conduct manual, the married woman of early national legal discourse nonetheless set an important precedent that persisted throughout the nineteenth century by enforcing women's exclusion from the market.

The notion that the women required patriarchal protection from market and public life in general was reinforced by seduction novels like Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple*, considered the nation's first best-seller. These cautionary tales at once warned young women of the perils of extramarital sex and the dangers of navigating the New

World alone. The archetypal plot followed the coercion of orphaned or otherwise young and naïve women by rakish suitors, who promised social mobility and economic security. After the protagonist's "fall" and pregnancy, the woman was abandoned by her lover, shamed and isolated by her community, and eventually died. Affirming emergent republican values, the novels explored the consequences of women's sexual and economic vulnerability to seduction, allegorizing dependency as a feminized weakness that threatened the very stability of the nation. As Roediger observes, "Republicanism had long emphasized that the strength, virtue, and resolve of a people guarded them from enslavement, and that weakness and servility made those most dependent a threat to the Republic, apt to be pawns of powerful and designing men" (35). Seduction novels dramatized these fears, figuring single women, unprotected by patriarchal authority as a danger to democratic society who lacked the self-reliance necessary to resist corruption. For these texts, then, marriage was necessary as a means not only of protecting women from abuse and exploitation, but also of stabilizing social relations within the nation. Widely read and popular, they gave legitimacy to the assumptions about feminine weakness that sustained the principle of coverture, since they cautioned women against the dangers of remaining unmarried.

Albeit from a different class perspective, early nineteenth-century labor movements, too, represented women's participation in the market as dangerous. "Freemen" were concerned that the market threatened to corrupt women's gentle constitutions; perhaps more importantly, though, they worried that their presence at work threatened emasculation. The example of the family wage is especially telling in this regard. As part of their broader strategy for securing rights and better working conditions,

free laborers demanded a wage sufficient to support a wife and family. Anything less, they claimed, simply stripped away the dignity of American manhood. In his writing on the subject, William English, a leader of the National Trades' Union, wondered when "our wives, no longer doomed to servile labor, will be the companions of our fireside and the instructors of our children" (qtd. in Sumner 14). English framed the family wage as serving justice to women, who, as a result of their husbands' insufficient pay, were compelled to work outside the home and denied the opportunity to adequately perform as wives and mothers. The married woman that English imagined was classified as superior to the "servile" woman who was compelled to work for a living. This sentiment was echoed by William Sylvis in an 1867 speech to the National Labor Union:

> Rest assured, gentlemen, we cannot go forward without marching hand-in-hand with woman. If we leave her behind, capital will not be slow to unsex her, and place her in many of those channels of labor now occupied by us. She must have the same inducements, and derive equal benefit from the reform we are striving to accomplish, to make ourselves secure. We are bound to extricate her from her present depressed condition from motives of humanity as well as policy. It will be fatal to the cause of labor, when we place the sexes in competition, and jeopardize those social relations which render woman queen of the household. Keep her in the sphere which God designed her to fill, by manly assistance, and save her as far as possible from physical prostration, and the too often demoralizing influences of the mill, the factory, and the workroom (220).

In order to theoretically position women as equal in the fight against exploitative working conditions, Sylvis imagines married women's liberation from capital not as equal access to economic independence, but as access to housewifery, a freedom from "working" at all. In his configuration, housework is pastoralized: it appears as non-work, the home as a space that the housewife passively "fills." He envisions that the labor movement's success would secure women's protection from "the mill, the factory, and the

workroom," places and working conditions that threaten more than physical violence. These masculinized spaces might, he fears, "unsex" women. To Sylvis, women that worked outside the home became non-women, or even anti-women, denying workingmen the opportunity to perform as breadwinner. By such logic, the independence of workingmen required not only the subordination of housewives, as scholars have often argued; their claim to freedom and power also was built on the denigration of women that worked outside the home.

The notion that women found a respite from work within the home was widely contested from the founding of the nation through the antebellum period, when early feminist movements decried coverture as exploitation. As early as 1776, Abigail Adams famously warned her husband: "Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the husbands. Remember, all men would be tyrants if they could" ("Letter"). In the decades that followed, with the rise of the abolitionist movement, middle-class white women joined the fight for equality, launching a critique of what they perceived as a hypocrisy: slavery and widespread disenfranchisement in a republic built on the promise of freedom and equality for all. Still, the early feminist movement was hardly a unified effort, as women and activists disagreed about what kinds of rights to pursue and how to do so. "The marriage question" was a particularly controversial issue approached from a number of perspectives: some seeking to make the contractual bond more mutually beneficial and equitable, others demanding women's right to divorce. Given these competing pursuits, the feminist movement produced a variegated image of the housewife as one either entrapped by the institution of marriage, or else empowered by it. Many even went so far as to compare the situation of housewives to that of bondwomen.

In an 1856 essay, "Marriage," Sarah Grimké, an anti-slavery activist and advocate for woman's rights, argued that, "Wives have too soon discovered that they were the unpaid housekeepers and nurses and still worse, chattels…to be used and abused at the will of a master" (95). Abolitionist Antoinette Brown Blackwell agreed: "The wife owes service and labor to her husband as much as and as absolutely as the slave does his master" (580). In this analogy, it is not the market nor "rakish" suitors that exploit women, but their own husbands. Within this framework, however flawed, the Anglo-American married women argued that their incapacity to collect a wage and their effective confinement to the home constituted predatory violences from which they needed liberation.

Some works of domestic fiction dealt with the issues with coverture that feminists identified, reimagining marriage as a bond of mutual reciprocity that effectively, if not legally, rendered husband and wife equals. Even as women increasingly elected to remain unmarried, and the number of women working outside the home steadily increased, representations of married women dominated the literary marketplace, obscuring single and working women from public culture. "Marriage plot" novels explored the structural inequalities in the lives of women under coverture, providing narrative resolution for a readership of young women that faced the prospect of "civil death." Hannah Webster Foster's novel *The Coquette*, for instance, both demonstrated how the pressure to marry was a central feature of American womanhood, and critically analyzed the devastating consequences of coverture, representing marriage as a simultaneously contractual, market, and private, personal event. Novels like Foster's ultimately resolved in an image of "republican marriage," suggesting that though married women were formally

disenfranchised, they could hope to secure a husband that treated them as if they were an equal. As literary critics Jan Lewis puts it: "republican marriage presented itself as egalitarian. Republican characterizations of marriage echoed with the words *equal, mutual,* and *reciprocal*, and marriage was described as friendship between equals" (707). Unlike the image of marriage advanced by legal discourse, in which husband and wife were set in a contractual and domestic relation not unlike the relation between master and servant (as in Reeves' description), the images of spousal relations offered by marriage plot novels were premised on shared affection and companionship.[9]

These texts contributed to a broader cultural shift that struggled to reframe marriage as an egalitarian bond and a cultural requirement of normative, Anglo-American femininity, while maintaining the strictures of coverture and the marriage contract. Such cultural myths stabilized the distinction between the spheres by making marriage into a cultural ideal, rather than a condition of institutionalized dependency. Towards the mid-nineteenth century, the push to reimagine married women's role in U.S. society led to changes to their rights, as new legislation expanded married women's civil rights to include ownership of property and, eventually, their wages. With the passage of these property reforms beginning in 1839, the social positioning of a married woman was transformed as she was elevated above the degradation of servitude. These reforms implied that women could be property owners, and were perhaps propertied in their

[9] This is not to suggest that literary representations of marriage were uncomplicated or uniform in their position towards coverture and companionate marriage. As Karen Weyler argues, popular literature like Sally Sayward Barrell Keating Wood's *Dorval* both exposed "how coverture undermines affectionate marriage, [and] models alternatives to women's economic dependence by demonstrating the use of marriage settlements, which in *Dorval* reduce economic incentives for marriage, enhance the economic stability of families, and enable individuals to seek truly companionate marriage" ("Marriage, Coverture, and the Companionate Ideal in *The Coquette* and *Dorval*," p. 2-3).

labor—a radical implication and departure from historical precedents. Legal historians caution against reading these changes as the recognition of women's equality, however; in practice, Married Women's Property Acts, they contend, were generally called upon to bar predatory creditors from seizing a wife's property as repayment for her husband's debt.[10] Though lawmakers across the country persisted in describing the marital bond as one necessarily premised on women's subordination, with these reforms, the possibility emerged that married women were not equal to servants. By granting married women greater rights that positioned them among a property-owning and employing class, these reforms distinguished housewives from the serving class women that they employed. With their elevation, new lines were drawn to delineate a hierarchy of domestic relations, emphasizing the sanctity of the family unit of which servants only uneasily formed a part. While these legal provisions were, therefore, ineffective in liberating married women from patriarchal authority, they granted social and economic powers that made housewives appear as a distinct, superior class of women.

Indeed, even as many early feminists opposed the separate spheres ideology, their arguments for women's equality often reinforced the image of married women as housewives and imperial queens. In an 1854 petition to the New York Legislature, for instance, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and others mobilized the housewife's status as a member of the employing and property-owning classes to argue that the imposition of separate spheres was problematic insofar as it delimited woman's power to influence to

[10] For an example of this historical argument see Elizabeth Bowles Warbasse, *The Changing Legal Rights of Married Women 1800-1861* (New York: Garland, 1987).

the home. They claimed that "the family is the nursery of the State and the Church – the God-appointed seminary of the human race" and therefore

> [t]hat women's duties and rights as daughters, sisters, wives, and mothers, are not bounded within the circle of the home; that in view of the sacredness of their relations, they are not free to desert their fathers, brothers, husbands, and sons amidst scenes of business, politics, and pleasure, and to leave them alone in their struggles and temptations, but that as members of the human family, for the sake of human advancement, women are bound as widely as possible to give to men the influence of their aid and presence; and finally, that universal experience attests that those nations and societies are the most orderly, high-toned, and rich in varied prosperity, where women most freely intermingle with men in all spheres of active life (593).

Such an argument relies on the emergent logic of the separate spheres as much as it repudiates it. Women could better "influence" their "fathers, brothers, husbands, and sons," Stanton and her associates reasoned, if they were permitted to exercise their special influence outside the "circle of the home." To underscore the importance of women's equality, the petition links women's appearance in public life to the accrual of national power. Citing nations that are "most orderly, high-toned, and rich in varied prosperity," the petition appeals to the Legislature's presumed investment in U.S. territorial expansion and international esteem. Stanton and others embraced their role as "missionary" by contributing to the distinction and elevation of married women to a special class of American woman. They idealized the possibility that Anglo-American women could serve as powerful forces of diplomacy, as arbiters of American cultural values beyond the limits of the home.

The role of housewives in the early republic was widely contested, as various interested actors advanced competing interpretations of women's relationship to the market. For some, women needed protection from the corrupting and seductive forces

that women would confront in public, while for others, the tyrannical abuse they might face at home was compounded by their institutionalized dependency. In either case, women were cast as victims of patriarchal violence who would not be liberated from these conditions so long as they were socially equal to servants. The image of the housewife as a cultural power that cared for and domesticated not only the nation's children, but also all of its men, resolved these contradictions. To redraw the relationship among husband and wife as one of theoretical equals was to form new alliances on the basis of class and race in the name of the nation. Even as coverture prevented women from maintaining an independent political identity, or from accessing formal political processes and economic structures, the cultural mythology of the housewife as a missionary, and even a "queen," repositioned married women not as their husbands' servants, but as their companions. As Amy Kaplan has aptly observed, this involved a reconfiguration that "unite[d] men and women in a national domain and to generate notions of the foreign against which the nation c[ould] be imagined as home" (201). Becoming "housewifized" meant also, therefore, adopting the logic of housewifization and colonization which separated and subordinated in order to consolidate power. Inhabiting this position, housewives took charge of the "sphere" of social reproduction, developing expectations for the proper performance of domestic labor relations, as well as methods for educating servants, and systematizing the activities involved in the reproduction of American society.

Solving the Servant Problem

Alongside marriage plot and seduction novels, women's magazines, conduct manuals, and self-help writing circulated in a literary market increasingly oriented towards a new reading public: bourgeois Anglo-American women. Catharine Beecher's treatises and household manuals were among the most widely read and influential of the period, some seeing as many as fourteen reprints over twenty years. In her writing, we see a self-conscious attempt to systematize and theorize the significance of reproductive labor, to negotiate women's exclusion from the "free" market, and to inscribe domestic labor with sociopolitical symbolic meaning. Her texts perform the very reproductive labor that they set out to describe and organize, training readers to perform the domestic, affective, and emotional labor requisite to maintain the family. When she writes about the servant problem, offering advice for housewives that confront the myriad problems involved in hiring help, Beecher provides instruction in the cultivation of affective bonds, which she believed were necessary for sustaining a happy home and democratic nation. When she addresses servants themselves, Beecher's writing takes on a different form and mode of argumentation. In order to train servants, she adopts a parental posture evident in her choice to develop her argument through the form of a fable that draws on scripture. In addition to providing women with instruction, she therefore even offers *models* for cultivating strong domestic labor relations, the text itself staging the relationship between housewife and domestic. Accepting and performing her role as "missionary" to the would-be mothers and wives of the U.S., Beecher aimed to reconfigure the desires of readers of both employing and serving classes away from economic independence and towards self-denying benevolence.

In what follows, I consider how Beecher's writing registers uneasiness, ambivalence, or overt resentment about her position, especially when confronted with servants who, in many ways, reveal the limits of her newfound social power. In particular, I analyze the resolutions that Beecher proposes to the period's famous servant problem to demonstrate how she attempts to compensate for housewives' loss of political and economic power by inscribing the figure of the housewife with an imperial power instead, insisting she is the "sovereign of an empire." In order to ameliorate the possible resentments and ambivalences, Beecher's writing theorizes a reproductive labor system in which Anglo-American housewives would reign as missionary-mothers over their racialized domestic servants. I argue that by setting forth new terms of labor and naturalizing a hierarchical arrangement of women workers, Beecher's texts propose a social organization of reproductive labor that replicates the self-same logic of housewifization and colonization: she "separates" and "subordinates" working-class, immigrant, and Black women in order to consolidate the power of the housewife. Governing the home through affection rather than force, Beecher reimagines the reproductive labor system as one organized according to relations of pseudo-kinship under which housewives and servants are bound to labor both with and for each other out of love.

Over the course of her career as a social reformer and domestic educator, Beecher's writing consistently complained of the unmanageable number of tasks that fell under the purview of housewives. A version of the following phrase appears in almost all of Beecher's public writing on the subject, as well as her personal letters: "The difficulties and sufferings, which have accrued to American women, from this cause [the

servant problem], are almost incalculable. There is nothing, which so much demands system and regularity, as the affairs of a housekeeper, made up, as they are, of ten thousand desultory and minute items" (*Treatise* 41). She even contends that, in comparison to men who work in industries whose operations are highly systematized and technologized for efficiency, women's working conditions are such that their work is utterly unending: "For a housekeeper's business is not, like that of the other sex, limited to a particular department, for which previous preparation is made. It consists of ten thousand little disconnected items, which can never be so systematically arranged, that there is no daily jostling, somewhere" (150). In light of the separation of spheres, Beecher's texts register an uneasiness about the injustices that make women's work increasingly demanding and yet, without the technology and systemization of industrialization, totally disorganized. By the end of her writing career, Beecher resolves that the housekeeper's work should be distributed to other women whenever possible—to laundresses, bakers, servants. She sees the expansion of the reproductive labor system into the formal market economy as a means of providing potential relief to the housewife who continues to labor without compensation or adequate support. The burden of social reproduction, her writing admits, is far too much for one married woman to handle alone.

Despite this admission, Beecher nonetheless remains resolved in her belief that the housewife is singularly disposed to the project of American democracy and the fulfillment of God's design. In the opening chapter of *A Treatise on the Domestic Economy*, after describing the "peculiar difficulties" that American housewives face, she concludes with an image that unifies women across classes and positions, all of whom

labor in their womanly way to contribute to the greater good. Of those "labors which are to be made effectual in the regeneration of the Earth," Beecher explains:

> [It] is by forming a habit of regarding the apparently insignificant efforts of each isolated laborer, in a comprehensive manner, as indispensable portions of a grand result, that the minds of all, however humble their sphere of service, can be invigorated and cheered. The woman, who is rearing a family of children; the woman, who labors in the schoolroom; the woman, who, in her retired chamber, earns, with her needle, the mite, which contributes to the intellectual and moral elevation of her Country; even the humble domestic, whose example and influence may be moulding and forming young minds, while her faithful services sustain a prosperous domestic state;--each and all may be animated by the consciousness, that they are agents in accomplishing the greatest work that ever was committed to human responsibility (37-38).

The text anticipates readers' potential dissatisfaction with their lot in life: since married women are responsible for a massive and unwieldy amount of work, while at the same time they are excised from political processes and denied both financial compensation and social recognition, married women might feel that their station is rather thankless. She implores her readers to adopt an alternative perspective that hovers far above the material realities of their day-to-day lives, reminding them that, from God's perspective, all workers are important, no matter how "humble their sphere of service." Moreover, within the reproductive system that she imagines, she designs a hierarchy of women workers, descending from the housewife, to the teacher, needlewoman, and finally, domestic. She reminds her readers triumphantly, that "She, who is the mother and housekeeper in a large family, is the sovereign of an empire, demanding more varied cares, and involving more difficult duties, than are really exacted of her, who, while she wears the crown, and professedly regulates the interests of the greatest nation on earth, finds abundant leisure for theatres, balls, horseraces, and every gay pursuit" (157). This image of the housewife as a sovereign atop a complex hierarchy, delegating and

overseeing labor, proposes a resolution to readers' potential resentments. In order to compensate for housewives' loss of formal political inclusion, Beecher encourages housewives to imagine their labor glorified as empire-building.

The pressing concern about the labor of "regeneration," her text admits, extends beyond how it is undervalued by a profit-driven society into the near impossibility of carrying it out with the materials and workers available. Describing the "peculiar difficulties" that American housewives face in difference with their British and European counterparts, Beecher's treatise explains that the housewife's excessive burden arises from early industrialization and the increased immigration that followed. She writes: "Our manufactories, also, are making increased demands for female labor, and offering larger compensation. In consequence of these things, there is such a disproportion between those who wish to hire, and those who are willing to go to domestic service, that, in non-slaveholding States were it not for the supply of poverty-stricken foreigners, there would not be a domestic for each family who demands one. And this resort to foreigners, poor as it is, scarcely meets the demand" (40). Because industrial labor became a "better job"—one with higher wages and without the stigmatized association of domestic work with enslavement—the domestic service market was depleted of Anglo-American women, leaving only "poverty-stricken foreigners," whom, she here implies, were not up to the challenge. She makes this more explicit when she elaborates on why this change in the market is experienced by housewives as such a serious disservice: "a woman who has been accustomed to carry forward her arrangements with well-trained domestics, would meet a thousand trials to her feelings and temper, by the substitution of ignorant foreigners, or shiftless slaves, which would be of little account to one who had never

enjoyed any better service" (39). For American women, who have long received domestic help from Anglo-American girls and women of their same social class, Beecher argues that immigrant or slave women are a poor substitute because they are, she says, uneducated and lazy. A further implication, of course, is that housewives resent having to negotiate the cultural and class differences that distinguish American ladies from foreigners and slaves, a constant test of their temper and patience. Here and throughout her writing, the figure of the inept servant serves two rhetorical functions: she stands as a scapegoat, named as the cause of housewives' unhappiness, while, at one and the same time, she becomes the very objects of housewives' reproductive labor, that which gives the housewife purpose and power.

As she describes it, the servant problem largely results from servants' resistance to this arrangement. According to her *Treatise,* the problems with immigrant servants were many: they "exact exorbitant wages"; they are too quick to leave an appointment at a household for more money; and they are insubordinate such that their "spirit [is] not conformed to their condition" (205). Each of these charges is informed by both prevailing wisdom that regarded women's participation in the market as mercenary, and Beecher's sense that Irish domestics "come here feeling that this is somehow a land of liberty, and with very dim and confused notions of what liberty is" (313). The conflicts between employing and serving classes arise, it would seem, when workers violate the affective and aesthetic expectations of housewives. When they demanded a wage commensurate to their labor, housewives experienced this as a crude violation of the careful and tenuous distinction between home and market. Similarly, they accused servants of selfishly privileging their own economic independence, expecting that they act as a pseudo-

member of the family, laboring out of love and devotion not in pursuit of financial gain. And finally, when servants violated housewives' expectations that they adopt a deferential and self-sacrificing affect, they were regarded as "uppity" and presumptuous. While housewives preferred to treat service as an act of love not unlike their own, workers insisted on their labor as earning them "contract freedom," if not outright economic independence. For housewives, performing the labor involved in the "regeneration of the Earth" was, by law and custom, an unwaged and selfless act. To accept this fact, Beecher advised that housewives take comfort in the social benefits that they and others enjoyed as a result of their hard work. Servants, however, disrupted this fantasy, revealing that it was possible for reproductive labor to be paid work. These competing interpretations of reproductive labor expose the difficulty of separating work from home, an arrangement that unevenly benefited the women working in the domestic sphere.

To suppress the intrusion of market relations into the home, and compel servants to conform to their desires, Beecher recommends that housewives embrace their role as missionaries and even supplementary mothers for their servants. Insisting on a labor relation modeled on kinship, Beecher recommends that, in order to oblige servants to behave in less market-driven and more accommodating ways, housewives should treat domestics not as their equals, but as their children. Theirs should not be a relationship of exchange, but, ideally, one of mutual attachment, affection, and obligation. Beecher advises housewives:

> It is not merely by giving them comfortable rooms, and good food, and presents, and privileges, that the attachment of domestics is secured; it is by the manifestation of a friendly and benevolent interest in their comfort

> and improvement. This is exhibited, in bearing patiently with their faults; in kindly teaching them how to improve; in showing them how to make and take proper care of their clothes; in guarding their health; in teaching them to read, if necessary, and supplying them with proper books; and, in short, by endeavoring, so far as may be, to supply the place of parents (207).

Beecher recommends that housewives secure workers' "attachment" by taking the "place of parents." She reasons that establishing and performing this relationship as second mother and would-be daughter could, at least in part, resolve the servant problem by remediating the working conditions of which domestic workers frequently complained. While this would appear to be a mutually beneficial arrangement, it is not without troubling implications. The aim of such an affective performance was to compel domestics to relinquish autonomy and commit to working for her mistress outside the bounds of a contract. Beecher writes that, if housewives adopt the affective performance of a mother, "It is seldom that such a course would fail to secure steady service, and such affection and gratitude that even higher wages would be ineffectual to tempt them away" (207). Exercising a distinctly feminized form of authority, housewives could, Beecher explains, vanquish the temptations of the market and secure a lifelong, loyal servant who would not expect too much (money) in return. Becoming a successful housewife, according to the treatise, involved maintaining a strict boundary between private and public, one achieved primarily through carefully orchestrated displays of affection.

The housewife-domestic relation that Beecher theorizes in her *Treatise* is dramatized in writing that addresses domestic workers directly. Beecher's *Letters to Persons who are Engaged in Domestic Service*, for instance, attempts to educate and acculturate Irish workers to the imperial social order of U.S. society and the operations of American democracy. Despite its title, however, the opening preface suggests that

Beecher believed this text would be purchased and read by "American Ladies," her "Countrywomen," whom she hoped would "secure the reading of this book to at least *one* of those for whom it is written" (2). That it will be read by domestic workers themselves is a possibility, but also a metaphorical conceit of the text. *Letters* ultimately models a mode of authority that housewives should use to set the terms of their relationship to their workers. Unlike her *Treatise,* which deployed political discourses and applied the tools of social scientific analysis to her discussion of housewifery, the opening chapters of *Letters* take the form of a fable about a shipwrecked group of men and women that learn, with the help of a wise Protestant minister, how to govern themselves as well as respect each other. While not an uncommon form of the period, that the pedagogical approach aims to indoctrinate domestic workers to Protestant values is significant when the vast majority were Irish Catholic. Positioning Protestant housewives as the missionary teachers of their Catholic workers, Beecher's *Letters* may be read as a strategy manual for assimilation.

"Once there was a ship," she writes, at the beginning of an extended tale about a diverse group of passengers—gentlemen, ladies, children, and servants—who, after a difficult storm, come under the protection of a foreign king who grants them access to a large estate. Here, without the proper divisions of labor and resources, without the enforcement of classed and gendered hierarchies, chaos ensues. All desire rich foods, leisure, and fine clothes; all refuse to work for anyone else. The passengers' conflicts are resolved by a minister who appeals to the group's reasonability and religiosity, as well as the logic of the separate spheres. The minister of Beecher's fable argues that in order that labor benefits the greatest good, society must be systematically organized such that each body is doing work that complements their disposition and constitution. The minister

explains that the "strongest and healthiest" bodies should be charged with providing basic necessities, since such labor would adversely impact the "delicate and weak." "For this reason it was decided," the narrative continues, "that the men should do the out-door work, and that the women and children should do the lighter work in the house" (19). In this narration, the sexual division of labor emerges as a natural and rational strategy for ensuring the overall wellbeing of the group. Combining the rhetorical power of the fable, which used allegory to represent universal or human truths, with the authority of the Bible, *Letters* proposes that the best way to discipline servants is through moral authority. Rather than address servants as equals, using political philosophy or history to explain the emergence of separate spheres in U.S. culture, as she does in her writing to housewives, Beecher here presents these historical developments as self-evident, self-justifying, and inevitable. She demonstrates that taking on the role of missionary in relation to one's servants involved embodying an unquestionable authority.

This set of rhetorical strategies is especially important for the final moral of the fable: that far from evidence of injustice or inequality, the material differences that made housewives and servants distinct were part and parcel a state of nature. Beyond a sexual division of labor which emerges from the essentialized physical differences between masculinized strength and femininized weakness, the minister further explains that the hierarchical arrangements that form domestic labor relations emerge, too, from innate differences, those expressed by clothing, type of work, and habitation:

> Now it was manifest that those who did the hardest and dirtiest work, needed the stoutest and darkest clothes, and that if any body wore the delicate muslins and silks, it should be those whose enjoyments would least injure them. In regard to a choice of rooms too, it was best and most convenient, that those who did the dirty work should inhabit the rooms

> most convenient to their work, and those furnished so that they would be least injured by the use of persons whose feet and clothing were often soiled by their work. The most elegantly furnished rooms were those most easily soiled and injured, and therefore the general good required, that they should be occupied by those whose work and dress would least injure them (20).

Beecher's fable for domestic workers locates the design of the labor market and the domestic sphere in the bodies of workers and the classed implications of their outward appearances, which presumably accord with their skills, character, and social value. According to the story, all persons are constitutionally and naturally created either to enjoy "elegantly furnished rooms," or to produce and maintain them. Her text argues that one's labor is a natural expression of their gender or class, and more implicitly, their race, since the phrase "dirty work" implied, in this period, a blackening or racialization that associated workers with the degradation of slavery. In her story, there is a natural hierarchy among the employing and serving classes. Rather than an oppressive structure, however, this hierarchy is framed as a mode of governance that is in the best interest of all. Within this system, to refuse to submit to the authority of refined, white ladies would prove both futile and selfish. Her *Letters* makes economic inequality and social positioning not the consequences of, but rather the preexisting conditions for the structure of U.S. society. With this gesture, the fable reproduces the logic of colonialization and housewifization, subordinating and separating classes of women on the basis of their racial identity or class positioning. And while Beecher's text apparently takes as its topic the issue of women's work and the systematic distribution of reproductive labor that attends it, her writing participates in what Boydston describes as the pastoralization of domestic labor, effacing the work of housewives and servants as an emanation of their true nature. This strategy is made to serve the interests of housewives, suppressing the

extent to which servants brought with them market forces and the notion of "contract freedom."

According to the text's final chapters, servants themselves could resolve the problems that they had with their mistresses only by accepting the fact of their "station" and adopting a self-denying attitude, forgetting their self-interested pursuit of economic independence. Beecher ventures that if women hired to work as domestic servants perform the labor for which their body is designed, agreeing that this is the best use of their body and life, effectively embody their God-given position of subordination, and internalize the imperative to work always in the interests of others, then the misunderstandings between domestic workers and mistresses may be more easily avoided. As an example, she offers the following description of a servant who she claims to have seen at a friend's house:

> In the first place, she always dresses herself neatly and yet in a style fitting the work she has to do, while she keeps her chamber and kitchen in such neat order, and there is such a look of comfort and respectability about her and all her concerns, that every one likes to see her in her kitchen. Then she is intelligent and well educated, at least enough so to know that it is lady-like to be respectful and polite to everybody. If any person comes into her kitchen, she offers a chair, and treats them with the same politeness that is shown by the lady of the house to her visitors.
>
> Then, she *always* does *all* her work *well.* Her bread is always the best, her meats are well cooked, her vegetables served hot and in the neatest order. She is economical and careful, too, so that nothing is wasted by neglect. She is not *set* in her own way, but is always ready to do any kind of work that her employer wishes done, and to do it in the manner requested (83).

Successful service appears here as an effective but appropriate imitation, one that approaches Anglo-American middle-class femininity but never challenges it. A domestic worker must excel at the hard labor that refined ladies are not constitutionally able to do themselves, of course; better, though, if they follow the model social behavior of the lady

of the house. She expects, in other words, that domestics perform affective and emotional labor to craft a self-presentation that conforms to the aesthetics of domesticity. In this way, the class differences among housewives and workers should be made invisible, as the domestic worker becomes indistinguishable from her mistress, an extension of her own labor and influence in the household. This could only be achieved by another kind of effacement, tellingly elided here, as the affective performance erased evidence of any classed, racial, or ethnic difference, and made the particularities of the worker invisible. What Beecher calls for is an impossible and nostalgic ideal, romanticizing the recent past when the serving class was primarily comprised of Anglo-American girls and women. As such, it maintains housewives' constitutive gripe: that it's so hard to find good help these days.

What is absent from this description is how precisely this domestic came to be so attentive and well-mannered. Such disciplined servants, Beecher advises, were not simply born, but were made by the loving, firm hand of housewives. In several of her publications, Beecher describes the labor of social reproduction in which housewives are engaged by comparing it to making bread. She writes: "Some persons prepare bread for the oven by simply mixing it in the mass, without kneading, pouring it into pans, and suffering it to rise there. The air-cells in bread thus prepared are coarse and uneven; the bread is as inferior in delicacy and nicety to that which is well kneaded as a raw servant to a perfectly educated and refined lady. The process of kneading seems to impart an evennesss to the minute air-cells, a fineness of texture, and a tenderness and pliability to the whole substance, that can be gained in no other way" (174). Beecher draws an analogy between the process of "making servants" and the process of "kneading" bread, a

physically arduous task that reworks "coarse" dough into a substance more refined and even. Kneading achieves a transformation to the bread's entire substance and composition that, she says, "can be gained in no other way." Such a comparison manifests the latent violence involved in housewives' performance of missionary within the home, suggesting that beyond the correction of servants' "raw" and "inferior" characteristics through motherly love and moral guidance, housewives must enact a relentless repression that remakes them from the inside out. The goal of their reproductive labor is not merely to regenerate life, but to craft it such that servants' entire being is transformed into something more palatable.

Tasked as ladies were with such transformative work, the housewifization of Anglo-American women should be understood as an attempt to resolve the crises of social reproduction caused by industrial capitalism. The genealogical approach to historical investigation taken here demonstrates that that the housewife was not a historical inevitability, but rather a figure of labor that emerged through a particular struggle to determine the relationship among the social categories of gender, class, race, and labor. This figure and the processes that articulated it into being sought to reconfigure and ultimately stabilize these relationships. Scholars have long recognized that the sexual division of labor had the effect of effacing housework as labor, reframing it as an act of love or even an "emanation of Womanness." But sustained analysis of the rhetoric of the servant problem reveals that distinguishing work from home, productive from reproductive labor, involved, too, distinguishing employing from serving classes of

women. Appropriating the logic of colonization, Beecher constructs an essentialist relationship between identity and labor within the domestic sphere. Like the "freemen" that comprised the emergent white working-class in the period, housewives mobilized their whiteness in order to claim power and distinguish themselves from other "dependent" populations. The incompetent and acculturated servants that they wrote about and worried about provided evidence of both the superiority and necessity of housewives. Without the chimera of bad servants, housewives could not have claimed nearly the social and cultural significance that Beecher and others did. As we shall see in the chapters that follow, the housewifization of Anglo-American women depended on the racialization of service.

CHAPTER 2

BONDWOMAN, MAMMY, MOTHER AND THE MYTH OF THE PLANTATION FAMILY

> A man loves his children because they are weak, helpless and dependent. He loves his wife for similar reasons. … He ceases to love his wife when she becomes masculine or rebellious but slaves are always dependent, never the rivals of their master. Hence, though men are often found at variance with wife or children, we never saw one who did not like his slaves, and rarely a slave who was not devoted to his master.
>
> — George Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South, or the Failure of Free Society*

Surprising as it might strike us, it is no coincidence that this argument by the pro-slavery advocate George Fitzhugh resonates remarkably with the domestic labor system that Beecher imagines. She, too, premised her system on the notions of familial social relations and governance by patriarchal authority. Fitzhugh's "sociology" produced an analogue to idealized domesticity in the South: the so-called plantation family. If Beecher prescribed a maternal relationship between housewife and domestic worker, suggesting, in turn, that workers' absolute submission produces harmonious social relations, Fitzhugh famously claimed in his 1854 tract that Southern slavery produced not only benevolent relations between master and slave, but relations that were morally superior to the emergent capitalist labor relations of the free states in the North. Devoid of the impersonality and indifference that plagued market relations, argued Fitzhugh, the forced labor system of the plantation supplied Black workers with the paternal support and care which they required. As we see above, he drew on the sanctifying power of the discourse

of domesticity to further suggest that the master-slave relation constituted a familial one—and perhaps an ideal one. The master-slave relation, he contends, stands as a more perfectly realized version of husband-wife dependency created by the marriage contract.

Such a theory depends on a prevailing logic of slaveholder ideology that Saidya Hartman names the "doctrine of 'perfect submission'" whereby the weak are empowered through their weakness to "disarm" their master, thus establishing mutual obligation, if not equitable exchange.[11] Accordingly, mutual dependency theoretically cultivates a bond of affection that compels both master and slave to "act right." Much as Beecher had idealized the willing subordination of categorically inferior women in her narration of domestic labor relations, slaveholders agreed that the paternalistic governance of enslaved Black men and women resulted in social harmony. Such arguments were rejected wholesale as ridiculous by abolitionists for whom the myth of the plantation family was disingenuous, a denial of the brutal violence involved in the maintenance of the "peculiar domestick [*sic*] institution."[12] The same cannot be said, however, of Beecher's theory, which was widely accepted as a cultural ideal, if not an accurate representation of material conditions.

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[11] Saidiya Hartman uses this term in her seminal text, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America* (1997), to describe a common assumption stated and implied in slave code and court cases which attempted to determine the criminality of both slaveholders and slaves. What Hartman terms the "discourse of seduction" "denotes a theory of power that demands the absolute and 'perfect' submission of the enslaved as the guiding principle of slave relations and yet seeks to mitigate the avowedly necessary brutality of slave relations through the shared affections of owner and captive. The doctrine of 'perfect submission' reconciled violence and the claims of mutual benevolence between master and slave as necessary in maintaining the harmony of the institution" (88).

[12] A term coined by John C. Calhoun in his defense of the South and popularized by abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison and former slave Frederick Douglass who contested the phrasing as absurd.

Despite their similarities, the debates in which Beecher and Fitzhugh participated—the servant problem and the slavery debate—referenced each other only obliquely. When they complained about the difficulty of finding good help, housewives, for instance, might have indirectly implied that what they were after was not simply better free servants, but slaves. And though abolitionists regarded the conditions of free labor to be a separate issue that undermined the singularity of their repudiation of slavery, pro-slavery advocates frequently called on the image of the "white slave" as evidence that the capitalist system of wage relations, too, was exploitative and oppressive. Reading Beecher and Fitzhugh together alerts us to their shared assumptions about the superiority of labor relations that most closely resembled kinship and guaranteed not formal equality, but mutual dependency. Both are concerned, after all, with much the same problem: how to resolve the tension between the patriarchal social order that characterized domestic and slave relations, and the emergent capitalist contractual relations that claimed to produce formal equality between employers and workers. Across both debates, in antebellum literature in the North and South, the trope of the Mammy provided a symbolic resolution to these tensions. Whether in pro-slavery, minstrel, or even abolitionist literature, Mammy figures were characters content to serve the needs of the white family, willing to accept a position of subordination and relinquish their autonomy for the "greater good." Laboring out of love and without any desire for economic independence, the Mammies that appeared in antebellum literature represented the ideal domestic servant.

This chapter recovers the process by which the Mammy came to be a dominant figure in the antebellum literature of service, imagined as an ideal worker in the domestic labor system by Northern housewives and Southern plantation mistresses alike. While

critics have long supposed that the myth of the Mammy functioned to assuage the guilty consciences of mistresses, I argue that the Mammy served a more specific cultural function within the context of the crises of social reproduction that attended industrial capitalism. In an economic system that required the neat division of productive and reproductive labor, and a culture that increasingly valued the privacy and sanctity of the family, bondwomen's rape and forced gestational labor was troubling, to say the least. Generating both profit as well as the workforce necessary to maintain the plantation, bondwomen were reduced to bodies, treated at once as vehicles for productivity and social reproduction. This state of affairs inspired anxiety and moral panic among mistresses North and South who decried the corruption of victimized bondwoman, or else condemned their indecency. In what follows, I look to the institutional forces that gave voice and proposed resolution to the myriad crises caused by the bondwoman's rape, including legal discourse and literature. To make bondwomen fit into the domestic sphere, I argue, antebellum culture produced and celebrated the figure of the Mammy: an image of a docile Black domestic that neutralized slave women as sexual threats by making maternal love a natural expression of Black femininity instead. Like the model domestic that Beecher describes, the Mammy was a loyal, selfless, and hardworking woman who knew her place. After emancipation, the figure of the Mammy rose to even greater cultural prominence, supplying the most coveted image of harmonious domestic relations in a post-slavery society.

The second half of the chapter turns to Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl,* a slave narrative that reveals and refutes the coercive dimensions of the myth of the Mammy. Drawing on Black feminist theory, I read Jacobs' narrative within

Darlene Clark Hine's framework of dissemblance, which understands Black women's culture as giving the appearance of openness and disclosure in order to maintain a private, undisclosed self. As a strategy for surviving a white supremacist and patriarchal culture, dissemblance is achieved through a convincing performance of affective and emotional labor not unlike the kind that housewives claimed to prefer. Insofar as it appeals to an audience of sympathetic white readers, Jacobs' narrative imitates the performance of docile affection that women of the employing classes desired. In adopting this posture towards its readers, the text offers a subtle challenge to what was, by mid-century, a prevailing assumption about Black women's place in a post-emancipation United States: that freedwomen would happily serve as the ideal domestic servants for white families North and South. Portraying a series of relationships among the white mistresses and the Black girls and women that serve them, Jacobs explores the metaphor of sisterhood as it operated on the Southern plantation and in the Northern domestic sphere. Whether figured as sisters by blood, as was the case on plantations where masters fathered both free and slave children, or sisters in solidarity, as when abolitionists advocated on behalf of bondwomen, Jacobs shows that these relationships are characterized by inequality. *Incidents* refutes both the myth of the plantation family and the domestic labor relations imagined by Beecher by showing how sisterly relations, though they might promise mutual care and reciprocity, were inevitably compromised whether mistresses betrayed or "saved" the Black women that worked for them.

Making Mammy a Part of the Family

As housewifized women began to understand their role as missionaries and mothers to the nation, claiming their authority through masterful care and moral authority, they quickly rallied around the cause of the distressed bondwoman. If their duty was to maintain domestic harmoney, this was nowhere needed more than in the slaveholding South where masters regularly violated the marriage contract to rape and sexually exploit bondwomen. The practice was codified by law: the legal doctrine of *partus sequitur ventrem*, which held that the legal status of a child followed the condition of their mother, legitimized the sexual exploitation of enslaved women. Although mistresses' mission to save the bondwoman from these conditions was often altruistic, it also could take on a more sinister character. Jealous mistresses accused bondwomen of seducing their husbands, casting them as impure seductresses. The latent and sometimes manifest animosity appears to be related to mistresses' social insecurity. For them, the bondwoman represented a potential threat to the sacred domestic sphere, but also their own authority, since she exposed their lack of control they held over their husbands, servants, and the boundaries of their home.

In what follows, I show how the figure of the Mammy emerged to assuage these anxieties, placing the bondwoman firmly in the position of the housewife's loyal subordinate. Images of the Mammy figured her as one predisposed to care labor, and yet equally committed to and capable of doing the hard labor of housework that housewives preferred not to do. Calling her a "part of the family," or even a sister, mistresses in the South and housewives in the North alike identified the Mammy as their ideal servant, even more so than an Anglo-American girl of their same social class. Although

abolitionists and Northern housewives believed that they were articulating a far more compassionate and sufficiently republican labor system, it is no coincidence that the Mammy was prized both North and South, since, as a figure, it supplied a means for a white master class to subordinate a Black serving class in the interest of reproducing Anglo-American society and a white supremacist class structure.

Slave law institutionalized bondwomen's sexual exploitation and reproductive coercion through at least two related provisions: the doctrine of *partus* as well as the denial of access to the marriage contract. From the perspective of housewives, these laws denied bondwomen access to either wifehood or motherhood, which increasingly came to constitute hegemonic structures of bourgeois, white womanhood. But, more than a denial, the language of the law reveals that bondwomen's gender subjection and racial formation occurred in the context of a distinct political economy. Passed in 1662 by the Virginia General Assembly, and thereafter taken as legal precedent across the slaveholding republic, the legal doctrine of *partus* ruled that "Negro womens [*sic*] children …serve according to the condition of the mother" (Hening 170). This doctrine, writes Saidiya Hartman, codified "the negation of kinship, and the commercial vitiation of motherhood as a means for the reproduction and conveyance of property and black subordination" (11). Not merely a denial of inclusion in the institutions that made women into housewives, *partus* and attending legal precedents cast and subjected Black women as vehicles for the social and economic reproduction of the slave system. Rendering slaves incapacitated of the right to make "even a contract of matrimony," (Wheeler 190) the law subjected Black women through a different set of political and economic structures. Bondwomen were sexually controlled through brute force and as property. A matter of

market and not sentiment-—not love, companionship, in pursuit of the private family, under the protection of the patriarch—the social relations of the plantation "family" troubled Southern mistresses and Northern housewives alike.

Antebellum abolitionists, many of them white women of the employing classes, decried these conditions, which they interpreted and aimed to correct through the ideological lenses of the separate spheres and the cult of domesticity. Especially disconcerting to them were the ways in which bondwomen's bodies were treated as objects from which masters derived profit and, presumably, pleasure. A commonly reported scene in abolitionist literature, for instance, recalled the inspections that took place at the slave market where the bondwoman appeared as a half-naked spectacle, subject to her master's "habit not only of stripping [his] female slaves of their clothing…but of subjecting their naked persons to the most minute and revolting inspection" (Weld 154). Rhetorically, this reportage inspired shock in its readers for whom such a process was a gross violation of the Victorian social codes of domesticity that valued privacy, modesty, and piety. More than a social violation, though, the treatment of feminized bodies in this way violated the economic distinction that the cult of domesticity sought to make between private and public, home and market. Public displays of sexualized bodies were, in their words, "revolting" and antithetical to the avowed values of a culture that celebrated motherhood as a sacred role for women. Hartman identifies this disjuncture as "the difference between the deployment of sexuality in the contexts of white kinship—the proprietorial relation of the patriarch to his wife and children, the making of legitimate heirs, and the transmission of property—and black captivity—the reproduction of property, the relations of mastery and

subjection, and the regularity of sexual violence" (87). The apparent contradiction between these two "economies of constraint" (87) appeared to mistresses and housewives in both the North and South as a violent transgression of the cultural ideal of Anglo-American domesticity.

Abolitionists' revulsion at bondwomen's mistreatment was often articulated as a moralizing call to end slavery and a condemnation of its destructive effects on domesticity. Drawing on the logic of the marriage contract, and the image of normative relations between housewives and their husbands, abolitionists made the case that it was their lack of access to these institutions that made bondwomen vulnerable to the exploitation and abuse of their masters. Fugitive slave Lewis Clarke, for instance, said to his audience of Northern men: "I can't tell these respectable people as much as I would like to, but think for a minute how you would like to have *your* sisters, and *your* wives, and *your* daughters, completely teetotally, and altogether in the power of a master" (*Leaves* 78). He concludes that the cruelty of this is that "A SLAVE CAN'T BE A MAN" (78). Beyond an injury to bondwomen, then, the denial of access to the marriage contract was believed to have the effect of emasculating bondmen, too, who were barred from performing as protective patriarchs. As was the case with the fallen woman of seduction plot novels, a proliferation of narratives figured the bondwoman as vulnerable to exploitation of all kinds because she was deprived of a husband. Without access to, as one abolitionist put it, "woman's grand shield, MATRIMONY," (Bourne 121) many feared that bondwomen's sexual exploitation threatened to destroy the possibility of stable, normative domesticity. Revealing the sanctity of the white family and the

authority of housewives to be unstable, the institutionalization of bondwomen's rape and exploitation appeared to pose an existential threat to housewives and mistresses.

While for abolitionists this made bondwomen especially pitiable victims of slavery, for Southern mistresses' it also made them a target of resentment and ire, as evidenced by the prominence of the trope of the Jezebel. According to Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Southern lore figured the "Jezebel" as a Black woman that "lived free from the social constraints that surrounded the sexuality of white women. She thus legitimated the wanton behavior of white men by proclaiming Black women to be lusty wenches in whom sexual impulse overwhelmed all restraint" (292). A perverse misrepresentation, the Jezebel was thus imagined to be one sexually liberated, unrestricted by the Victorian social codes that white women were supposed to abide. This myth was undergirded by the logic of "perfect submission," which empowered the weak to exercise power over their masters. Through their weakness, mistresses and lawmakers alike believed, the dominated could inspire sympathy in their master such that they would recover any asymmetries in power to maintain a relationship of mutual dependency. However, if the dominated gained too much power, this theory reasoned, they could become the seducer of their master, and therefore agents in their own subjection. Hartman explains such a rationale: "The sexual exploitation of the enslaved female, incredulously, served as evidence of her collusion with the master class and as evidence of her power, the power to both render the master weak, and implicitly, to be the mistress of her own subjection" (87). From the perspective of mistresses, whose own social power was derived from a position of weakness relative to their husbands, bondwomen were not just victims of abuse, but were agents in actively undermining the classed and racialized hierarchy that

was supposed to align wives with their husbands over and above the Black serving classes. The myth was given some credence by the practice of masters taking bondwomen as their "concubine" and providing them the comforts of domestic life and education. In the language of the day, this inspired "jealousy" in mistresses, but we may recognize from our historical perspective that it also undermined their authority by exposing housewives' lack of control over their home, their husbands, and their servants. The figure of the Jezebel thus gave voice to the contradictions that mistresses perceived in the coexistence of slavery with domesticity and effected an interpretive displacement whereby white violence was read as Black indecency and even criminality.

Though their political motives were ostensibly opposed, abolitionists gave credence to Southerners' argument that bondwomen could be complicit in their own rape. Antislavery literature subscribed to the doctrine of perfect submission and argued that bondwomen's sexual exploitation corrupted them and made a mockery of the marriage bonds of plantation masters and mistresses. Take the position described by Angelina Grimké, for example: "It is not the character of the mistress alone that is injured by the possession and exercise of despotic power; nor is it merely the degradation and suffering which the slave is continually subject; but another important consideration is, that in consequence of the dreadful state of morals at the South, the wife and daughter sometimes find their homes a scene of the most mortifying, heart-rending preference of the degraded domestic, or the colored daughter of the head of the family. There are, alas! too many families of which the contentions in Abraham's household are a fair example" (qtd. in Child *Patriarchal Institution* 29). Grimké alludes to the Biblical figure of Abraham, who, believing his wife Sarah was barren, took their slave Hagar as a

concubine. The story was cited often in the antebellum period as a way of describing the tensions between plantation mistresses and their husband's "secondary wives," since Hagar's pregnancy inspired jealousy and rage in Sarah. Referring to bondwomen as secondary wives or concubines, as was common in abolitionist tracts, sustained the mythology of the Jezebel, and obscured the extent to which for bondwomen, as Harriet Jacobs writes, "it is deemed a crime…to be virtuous" (*Incidents* 49). As "secondary wives," Jezebels undermined the role of housewives in regulating social reproduction, compromising their ability to create and maintain a domestic sphere that promoted moral behavior and tempered base desires. For abolitionists, the goal was twofold: liberate bondwomen from these debasing conditions; and bring them to heel such that they were no longer a threat to, but were brought to serve, the interests of the white family.

If the Jezebel was a figure that allowed mistresses to give voice to their felt sense of injustice and resentment, the figure of the Mammy emerged in the antebellum South as a cultural ideal, a bondwoman that might be incorporated into the plantation family as the housewives' ally and friend. The term "mammy" was a designation that originated to describe bondwomen charged with the care of children. As early as the 1820s, writes Kimberly Wallace-Sanders, slaveholders in the South used the term to describe "almost exclusively [those] serving as wet nurses and caretakers of white children" (4). At the same time, the image of the fictional Mammy appeared in Southern fiction and travel narratives to promote evidence of the familial bond between the master and slave classes. As an invention of the slaveholding South, the image of Mammy represented an acceptable relation between mistress and bondwoman that, according to Deborah Gray White, "helped endorse the service of Black women in Southern households, as well as

the close contact between white and Blacks that such service demanded. Mammy did a lot of explaining and soothed a troubled conscience" (61). In difference with the Jezebel who posed a threat to her mistresses' command over her home and husband, the Mammy was designed as one that, out of love for her mistress, subordinated herself to serve faithfully, selflessly, and contentedly. Abiding the circumscriptions of slave law which denied her motherhood or wifehood, this imagery represented the bondwoman not as a sexually transgressive "secondary wife," but as an asexual "second mother." Indeed, so cherished was the Mammy that representations often figured her as a "dark-skinned Madonna,"[13] as in the case of Isabel Drysdale's popular book *Scenes in Georgia* (1827) which reads: "Perhaps a more interesting picture is seldom seen, than that which was often exhibited by Aunt Chloe and her little nursling, its fair face pillowed in her faithful bosom, contrasting the sable but loving countenance bent above it" (31). Forged *with* the image of the housewife, the figure of the Mammy represented a cultural ideal of domestic labor relations in which the bondwoman's Blackness and femininity were non-threatening to white housewives' authority, smoothly subordinated to the interests of white domesticity.

The cultural work that Mammy did for the slaveholding South extended to the abolitionist movement and Northern domestic culture which also endorsed the doctrine of perfect submission. Harriet Beecher Stowe's wildly popular anti-slavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* explored a wide range of Mammy characters who each served as surrogate

[13] In her study of the cultural dominance of the image of the Mammy in post-emancipation culture, *Mammy: A Century of Race, Gender, and Southern Memory* (2009), Kimberly Wallace-Sanders argues that the "classic image of the mammy stereotype" "place[s] and aesthetic value on the image of a dark-skinned woman holding a white child," describing such a representation as "a dark-skinned Madonna, holding a Sacred Child to her breast" (5).

mother to the white children of her master. Like other abolitionist writers, Stowe developed her argument against slavery through an invocation of the sacredness of the domestic sphere and the family, representing a series of slave mothers that mourn the loss of their own children and serve as dedicated "Mammy-mothers" to their master's children. Even Stowe's Aunt Chloe, a complex character that openly critiques slavery as antithetical to family values, appears to prefer her white charge "Mas'r George" to her own children. Literature attending to the "servant problem" in the North, too, circulated images of Mammy servants, free Black women that of their own volition happily served lifetime appointments with white families. In juxtaposition with "uppity" white and immigrant servants, the docile Mammy was idealized as one predisposed to servility and deference. The Mammy character of Phillis in Sarah Savage's *Truth and Self-Discipline*, for instance, labors out of love for the family she serves, rather than for money, even offering her life savings when the family faces bankruptcy. Says her mistress of Phillis' place in the home: "'We cannot persuade her to leave us…it is so unusual to be thus beloved by our domestics. There is something too, particularly pleasing about her, very mild lady-like…And yet with all her gentleness, she exerts great control over the other servants, and even my little Ellen yields to her soft sway much more readily than to mine'" (27). For Northern ladies as well as abolitionists, the Mammy provided both a resolution to the avowed servant problem, and a safe vision of the relation between white women and their domestics in a post-emancipation future. Although housewives and abolitionists believed that, by bringing Black women under their power, they were resolving the contradictions by replacing rape and force with affection and mutual attachment, their program was eerily similar to the slave system from which bondwomen

would be emancipated. Whether through force or affection, these systems both subordinated Black women to serve the interests of white property and wealth, as well as a white supremacist social order.

Reading together the contemporaneous debates of the slavery debate and the servant problem demonstrates that determining the meaning of bondwomen's gender, sexuality, and labor for the republic was urgent for both the slave and free labor systems. According to the cult of domesticity, the separation of spheres and the marriage contract achieved an ideal set of social relations in which wives were under patriarchal protection but, through the cultivation of affective bonds, rendered themselves their husbands' equal and their servants' master, establishing a class and racial hierarchy within the domestic sphere. The stability of this system for social reproduction appeared to be contested by the particular ways Black women were subjected and racialized under the political economy of slavery. Their overtly sexual function for the slave system was interpreted as an impediment to the achievement of domesticity that threatened to undermine the stability of the whole structure. Yet these two apparently incompatible systems relied on the same logic: the doctrine of perfect submission. Both debates, therefore, could find resolution in the figure of the Mammy, arguing that in order for Black women, whether free or bound, to be made to serve the interests of the family and nation, they must be made docile, asexual, and maternal. In difference with the image of the Jezebel, a figure deployed to represent bondwomen as a sexualized threat to the family and marriage contract, representations of the Mammy foregrounded bondwomen's surrogate maternal qualities—their capacity to loyally serve and care for children not their own—and thus found a place for the Black woman in the American domestic sphere. This racial ideal

stabilized the boundary between the separate spheres, keeping the market at bay while also preserving the image of the housewife as among the employing classes. Unlike the housewife, a figure of labor that claimed imperial power through the "choice" to obey her husband, a bondwoman's "choice" to serve the family and interests of a white patriarch did not elevate her social status. Instead of inscribing Black women with the power to choose, and therefore the power to rule and discipline, the figure of the Mammy racialized subordination and fixed Black women in a position of dependency.

"Love, duty, gratitude also bind me to her side": Sisterhood and Domination in Jacobs' *Incidents*

Although much of the literature representing bondwomen was borne of a white imagination, Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) writes from the perspective of a freedwoman reflecting on and reconstructing experiences of Southern slavery and Northern freedom. One of only a few extant slave narratives written by women in the U.S., Jacobs' text contends with the tropes of the Mammy and the Jezebel, and questions abolitionist assumptions about the conditions of Black women's bondage and freedom. What may best be understood as Jacobs' critical and artistic engagement with literary conventions and cultural discourses, however, was formerly taken to be evidence of the text's fraudulence. Presumed to be written by a white woman, and perhaps Lydia Maria Child herself, *Incidents* was not authenticated until the 1990s when Jean Fagan Yellin's exhaustive research uncovered the facts of the text's production, as well as evidence that aspects of the narrative corresponded with details of Jacobs' life as a slave and domestic servant in the North. Perhaps because of this history of mistaken

authorship, literary critics have remained concerned with determining whether and to what extent Jacobs' voice was compromised by either Child's intrusion as editor, or else the pressures of the discourses of abolitionism and domesticity that shaped sentimental literature in the period. While some critics have argued that Child's role as editor reshaped Jacobs' narrative in order that it conformed to a politics amenable to her own, others read Jacobs' text as an apparently unmediated disclosure of the "truth" of slavery and Black womanhood.[14] These trends in scholarship share in an unfortunate and unproductive assumption: that Jacobs' narrative is a sociological artifact that delivers unmediated the experience of slavery for a bondwoman. When critics assume Jacobs' narrative must contain the disclosure of her personal experiences, they miss the ways that the text is a literary and cultural production in dialogue with various tropes, conventions, and discourses.

This chapter will depart from these tendencies to pursue a reading of Jacobs' *Incidents* within the framework of what Darlene Clark Hine calls "dissemblance." In her analysis of Black women's migration to the North and Midwest, Hine argues that "the fundamental tension between Black women and the rest of society…[has] involved a multifaceted struggle to determine who would control their productive and reproductive

[14] For examples of arguments about Child's relationship with Jacobs consult: Jean Fagan Yellin, "Written by Herself: Harriet Jacobs' Slave Narrative." *American Literature*, vol. 53, no. 3, 1981; Donald B. Gibson, "Harriet Jacobs, Frederick Douglass, and the Slavery Debate: Bondage, Family, and the Discourse of Domesticity." *Harriet Jacobs and Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: New Critical Essays*, edited by Deborah M. Garfield and Rafia Zafar, Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 156–78.; Bruce Mills, "Lydia Maria Child and the Endings to Harriet Jacobs's Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl." *American Literature*, vol. 64, no. 2, Duke University Press, 1992, pp. 255–72.

capacities and their sexuality" (915). Not only seeking economic liberation, Black women that fled to the North also sought to escape the sexual exploitation that characterized life and work in the South. Even after emancipation, however, Black women struggled to achieve economic independence and were often restricted to work as domestic servants. Hine argues that performing this kind of labor required that Black women "adhere to a cult of secrecy, a culture of dissemblance, to protect the sanctity of inner aspects of their lives" (915). Rather than fully eradicating the "misrepresentations and negative images of themselves in white minds," she argues that Black women have historically created "a secret, undisclosed persona [that] allowed the individual Black woman to function, to work effectively as a domestic in white households" (916). As we have seen in Beecher's writing, such were the demands of the domestic labor system designed in the antebellum period. White housewives desired that their subordinated servants adopt a posture of "self-denying benevolence" and sublimate more disagreeable attitudes in order to serve the interests of the family. Through domestication, housewives sought to transform their workers from the inside out, reconfiguring their desires such that they would relinquish autonomy and, of their own volition, serve the family not for money, but out of love. In order to survive these working conditions, this meant that Black women had to do the affective labor necessary to meet the aesthetic demands of their mistresses, while at the same time protecting and preserving an inner self from the violent domestication that this entailed. Thus, what Hine describes as the tactics that Black women adopted to protect the "sanctity of the inner aspects of their lives," I argue, must also be understood as the affective and emotional labor involved in meeting the demands and surviving the domination of the employing classes. This section will

consider how Black women's performance of docility and affection—so coveted by Northern housewives and Southern slaveholders that idealized the Mammy's relationship to the white family—is both evidence of deeply exploitative working conditions and potential tactics of subversion. Despite housewives' efforts to domesticate the hearts and minds of their servants, Hine's theory suggests that Black women's performance of labor may have offered the appearance of docility in order to maintain a private and even transgressive identity.

The framework of dissemblance requires that we consider how Jacobs' narrative enacts a "self-imposed invisibility" by critically deploying the negative images of Black women circulating in the period. Writing from her position as a Black domestic servant and ex-slave, Jacobs, through her pseudonymous narrator Linda, performs the deference, affection, and openness that her readers expect in order to ultimately reveal the hypocritical self-interest of her readership's avowed commitment to Black women's liberation. The text's narrator appears to fulfill readers' expectations, presenting herself to the "women of the North" as a docile and grateful Black domestic worker. Additionally, as Linda recounts the events of her life, the narrative explores the domestic labor relationships between Black and white women imagined and idealized by abolitionists and slaveholders, examining in particular the concept of "sisterhood" among bound and free women. These quasi-sisterly relations are consistently shown to be corrupted, as white mistresses and friends fail to make good on their promises to either Linda or her grandmother Martha. The text's exploration of the failure of avowed sisters to provide reciprocal care serves, I argue, as a metafictive critique of its readers' own labor and racial politics. Whereas for slaveholders, housewives, and abolitionists, the idea

of the Mammy provided a possible resolution to the slavery debate as well as the servant problem, for Jacobs, such a proposition was ill-conceived, and depended on a number of problematic assumptions about the meaning and value of Black women's labor. Making plain what was otherwise mystified in the representation of Black women domestic workers, whether bound or free, Jacobs' narrative reveals that the Northern domestic labor system promises political freedom only in exchange for Black women's continued economic dependence and social immobility. The structure and focus of the narrative demand not only that Jacobs' readers, the "women of the North," take action to abolish slavery, but also that they consider their complicity in reproducing unequal labor relations in their own homes through the rhetoric of sisterhood and affection.

Beginning with the text's two prefaces—one by Jacobs, the other by Child—we can see how the very arrangement of the text betrays a fraught relationship between even the closely allied Black author and white editor. Jacobs' preface, performing humility common to the period, explains that the poor quality of her writing is a consequence of her lack of formal education as well as the conditions of her working life in the North, writing: "Since I have been at the North, it has been necessary for me to work diligently for my own support, and the education of my children. This has not left me much leisure to make up for the loss of early opportunities to improve myself; and it has compelled me to write these pages at irregular intervals, whenever I could snatch an hour from household duties" (5). Jacobs identifies herself as a domestic servant, and also performs the manners of a good one. She adopts the rhetoric of self-reliance, while also implying that she prioritized the needs of the family that she served above her own. While on the one hand, the preface gives the appearance of a performance of perfect submission, on

the other, the passage is forthright in explaining that even in North, Jacobs had insufficient freedom from her employers' demands, having still to "snatch" hours to escape them. Explaining her purpose further, Jacobs writes: "I have not written my experiences in order to attract attention to myself; on the contrary, it would have been more pleasant to me to have been silent about my own history. Neither do I care to excite sympathy for my own sufferings. But I do earnestly desire to arouse the women of the North to a realizing sense of the condition of two millions of women at the South, still in bondage, suffering what I suffered, and most of them far worse" (6). The preface thus constructs the narrative as an appeal to abolitionist readers' sentiments, its narrator tasked with successfully cultivating an affective bond with the "women of the North." Performing the self-denying benevolence prescribed by Beecher, and suppressing her own feelings, Jacobs describes the writing of her narrative as a kind of emotional labor: painful work that is done not for her own benefit, but to serve the greater good, and more immediately, to produce what Hochschild might call the "proper state of mind in others."

Lydia Maria Child's "Introduction by the Editor" serves a different function for the narrative, primarily to sanction Jacobs as an author whose words and intentions may be trusted. She addresses readers as if they were her fellow housewives, and positions Jacobs as their shared class subordinate. Accordingly, Child is first concerned with assuring readers of the veracity of Jacobs' claims, and moreover, the pleasantness of her character. As evidence for both, Child writes: "During the last seventeen years, she has lived the greater part of the time with a distinguished family in New York and has so deported herself as to be highly esteemed by them. This fact is sufficient, without further credentials of her character" (7). Verifying that she is a formidable worker, Child and

Northern employers authorize her storytelling. Thereafter, Child repeats and revises the short biographical context that Jacobs' own preface details. What Jacobs has named as an experience of misfortune resulting from the oppressions of slavery, however, Child suggests as a rather fortunate set of circumstances: "In the first place, nature endowed her with quick perceptions. Secondly, the mistress, with whom she lived till she was twelve years old, was a kind, considerate friend, who taught her to read and spell. Thirdly, she was placed in favorable circumstances after she came to the North; having frequent intercourse with intelligent persons, who felt a friendly interest in her welfare, and were disposed to give her opportunities for self-improvement" (8). Child's account discounts the possibility that Jacobs may be an agent actively working to gain either her freedom or literary skills, and instead describes in her totally passive terms. In her representation, Jacobs becomes the direct object of sentences, at turns shaped by nature, kind mistresses, good fortune, or generous employers. Taken together, these prefaces dramatize what would have been considered proper domestic relations among white housewives and Black servants: Jacobs' narrative performs humility and gratitude for the housewives in order to court their affection, and Child's narrative makes Jacobs a loyal, docile servant and object of charity.

Wielding a maternal power over Jacobs, Child invites a collective readership to do the same, most explicitly through the use of a first-person plural, "our." As she continues to describe her purpose, Child warns readers: "This peculiar phase of Slavery has generally been kept veiled; but the public ought to be made acquainted with its monstrous features, and I willingly take the responsibility of presenting them with the veil withdrawn. I do this for the sake of my sisters in bondage, who are suffering wrongs

so foul, that our ears are too delicate to listen to them. I do it with the hope of arousing conscientious and reflecting women at the North to a sense of their duty in the exertion of moral influence on the question of Slavery, on all possible occasions" (8). The passage constructs a hierarchical "us" and "them," even as it desires to imagine "sisterhood" between Black women in bondage and free white women, presuming to take "responsibility" for the presentation of the "indelicate" aspects of Jacobs' life story. In her formulation, it is not Jacobs whose words or struggle will advance the anti-slavery movement, but rather her readers who, through reading, will be compelled to exercise the "moral influence" necessary to abolish the slave system. As framing paratextual elements, Jacobs' "Preface" and Childs' "Introduction" position readers among employing classes of white women to whom the narrator is subordinated. Staging the affective bonds idealized by mistresses North and South, the text engages readers in a metafictive dramatization of the bonds of sisterhood. Though they promise otherwise, such sisterly relationships, events of the text show, are a near constant source of trouble.

Beginning with the first chapter, the text explores a series of conflicts and disappointments among Linda's foremothers—her mother and her grandmother, Martha—and the white women that were either their sisters, mistresses, or both. In its account of Martha's life in bondage and her pursuit of freedom, the text focuses on how slavery disfigures kinship relations, especially among women who share in the labor of social reproduction. Martha, as critics have noted, appears to possess the virtues of True Womanhood "to an almost formulaic degree," (Foreman 88) and acts an ideal servant for her mistress. Yet while some have read Jacob's rendering of Martha as an endorsement of the concept of True Womanhood, the framework of dissemblance encourages us to

consider that this appearance may be understood as Jacobs' strategic appropriation of the stereotype of the Mammy. In her telling of Martha's story, Jacobs describes a woman that abides the doctrine of perfect submission, developing a relationship of apparently mutual dependency with her mistress, and lovingly caring for white children. Though she has children of her own, the narrative makes no reference to their paternity, carefully crafting Martha as an asexual maternal figure, rather than a sexualized Jezebel. The events of the narrative suggest that Martha's successful embodiment of the ideal Mammy serves her well, as she pursues economic independence and freedom by successfully sewing herself into the market and hearts of the community. Unlike a prototypical Mammy, however, Martha achieves economic independence, taking care of her grandchildren and becoming possessed of a home of her own. This departure from the myth of the plantation family opens up an unexplored possibility for white women readers, suggesting that Black women's "place" in U.S. society might be somewhere other than the white domestic sphere.

Although Martha appears to embody the characteristics of an ideal servant, the women with whom she lives and for whom she cares consistently fail to live up to the promise of sisterhood and mutual obligation. Jacobs' narration of Martha describes her commitment to her mistress as well as her performance of servitude in terms that resonate with the conventions of domesticity and the myth of the plantation family. Jacobs writes of Linda's grandmother: "…as she grew older she evinced so much intelligence, and was so faithful, that her master and mistress could not help seeing it was for their interest to take care of such a valuable piece of property. She became an indispensable personage in the household, officiating in all capacities, from cook and wet nurse to seamstress" (12).

Jacobs embeds in this description of Martha the discourse of domesticity, characterizing her as one that accommodated every need of the household she served. Industriously performing domestic labor and offering herself as an extension of her mistress' own body when she attended to all aspects of care work, including acting as a wet nurse, Martha appears to contentedly occupy the position of Mammy in the household. Jacobs' narration reminds readers, however, that in spite of the affection that she cultivated through her "perfect submission," her mistress "could not help seeing her…[as] a valuable piece of *property*." Although Martha abides the doctrine of perfect submission, when the time comes to fulfill her promises to free Martha's children or even pay back a debt, Martha's mistress betrays her. The narrative debunks the myth of the mutual dependency that unites the plantation family and shows that Martha is ineligible for protections and privileges enjoyed by others under a patriarchal economic system since, no matter how industriously and affectionately she performs, she remains subordinated to the white family as a racialized dependent and piece of property.

In contrast to these bad mistresses and masters with whom readers would likely disidentify, Jacobs' narrative offers a figure of more heroic possibility and a possible model for the sisters in solidarity that read her narrative. When Martha is unjustly put on the auction block, the community is generally outraged at Dr. Flint's decision to sell her, and a woman in the crowd, perhaps out of a sense of loyalty or guilt, feebly makes an offer to purchase Martha with the intention of granting her freedom. Here is what readers learn of this old woman from Linda's narration: "She had lived forty years under the same roof with my grandmother; she knew how faithfully she had served her owners, and how cruelly she had been defrauded of her rights; and she resolved to protect her. The

auctioneer waited for a higher bid; but her wishes were respected; no one bid above her. She could neither read nor write; and when the bill of sale was made out, she signed it with a cross. But what consequence was that, when she had a big heart overflowing with human kindness? She gave the old servant her freedom" (21). Unlike Martha's mistress, or Dr. and Mrs. Flint, this near-sister fulfills a sense of obligation to Martha who has lived and worked in her home for most of her life. Positioned as a celebrated savior figure and a good sister, this woman uses the tool of manumission to bestow upon Martha the gift and protection of freedom. The means by which Martha achieves freedom may appear to inadvertently justify one of the plantation slavery's enabling myths, showing that there are some good mistresses after all. However, Jacobs tellingly reworks this myth to challenge readers' expectations for Black women. Rather than continuing to serve the family out of love as might have been expected or customary in stories featuring Mammy characters, Martha herself becomes a matriarch possessed of a home, purchased with money earned through her labor. In the end, Martha well exceeds the typology of bondwomen circulating in antebellum culture, denying the notion that her maternal power would serve to fix her as a supplementary or surrogate mother confined to her master's home. Moreover, the woman that purchases Martha's freedom represents for readers an ideal sisterly white woman against whom readers could measure their own politics and behaviors. Achieving her mission to "arouse the women of the North to a realizing sense of the condition of two millions of women at the South," is achieved not only by contesting damaging and prevailing myths about Black women's sexuality and labor, but also by instructing white women in more or less ethical performances of affection. Advising readers through example, the narrative suggests that those with a "big heart

overflowing with human kindness" would bestow upon their Black sisters not the opportunity to freely serve, but the freedom of self-determination, to exist independent of white domestic structures.

With the character of Linda, a narrative analogue for Jacobs herself, Jacobs explores the conditions that lead to a bondwoman's "fall," writing Linda into a story that commonly featured Jezebel types. Pursued by a licentious master, and subject to the torture of a jealous mistress, Linda struggles to escape corrupting forces. Unlike the narrative's representation of Martha, however, which primarily provides readers access to her outward and affective performance, Jacobs presents Linda's experience through the focal consciousness of a first-person narrator, constructing a more intimate relationship with the "virtuous women" that Jacobs expected to read her text. Linda claims to share with readers the truth of her experience, while they witness her strategically hiding from and lying to other characters in the narrative. The text thus dramatizes the domestic labor relation that Northern and Southern mistresses idealized, and the narrator, Linda, performs affective labor for her readers in order to appear totally trusting and transparent, drawing them into an intimate relationship in which they are positioned as superiors. This elaborate performance of dissemblance depends on a distinction between Linda, the narrator, a freedwoman who repents for her sins and calls on readers to exercise compassion towards the bondwomen of the South, and Linda, the character, fugitive slave woman, who carefully negotiates white ways of seeing black women, manipulating others' perception when necessary. The narrative creates an effect of providing readers access to both Linda's sanctioned public persona and her private self. By the narrative's end, however, the distinction between these two breaks down, and readers—as well as

critics—are unable to discern whether the narrator is sincere or "seething."[15] Unsettling readers' assumption that Jacobs could or should share with them her most private self, the text's final scenes confront readers with the troubling parallels between their own expectations for Linda, and the expectations of her new Northern mistress to whom Linda is emotionally and financially "bound."

As it does with Martha, Jacobs' narration of Linda takes aim at the myth of the plantation family, parodying the parental relationship between mistress and slave that both Beecher and Fitzhugh idealize. The text's opening anecdotes, focusing on Linda's childhood, thematize the affective bonds between "sisters," showing them to be not only illusory, but deeply exploitative. Take Linda's narration of her early experience of "domestic affection": "My mistress was so kind to me that I was always glad to do her bidding and proud to labor for her as much as my young years would permit. I would sit by her side for hours, sewing diligently, with a heart as free from care as that of any free-born child. When she thought I was tired, she would send me out to run and jump; and away I bounded, to gather berries or flowers to decorate her room" (14). The young Linda, this narration suggests, labored happily out of love for a mistress with whom she had a genuinely affectionate bond. Says the narrator: "I loved her; she had almost been like a mother to me" (14). Such an image might appear to affirm the slaveholder's argument that plantation families enjoy and benefit from reciprocal care and the performance of domesticity produces kindness and generosity on the part of both mistress and slave. However, the idealization of the mistress-bondwoman relationship is swiftly

[15] P. Gabrielle Foreman argues that the text's final pages "seethe" with Linda's "barely checked anger," (87) while Bruce Mills interprets the text's conclusion as a "reflection upon the joys of domestic life and upon her grandmother [that] calm[s] more than agitate[s]" (257).

undermined by an account of the betrayals and deceptions wherein mistresses fail to fulfill their promises to Linda's mother and grandmother. Linda realizes that the slave system perverts the nature of the intimate relationships among the women in her life, whether her mistress, her grandmother, mother, and all their children:

> When I was six years old, my mother died; and then, for the first time, I learned, by the talk around me, that I was a slave. My mother's mistress was the daughter of my grandmother's mistress. She was the foster sister of my mother; they were both nourished at my grandmother's breast. In fact, my mother had been weaned at three months old, that the babe of the mistress might obtain sufficient food. They played together as children; and when they became women, my mother was a most faithful servant to her whiter foster sister (14).

Although they appear to be a "family," the relations between maternal figures and their children are reconfigured by the plantation domestic labor system to turn sisters into either mistresses or slaves. Though Linda, her mother, and her grandmother all dutifully and selflessly serve as caregivers, abiding both the precepts of Beecher's proper housewife-domestic relation, and often even performing the perfect submission described by Fitzhugh, none are granted the freedom that their mistresses promised. Instead, each mistress persists in naming the women of Linda's family as an inheritance for her daughters. Beginning with an apparently benevolent relationship between a white mistress and the young Linda, the narrator then leads her readers towards a troubling implication: that domestic affection among white women and the Black women that serve them may reproduce inequalities, rather than shore up feelings of mutual obligation and affection. Black women's bodies, affections, and labor are used by the plantation and white domestic systems alike to reproduce white society and power.

The text pursues its exploration of the myth plantation family primarily through Linda's relationship with Dr. Flint, her licentious master. Readers might have seen

themselves as Linda's gender ally and championed her struggle against Flint's coercive and violent demands. However, the narrative pushes readers to consider the ways in which the experiences of Black and white women's sexual subjection differed. Linda cannot rely on the protection of a patriarch, cannot marry the man that she chooses, and can therefore only escape her master by submitting to the advances of another white man. Even at the risk of giving credence to the mythology of Black women's sexual promiscuity, Linda chooses (to the extent that it can be called a choice) to have an affair with Mr. Sands. Lest readers reduce the complexity of Linda's situation to exploitation by Mr. Sands, Linda informs readers: "I knew what I did, and I did it with deliberate calculation" (84). The knowingness that Linda expresses demands that readers recognize her sexual agency and the "deliberate" nature of her action, subject as it is to the constraints which structured the relation between the free, wealthy white man and the Black bondwoman under extreme duress. Jacob's narrator reflects on and assesses her relationship with Mr. Sands, critically analyzing the conditions under which bondwomen's affections are cultivated and manipulated:

> So much attention from a superior person was, of course, flattering; for human nature is the same in all. I also felt grateful for his sympathy, and encouraged by his kind words. It seemed to me a great thing to have such a friend. By degrees, a more tender feeling crept into my heart. He was an educated and eloquent gentleman; too eloquent, alas, for the poor slave girl who trusted him. Of course I saw whither all this was tending. I knew the impassable gulf between us; but to be an object of interest to a man who is not married, and who is not her master, is agreeable to the pride and feelings of a slave, if her miserable situation has left her any pride or sentiment. It seems less degrading to give one's self, than to submit to

> compulsion. There is something akin to freedom in having a lover who has no control over you, except that which he gains by kindness and attachment (85).

The narrator compares two relationships here: one, a relation of forced subordination in which Linda is silenced and entirely under the control of her master; the other, a relationship borne of an apparently mutual affection, and cultivated through acts of kindness. The latter, the narrator decides, is preferable since "it seems less degrading to give one's self" and even that "there is something akin to freedom" in doing so. However, there is suggestion that the relationship does not and cannot possibly achieve the reciprocity and formal equality so idealized among the ruling classes. There is, Linda says, an "impassable gulf" between this wealthy white man and herself; and moreover, theirs is still a relationship in which Linda must relinquish control or autonomy. Control, between Linda and Mr. Sands, is not exercised through force, but is rather "gain[ed] by kindness and attachment." Although explicitly describing the terms of romantic relations among Black women and white men, the comparison more implicitly describes the differences between relations among masters and slaves in the South, and the white employing and Black serving classes in the North. Linda calls to account the notion that sentimental relations or affective bonds could, in fact, effectively overcome power asymmetries.

While readers might have felt themselves to be Linda's allies, as women who also navigate the conditions of a patriarchal social and economic system, the narration ultimately positions them as among her antagonists. This critique is made more overtly in the text's ending, when Linda finds freedom in the North, and yet is still subordinated to a white mistress, working as a domestic servant. Linda achieves freedom, finally, through

manumission. Her mistress and friend, Mrs. Bruce, purchases Linda's freedom and that of her children, and Linda becomes her domestic. The closing scene, and the mistress-domestic relation in which Linda finds herself, recalls the young Linda's short-lived experience of domestic tenderness. As she informs the reader, "I still long for a hearthstone of my own, however humble. …But God so orders circumstances as to keep me with my friend Mrs. Bruce. Love, duty, gratitude also bind me to her side. It is a privilege to serve her who pities my oppressed people, and who has bestowed the inestimable boon of freedom on me and my children" (303). Her freedom and employment in the North, it seems, do not bring her any closer to achieving independence nor the "dream of [her] life." Rather, she remains bound to a white mistress to whom she owes her freedom and thus her loyalty, love, and labor. In these final pages, the distinction between the narrator Linda and the character Linda collapses, as she writes of her present working and living arrangements. This collapsing results in an ambiguity that has troubled critics who seek to determine whether the narrative ends happily or bitterly, conforming to the conventions of sentimental literature or critiquing abolitionist racial and gender politics. No longer given access to Linda's critical perspective, readers bear witness instead to an affective performance that appeals to them as if they shared with Mrs. Bruce expectations of Linda's deference. Undermining the logic of sisterhood, which presumed that women could share equally in a struggle against oppressive patriarchal and capitalist structures, the narrative charts new alliances, positioning her would-be sisters on the other side of a line dividing the employing from serving classes, the white masters and mistresses from their Black servants. This "impassable gulf" cannot be crossed and is only reinforced by Linda's position within the Bruce home.

The conclusion's ambivalence towards Mrs. Bruce and the women of the North more broadly raises what would be for readers an unsettling possibility: that the gratitude and contentedness that Black domestic servants avow is merely performative, covering over an unspeakable bitterness and resentment for those that "bestow the inestimable boon of freedom." Though she appears to perform as an ideal domestic servant, Linda undermines the notion that Black women were suited and happy to indefinitely serve the interests and needs of white families, insisting that hers is a dream not yet realized. Linda's dissatisfaction suggests that while the role imagined for Black women by a white supremacist culture may resolve myriad anxieties and crises of social reproduction, it failed to sufficiently liberate Black women or resolve the crises presented by slavery. The text's narrative conceit, its engagement with the tropes of the Mammy and Jezebel, and its critique of the bonds of sisterhood reveal that the crises are far from resolved. If an effort to influence the sympathies of her readers, however compromised or affected by Child's editing, Jacobs' *Incidents* powerfully reveals the vision of freedom articulated by abolitionists to be hypocritically self-serving and dissatisfying to Jacobs personally. Though politically free, Linda remains emotionally indebted, economically dependent, and socially immobile in the North.

As we have seen, the myth of the Mammy served apparently divergent cultural functions. For slaveholders, it provided a means of imagining and justifying intimate relations among masters and slaves, suppressing the extent to which the social reproduction of the slave system required bondwomen's sexual exploitation, and

therefore quelling the anxieties such a fact inspired among mistresses. For abolitionists and Northern housewives, the figure of the Mammy was presented as a humane and moral alternative to slavery in which Black women's labor was crucial but subordinated to the economic and social interests of the white family. As this chapter has shown, the overlapping assumptions of slaveholding and abolitionist thinkers results from a shared investment in resolving multiple crises of social reproduction posed by the emergence of industrial capitalism. Legal and cultural institutions conspired to resolve these crises by separating the "spheres" and formally removing domestic work, care work, and all reproductive labor from the market as unwaged and natural expressions of femininity. Such a separation necessitated that women working in the domestic sphere adopt an ethos of self-denial—a demand that differently impacted white and Black women, employing and serving classes. As Hine's theory and Jacobs' narrative show us, if domestic education disciplined white housewives by reconfiguring their desires away from economic independence and towards the family, it also empowered housewives to demand the affective and emotional labor of their servants. The guise of kinship made these relationships appear as equal—mutually beneficial and requiring mutual sacrifice. Curiously enough, the language of kinship, sisterhood, and friendship rose to prominence as a means for describing domestic labor relations precisely when Anglo-American girls abandoned service as a profession, and Black, immigrant, and non-kin workers flooded the market. As we shall see in the next chapter, the so-called racialization of service transformed the organization of social reproduction, instituting a racialized hierarchy of care workers that persists well into the present.

CHAPTER 3

THE NARRATIVE STRUGGLE TO RACIALIZE SERVICE

Of all the novels representing girls "sent out to service" in the antebellum period, Catharine Maria Sedgwick's 1837 *Live and Let Live: Or, Domestic Service Illustrated* was perhaps the most influential. According to literary critic Barbara Ryan, "it is not too much to say that this one writer contributed so powerfully to the literature of nineteenth-century U.S. service that all subsequent advisors had to negotiate her legacy" (11). Sedgwick's writing, Ryan argues, set the agenda for representing and educating readers in the performance of proper service relationships in the antebellum period. *Live and Let Live* follows the tale of a recently downtrodden Anglo-American girl, Lucy Lee, as she encounters various types of mistresses and domestic workers, some kind and some cruel. In the mistress Mrs. Hyde, Lucy finds what she calls a "second mother," (214) a woman of similar class and racial background that trains her in both housework and the performance of bourgeois, Anglo American femininity. Through this experience, Lucy learns to become a housewife and, by the novel's end, is married to a baker, preparing to run a home of her own. Fortunately for Mrs. Hyde, Lucy leaves behind another worker in her stead: Clara Lane, a Black domestic lovingly referred to as the Hydes' "Mammy":

> Clara had lived with Mrs. Hyde from the time of her marriage. She had taken care of all her children, from her firstborn to the youngling of the flock—the present little pet and idol of the house. Mammy had knit herself into the hearts of the children. She had watched them by night and by day through the diseases of childhood. She had been patient and gentle in all their impatience and irritability. She had overcome their little selfishnesses

> by the example of her generosity and self-denial. She had shown to all a steady and equal kindness; in short, she had been *a second mother* to them (202, my emphasis).

Embodying the characteristics of a classic Mammy type, Clara is portrayed as an ideal domestic servant who exhibits loyalty over the course of a lifelong appointment, sublimating her own emotions and needs, and forging affective bonds with her employer and the children for whom she genuinely cares. Clara embodies the white fantasy about Black womanhood that casts her as a maternal power deeply invested in the care of her white charges. She, too, is what the text calls a "second mother."

Yet this term of endearment has vastly different implications for the two women. As we have seen, reframing women's labor as an act of maternal love enabled the pastoralization of housework. For housewives, this meant that their labor was invisible as such, a discursive development that justified their exploitation by denying its very existence. But it also granted housewives cultural and social power, naming them as sovereigns of the domestic sphere. Sedgwick's Mrs. Hyde exemplifies the ideal housewife in this respect, exercising the patience, compassion, and discipline said to emanate from the "Womanness" of bourgeois Anglo-American women. And although Clara Lane similarly performs emotional labor and is similarly praised as an exemplary domestic worker because of her capacity for maternal love, the pastoralization of her labor has different rhetorical and material consequences. The metaphors of kinship justify her exploitation by making self-sacrifice a sign of her fitness *to serve*, rather than her fitness *to reign*. In this fantasy, Clara *chooses* to be burdened by labor, overtaxed to the point of exhaustion, not because she is coerced or forced, but because of the depth of her love for the family. This boundless love makes her the most ideal servant, but also

empties her of an identity independent from the family she serves. By this logic, the best domestic workers are literally selfless, and necessarily dependent. As Mrs. Hyde says of Clara: "Mammy was always with me; and when I could get no one else, she insisted on relieving me from the roughest of the work, though she had only contracted for the duties of nurse. But she was my friend—my *help* in all things, and I treated her accordingly" (87-88). According to Mrs. Hyde, Clara exceeds expectations, working beyond the terms of her contract simply because she wanted to as the "help" and "friend" of her employer. Much like Linda Brent's relationship with her friend and mistress, Mrs. Bruce, this one is a fundamentally unequal relationship under the guise of mutual care. When the terms second mother, help, or friend are applied to Clara, they signal her inherent servility and provide an alibi for housewives' otherwise politically questionable desire to employ a servant.

The example of Sedgwick's Clara Lane illustrates the duplicitous function of the metaphors of kinship that were used by housewives and other empowered historical actors to naturalize a racialized division of labor among working women. Although the language appeared to align Clara and Mrs. Hyde as gender-allies, women sharing in the labor of social reproduction, it also created and naturalized divisions and hierarchies among these women. Ultimately, the distinction between these "second mothers" turned on a difference of race and class that had lasting implications for the organization of domestic labor. As scholars have observed, the Mammy's rise to popularity as a figure of labor coincided with rapid departure of white women from the profession in a turn of events scholars have referred to as the "racialization of domestic service."[16] This

[16] Among the most important scholarship for the study of the racialization of service are: W.E.B. Du Bois, *Philadelphia Negro*, Univ of Pennsylvania Press, 1899; David Katzman, *Seven Days a*

sociological argument, while descriptive of changes in the labor market, does not fully account for the causes and conditions that ushered in this transformation, nor its long-term consequences for the organization of reproductive labor in the U.S. Moreover, it assumes that the social categories of race, gender, class, and labor preexist discursive formation. Sedgwick's narrative construction of Clara indicates another possibility: that it was through representation and the establishment of a hegemonic discourse of labor that Black women became racialized, feminized, classed subjects, positioned in what writers like Beecher and Sedgwick referred to as a "station." As we have seen elsewhere, serving as a surrogate mother to white children was the "dream" of no Black domestic, Northern or Southern. Rather, by culturally producing service as labor unfit for white women, and the Mammy as a second mother, various historical forces shaped the material conditions of reproductive labor such that Black women were compelled to fill this role and perform the requisite affective and emotional labor. I argue that the racialization of service, a pivotal moment in the history of capitalist social reproduction, must be understood as a sociological event driven by a representational process—one that enabled the transition from a labor system dependent on bound and unpaid workers to one of paid and "free" workers.

This chapter will recover that representational struggle to racialize service and domestic workers, situating it in the broader context that this dissertation has constructed thus far. As we have seen in chapters 1 and 2, labor was not merely a material act with

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Week: Women and Domestic Service in Industrializing America, Oxford Univ Press, 1979; Trudier Harris, *From Mammies to Militants: Domestics in Black American Literature*, Temple Univ Press, 1982; Faye Dudden, *Serving Women: Household Service in Nineteenth-Century America,* Wesleyan Univ Press, 1983; David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class,* 1991; Lori Merish, *Archives of Labor: Working-Class Women and Literary Culture in the Antebellum U.S.,* 2017.

self-evident meaning; rather, narratives by housewives, their husbands, and social reformers of various kinds created raced, classed, and gendered figures of labor in an attempt to organize the distribution of work among them. For each laboring body, domestic educators argued, there was an appropriate "station" and kind of labor in which they should be engaged. This chapter will show how the vision of domestic labor articulated by employing classes came to dominate through the suppression of opposition and alternatives. I will look to the various historical forces that conspired to silence domestic workers themselves, including legal discourse, the woman's movement, the labor movement, the abolitionist movement, and domestic literatures propagating myths about insurgent and inept servants. I argue that these discourses and movements drove the racialization of service in a number of ways: by discrediting domestic workers and obstructing their access to public representation; by figuring service as labor unfit for white workers and incompatible with bourgeois gender norms; and by propagating the image of the Mammy as an ideal and self-sacrificing second mother. Together, these historical forces naturalized a symbolic relationship among Blackness, femininity, and service, and made possible the racialized distribution of reproductive labor that would follow emancipation. By finding a place for Black women in the home, employing classes secured a future after slavery that preserved white supremacist visions of the home and nation.

The second half of this final chapter of Part 1 will turn to Harriet Wilson's 1859 semi-autobiographical novel, *Our Nig: Sketches from the Life of a Free Black, In a Two-Story House, North. Showing the Slavery's Shadows Fall Even There.* The only extant novel written by a free Black domestic in the antebellum period, *Our Nig* contests the

domestic labor relations idealized and advocated by the literature of the employing classes. The novel recounts the life of Frado, a "mulatto" child abandoned by her mother and taken in as an unofficial indentured servant by a Northern white family, the Bellmonts. As its title suggests, the novel compares the working conditions of free Black domestics with slaves, drawing on the genre conventions of the slave narrative in its representation of Frado's life. But Wilson also incorporates other sentimental genres of the period: the servants' tale, the seduction plot, and the marriage plot foremost among these. Parodying the discourses and genre forms that animated the housewifization of Anglo-American women and the racialization of servants, Wilson's novel dramatizes the representational struggle to make Black women serve the interests of the white family. Both the pro- and anti-slavery Bellmonts, the novel shows, participate in Frado's subjection as a docile racialized subject, whether through the exercise of brute force or the cultivation of affective bonds. Resisting the notion that this distribution of labor, as well as the racialization and feminization of domestic workers, were in any way natural, Wilson's text demonstrates instead that antebellum narratives and employers had only a tenuous hold on the meaning of Black women's labor.

Silencing Servants, Racializing Service

The previous chapter has shown already how the idealization of the Mammy served to shore up symbolic links among Blackness, maternity, and service. To further explore this historical process, this section will survey literature that may appear to have little interest in actual domestic workers. It is my contention that the omission of domestic servants from literatures concerning the organization and distribution of reproductive labor is not so much evidence of disinterest, as a collective understanding

that domestics' "station" was a foregone conclusion. In the literature of many social movements, for example, the domestic servant was referenced most commonly as a symbol of degradation, a foil against which working men and women could contrast their whiteness and entitlement to economic independence and political enfranchisement. This rhetorical strategy, in conjunction with the suppression of domestic workers' speech and testimony, presumes a shared understanding of the domestic worker as a social outcast, her labor unfit for Anglo-American men and women. This section will show how the racialization of service was achieved not only through the idealization of the Mammy, but also through the dissociation of whiteness from service. By marking domestic servants as un-American outsiders, whether because of their resonance with anti-republican values or their foreignness, white workingmen and women were more successfully able to declare themselves unfit for the labor of servitude. What's more, these characterizations made domestic workers unreliable narrators of their own life stories, and therefore suppressed possible objections, creating a self-justifying discursive structure in which the value of domestic workers appeared self-evident and inevitable. The omission or silencing of servants served a crucial cultural and social function, excluding the possibility of another representational tradition from emerging. In its place, a proliferation of literary representations of servants generally appealed to the sensibilities of housewives and the employing classes. Propagating the tropes of the help, the Biddy, and the Mammy, these novelistic representations advanced an argument for proper domestic relations that had material effects on actual labor arrangements. The analysis that follows will demonstrate how these various forces coalesced to figure domestic service as a racializing and

feminizing form of labor, forging a complex narrative structure through which domestic servants were made and the terms of their labor established.

In antebellum legal discourse, the domestic servant was largely absent, though some provisions were made to support poor and working women who were generally regarded by the bourgeois and employing classes as pitiable victims. Married women's earnings reforms are an instructive example. Passed in only four states before the Civil War, they sought to redress working women who were unfairly exploited by both their husbands and the law. Of the passage of postbellum earnings reforms in Chicago, activist and founder of the *Chicago Legal News* Myra Bradwell explains that the law, designed "for the poor and down-trodden women, the wives of drunkards and wife-beaters," took aim at "Rich, shoddy creditors of the husband [that] have taken the money earned by the honest toil of the wife, for the purpose of supporting her ragged, starving children, which a drunken or unfortunate husband failed to provide for" (37). Perpetuating an image of the working-class family as immoral and dysfunctional, even feminist legal discourse figured working women as victimized by their need to work. While they could have radically reclaimed women's right to wages in the context of coverture and displaced the notion that women ought not work outside the home, these laws actually took for granted and preserved the breadwinner-housewife ideal. By their logic, work outside one's own home was injurious to women. Such a sentiment stoked suspicions about working women as characteristically weak, dependent, and therefore susceptible to corruption.

That of a leading voice in the movements which resisted coverture and advocated for women's suffrage, Bradwell's representation of working women is consistent with the literature of the antebellum woman's movement. Here, the domestic servant was more

often invoked metaphorically to describe the situation of housewives than as the object of legal or social reform. Former New York congressman and *Tribune* founder Horace Greeley, responding to a letter from Elizabeth Cady Stanton urging him to attend the Syracuse National Convention in 1852, calls this hypocrisy to her attention: "it seems to me that the friends of woman's rights may wisely and worthily set the example of paying juster prices for female assistance in their households than those now current. If they would but resolve never to pay a capable, efficient woman less than two-thirds the wages paid to a vigorous, efficient man employed in some corresponding vocation, they would essentially aid the movement now in progress for the general recognition and conception of Equal Rights to Woman" (521). In her narrative response to the letter, published in the *History of Woman's Suffrage*, which collects and contextualizes the primary documents of the woman's movement, Stanton deflects by explaining that "pauperized" housewives can hardly be held responsible for doling out fair wages, since they themselves have been dispossessed of wealth. Apart from this exchange, the term "servant" appears less than 20 times in the sprawling 1800-page account of the history of the woman's movement and *only* as a metaphor used to describe the situation of housewives—never to directly address the interests and rights of paid domestic workers. Effacing actual paid domestic workers altogether, the literature of the woman's movement often used the concept of domestic servitude to describe the exploitation of housewives who, they argued, were wrongfully made to be the servants of their husbands. They thus made their argument for economic independence and political enfranchisement by constructing domestic servants as their foil, a symbol of the conditions to which they refused to submit. Such an argument made service appear as beneath bourgeois and Anglo-American women, and all

who aspired to achieve the ideal of "housewife." This had long-lasting implications and shaped the way that white women would enter the market, paving the way for the demographic shift in the domestic service labor market that would occur in the decades following emancipation.

A surprisingly similar argument was made by working-class white women who conflated the exploitation of housewives with the degradation of domestic service. The *Lowell Offering* and *Voices of Industry*, two publications founded by mill and factory workingwomen, frequently alleged that the home represented for women a fate not unlike slavery. Appropriating the structure and conventions of the slave narrative, stories featured in these publications often framed the mill or factory as a refuge from the abuse and oppression experienced at the hands of an unjust patriarch. Contesting the notion that work outside the home was necessarily oppressive for women, these workingwomen argued that it was in the mill or the factory that they found autonomy and self-reliance.[17] The opening story in the first issue of the *Lowell Offering* is an especially compelling example. "History of a Hemlock: Written By Itself," a title that parodies those of the slave narrative tradition, tells the story of a woman seduced into domestic servitude. A personified hemlock, the narrator gives way to the temptation to see more of the world, which makes her vulnerable to the "jack knife" of a "farm-yard acquaintance" (1). Once torn from her "parent tree," the hemlock branch is made to serve as a broom in a new home where she is reduced to a tool used for cleaning the kitchen grate. The story warns against the dangers of seduction and romantic union, which could quickly turn into the

[17] For an extended analysis of the relationship between anti-slavery feminist rhetoric and the literature of factory and mill workers, see Julie Husband's article, "'The White Slave of the North': Lowell Mill Women and the Reproduction of 'Free' Labor," *Legacy*, vol. 1. no. 1., 1999, p. 11-21.

drudgery of domestic servitude. A critique of the patriarchal social structures that governed homes both North and South, this story suggests that it is through seduction and even marriage that women could be made into domestic servants—here figured as mere inanimate objects—suffering a fate similar to bondwomen, since marriage, too, often entailed physical and sexual abuse, in addition to exploitation. In order to redeem factory and mill labor from slander, these workingwomen took the name the "daughters of freemen," ("The Turn Out at Lowell" 11) positioning themselves as the inheritors of the rights for which their "Patriotic Ancestors" fought in the Revolutionary War. In a context in which bondage or freedom were legally inherited political identities per the terms of slave law, such a claim implies that these women were entitled by blood to working conditions far above the objectifying ones of servitude and slavery. By marking the home as a workplace characterized by oppressive patriarchal structures and making analogous the labor of housewives and servants with slaves, labor publications by workingwomen contributed to the symbolic racialization of service, as well as the eventual widespread rejection of domestic work by Anglo-American girls and women.

These "daughters of freemen" were transformed in proslavery writing into the figure of the "white slave," a domestic worker that suffered a great injustice as a result of the indignity of service. Whether novels or sociological treatises like Fitzhugh's, proslavery writing constructed the domestic servant as suffering a fate far worse than slavery as a result of the impersonal and malevolent nature of the free market. Like labor publications, these texts generally presumed that the injustices suffered by the white slave were a consequence of the disorganization of a natural order in which Black workers were given undue privileges that were, in turn, denied to white workers. During the

antebellum period, the literary genre of "servants' tales" featured fictionalized first-hand accounts of the experience of white slave in the North. So-called "Anti-Tom novels," positioned in opposition to Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, are a significant instance of this. These texts featured poor, Northern working-class men and women who claimed to be suffering without the protection and affection of the paternalistic masters of the South. In Caroline Hentz's 1854 *The Planter's Northern Bride,* for example, a white domestic servant, Betsy, exclaims of her predicament vis-à-vis an "aristocratic" bondman: "Talk about the black folks at the South having such a dreadful time!... I want to know who has an easier time than this fellow? … I'm ten times more a slave, this minute, than you are, and have been all my life" (174). Betsy's statement dissociates one's status as a slave from political definition, reconceptualizing enslavement as enacted through set of working conditions—specifically, in this case, those endured by women working as hired domestics. According to proslavery literature, then, it is through the labor of paid domestic servitude that one is deprived of the freedom which is their birthright and, in effect, becomes a slave.

While domestic servants served as a powerful symbol for the labor, woman's, and even proslavery movements in the abstract, actual domestic workers were often positioned as a potential threat to the social and political goals of housewives, or even the nation more generally. Especially with the introduction of non-kin service workers, most of whom were immigrants or Black, Anglo-American employers became increasingly concerned about the trustworthiness of the strangers that witnessed the most intimate aspects of their private lives. Though generally barred from giving testimony in court and discouraged by what such an act would mean for their employability, when domestic

servants were asked to testify, they were met with reproach and disgust. Writes "An American" in an editorial after a domestic servant was called to testify in a divorce trial: "There is neither safety nor peace to expect in society hereafter if the lowbred, morbid and indecent thoughts and inferences of servants…are to be applied to the actions of those whom they serve, and their most innocent acts distorted into crimes, and published to the world" (4). In order to defend of elite propriety and privacy, the speech of domestic workers was constructed as highly suspect and even dangerous, the workers' "lowbred" class status taken as a sign of their immorality. Identifying as an "American" signals to readers, too, that while their own loyalties and values are patriotic, those of the domestic servant are uncertain and possibly anti-American. This has the effect of justifying domestic workers' disenfranchisement and prefiguring any rebuttal that they might offer as further evidence of their disloyalty. To silence domestic workers actively suppressed alternative ways of understanding and imagining domestic workers' role in the home and relationship to the nation.

Defensive censure of the speech of domestic workers appeared with frequency in the writing of housewives who feared that their testimony might topple the precarious social hierarchy atop which housewives sat. Consider the oft-studied exchange of letters between domestic educator Catharine Beecher and abolitionist Angelina Grimké. Among other topics, the writers debated the principles of abolitionism, including whether members of the serving classes had either the right or the ability to demand that their employers' change their own bad behavior. For Beecher it is a self-evident truth that "there are cases…where differences in age, and station, and character, forbid all interference to modify the conduct and character of others" (*Essay* 48). She cites, without

further explanation, the example of a domestic worker, writing: "A nursery maid may see that a father misgoverns his children and ill-treats his wife. But her station makes it inexpedient for her to turn reprover. It is a case where reproof would do no good, but only evil" (48). If the domestic worker were to intercede in or object to the actions of the household patriarch, the only possible outcome for Beecher would be an "evil" one. Her transgression, the text assumes as indisputable fact, would serve only to hurt the family and maybe herself, threatening as it does the hierarchical social arrangement that Beecher believes is necessary for the success of American democracy. Grimké's response draws out much of what is only implied in Beecher's letter, arguing that the domestic worker's "station peculiarly qualifies her for the difficult and delicate task, because nursemaids often know secrets of oppression, which no other persons are fully acquainted with" (61). Taking this idea one step further, Grimke attests: "I have myself been reproved by a *slave,* and I thanked her, and still thank her for it…. I believe it is *now the duty of the slaves of the South to rebuke their masters* for their robbery, oppression, and crime" (61). Contesting the image of the eavesdropping and disloyal servant, Grimke's response instead suggests that servants, like slaves, know the "truths" of oppression and the true meaning of suffering. By drawing this comparison, Grimké, like Beecher, assumes the social proximity of nursery maids with slaves. Allying herself with the employing classes, Grimke inadvertently naturalizes a racialized hierarchy in which servants and slaves are similarly, if not equally, marked as a latent threat to the domestic labor relations idealized by both housewives and plantation mistresses. Though they appear to disagree, both Grimke and Beecher assume that domestic servants owe it to their employers to perform a particular emotional and social role in the family. Race and

"station," in this discussion, become mutually animating social categories that, together, position the Black servant as one bound to be subordinate, loyal, and honest.

These assumptions were tested and explored in myriad genres of antebellum literature. Here, we may observe a wide variety of servant characters figured as props, fantasies, second mothers, dastardly thieves, uppity foreigners, Mammies, victims, or even housewives-in-training. Generally written by members of the employing classes, these novelistic representations typically sympathized with housewives who contended with more "bad" servants than "good." Through family drama and conflict between worker and mistress, these novels delineated how and to what extent servant-characters of different kinds could be considered "part of the family." Perhaps the three most significant servant-types were the "help," the Mammy, and the Irish Bridget or Biddy. These tropes, forged in relation to each other and in juxtaposition, represented the best and worst case scenarios of domestic life from the perspective of housewives. While native-born Anglo-American helps might have fit most easily into the family, they were sure to depart in order to become housewives themselves. Mammies, as we have seen, were idealized as docile, lifelong servants who accommodated their mistress and asked for nothing in return. The Mammy's opposite, the Irish Biddy, was a constant source of aggravation and despair for housewives charged with the duty of domestication. The mythology around these servant types played no small part in shaping the lived experiences of domestic workers whose employment arrangements were informed by attitudes which these servant tropes cultivated and, in turn, justified. By making the behavior and quality of servants an expression of difference—whether class, racial, or national origin—fictional representations of servants supplied the cultural myths that

would sustain the racialization of service, as well as the racial hierarchy within the reproductive labor system, long after the abolition of slavery.

The tropes that appeared in literature had referents in actual homes, too, where domestic workers took on different titles, depending largely on their race, class, and national origin. These titles—ranging from drudge, hireling, servant, help, maid-of-all-work, and domestic—named possible labor relations that differed in the degree of exploitation and relationship to the family that they served. While some were considered more pejorative than others and enjoyed popularity among different groups of workers during different decades of the nineteenth century, the terms were deployed somewhat indiscriminately, especially among employing classes who tended to trivialize workers' investment in the significance of a title. As we have seen in Beecher's writing, domestic workers often took seriously the significance of their title, recognizing that it was more than just a name—that it represented their social and cultural value, their relationship to the nation, and, perhaps most importantly, their proximity to Blackness. In what follows, I will examine the relationships both among the literary tropes of the help, Biddy, and Mammy, and with their analogs in the sociological history of domestic labor relations. Though prescriptive literature like Beecher's or Sedgwick's attempted to stabilize the meaning and organization of service, these narratives were contested by workers themselves, or else by competing literary traditions that advanced alternative interpretations of domestic labor. What we will see is that the meaning of domestic service was far from certain—it was the site of social and cultural struggle where emergent notions of race, class, gender, and national belonging collided.

The first servant type, the "help," or the girl "sent out to service," was the most common protagonist of service literature and was nostalgically represented as the most ideal domestic worker. Prior to the antebellum period, service labor was informally organized among families and neighbors, as mothers sent their daughters to provide support to housewives in exchange for a small wage. As this became less common, housewives bemoaned the loss of good help, and retrospectively idealized the good old days when servants were Anglo-American girls of their own class, and perhaps even their own kin. Although this labor arrangement became increasingly uncommon, novelistic representations of helps proliferated over the course of the nineteenth century, representing the arrangement between housewives and helps as a mutually beneficial ideal. Sedgwick's *Live and Let Live,* for instance, suggested that, for helps, service work was a valuable means to an end. According to novels like these, serving as a help afforded young girls the opportunity to be trained in the proper methods of bourgeois domesticity, including not only domestic labor like cooking, but also proper table manners and middle-class propriety. Writes Lucy to her mother in the final chapter of *Live and Live Live:* "In all respects, Mrs. Hyde has been a mother to me. She has qualified me to take charge of a family of my own, so that, with the blessing of God, I hope to perform my part well, and to contribute to Charles's prosperity as well as his happiness" (214). Working as a help was thus not represented as a degrading experience; on the contrary, prevailing representations of helps as housewives-in-training suggested that to work in domestic service was consummate with the codes and culture of domesticity, enriching the lives of both employer and worker. Using the language of family and affection, the literature of helps propagated an image of domestic labor

relations as intergenerational feminine communion—so long as the women shared a common racial and class background.

Despite the romance of helps and Anglo-American service represented in literature, white working women throughout the nineteenth century consistently regarded domestic servitude as unsuitable labor and actively revised the terms of their employment. As early as 1807, a domestic worker famously replied when asked if her "master" were home, "I am Mr. ____'s *help.* I'd have you know, *man,* that I am no *sarvant* [*sic*]; none but *negers* [*sic*] are *sarvants*" (Janson 88). Distinguishing themselves from "servants," a term used by slaveholders interchangeably with "slaves," helps transformed the narration and material conditions of their labor, here, in part, through a pejorative "blackening." Whereas to "serve" implied that a worker was dispossessed of their labor and denied power to determine the labor relation, to "help" a housewife in the production of domesticity implied instead a voluntary gift of one's labor to another in need. In her seminal historical analysis of the changing nature of domestic labor relations, Faye Dudden cites Northern housewives' correspondence and diaries which attest to helps' efforts to undermine the subservience connoted by the term "servant." Remarks one housewife of helps: "They think that their employer is quite as much indebted to them as they are to the employer" (27). Through the revision of the terms of the labor relation, white working girls and women elevated their labor above the drudgery, indignity, and Blackness of slave labor, effectively advancing their whiteness as a social power over and above the unfree workers with whom their labor could be compared. This development in the language of domestic labor, together with the service literature idealizing white helps as future American housewives, dissociated whiteness from

domestic servitude, reframing the latter as a labor arrangement reserved for non-kin, non-white, economically dependent workers.

By the mid-nineteenth century, white working women increasingly pursued factory or clerical work, which were regarded as a more respectable pathway towards economic independence and autonomy. Helps were replaced by "domestics" and "maids-of-all-work," free Black and Irish immigrant women hired as domestic workers and expected to do a great deal more work than the helps they succeeded. By 1855, Irish immigrant women, euphemistically referred to as "Bridgets," and more disparagingly as "Biddies," accounted for at least 75% of domestic service workers in Northern U.S. cities, a change in the domestic labor market that gave rise to the "servant problem" (Dudden 60). The introduction of these "foreign" workers into Anglo-American homes was met with dismay and precipitated the institution of a far more exploitative and rigidly hierarchical set of labor relations. Virginia Penny, in her 1863 *The Employments of Women*, remarks that: "Most [servant girls] are raw Irish girls, who think, when they come to this country, everybody is equal. Consequently, they do not know their places as they do in the old country, where there are distinct grades in society" (403). Unlike helps who performed nearly egalitarian relations with their employers, Irish maids-of-all-work were expected to perform deference and subservience, accepting an inferior "station" in the home and broader society. This held implications, too, for the terms of their hire. Maids-of-all-work were expected, as their title implies, to do all types of work not in the company of their mistress, but *in place of* their mistress. These women tended to be single, since many arrived in the U.S. alone and were encouraged by Irish leadership to remain unmarried, and so were perceived by Anglo-American housewives to be

"uncivilized" because unaccustomed to the particular social codes of bourgeois American culture. The perceived task of assimilating these women into the Anglo-American home and nation frustrated housewives, stoking their nativist sentiments, as evinced by the addition of the disclaimer "No Irish Need Apply" to their employment advertisements. The transition from helps to maids-of-all-work spurred the racialization of domestic service: no longer a site of harmonious would-be mother-daughter relations, with the introduction of the Biddy, the home became a site of racial and cultural conflict in which the housewife exercised her domesticating capacities to dominate and conquer her foreign charge.

Anti-Catholic and Anti-Irish literature of the 1830s and 40s disseminated images of the Bridget as a potentially seditious actor, sowing anarchy in the Anglo-American domestic sphere on behalf of her homeland. An 1868 story in *Godey's Lady's Book*, "The Revolt in the Kitchen," for instance, speculated that the employment agencies which assigned domestic workers placed Biddies that would undermine housewives' control of the home. The "intelligence office," according to the story, "represents, in Biddy-dom, all the power of the State, and is moreover the Temple of Liberty. The custom of other places is here reversed, and the servant is the mistress. She sits enthroned, waiting to receive the homage of dependent and tributary housekeepers" (Price 143). Marshalling the imagery of sovereignty and queenship, the story suggests that Biddies threaten not just to overstep the bounds established by housewives, but to de-throne them entirely, destabilizing a whole system of social relations. A burgeoning Irish independence movement meant for housewives that Irish "Biddies" and "Paddies" were disposed to transgressive political action, their allegiance not to American families but to their own in

Ireland. Moreover, Catholicism itself was considered suspicious among Protestants on both sides of the Atlantic, since, according to Marjorie Elizabeth Howes, it was associated with "sexual depravity, infanticide, abuse of the confessional, and victims who [were] forbidden to read the bible and [were] forced to abandon their individual sense of right and wrong and to submit to the absolute and tyrannical authority of corrupt priests" (144). Irish Catholic servants, therefore, were at once believed to embody qualities of servility and vulnerability thought to threaten the stability of the republic, "apt to be pawns of powerful and designing men," (Roediger 35) and seen as fearfully violent and rebellious. The trope of the Bridget or Biddy functioned to make a case against Irish women as domestics, against whom the loyalty, temperament, and Americanness of the Mammy was measured.

Among Irish immigrants, however, a different image of domestic servitude appeared: the "colleen," a romantic figure in transatlantic Irish culture, who left her struggling family in Ireland in order to earn money in the U.S. as a domestic servant. Contesting the image of the Biddy, which by the end of the nineteenth century tended to represent Irish women and girls as muscular, masculine, and simian, the colleen was a beautiful, dark-haired, self-sacrificing and chaste young girl, the embodiment of idealized Irish femininity. A popular example of the Irish colleen in U.S. literature is Irish-American/Canadian author Mary Ann Sadlier's 1861 *Bessy Conway, or The Irish Girl in America*. Sadlier's popular novel aimed to educate and prepare young emigrants to navigate American cities and homes. An Irish servants' tale, the novel recounts Bessy's journey from Ireland to America where she finds work as a domestic in order to send money back to her father and family across the Atlantic. Along the way, like Sedgwick's

Lucy Lee, Bessy contends with social forces unique to the "New World": sexual, political, and religious temptations that corrupt her fellow expatriates who all become "fallen" and are, in some cases, severely punished. Unlike Lucy, however, Bessy remains unchanged by what she sees and experiences, steadfast in her values, representing an unshakeable moral power. Sadlier describes the situation of Irish colleens as follows:

> Perhaps in the vast extent of the civilized world there is no class more exposed to evil influences than the Irish Catholic girls who earn a precarious living at service in America. To those who are even superficially acquainted with the workings of that chaotic mass which forms the population of our cities, of the awful depth of corruption weltering below the surface, and the utter forgetfulness of things spiritual, it is a matter of surprise that so many of the simple-hearted peasant girls of Ireland retain their home-virtues and follow the teachings of religion in these great Babylons of the west (iii).

Rejecting the idea that Irish girls needed to be disciplined, assimilated into bourgeois American life, and *made into* proper servants, Sadlier's Bessy Conway comes to America a fully-formed, feminized Irish subject. What Beecher and Sedgwick might frame as disciplinary structures necessary for the strength of the republic, then, Sadlier casts as corrupting and threatening forces, those which justify housewives' individualistic and materialistic lifestyles. In contrast, Bessy successfully thwarts temptations in "these great Babylons of the west," fulfilling her mission and remaining true not to herself, but to her religion, her family, and the Irish Catholic community at large. Critiquing the vision of domestic labor relations advanced by Anglo-American housewives, then, Irish literature like Sadlier's inscribed domestic service with a divine, feminine, and transcendent social value. These narratives contested the racialization of Irish women by anti-Irish publications by rejecting the associations of Bridget with dirt, ignorance, and violence. Well aware of the associations between slavery and servitude, Irish literature offered a

counternarrative, suggesting that the fact that Irish immigrants were performing domestic service was not itself racializing; rather that it was their employers who, through abuse and corruption, made their servants "slavish."

This sentiment was shared by African American abolitionist orator and former domestic worker Maria W. Stewart. One of the few anti-slavery activists to take up the cause of free Black women in North, Stewart aimed to correct the prevailing notion that Black women were naturally suited for service and contest the image of the Mammy. In an 1832 lecture delivered at the New England Anti-Slavery Society, Stewart says:

> O, ye fairer sisters, whose hands are never soiled, whose nerves and muscles are never strained, go learn by experience! Had we had the opportunity that you have had, to improve our moral and mental faculties, what would have hindered our intellects from being as bright, and our manners from being as dignified as yours? Had it been our lot to have been nursed in the lap of affluence and ease, and to have basked beneath the smiles and sunshine of fortune, should we not have naturally supposed that we were never made to toil? (44)

Stewart's speech undermines the prevailing argument made by housewives like Beecher and Sedgwick: that labor ideally gives expression to already raced, classed, and gendered bodies. For Stewart, it is just the opposite. It is through the hard labor of domestic service that Black women are *made into* a socially inferior class of workers. And it is through the spatial configuration of the home that hid them from view, the theft of their free time and leisure, and the demand to continually toil that domestic servants are "blackened." By displacing arduous labor onto their servants, Stewart argues that her "fairer sisters" have deprived Black women of the opportunity to pursue intellectual projects and independent lives. Likewise, rather than God-given or natural, Stewart argues that middle-class Anglo-American's status as housewives is developed through a process of socialization that teaches them that they are unfit for service. This reversal departs from abolitionist

literature's tendency to persistently locate liberation in the free market. Instead, Stewart shows that free Black women are still effectively bound by "chains of ignorance" and soul-deadening hard labor in order to secure the class status and Anglo-American femininity of housewives. Stewart ultimately rejects domestic service as unjust for free Black girls—not because the work was itself inherently degrading or racializing as most others claimed, but because it at once reinscribed an extant white supremacist organization of domestic labor relations and enabled its continuation in the so-called free market.

Antebellum literature and culture struggled to determine the meaning and value of the care work, affective and emotional labor, and housework that domestic service entailed. Somewhere in between the work of the housewife and the bondwoman, the labor of domestic servant stood in uneasy relation to both, lending it mutability in representational practices. The mutability of the figure of the domestic servant is suggestive of two things: first, that the available meanings of domestic service were many and sundry, so that service was not inevitably bound to be any one thing in particular; and second, that the racialization of service was necessary to restore order to an increasingly unstable labor system. Consider how the racialization of service, epitomized in the eventual hegemony of the Mammy figure and realized in the expanded employment of Black women as domestics in the North, resolved myriad social tensions. As we have seen, many historical actors relied on the denigration of the domestic servant in order to stake their own claim to political enfranchisement or economic independence. Organized social movements generally failed to take up the cause of domestic service, but frequently deployed the figure of the degraded servant for their own ends instead, using the servant

as a foil for the freedoms and rights to which they claimed entitlement. On the other hand, many resisted the notion that this form of labor was necessarily degrading, "blackening," or otherwise work that should be performed by non-white, dependent workers. For white women, for instance, prescriptive literature suggested that domestic service could be potentially empowering, offering young girls the opportunity to become trained in housewifery. But white women increasingly believed, too, that service was a potentially disempowering form of labor, since it appeared to reinforce an unjust proximity to bondwomen. And although Anglo-Protestant literature derided Irish Catholic servant girls and women as incompetent and even violent brutes—the worst kinds of servants—Irish literature conceptualized domestic service in the U.S. as an opportunity for innocent peasant girls to fulfill commitments to their religion and their country. While for their mistresses, Black women represented the ideal domestic servant, for Black women, domestic service in the North was seen as the continuation of white supremacist bound labor, albeit under the banner of "free labor." It is these disparate forces that, together, articulated the transition from slavery to freedom such that it could involve little change for Black women in the North, their place in the home and nation established well before emancipation.

Wilson's "Experiment" and the Demand for "Sympathy and Aid"

Harriet Wilson's 1859 *Our Nig: Sketches from the Life of a Free Black* begins its exploration of the racialization of service in the 1830s with the story of a fallen woman, the protagonist's white mother, Mag Smith. Critics have puzzled over Wilson's decision to begin her semi-autobiographical novel with a seduction plot, citing this as one among many incongruities in the novel that evidence either her amateurishness as an author, or

her desperation as a destitute mother.[18] Read within the framework of this dissertation, however, Wilson's parody of the seduction plot and ironic use of the figure of the fallen woman is more than an "unsophisticated" "reminder of [the text's] economic motive" (Holloway 131). As we have seen in previous chapters, the seduction plot was among the first narrative forms in the U.S. to participate in the stigmatization of single working women and, through its cautionary tale, celebrate marriage and housewifery as the fulfillment of white womanhood. Moreover, the plot explored republican fears of dependency and weakness, both qualities symbolically associated with femininity and blackness in the early American slaveholding republic. If Wilson's novel is understood as one grappling with the representational struggle to racialize service and servants, her use of the seduction plot is not incongruent, but instead an engagement with one of the foundational enabling fictions that naturalized the association of feminized forms of labor with blackness. The title page alone justifies such an understanding, announcing the text as an autobiography—by "Our Nig" and about "'Our Nig'"—comprised of "Sketches from the Life of a free Black, in a two-story white house, North. Showing that slavery's shadows fall even there." The semi-autobiographical novel thus purports to show readers how the conditions of slavery are present in Northern homes from the perspective of one that is both "free" and "Black." The parallel constructed between its title and its author, a racial slur and racializing nickname marked by quotations as the language of another,

[18] Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s initial assessment of Wilson's novel, which he "re-discovered" in the 1980s puts forth such an argument. In his introduction to the text, he writes that "the 'autobiographical' consistencies between the fragments of Harriet Wilson's life and the depiction of the calamities of Frado, the heroine of *Our Nig*, would suggest that Mrs. Wilson was able to gain control over her materials more readily than her fellow black novelists precisely by adhering closely to the painful details of suffering that were part of her experience" (xxiii). Gates implies that the artfulness of Wilson's novel emerges directly out of experiences of suffering, as opposed to the author's imaginative and literary capabilities.

indicates that this is less a first-hand account in the words of Wilson herself than a first-hand account as it might be narrated by a white imagination. It names itself, in other words, as a novel by and about a racialized servant. Contained within a "two-story white house, North," Wilson places the discursive and material struggle for survival within sphere of white domesticity.

Wilson's novel draws together a wide array of the genres and tropes that are implicated in the racialization of service: the marriage plot, the seduction novel, the slave narrative, the servants' tale, the sentimental novel; the fallen woman, the housewife, the Mammy, the Jezebel, the Bridget. By bringing together under one "roof" what may otherwise seem to be disparate, distinct representational traditions, I argue that Wilson's metafictional novel shifts the burden of meaning onto its readers, demanding that we consider how these narrative structures conspired to make service into Black women's labor and make Black women into servants. Determining how these narratives fit together—or don't—is illuminating for understanding how the racialization of service was necessary for and enabled a transition from slavery to freedom that would preserve Black women's place in the home. These enabling fictions allowed for the continuity of a coercive labor system, naturalizing not only a racial hierarchy within the reproductive labor system, but also the commercialization of affective and emotional forms of labor. My analysis of Wilson's novel brings to bear the discursive context that the first three chapters have constructed in order to show that the text satirizes and critiques the narrative forms used to systematize reproductive labor. In what follows, I focus on instances in which Wilson appropriates sentimental genre conventions to critique their ideological limitations and undermine their authority. Though often dismissed as

haphazard or lamented as ineffectual, I argue, on the contrary, that Wilson's use of genre serves to expose the fantasy of the Mammy, and attendant myths about ideal domestic labor relations, as fictions necessary to sustain the structuring power of a white imagination. Taken together, the metafictional use of genre, ironic reversals, and use of an intrusive narrator result in two interrelated effects: the novel lays bare the extent to which labor is given meaning by/in narrative and in relation to other socially defined categories; and, that the novel itself is revealed to be an act of intellectual, emotional, and affective labor for which Wilson demands compensation.

Beginning the text with a parody of the first novelistic genre of the Americas, the form of the novel suggests that the story of "Our Nig" began long before her birth. And by tracing the racialization of Frado back to the fall of her white mother, the novel's plot locates Frado's "blackening" in the sexual transgressions of her mother. The novel's opening passage deploys an exaggerated version of sentimental language, characterizing "Lonely Mag Smith!" as one "early deprived of parental guardianship, far removed from relatives," (3) and thus left to navigate a dangerous world alone and unprepared, possibly as an Irish immigrant newly arrived in the U.S.[19] Mag's story does not end in the usual way—with her abandonment and death—rather, she survives the "fall," as well as the death of her extramarital child, and attempts to make a living as a help. When these efforts fail, Mag marries a free Black man, Jim, and raises several children, including Frado. Mag's fall from innocence is represented as a fall towards Blackness: from courtship to drudgery, from a socially superior suitor to a working-class Black husband, and finally a Black lover. This gesture, which connects sexualization, degradation, and

[19] An implication that is perhaps given more credence by researchers' discovery that Harriet Wilson's mother of the same name was a washerwoman of Irish ancestry.

racialization, appears to reinforce the logic of white supremacy which codes Blackness as a state of dependency and weakness. The narrator, too, appears to endorse this logic, expressing pity and dismay when Mag decides to partner up with another Black man, Seth, after the death of her husband. Says the narrator of Mag: "She had no longings for a purer heart, a better life. Far easier to descend lower. She entered the darkness of perpetual infamy" (16). Adopting a critical posture, the narrator describes Mag as resigned to her ruin, too weak to work up the strength or courage to overcome obstacles and taking the easy way out by descending into "darkness." While the narrator appears to endorse white supremacist rhetoric, the events of the novel stand in subtle contrast, opening a gap between what such narratives generally prescribe as truth and what "truthfully" occurs.

Consider, for instance, the narrative's treatment of the death of Mag's first child, a girl. Says the narrator: "How many pure, innocent children not only inherit a wicked heart of their own, claiming life-long scrutiny and restraint, but are heirs also of parental disgrace and calumny, from which only long years of patient endurance in paths of rectitude can disencumber them" (6-7). Here, the narrator describes a kind of symbolic inheritance through which children are marked by the sins of their parents, and perhaps more specifically, daughters are stigmatized by the ruin of their mothers. For antebellum readers, this suggestion would have had a clear referent: the doctrine that declared children either free or enslaved based on the "condition" of their mother. In this sense, the notion that one can, through "patient endurance in paths of rectitude," overcome the conditions that they've inherited must read ironic—all the more so because Mag's next daughter, Frado legally inherits "freedom" from her mother, but becomes effectively

enslaved by the Bellmont family and, despite her patient endurance, is never able to achieve economic independence. In this sense, Mag is correct in her assumption that her daughter cannot but follow in her footsteps, having been born in a state of ruin. However, it is not Frado's destitution nor the memory of her mother's sin that determines the course of her life. Rather, it is what she "inherits" from her father: his Blackness. The seduction plot affords Wilson the opportunity to reveal, from the beginning of her autobiographical novel, the gap between the fictions of American labor and its social realities, displacing the authority of hegemonic narrative traditions in favor of the much more unstable racial, gender, and class logics that were at war in this period.

Once Mag and Seth leave Frado at the Bellmont home, the narrative takes the form of a servant's tale to tell Frado's story, a genre that typically represented Anglo-American girls like Lucy Lee who, after a time, escaped the conditions of drudgery to become housewives themselves. In her version of the servant's tale, Wilson's novel demonstrates what it means for a "mulatto" girl to be sent out to service instead. Whereas Lucy Lee negotiates with mistresses to determine a fair wage and set of working conditions, and leaves appointments that become too exploitative, Frado is not permitted to act as an agent in determining the terms of her employment nor the duration of her contract. Even after Frado is permitted to leave the Bellmont home, when she marries and has a child, she never achieves the security that the position of "housewife" would afford. As the servant's tale proceeds, it gives way to tropes and scenes conventionally featured in the slave narrative genre, including foremost the representation of racial violence and Frado's longing to escape. This is ironic, since, in slave narratives like that of Jacobs, a home in the North was often figured as a refuge for runaway slaves. To see Northern

domesticity as an escape from white supremacy, Wilson's readers learn, is an error. Peace is not possible in the Bellmont home, where racial and labor relations are persistently a source of tension and fury, made all the more so by Frado's presence. Her entrance initiates a protracted battle among the members of the family, each of whom lay claim to Frado's labor through methods well-trod by mistresses and masters, North and South. Indeed, behind the closed door of the Bellmont home, the text dramatizes a nationwide and decades-long battle over the meaning of Black women's labor. Using the very narrative forms that conventionally resolved these tensions in the image of the Mammy, Wilson's novel lays bare instead the messy and violent production of the docile Black domestic.

The drama begins with Frado's arrival into the Bellmont home, as Wilson stages a debate among members of the family who each give voice to dominant positions within the cultural debates about domestic labor relations: the slavery debate and the servant problem. In Chapter III, "A New Home for Me," the Bellmonts discuss whether and how to incorporate Frado into their home as part of their family. For Mr. Bellmont, Frado appears as the object of his empathy and he considers offering his charity: "the child's desertion by her mother appealed to his sympathy, and he felt inclined to succor her" (24). While their eldest daughter, Jane, remains quiet, "apparently uninterested," Jack, their youngest son, sexualizes Frado in terms of her proximity to whiteness, saying, "She's real handsome and bright, and not very black, either" (25). Although Mary, her mother's favorite daughter, initially objects to hosting Frado at all on the basis of her apparent racial identity, asking, "I don't want a nigger 'round *me,* do you, mother?", Mrs. Bellmont proposes a vision of the household labor system that accommodates their

shared white supremacist attitudes (26). In fact, it is entertained by Mrs. Bellmont that Frado might represent the solution to her servant problem. Says Mrs. Bellmont to the family: "I don't mind the nigger in the child. I should like a dozen better than one. … If I could make her do my work in a few years, I would keep her. I have so much trouble with the girls I hire, I am almost persuaded if I have one to train up in my way from a child, I shall be able to keep them awhile. I am tired of changing every few months" (26). Complaining about her difficulty maintaining a steady employee, Mrs. Bellmont gives voice to dominant cultural narratives like Beecher's or Sedgwick's which tended to sympathize with the burden that free servants represented for housewives.

It is implied that Frado represents a possible solution *because* she appears Black, and Mrs. Bellmont assumes, is in a more easily exploitative relation to the home where she might be made to not "help" in domestic labor, but actually "do [her] work in a few years." Whereas Irish maids-of-all-work were free to leave the Bellmont home when Mrs. B. became too demanding or violent, Frado, it is assumed, can be "kept" for an indefinite amount of time. Mary rejoins her, saying: "She came just in the right time, didn't she? Just the very day after Bridget left" (28). Though she replaces the Bridget that came before her, Frado's place in the family is, from the start, entirely different and determined by her apparent racial identity. Even Jack, who acts with compassion towards Frado and espouses anti-slavery values, assumes a position of domination and proprietary possession over "the girl" and is the first to call Frado "*our* nig" (26). While they may disagree about whether to treat Frado with compassion or cruelty, the Bellmonts do agree that she is, to them, a racialized servant and dependent in a position of obligation. In fact, the characters appear to believe that Frado's Blackness is a simple fact, and her place

within the home is certain—but the events of the novel suggest otherwise. It is through competing strategies of violence and coercion that the Bellmonts compel Frado to perform as a docile Black domestic, and even then, only with limited success. Through this dramatic irony, Wilson's novel undermines the authority of white-authored or white-sanctioned narratives that figured Black women as preternaturally disposed to serve.

As she is not very dark-skinned and free according to the condition of her mother, Frado's role in the home is not inevitably as a bound Black servant. She occupies a more ambivalent relation to the racial categories operative in the period, and in order to secure her own whiteness and status as sovereign, the mistress Mrs. Bellmont must actively *make* Frado Black. She accomplishes this not only through her treatment of Frado, which imitates the physical violence inflicted upon slaves in the South, but also through a series of symbolic acts designed to make Frado appear more proximate to Blackness. While white orphaned girls might be gifted proper clothes by their mistresses, for instance, Mrs. B. refuses to allow Frado to wear shoes even in the winter and gives her only scraps and hand-me-downs to signify her economic dependency. Mrs. B. also cuts Frado's hair when she threatens to become too beautiful or feminine. Such scenes recall Jacobs' narrative and, more generally, the relationship between Southern mistresses and the bondwomen whom they perceive as a sexual threat. By placing the performance of this relation in a Northern home, the practices seem needlessly cruel and almost absurd: Frado poses no actual sexual threat that the text discloses, and even on-lookers in Singleton, the fictional town where the novel is set, register Mrs. Bellmont's abuse as excessive. Satirizing the process of Frado's racialization, the novel highlights the extent to which Mrs. Bellmont's blackening of Frado is borne of her own racial, class, and gender insecurity: "At home,

no matter how powerful the heat when sent to rake hay or guard the grazing herd, she was never permitted to shield her skin from the sun. She was not many shades darker than Mary now; what a calamity it would be ever to hear the contrast spoken of. Mrs. Bellmont was determined the sun should have full power to darken the shade which nature had first bestowed upon her as best fitting" (39). That Mrs. Bellmont must physically "darken" Frado as she works, making literal the racializing effect of performing domestic service, serves to denaturalize the conceptual associations among hard labor, degradation, and Blackness. As the novel ironically suggests by making the symbolic process of racialization material, the significance of their racial differences is not sufficient evidence of their natural place in a social order, as Beecher may have imagined. Rather, the claim that the family has over Frado's labor is tenuous and requires constant reinscription and maintenance.

This is, in part, because the character of Frado proves to be a playful and quick-witted child with a predilection for practical jokes and puns. The narrator shares in this play, as we have seen, through ironic reversals, juxtapositions, and dramatic irony. These rhetorical gestures take as their target not only the violence of white supremacy that seethes beneath the surface of True Womanhood, but also the domestic labor relations idealized by housewives. For instance, when her mother is away and "Mary was installed housekeeper," the narrator remarks that Mary occupies a position of power "in name merely, for Nig was the only moving power in the house" (62). The narrator demystifies the power that the title of housekeeper should confer upon Mary, locating power in the

performance of labor instead. Elaborating on the implications of this inversion, the narrator remarks of Frado:

> She was now able to do all the washing, ironing, baking, and the common *et cetera* of household duties, though but fourteen. Mary left all for her to do, though she affected great responsibility. She would show herself in the kitchen long enough to relieve herself of some command, better withheld; or insist upon some compliance to her wishes in some department which she was very imperfectly acquainted with, very much less than the person she was addressing; and so impetuous till her orders were obeyed, that to escape the turmoil, Nig would often go contrary to her own knowledge to gain a respite (63).

Using language that imitates housewives' complaints of their inept servants, the narrator suggests that Mary's performance of "sovereign" is just that—an affective performance and thin cover for her ineptitude. Whereas Frado is a "moving power" that has mastered all household duties, Mary is an ephemeral presence in the kitchen where she "would show herself" only "long enough" to issue an errant command. The narrative inverts the antebellum mind-body hierarchy, so often used to justify the dehumanization and disenfranchisement of manual laborers like Frado. Calling into question even Maria W. Stewart's sense that physical "drudge" stifles intellectual growth, this scene suggests just the opposite, locating the acquisition of Frado's social intelligence in her performance of domestic labor. In fact, the scene unsettles the racial and social logic of domestic labor relations, raising the question of who may be accurately called a housekeeper—she who appears to fulfill the racial and classed aesthetics of housewifery, or she who does the labor of homemaking, who has deep knowledge of its most efficient methods. The dramatic irony is further emphasized in the final sentence in which the narrator explains that Frado abides the orders of her would-be mistress, even when she knows they're wrong. Giving her mistress the appearance of docile obedience, Frado performs the role

of "Nig," but readers know better. What Beecher and Sedgwick represented as a natural order, in Wilson's novel is a fiction, a fantasy that the Bellmont women, "wholly imbued with *southern principles*," ("Preface") attempt to make real through force.

The rhetoric of the servant's tale, and the values espoused by Beecher's treatises, are performed more earnestly in the novel by James, Frado's only friend and ally in the home. But rather than endorse the common belief that employers should adopt a parental relation to their servants, the narrative reveals this strategy to be equally violent and white supremacist. What might have appeared as opposites to abolitionist readers—the brutality of Mrs. Bellmont and the compassion of James—are, according to the events of the novel, twin forces that compel Frado to submit as a Black subordinate. Echoing sentiments found in the writing of Beecher and Stowe, Wilson writes that James "felt sure there were elements in her [Frado's] heart which, transformed and purified by the gospel, would make her worthy the esteem and friendship of the world. A kind, affectionate heart, native wit, and common sense, and the pertness she exhibited, he felt if properly restrained, might be useful in originating a self-reliance which would be of service to her in after years" (69). The language of "purification," "transformation," and "restraint" imply that James perceives Frado's Blackness as signifying both dirtiness and wildness. Through the gospel and guidance, James expects that the raw and uncultivated qualities of Frado might make her "worthy" and produce in her the "self-reliance" of one truly independent. Such metaphorics were common in both servant problem and anti-slavery literature, which characterized Irish immigrant and Black women as the objects in need of a housewife's domesticating touch. When he counsels Frado that "she might hope for better things in the future," (76) James elaborates by sharing his plan to take Frado to

his own home where she would work under better conditions. Like abolitionist literature that imagined freedwomen would happily serve as domestics in kinder Northern homes after emancipation, James assumes that Frado's future is limited to two options: working as a domestic in a home with a cruel mistress or working as a domestic in a home with a kind master. In the narrative, Frado appears to be seduced by his logic, and clings to the hope that she might one day escape Mrs. Bellmont to care for James. The refuge that she dreams of is not North, but West, where James and his wife Susan live on the edge of American territorial expansion. In difference with Frado, however, readers might consider the cruelty that results from their affective bond. Afterall, James' kind guidance proves to be even more effective than Mrs. Bellmont's beatings in compelling Frado to submit to authority.

Although James describes his mode of authority as a corrective to his mother's, the events of the novel demonstrate his complicity in Frado's exploitation and racialization. It is through his cultivation of an affective bond with her that Frado finally, and lovingly, submits to authority, accepts her "station" and works herself nearly to death. When Frado misbehaves during her time at the family dinner table, James explains to his mother that he "would not excuse or palliate Nig's impudence; but she should not be whipped or be punished at all. You have not treated her, mother, so as to gain her love; she is only exhibiting your remissness in this matter" (72). With this sentiment, James parrots not only a character from a Sedgwick novel, but, more perversely, George Fitzhugh and other slaveholders who argued that slavery was a "parental relation." Where his mother has been "remiss," however, James is prudent and later says of Frado: "She has such confidence in me that she will do just as I tell her" (75). And it does appear to be

the case that Frado has faith in James as an ally, and becomes emotionally attached to him, as well as the relief that a future as his servant would promise. This felt sense of obligation drives Frado to inconsolable suffering when James becomes sick. In order to care for him, Frado acts in ways that are excessively self-sacrificing and ultimately detrimental to her own physical and psychic wellbeing. Describing their mutual obligation, Wilson writes: "He shielded her from many beatings, and every day imparted religious instructions. No one, but his wife, could move him so easily as Frado; so that in addition to her daily toil she was often deprived her rest at night" (76-77). In return for his guidance and friendship, Frado stands in for James' wife to do care work at the expense of her own rest. While he gives Frado protection from one kind of physical harm, the labor that she gives him similarly affects her health which is "impaired by lifting the sick man, and by drudgery in the kitchen" (81). Whereas James had hoped that the sentimental bond that he cultivated with Frado would elevate her socially and economically, the narrative describes the opposite effect, as Frado was "at last so much reduced as to be unable to stand erect for any great length of time" (82). In addition to the physical toll that caring for James inflicts, Frado experiences emotional turmoil, watching her would-be savior die. Says the narrator: "Nig was in truth suffering very much," and upon James' death, she "wept like one inconsolable" (86; 97). What's worse, when Mrs. B. observes her crying, she punishes her with a beating, since crying was for Mrs. B. an act of disobedience. Although the labor relation that he performs is premised on mutual care, therefore, James only compounds Frado's suffering. Rather than antagonistic forces, the Southern and Northern domestic labor relations are represented as, in Wilson's words,

"brothers" (126) that together conspire to finally subject Frado as a docile, racialized subordinate.

Per the conventions of the slave narrative genre, the loss of a loved one and Frado's suffering precipitates an act of outright resistance of Mrs. Bellmont's beatings. The "victory at the wood-pile," as the narrator calls it, inspires in Frado a new understanding of power and independence. Writes Wilson:

> "Stop!" shouted Frado, "strike me, and I'll never work a mite more for you;" and throwing down what she had gathered, stood like one who feels the stirring of free and independent thoughts.
>
> By this unexpected demonstration, her mistress, in amazement, dropped her weapon, desisting from her purpose of chastisement. Frado walked towards the house, her mistress following with the wood she herself was sent after. She did not know, before, that she had the power to ward off assaults. Her triumph in seeing her enter the door with *her* burden, repaid her for much of her former suffering (105).

This moment of self-knowledge is in many ways emblematic of the slave narrative tradition, representing a coming to consciousness that should inspire Frado to pursue freedom and escape her tormenters. But not only is Frado's journey towards independence stunted, but the narrator registers trepidation even here. When she shouts at Mrs. Bellmont, Frado feels, for the first time, "*like* one who feels the stirrings of free and independent thoughts," (my emphasis) a phrasing that emphasizes the performative and affected aspects of the act. While readers might have expected, thereafter, that Frado would begin to plan her escape and come to a consciousness of herself as a self-reliant woman, departing from convention, Frado resolves to see through the end of her indenture and avoid beatings as much as possible. Readers might have read this as a resignation to and internalization of white supremacy, but the narrative suggests something more complicated. Writes Wilson: "She determined to flee. But where? Who

would take her? Mrs. B. had always represented her ugly. Perhaps every one thought her so. Then no one would take her. She was black, no one would love her. She might have to return, and then she would be more in her mistress' power than ever… She decided to remain to do as well as she could; to assert her rights when they were trampled on" (108). Being already in the North, the destination of runaway slaves, Frado has nowhere to run. Moreover, Frado knows that Mrs. B's "representation" of her Blackness rules the day and would powerfully influence would-be employers' impressions who are want to perceive domestics as untrustworthy and even criminal. When the narrator writes, "She was black, no one would love her," however, it's unclear whether Frado has internalized the Bellmonts' racializing narrative, or the narrator parodies Mrs. B's speech. It's not clear, in other words, where Mrs. Bellmont's narrative ends and Frado's self-representation begins, an ambiguity that illustrates the epistemological violence involved in making Frado a racialized subject. Challenging the slave narrative's conventional celebration of the runaway slave as a symbol of transgressive agency, Wilson's appropriation of the form shows that a consciousness of the processes of racial subjection cannot alone liberate Black women. Ultimately, "restrained by an overruling Providence," Frado resolves to stay through the period of her service, having both learned "how to conquer," as well as what it means to be "Black" in the North.

This is demonstrated most succinctly in the novel's final paragraphs when the narrator obliges readers to compensate Frado in exchange for the "sketches" they've just read. Wilson writes: "Nothing turns her from her steadfast purpose of elevating herself….Still an invalid, she asks your sympathy, gentle reader. Refuse not, because some part of her history is unknown, save by the Omniscient God. Enough has been

unrolled to demand your sympathy and aid" (130). Monetizing the affective and intellectual labor involved in performing within white narrative structures and for a presumably white, abolitionist audience, Wilson positions the book within a labor and literary market that commodifies the suffering of Black women. Repeating the trick done to Frado by the Bellmonts—that is, courting readerly sympathy and affection in order to coercively engage them in a relationship of mutual obligation—the narrative uncovers a political economy of sentimentalism obscured by theories of labor that would have Black women laboring "out of love." Scholars often read this closing as a "regrettable compromise," and evidence of the writer's "attraction to the promises of the free market."[20] Such readings errantly presume that the author's economic need delimited the imaginative possibilities of the text, taking the thickly ironic preface on faith when it says that the author has been "forced to some experiment" ("Preface") to write the book. However, given the text's exploration of the bounds of authorship and narrative form, it seems just as likely that the reference to her own poverty serves as part of a narrative conceit. Moreover, rather than the disclosure of truth, Clark's theory of dissemblance would encourage us to see this as "the appearance of openness and disclosure [that] actually shielded the truth of [Wilson's] inner life and self from [her] oppressors" (912).

[20] In his article, "By Dint of Labor and Economy: Harriet Jacobs, Harriet Wilson, and the Salutary View of Wage Labor," Thomas B. Lovell summarizes a critical tradition beginning with Henry Louis Gates, Jr., who first "discovered" Wilson's novel and did deep historical research to recover the facts of Wilson's life. According to Lovell, while scholars have "sometimes addressed Wilson's and Jacobs' attraction to the promise of a free market, they have tended to see it, with Gates, as a regrettable compromise between an activity of the mind and the exchange of commodities" (27). In their assessment of Wilson, Holloway, Gates, and others, have constructed an opposition between pure creative activity and creativity channeled into the production of a commodity. Lovell sees this as a false dichotomy, and I tend to agree. Lovell believes that this is an ahistorical assumption, as this opposition would have never occurred to Wilson or Jacobs in the first place.

In its satirical appropriation of the narrative conventions through which Black women's labor was interpreted as a selfless act of love, Wilson's novel insists on the cold economics that underlie the familial and loving relations among housewives, domestics, and children.

Contemporary critics' distaste for Wilson's disclosure of the text's value as a commodity curiously echoes nineteenth-century attitudes towards Black women's labor reveals not a simple continuity, but rather a century-long and ongoing struggle to parse labor and care. When critics read Wilson's novel as an aesthetic failure, citing its rush to market as the cause, they persist in maintaining a distinction between art and work, sentiment and market, private and public. As we have seen throughout this extensive study of antebellum culture, housewives obscured the extent to which their servants were *working* by calling them a "part of the family," describing their labor as an act of love and loyalty. Slaveholders, too, advocated for imagining cross-racial and cross-class labor relations as constitutive of a "plantation family," bound in relationships of mutual dependency. Positing care as incompatible with capitalist market relations, mistresses of the antebellum period took comfort in the myth of the Mammy, a worker who would convincingly perform affection, exhibit genuine loyalty, and yet remain subordinated to the authority of whiteness and Womanness. Wilson's novel denies readers these comforts, placing the text's conditions of production front and center such that the political economic dimensions of sentimental relations cannot be denied. When the narrator names the text as a performance of affective labor, she preempts readers from disavowing their complicity in Frado's suffering. Further, by reconstructing the representational struggle to racialize service, the novel throws into stark relief the

opposition between Southern and Northern "principles," revealing them to be co-conspirators in the effort to subject Black women as domestics.

Conclusions

The first part of this project has shown how, during the early decades of industrialization in the U.S., the metaphor of the separate spheres and the sexual division of labor emerged to resolve a crisis of social reproduction produced by capitalism. To resolve these tensions, the figures of the housewife and the Mammy emerged to imagine a stable separation of gendered forms of labor and hierarchical positions of power. Using the language of love and metaphors of kinship, the cult of domesticity reframed labor relations in the home as sentimental affective bonds, and rendered the labor performed therein as an expression of women workers' inherent capacity for care.

The rhetorical stabilization of the separate spheres, we've seen in chapters 2 and 3, was made possible by the racialization of service. Cultural representations of bondwomen, whether abolitionist or proslavery, consistently articulated the degradation of bondwomen in terms of sexual corruption and the inability to serve as a mother to her children. The Mammy, I argue, therefore emerged as the housewife's ideal servant, as an asexual, self-sacrificing surrogate mother who required neither children of her own nor any compensation apart from the family's affection. The figure of the Mammy propagated a myth of the naturalness of Black subordination, suggesting that Black women's role as servant was an inherent expression of their race, gender, and class. These cultural and historical forces created a demand on Black women's affective and emotional labor, and housewives therefore desired a performance of self-effacing

deference—what Hannah Nelson would later describe as "conversations about nothing."

In domestic fiction, proslavery writing, political cartoons, and literary magazines, various images of domestic servants appeared: Anglo-American servants were represented as housewives-in-training, their service a temporary measure; Irish servants were rendered as buffoonish and greedy, a foreign threat that required the housewife's civilizing; and Black servants who appeared as preternaturally disposed to caring for children and helping housewives, taking on lifetime appointments and demonstrating their loyalty through a refusal to accept pay for all the work that they did. As a result, the conditions of domestic service in the antebellum North appeared to be not so different than those of domestic slavery in the South.

The "domestic labor relations" that emerged in this period imagined the ideal mistress as a "missionary-mother" caring for her family with the aid of a deferential Mammy. Both of these figures contained the demand that working women perform an affective performance of self-denial, suppressing and effacing aspects of themselves that interrupted fantasies of domestic bliss. But this was not merely the imposition of a structure onto hapless women workers. Rather, women workers themselves participated in acts of self-effacement in order to covertly secure social, cultural, or even economic power: whether housewives that claim imperial control over their servants, using this myth to gain access to a more significant role in U.S. political life, or servants that, like Wilson, embodied the "controlling image" invented by the white supremacist imagination in order to extract a profit.

In the chapters to follow, Part 2 of *Figuring Women's Work* turns to feminized forms of labor that emerged in the antebellum period and underwent commercial transformation

at the turn of the century in the context of increased industrialization, urbanization, and emancipation. I focus on the emergence of figures of labor that test the boundary between home and work in distinct ways: the personal secretary or "office wife" that brought a "woman's touch" to the office; the homeworker who completed industrial labor at home; and domestic day worker who was paid for service, but no longer invited in as "part of the family." In each case, I argue, we witness how the cultural discourses that organized labor in the domestic sphere were adapted to stabilize the relationship between women and their work, whether through the invention of bourgeois professional culture, the romanticization of immigrant poverty, or the cultural revision of the history of the Mammy. Even as women and their work were integrated into the formal economy, achieving the "visibility" that popular and feminist discourses might have imagined as liberatory, the commercialization of women's work sustained the classed inequalities and racial hierarchies developed in the private sphere.

PART 2:

COMMERCIALIZING WOMEN'S WORK

IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

CHAPTER 4
TYPEWRITER GIRLS, OFFICE WIVES, AND THE EMERGENCE OF PROFESSIONAL CULTURE

To glimpse how the relationships among working women were reimagined at the turn of the century, amidst the increased commercialization, professionalization, and specialization of reproductive labor, we might look to a cultural artifact of the period: the September 1909 edition of the *Strawbridge & Clothier Store Chat,* a magazine "edited by and in the interest of the employees" of the Philadelphia Center City department store. In this text, the Firm addresses their "Factory Pieceworkers," the Russian and Jewish immigrant women working in the South Philadelphia Royal Shirtwaist Factory and elsewhere across the city. But the magazine itself was written for its primarily Anglo-American workforce, the men and women that performed clerical work and acted as salesmen at the store, which suggests that the placement of the piece might have been intended to suppress any solidarity or sympathy that the clerical workers and salesmen felt for the pieceworkers. The Firm assures its immigrant workers that "every boy and girl, man and woman, of whatever race, religion or nationality, who works regularly for Strawbridge & Clothier in whatever capacity, is a member of the Store Family, and is entitled to the privileges such an honor bestows" (231). The Firm describes this as an "intimate relationship," forming an "interdependence" of "various Branches of the great…business" (231). In this rare message, ostensibly written to pieceworkers themselves, management draws on the metaphors of kinship and the logic of mutual obligation that we have seen at work in the struggle to organize labor relations in the antebellum domestic sphere. As when housewives mobilized this rhetoric to compel their

servants to work beyond the scope of their contracted labor, the Firm models for its clerical workers and salesmen an appropriate attitude and position to take in relation to the pieceworkers, criticizing their lack of dedication to the company, arguing that although they are technically paid "per piece," they should feel the same loyalty to the Family as those that get paid by the week. As part of their efforts to suppress ongoing labor unrest, the Firm elevates its department store professionals above the cause of labor, mobilizing anti-labor rhetoric in the form of a sentimental appeal. Just two months later, the pieceworkers would go on strike in solidarity with the shirtwaist strikers in New York City, an event that went entirely unreported in the *Store Chat* record, though one of the largest women-led strikes in U.S. history. In the context of this dissertation, this item in the *Store Chat* and the strikes it anticipates might be understood as expressions of the ongoing struggle to distinguish the stabilize the boundaries between work and home and compensate women for industrial, domestic, and affective labor. It reveals to us that, by 1910, clerical workers were allied with the employing classes, distinct from and socially superior to dissatisfied and proletarian pieceworkers.

The example of the *Store Chat* provides insight into the culture of white clerical workers who, by 1910, had fashioned themselves as "white-collar"[21] professionals, positioned in a hierarchy above the working-class immigrant laborers that produced the store's goods. Another part of the Store Family, though omitted from the *Store Chat* except by implication, were the Black service workers operating elevators, serving tables at the store restaurant, or performing custodial labor. In the pages of the *Chat,* we can

[21] Upton Sinclair is credited with coining the term "white collar" in the early 20th century to distinguish laborers working in office spaces from those in factories. A term that epitomizes the period's emphasis on fashion as a sign of one's class positioning.

glean a sense of the clerical workers' relationship to their Black coworkers in short pieces featuring racist jokes and, most notably, in the praise and advertisement of the Clover Mandolin Club, a minstrel troupe comprised of the store's women clerical workers. Forging a shared racial identity and culture, the Anglo-American and "foreign-born" white women working at the Center City department store repudiated a proximity to Blackness and servility through their mockery and distinguished themselves from the degradation of the working-class by claiming a "professional" identity. Though this arrangement of white, ethnic immigrant, and Black workers is in some ways particular to Philadelphia, it is also representative of what had by 1910 become the prevailing organization of women's labor in many U.S. commercial centers. But the distribution of labor among the "Family members" at Strawbridge & Clothier would have been unimaginable even a few decades earlier in the 1870s when white women's place in the offices of businesses, law firms, and government buildings was virtually unheard of and treated with great suspicion. From the mid-century scandals accusing women clerical workers of acting as the "concubines" of the office, to the declaration made by *Fortune* magazine in 1935 that "woman's place is at the typewriter," (53) the relationship between womanhood and work was transformed, and with it, the boundaries between private and public, reproductive and productive labor redrawn.

Scholars describe this historical transformation as the "feminization" of clerical work, a process that involved the reconceptualization of gender roles and relations among white men and women at the office.[22] Perhaps because this work was exclusively performed by

[22] Margery Davies' *Woman's Place is at the Typewriter* (1982) is among the most prominent studies of women's clerical labor. Others that study the the feminization of clerical work include: Graham S. Lowe, *Women in the Administrative Revolution: The Feminization of Clerical Work* (1980); Kwolek-Folland, Prof Angel, *Engendering Business: Men and Women in the Corporate*

white women, scholars have not yet given sustained attention to clerical workers' relationship to the discourses or processes of racialization. In general, white women's place in the office has been studied in the context of the late nineteenth century "Information Revolution," posited as the origin of modern corporate culture and the information sector of the economy. However, as the above example shows, the discursive production of clerical workers as business professionals appropriated the discourse of domesticity and the white supremacist labor relations designed and performed in the antebellum home. Situating white women's emergence as business professionals in the history of service and social reproduction instead, this chapter seeks to uncover the relationship between early twentieth-century professional culture and the cult of domesticity. As we have seen in the first part of this dissertation, white women claimed an empowered position within the realm of social reproduction as housewives by fashioning white, bourgeois, feminized social identities. This culminated with the racialization of service, when white women left domestic service to pursue other forms of employment—including, foremost, clerical labor.[23] Although their place in the office was virtually unprecedented in 1860, by 1880, white women comprised over 40% of stenographers nationwide (Gardey 327). In newspapers, writers expressed fears about the

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Office, 1870-1930. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.; Carol Srole, *Transcribing Class and Gender: Masculinity and Femininity in Nineteenth-century Courts and Offices* (2012); Christopher Keep's article, "Blinded by the Type: Gender and Information Technology at the Turn of the Century," (2008).; Strom, Sharon H., *Beyond the Typewriter: Gender, Class, and the Origins of Modern American Office Work, 1900-1930*. University of Illinois Press, 1994.

[23] According to Teresa Ammot in her study *Race, Gender, and Work*: *A Multi-Cultural History of Women in the United States. (*1991): "Drawn by new opportunities in offices and stores, especially in urban areas, white women left domestic service in large numbers. This decline was also facilitated by new commodities which permitted homemakers to clear and cook without the aid of servants" (127).

"integration of the sexes," and rendered scandalous and sexualized images of the "gold diggers" that went to work to find a husband above their "station." And in magazines written by and for stenographers and typists, many writers articulated the same anxieties about performing service that we saw in literature by antebellum housewives: a proximity to enslavement, drudgery, and the potential for proletarianization. In order for white women's place in the office to be stabilized and even celebrated, discursively, women's role was reframed as a feminized act of service. Ideally, these workers labored not out of economic self-interest, but for the good of all, and in service of their family, company, and country. The motto of *Strawbridge & Clothier's Store Chat* bears this out, advising its readers in every issue: "Let us mind our own business, and work for self by working for the good of all" (224).

This chapter will recover the discursive, social, and economic processes by which white women became professionals by analyzing the culture of clerical workers, as well as their representation in legal discourse, domestic fiction, and the literature of social movements. Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century when middle-class white women were hired to work for the U.S. Patent Office and Treasury Department, through the 1930s when the elite status of the "personal secretary" was popularly accepted, I chart the emergence of what I call professional labor relations that came to justify and celebrate white women's role in white-collar professions. Although much of the work of clerical labor is outside technical definitions of social reproduction, its narrative production and material conditions are informed by the gender ideology that relegated women to the domestic sphere. By 1930, the best personal secretaries are described as those that exhibit industriousness and efficiency, as well as a special ability to nurture, inspire virtuous

behavior through their "influence," and accommodate the emotional needs of their bosses and coworkers. Moreover, since women continued to be held responsible for unpaid domestic labor and caretaking, the women at the department store, as well as in factories, contributed to the processes of social reproduction in their capacity as wives and mothers. In order to stabilize the reorganization of social reproductive labor that resulted from industrialization and urbanization at the turn of the century when women "went to work," I argue that clerical workers fashioned a middle-class, white identity through the discourse and culture of professionalism. By appropriating the culture of bourgeois propriety and the affective gender performances developed by the cult of domesticity, these women workers cultivated a professional identity that reframed their disposition towards service as a uniquely feminine trait that would benefit corporate culture by transcending the corrupting forces of the market.

The second portion of the chapter turns to Willa Cather's office fiction: short stories that intervene into the cultural production of personal secretaries to contest the notion that clerical workers were empowered by their work or in their workplace. In difference with those that celebrated the typist as a modern, New Woman, who emancipated herself from the confines of the home to achieve equality and respect among men at work, Cather far more cynically suggests that women did not find liberation at work, but instead another intemperate, fickle man to serve. In these "Office Wives" stories, Cather stages the battle between managers and bosses with their stenographers and secretaries at the level of narrative control. The narrative perspective of her stenographers and typists is undermined by that of their husbands, bosses, and editors who ultimately decide whether and how the women work in the office.

The Invention of the Typewriter: "Woman or Machine?"

As more and more women went to the office, the sexual division of labor and the classed hierarchies that had structured labor relations within the home were destablized. After a decades-long battle to racialize service and justify housewives' unpaid labor, the feminization of clerical work expanded the commercialization of women's work and increased the number of women collecting a wage, unsettling the already tenuous relationships between gender, class, race, and labor established by the cult of domesticity. Housewives had reigned superior in the home precisely because it was a space in which exclusively women labored, and they elevated themselves above their servants through a claim to whiteness and class power. But offices were governed by men that hired both middle-class and working-class women as typists and stenographers. Not only an "integration of the sexes," therefore, the feminization of clerical work involved also the reconfiguration of the class and raced hierarchy that had previously organized working women. For leaders of the woman's movement and stenographers themselves, determining whether clerical workers were more like housewives or servants was a primary concern. The poles that structured the terms of the debate were often articulated as the question: "*Woman—or—machine?"* (Baldwin 39). Drawing on the discourse of domesticity to both articulate their predicament and imagine its possible resolutions, the culture of clerical work transformed the housewife into the "office wife." This section will show how the anxieties that attended the feminization of clerical work, and its possible racialization as a new form of service work, were resolved in the figure of the office wife or personal secretary through the invention of new disciplinary structures. Whether romance narratives that linked clerical work with acceptable forms of upward

mobility or conduct manuals that advised women to train their bodies to be "efficient machines," clerical culture produced the secretary as a modern professional, most effective when she was both woman *and* machine.

The scandalous story of women's entrance into office work was widely reported as evidence that the "integration of the sexes" was unsustainable and, perhaps even a threat to national values. During the Civil War, as male clerks left their post to serve in the military, U.S. Treasurer Francis E. Spinner hired the first women clerks to hand cut and count paper currency. Before this moment, clerical labor had been performed by men and was structured as an apprenticeship through which clerks could accumulate expertise and rise to the level of their employer. Citing their "nimble fingers," and efficiency, Spinner brought women into the "very heart of American capitalism," (Green 2) transgressing the ever-unstable boundaries between the private and public spheres. His decision caused unrest among employees who complained that "there [were] too many tea pots in the Treasury of the nation" ("Uncle Sam as Woman's Boss" 16). Since many of these women were forced into work after the loss of a breadwinner to war, reportage about the Treasury frequently drew on the themes of the seduction plot, imagining that women in these offices were vulnerable to the manipulations of their powerful bosses. In response to rumors of immoral conduct, a Special Congressional Committee was appointed to investigate the "widespread demoralization and corruption among the female clerks," whose employment had rendered the Treasury Department "a sort of Congressional harem" in which the clerks reportedly served as "concubines" ("The Female Clerks" 3). The Committee collected the testimony of the men and women working in the department responsible for manufacturing and cutting paper currency, including pages

from the diary of one of the accused women popularly known as the "Treasury courtesans." At the investigation's end, the leader of the division, as well as all of the accused women were found to be innocent, the charge that the Department had been turned into "house for orgies and bacchanals" disproved by the evidence ("Treasury Department Report").

Figure 1: "The Love Chase, or the Revolt of the Harem," Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, May 28, 1864. From the collections of the University of Minnesota Libraries.

Despite this, popular presses persisted in representing the department as "a few rooms fitted up in oriental style of splendor, and that a regular harem is kept under the control of a leading officer, for the benefit of persons high in the confidence of the President" ("From Washington"). *Frank Leslie's*, a popular literary and news magazine, even featured a political cartoon called "The Love Chase, or the Revolt of the Harem," in

which the Secretary of the Treasury is pictured as a Turkish sultan being assailed by a woman dressed in a similarly Orientalist aesthetic. The imagery of the courtesans and the metaphor of the harem articulated the sexualization of women workers through foreignizing and even racializing tropes. In the period, U.S. popular and consumer culture popularized images of the "Orient," a set of cultural signifiers represented, according to Naomi Rosenblatt, as both "mysterious, alluring, and sumptuous, as well as barbaric, irrational, and 'inclined toward despotism'" (13). To represent the women in the Treasury as "courtesans" in a "harem" was suggestive both of the titillating sexualization of their laboring bodies, as well as the dangers that their sexuality introduced. Working in the financial center of the nation, the women of the Treasury threatened to undermine the very foundation of a republican culture that valued formal equality and rebuked the tyranny and servility associated with aristocratic and antiquated forms of governance. One implication of the rhetoric surrounding the "Treasury courtesans," therefore, is that women's clerical labor was incompatible with Anglo-American cultural values, proof that women's sexuality and vulnerability to temptation were prohibitively dangerous at work. Moreover, the suggestion that these women were transformed into "concubines" would have resonated with the popular imagery of the Jezebel, a trope that represented bondwomen as the hypersexualized temptresses of their masters. So corrupted by working with money and men in the Treasury Department, these clerical workers were broadly condemned, a gesture that reasserted the necessity of the separate spheres.

Anxieties about the dissolution of clear gender roles persisted in shaping and reshaping clerical work, even in the development of technologies like the Remington typewriter which was, from the first, imagined and designed as a feminine technology

(see Figure 2). The first commercial Remington typewriters were assembled in sewing machine workshops, and even adapted functional components of late nineteenth-century sewing machines such as a pedal-operated carriage return. In the first catalogs that the company released, the typewriter was featured with a woman operator, pictured at home, her machine painted with a floral pattern (Gardey). Plus, the original keyboard design, credited to Christopher Latham Sholes, imitated the assembly of piano keys. Even after James Denmore's QWERTY keyboard rose to prominence with the distribution of Remington typewriters, the 10-finger touch typing method that the QWERTY encouraged was advertised as akin to middle-class women's piano playing.[24] Advertisements linked women's "nimble fingers" and their expertise in piano with the typewriter, rendering it a seemingly domestic technology, even though most typewriters were actually used in office settings (Boyer and England 245). Clerical labor had long been specialized work, and shorthand writing was a craft used primarily in legal proceedings by court reporters and law stenographers. But, the invention and commercial use of the typewriter initiated, at once, the automation and so-called feminization of stenography and clerical work in response to a growing demand in the business world. Despite the shared skillset that they required, commercial stenography and typewriting developed as distinct from the work of court reporters and law stenographers, whose workplaces continued to be run by mostly male clerks that were hired as apprentices. In difference, businesses, banks, and other corporate firms were quick to hire a large staff of

[24] There is disagreement about this among historians. Some argue that Densmore's QWERTY keyboard was intended for hunt-and-peck typing. However, Densmore's first prototype of the keyboard featured linear keys like those of the piano. In the early twentieth-century, August Dvorak designed an alternative keyboard which he claimed was more conducive for touch typing. As we know, QWERTY remains standard.

working and middle-class women to perform work as typewriter operators, copyists, clerks, and stenographers. By the end of the nineteenth century, the term "typewriter" was used interchangeably to refer to either the machine or the woman operating it, throwing into greater confusion the question of "woman or machine?" Increasingly, the answer appeared to be "both."

Figure 2: The Sholes and Gidden typewriter featuring floral designs, sold by Remington in 1874. From the Smithsonian Institute.

In the decades following the Civil War, the woman's movement for suffrage embraced the typewriter as a liberatory technology and championed the typist as an example of the modern, independent American woman. Heralding the invention as a tool for woman's emancipation from the drudgery of housework, many turn-of-the-century feminists saw the right to go to work, collect earnings, and own property as a pathway to political inclusion. In the literature of the "New Woman," the typist was a prominent protagonist, embodying the characteristic ambition, independence, and spunk that

distinguished these working women from their predecessors, housewives. The literature of New Woman constructed the precepts of antebellum "true womanhood" as akin to imprisonment and even enslavement. Olive Schreiner's 1891 story "Three Dreams in a Desert" exemplifies this logic. A South African feminist and author whose memoir *The Story of an African Farm* has been described as the "bible" of the New Woman, Schreiner uses the conceit of a dream to explore woman's journey from slavery to emancipation. Shackled to the ground, weighed down by the "burden of subjection" which man put on her, the woman that the narrator perceives in her dream is bound by "Inevitable Necessity" which requires the total abandon of her body and life to social reproduction. Before the narrator's eyes, the "knife of Mechanical Invention" frees the woman. A man explains to the narrator: "The Age-of-muscular-force is dead. The Age-of-nervous-force has killed him with the knife he holds in his hand; and silently and invisibly he has crept up to the woman, and with that knife of Mechanical Invention he has cut the band that bound the burden to her back. The Inevitable Necessity is broken. She might rise now" (6). In Schreiner's allegorical story, woman's "rise" and pursuit of equality begins with the invisible but powerful force of technology, inventions like the typewriter or dictaphone which privilege "nervous" over "muscular" force. For her, women were better positioned to enter the workforce because they were biologically predisposed to operate these technologies. Within the U.S., the woman's movement had long drawn on the metaphor of slavery to describe the situation of married women, a rhetorical gesture which distinguished employing from servant classes. Schreiner's story, and those that make similar arguments for women's empowerment via work, presume that women's work at the office would be a middle-class affair that preserved married

women's social status while granting them access to capital and independence.

But these dreams were rather quickly dashed, as would-be New Women found themselves working in crowded offices, among working-class women of varied backgrounds, and for men that did not regard their ladylike affect as particularly important. The automation of clerical labor, with the introduction of technologies like the typewriter and dictaphone, transformed the distribution, organization, and terms of labor in ways that threatened to make it appear as degrading for women as factory work. As offices hired more and more working-class women, they also instituted new systems that emphasized productivity and efficient use of time over quality of work. Instead of assigning one clerk to work on an individual basis with a boss that dictated to them, offices created "steno pools" where typists worked in a large room of side-by-side desks, transcribing correspondences that were pre-recorded on dictaphones. The rationalization of clerical work meant that women were engaged in labor more apparently mechanical and repetitive—not unlike those in the textile or garment industries. In a piece in a stenography magazine, stenographer Jennie Cook describes the physical fatigue resulting from this work, describing a weary clerical worker that "leaned her head on her hands… [as] her overtaxed brain, and the bewildering shorthand characters kept up at a dizzying whirl before her tired eyes" (271). Middle-class stenographers decried this transformation as a crisis, a threat to their social status, and blamed working-class women of an "inferior" education for driving down the value of their labor. Writers within the feminist movement, too, expressed concern for women workers who were not so much liberated by the typewriter as trapped under yet another patriarch's control. Sarah Grand, whose

1894 article coined the term "New Woman,"[25] writes in 1913: "The girl who must work finds herself tied to the easel, the typewriter, the desk, the shop, the mill, with little or no chance of rising or of being anything else but tied. She has become part of the machine, and is no more her own mistress than she ever was. All that she has gained is the right to work, a great gain certainly, but under such conditions she pays a ruinous price for it" (52). The technological changes to the work, its accessibility to working-class women, and the automation of work created massive anxiety for middle-class women who long understood that their supremacy depended on a clear division of space, class, and labor.

As a result, various derogatory myths about working-class "typewriter girls" circulated in stenography magazines and popular culture. Like housewives complaining about the difficulty of finding good help, lady stenographers articulated disdain for the inferior women who they were compelled to work alongside. That the typewriter girl became a veritable "symbol of the masses" was troubling for protectors of the profession who were at pains to maintain the respectability of stenography and typewriting. In a piece titled, "The Crowded Ranks," educator E.E. Doherty writes: "It is coming to be current opinion that any one can learn shorthand. I hav [*sic*] been applied to several servant girls of no education whatever, for instruction in the art, some friend having told them that that would be a good way to better their condition! Poor girls, what a pit they should hav been so misled, and how hard it was for me to crush down my sympathy for their laudable aspirations" (56). Doherty regards the desire for education of working-class "servants" a presumption that threatens to degrade the entire occupation, cheapening the labor of "real stenographers," and giving them a bad reputation among employers who,

[25] The term New Woman was popularized through Sarah Grand's essay 'The New Aspect of the Woman Question,' published in March 1894 in *North American Review.* (14).

she says, may assume, based on a few of this sort, that stenographers do not know how to spell. In the end, mobilizing the bourgeois logic of Catharine Beecher and the like, Doherty concludes that "stenographers, like poets, must be 'born, not made'" (56). In articulating an anxiety about the increased employment of working-class women in the fields of stenography and typewriting, Doherty draws on the terms which came to structure women's relationship in the domestic sphere. Naming these would-be stenographers as "servants" would have been, by this time, a raciailizing and pejorative gesture. Moreover, Doherty's conservative diatribe constructs the possibility of working-class women's social mobility as a gauche and improper attempt to transcend the "natural" order of things. In this conceptualization of the "profession," Doherty rejects the labor's relationship to servility or drudge, constructing stenographers as the servants' very opposite—"worthy, industrious learners," whose "minds, temperaments, and physical make-ups" make them most suitable for "real" stenography (56).

Adapting the domestic culture of modesty and propriety to the office, middle-class stenographers also blamed working-class women for making the office a sexually charged environment, and accused them of immoral behavior. In difference with the "lady stenographer," the figure of the "typewriter girl" was blamed for lacking the respectability requisite to maintain proper social relations at the office. During the 1880s, as more working-class women entered the field, the typewriter girl became a mainstay in fiction and popular culture, derided as an unserious, unintelligent flirt, and even a sexual threat to housewives whose husbands they worked alongside. Making more explicit the

tendency of typewriters to act as temptresses, poet Ben King parodies the perspective of a wronged housewife:

> You can let your book-keepers lay off
> And see a game of ball;
> The office boy can leave at noon
> Or not show up at all.
> There—what is this upon your coat?
> It isn't mine, I know.
> I think I know a thing or two—
> That typewriter must go (154).

When such a charge was made by housewives, it registered an uneasiness with the transgression of the boundaries between work and home, and across class lines, that the work of typewriter girls entailed. Not only were these workers violating the gender ideology that deemed labor degrading to women, when they ventured to pursue economic independence, they threatened the stability of a class hierarchy and aspired beyond their "station." Like antebellum plantation mistresses that believed bondwomen were temptresses that mobilized their vulnerability to seduce their masters, or servant girls' tales that represented domestic workers as disloyal thieves, the mythology of the coquettish typewriter girl presumed that the asymmetrical relationship between working-class women and their bosses would result in violation and corruption. Interpreting the relations among typewriters and their supervisors as a service relationship, the literature of the typewriter girl gave voice to fears about the power of the economically and socially dependent to exchange their sexuality for social mobility, or else take advantage of employing classes.

Threats of clerical worker's proletarianization were articulated as a threat of racialization, especially as the labor became more clearly associated with servitude. In the context of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, when service was

predominantly performed by Black women, and as clerical work became increasingly automated, whether this labor would mark them as professionals or proletarians remained unsettled. It is perhaps because the demands of the work depended so much on a performance of "self-denying benevolence" that clerical workers repudiated a proximity to blackness and servility in their leisure time, participating in minstrel troupes like the Mandolin Clover Club at Strawbridge & Clothier. According to historian Jerome Bjelopera, blackface involved performing the "opposite of the loyalty, thrift, temperance, and love of hard work that employers expected of their office and sales employees" (472). In1899, Frank Dumont, owner of the Eleventh Street Opera House in Philadelphia and renowned minstrel show manager, wrote a minstrel play titled "Scenes in Front of a Clothing Store," adapted and performed by clerical workers across the Northeast. In this play, two "seedy" criminal characters are hired to work as the living mannequins for a department store. As they model the store's suits, they steal from customers who appear unaware that they are actually alive. When the boss, "Moneymaker," interrupts their antics, both men freeze and Money says aloud to the audience: "How nicely they represent the dummies! What a glorious idea and how well they carry it out!" (5) The scene's humor is derived from both its mockery of the "black" men as reducible to "dummies," as well as the employer that they deceive. That the men can successfully hide in plain sight, undetected by customers, and that their game can go so long undiscovered by their employer becomes evidence of the naïveté of the bourgeois. The play assumes its audience not as the employing classes who are here the butt of the joke, but rather the department store clerks and salespeople that work alongside Black elevator operators, waitresses, and porters. In performing or watching the performance of this scene, clerical

workers forged a shared racial identity across class and ethnic differences, repudiating a proximity to blackness which is here mocked and criminalized. Taking the audience "behind the scenes" at the department store, behind the professional affective performance that work demanded, and behind the boss' back, Dumont's play allows its actors to explore clerical workers' resentments at having to perform servility and self-effacement for their customers and management. While the department store sales and office clerks were encouraged to see themselves as part of the story "family," and, as professionals, claimed allegiance to the employing classes, the short scene points to tension that persisted in shaping these relationships. In the end, the mannequins are discovered and all "pelt the dummies with all sorts of vegetables," (5) in a visceral act of rejection.

In an effort to resolve the crisis of the profession caused by its feared proletarianization, many stenographers and typewriters rejected affiliation with unions, which too closely aligned their working conditions and social status with the working-class. Alice Bean, a clerical worker with the Women's Trade Union League said "average American office workers… do not feel that they are 'wage earners' but have a notion that they are professionals and, therefore, it would be degrading to join a union. They leave unions to the factory workers" (Feldberg 157-158). Clerical unions emerged across the country, most led by men that worked as stenographers or clerks, though they were not sex-exclusive. Because women stenographers and typewriters were perceived as temporary employees that would work only until they married, and they were paid a good wage in relation to most other work available to women, unions were an unconvincing proposition for many clerical worker women. These women generally regarded unions'

antagonism towards employers as distasteful and at odds with the hard-won respectability of the profession. Instead, many stenographers and clerical workers formed professional associations that advocated for fellowship and education, rather than more working-class-centered demands around working conditions and pay. Relying on the myths of free labor and social mobility, and in defense of their own social status, middle-class stenographers accused unions of "attempt[ing] to restrict or impede the natural order of things" (Brown 203). Advocating for the respectability and status of clerical work as a profession, instead, became a major preoccupation of both men and women who feared their own proletarianization. "Perish the thought," one stenographer writes, "Whoever heard of a first-class stenographer 'striking,' or who in the profession would want such a thing" (Rogers 199). Professional stenographers, whether firmly middle-class or upwardly mobile working-class women, aligned their interests instead with the employing classes, seeking to establish themselves as respectable and equal in esteem to their bosses.

Women clerical workers cultivated a culture of professionalism, inventing a feminized professional identity and set of social practices that would ensure that neither their social status nor claim to whiteness would be degraded by their labor. The bodies of working-class women, and indeed the bodies of women at the office in general, threatened to sexualize the relations among men and women, and undermine the modesty that had been idealized in antebellum culture. Whether working-class women chewing gum, or typewriter girls seducing their married bosses, clerical workers' bodies appeared uncontrolled, and in need of discipline and education. Conduct manuals and business education programs instructed clerical workers not only in the care of their machines, but also in the physical components of the work. Training in the touch method was a key

aspect of this professionalization. Sir Isaac Pitman's *Typewriter Manual* identifies typographical errors and poor form as a consistent problem among typewriters and recommends reforming women's posture and training their fingers to respond automatically to visual stimulants to decrease errors. Drawing on a theory of "muscle memory," Pitman argues that an impediment to the process is that women often read what they're typing, and so involve their mind in the activity and create room for error. To increase efficiency, women must abandon themselves to their bodies and forge an instinctual relationship between their fingers and the keys. This "blind" method, Pitman argues, "will enable most operators to abandon the use of the eyes altogether as far as the keyboard is concerned, and it will be then found that the work is far less likely to be marred by errors than it had previously been" (14). Pitman's instruction, much like others of the period, renders women's working bodies passive vehicles through which words travel, ideally without any mediation. In a piece for *Phonographic World*, a business man explains that "The presence of the girl amanuensis [stenographer] should be felt rather than observed; and when…she is absent from her post, those whom she serves should miss her, not from the greater quiet…but from realizing that something sweet and pleasant has dropped out of their routine, that the office is more gloomy and less attractive, and that some how things don't get on as they should" (Packard 40). Effacing women from the processes of producing knowledge, literature, or the stuff of business made the work more amenable to the private-public binary, since their minds remained untouched by the corrupting forces of the market. The corporeality of the labor, the fact of women's bodies in the office, was reimagined as a "feeling" or a "presence," much

like the "influence" that women of the antebellum era were believed to have emanated in their homes.

In addition to education in the physical skill of touch typing, clerical culture also prescribed bourgeois methods of maintaining and shaping one's body. The 1916 manual, *How to Become a Successful Stenographer,* released by the Remington Typewriter Company, for instance, features a chapter that offers instruction for "Making Your Body an Efficient Machine." Here, the authors seem to have Kate Field's pie-eating typewriter girl in mind, recommending a diet and set of hygienic practices that optimize bodily efficiency and prevent fatigue. Cautioning against indulgence they write, "Don't order your luncheon according to a caprice of your appetite. You can select your food scientifically so that your body receives the needed elements of nourishment" (69). Embedding their advice with a discourse of economy and rationalization, the authors treat the care of the typists' body as a technical matter—not unlike how they describe the care of the machine itself. They provide examples of proper meals that accord with the seasons and recommend an optimal number of hours to sleep and enjoy proper forms of leisure. They similarly offer a sample budget and recommendations for proper office attire and appearances: "The business girl needs good quality, well-cut clothes, because it is part of her business capital to look her best. She cannot wear flimsy, ultra-fashionable garments or cheap imitations of Fifth Avenue, or cast-off finery that needs to be worn out" (63). In many ways like Beecher's *Treatise,* which sought to organize domestic labor and instruct middle-class women in gender-appropriate forms of governance that they might use to control their servants, the Remington manual prescribes a method for governing one's own body and its appearance, such that any working-class habits of

spending, consuming, and performing femininity are suppressed. Says the manual: "The more conscientious a worker you are, the more likely are you to overlook that most conscientious servant of yours, your own body" (68). The metaphor of the servant alludes to the unruly or base aspects of the clerical worker's body, those which need to be contained and managed in order to maintain stability and harmony between women and work. Through this training, clerical workers were transformed into professional women by effacing traces of working or serving-class behaviors and appearances.

Professional culture demanded not only that women clerical workers perform the manual components of their labor with efficiency and precision, but also that they cultivate a personality and affective performance appropriate for the workplace. The most rigorous training the stenographer must undergo, the Remington manual states, may be in improving her "Personal Habits and Character": "Here you may have the hardest fight to conquer yourself, but it the most worth while, for on these qualities depend not only your business success, but success in your social and other interests" (16). As in the case of bodily discipline, the manual here uses the housewife-servant dichotomy to interpret the relationship between the clerical worker's appearance and her inner self. In order to become a professional businesswoman, the manual explains, one needs to "conquer" or suppress aspects of the self that may be distasteful or an impediment to productivity. The chapter "Good Manners in the Office" begins with an illustrative anecdote that demonstrates what, precisely, it might mean for businesswomen to become domesticated or acculturated to the office. The authors describe an otherwise good stenographer that makes the crass mistake of correcting her boss' grammar. They explain that this "intelligent, but tactless" woman "didn't know enough about human nature to understand

that many business men who lack education nevertheless secretly cherish the idea that their letters are literary gems. The girl who succeeded her knew better. She took her employer's dictation without comment or interruption, made necessary corrections unostentatiously, and handed perfect letters to him. The tacit little fiction that he dictated perfect letters was preserved, and peace and good-will reigned" (58). Advising women to perform submission and inferiority, even when their knowledge and expertise exceeds that of their boss, the manual advises the self-denying benevolence associated with both the knowing and chosen subordination of housewives, and the proper self-effacement of the serving classes. Advising that the women, no matter their background or previous educational experiences, adopt a uniform affect that conceals their social class, the manual recommends that stenographers perform a tempered femininity most like that which Beecher might have idealized, advising against the indulgences and unseriousness of working-class women: "Cheerfulness without giggling frivolity; courtesy without 'gushing'; dignity without a freezing manner—that is all there is to the tactful girl's etiquette of business" (60). The preferred and most successful forms of professional femininity, the manual suggests, are those that combine the precepts of bourgeois Anglo-American womanhood with the self-effacement associated with servitude. This winning combination elevates the professional businesswoman aesthetically above the typewriter girl and perhaps even the housewife, insofar as she is able to pursue economic independence and cultivate *professional* skills.

As it developed from the labor of cutting paper currency and writing shorthand notes, clerical labor demanded more from its women workers, requiring affective and emotional labor, too. The Remington manual, and many others like it, appropriated

notions of Womanhood that emerged in the antebellum cult of domesticity and adapted them to the conditions of the office to make clerical labor, too, an act of love. By the turn of the century, women's special ability for efficiency, organization, and care were reframed as qualities that businessmen and offices needed in order to be productive. Moreover, the work ethic expected of women stenographers draws on the antebellum mythology that women should labor "out of love," rather than in pursuit of economic independence. In a piece for *Phonographic Magazine* titled "Advice to Girls Entering the Business World," stenographer Frances H. Cleveland advises: "Occasionally sacrifice a little of your spare time to assist some one else in the office, who you know is very busy. When you see little things to be done, do not allow them to be left undone simply because *it is not your work.* Show an obliging spirit for though you will not perhaps realize it for some time, these 'little things' enhance the value of your services in the eyes of your employer" (50). Cleveland encourages stenographers to adopt a selfless attitude towards work, an ethos that puts the needs of the business over their own self-interest and individual needs. By rendering clerical work an act of service, Cleveland and many of her contemporaries paradoxically empower women while encouraging them to abandon self-interest. In the past, we've seen this logic used by Beecher in her argument that housewives choose to submit to their husbands and, in so doing, become empowered as the "sovereign of an empire."

Though Cleveland argues that the self-subordination of clerical workers will, too, benefit them in the end, it's unclear whether that can actually be true. In a field that hired women precisely because they were temporary employees that would not advance towards management, most likely because they would be married a short time after being

hired, the only "ends" that might justify these means are fantastical. A story in a typewriter magazine bears this out. The "too obliging" Miss Blake works much harder than her coworkers, allowing others to impose on her. Nevertheless, she continues to assist an elderly client and old maid figure, Miss Bains, and is in the end rewarded when Miss Bains dies. Much to her surprise, Miss Blake inherits $50,000, a "small reward for the kindness and consideration you had shown an old and helpless woman." But, her laudatory employer laments, "it will probably be the means of losing the best stenographer I ever had" (410). Here, Miss Blake is not only rewarded a fantastic amount of money, but the text assumes that this inheritance will also mean the end of her career. She is rewarded with economic independence, without the material obligation to work. Much like the housewives and domestics who are rewarded "in the end," and are instructed to labor endlessly with that abstract reward in mind, clerical workers are encouraged to invest their time and energy into a business, beyond the scope of their contract, on the off chance that such a work ethic will miraculously pay off.

By appropriating the discourse of domesticity, and adapting it to the context of business, clerical workers were able to reframe their labor as a form of service, while at the same time distancing themselves from the degradation of servitude. By the 1930s, the personal secretary emerged as an elite ideal, a woman that was both capable of executing her work to perfection and performing an appropriately feminine affect. The "office wife," as she became known, was one admired and reviled, a figure of aspiration for women entering the workforce and jealousy for housewives who suspected she was the cause of their husbands' disloyalty. Faith Baldwin's 1930 romance novel *The Office Wife* is representative of this shift away from earlier decades' concerns with the degradation of

clerical labor and towards an image of the secretary as a cultural icon. A best-selling novel that was shortly thereafter turned into a Hollywood film, Baldwin's novel follows Irish-American Anne Murdock's rise through the ranks of the Fellowes Advertising Agency in Manhattan. An ambitious New Woman type, Anne is initially resolved to remain unmarried, witnessing the institution's negative impacts on the health and professional lives of her coworkers. But when she is finally promoted to the personal secretary of agency president Larry Fellowes, she finds herself growing more and more attached, even though Fellowes is already married to a woman of his own class. Before Anne ever has the chance to become an adulterer, and live up to the myth of the typewriter girl as gold digger, Fellowes' wife has her own extramarital affair and swiftly divorces her husband. In the end, Anne breaks her reluctant engagement to a lower ranking ad man at the agency, and becomes engaged to Larry with plans to transform from his "office wife" to "just—wife" (277). Even as the plot redeems Anne, and by extension, the figure of the office wife, from the charge that she was destructive to the marriage contract, the narrative ends with Anne's wondering whether his new secretary will pose a threat. Baldwin writes: "Anne tilted her chin in challenge and defiance. No, she was not afraid. She knew that side of him, too. Nothing was sealed to her—nothing was a closed book. No one could usurp her place, no one could threaten her sure position. She held his heart; she knew his mind; she would retain the partnership and be the beloved" (278). In this resolution, the office wife becomes not the antagonist of housewives, nor does her labor degrade her or obfuscate her path towards respectability. Rather, clerical labor and working with and for a businessman is reframed as a means for cultivating an even more intimate, stronger affective bond, assuring a marriage that is

incapable of corruption by the office wife. Resolving the tension between private and public, woman and machine, the figure of the office wife offered a powerful and persuasive cultural narrative in which it was possible for women to fulfill both their professional ambitions and social reproductive duties.

As this chapter has shown, the feminization of clerical labor involved the reconceptualization and reorganization of office work. No longer the manual tasks that male clerks performed in law firms and government offices, clerical labor by the mid-twentieth century involved the management of social relationships, affective bonds, and the maintenance of an acceptable appearance. As much as women's entrance into the office changed the labor and space, so too were woman's social identities transformed. In order to make sense of and manage the massive upheaval caused by the integration of the sexes and the disassembling of a classed and raced hierarchy that had structured the domestic sphere, clerical workers and business leaders fashioned a set of professional social codes by appropriating components of domestic culture and adapting them to serve the interests of business. This required, first, that clerical workers distance themselves from the sexualization associated with working-class and racialized women. To achieve this, stenographers mythologized typewriter girls as their foil, creating a sexual and cultural antagonist against which their own social value could be measured. Developing standards for professional performances of femininity, clerical workers themselves, together with institutions offering business education courses, in addition to a vast array of conduct manuals and advice columns, imagined the businesswoman as an ally of the employing class. Through a cultivation of personality, habits, and technical skills, clerical workers became professionals, thereby repudiating their association with servility and

blackness. Still, while the position guaranteed unique access to economic independence and social mobility, the increasing demands on women's affective and emotional labor meant that their autonomy had its limits. Scholars have described this as the paradox of "women's empowerment and subjection in the twentieth-century workforce," when "Twenty million young women rose to their feet and said 'We will not be dictated to' and immediately became shorthand typists" (Price 4). As we have seen, these contradictions remained a latent concern even among the department store clerks at Strawbridge & Clothier for whom the demand that they perform an affect of "self-denying benevolence" inspired a subtle resentment.

The Impersonal Personal Secretary in Cather's "Office Wife" Stories

Over the course of her career as a journalist, editor, and novelist, Willa Cather meticulously crafted a public persona, a commitment that she took seriously and to the grave. In her will, Cather stipulated that she would never "allow quotations from personal letters to be printed." But this wish was recently flouted by critics that deemed her private concerns "no longer valid" (ix). Editors of her private letters explain that the self that Cather had kept hidden—that which can only be gleaned in her communications with friends, artists, and coworkers in the industry—"is far more satisfying and more honest than that of a 'pure artist,' unmoved by commercial motivations, who devoted herself strictly to her creations and to nothing else" (x). The editors reason that while it is true that Cather's goal seemed to have been to "create a persona that practically disappeared behind [her] work," these mitigations are no longer necessary, since Cather's recognition as a "true artist" is, at this point, certain (ix). However, the fact is, Cather was never

successful in her attempts to erase her private self from public scrutiny and literary critics have habitually relied on Cather's biography as a lens through which to read her work. Cherishing any glimpse into her personal, private, and intimate self, critics locate analogues for Cather in her work, even at the expense of dealing with her text's explicitly stated interests. Consider, for instance, the case of *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* which one critic explains was not about race "in any directly legible sense," but instead uses the relationship between a plantation mistress and a slave girl as a conceit to explore Cather's relationship with her mother (Fetterly 16). Cather's reputation as an artist has long depended on its relationship to her private life, self, and politics.

The drive to uncover the hidden, personal life of Cather presumes that it is somehow possible to wrest the personal from the impersonal, the private from the public, and it assumes the stability of these categories for the early twentieth-century writer. It also curiously reproduces antebellum affective expectations that employers held for serving class women, seeking disclosure, an affective experience of intimacy. Critics have by and large neglected to consider precisely why Cather adopted self-effacement as a strategy in her writing and in her relationship to public representation, citing her concerns about the impact of commercialism on artistic production.[26] The history that the dissertation has assembled shows, however, that while self-effacement is a performance of affective labor that has historically accommodated the aesthetic demands of domesticity and professionalism, it has also been a transgressive strategy for preserving a private self in a context that demands the disclosure of one's professed love or "truth." We might ask,

[26] In her 1922 artistic statement, "The Novel Démeublé," she distinguishes "the novel as a form of amusement, or as a form of art; since they serve very different purposes and in very different ways" (5). The former Cather regards as utilitarian as "the egg one eats for breakfast" and as of the same quality as "cheap soap or a cheap perfume, or cheap furniture" (5).

therefore, how, as a woman working in the culture industries, these pressures shaped Cather's literary practice and the cultivation of an intensely private, public persona. More than a set of artistic principles, the tactics that Cather mobilizes to "disappear behind her work" respond to the social conditions that prefigure her labor as a form a "women's work," that evaluate her literary output as an expression of her gender, and that seek to position her in relationship to New Women fiction and feminist social movements.

In what follows, I turn to two pieces of Cather's office fiction: "Her Boss" and "Ardessa," stories that thematically explore the labor involved in producing a magazine, an autobiography, and even an "office wife." Here, we find metafictional texts in which personal secretaries confront the contradictory demands of a professional workplace that would have them perform a labor of love. Cather's stories revealed that the gendered social codes peddled by typewriter manuals and office romances were stable, coherent, or liberatory. Instead, her stories suggest that the women cannot be seen apart from these mythologies, they are not permitted to "disappear behind their work," since it is not their work that is evaluated. Rather, their appearance and affective performance is what determines whether they will rise to the status of personal secretary or remain in the steno pool, undistinguishable from other typewriter girls. In my reading, I argue that the stories, at once, perform "disclosure," promising to take readers behind the scenes, and stage an infinite deflection that prevents readers from ever accessing the "true" "personal" feelings, motives, and perspectives of her office wife characters. We can never get past the myths and tropes that constrain the visibility and meaning of women's work. As such, the very form of the stories illustrates the overdetermination of women's personal or private selves and obstructs readers and critics intent on consuming Cather's work as a

feminized affective performance, the work of a "lady novelist."

In her work as an editor, journalist, and writer, Cather negotiated a tension between journalistic or artistic integrity and commercialism, recognizing that the pressures of the market necessarily influenced the production of knowledge as advertisers and the drive towards profit exerted new power over newspapers, magazines, and cultural production more generally. The journalistic method of objectivity emerged to allow journalists to disavow the pressures of commercialism by presenting information to readers in an apparently disinterested way. Ironically, however, the appearance of disinterestedness was largely achieved through the performance of "personal integrity" or what Will Irwin described as "commercialized sincerity" on behalf of the author and publication (16). In a 1911 series of essays investigating the impacts of commercialism on journalism published in *Collier's*, Irwin identifies the "magazine standard" as a resolution to the apparently competing drives towards objectivity and profit that threatened the freedom of the press. Citing *McClure's,* the massively popular and profitable magazine that nonetheless featured serious social critique—and at which Cather served as managing editor—he argues that "nothing profits…like truth" (16). According to Irwin, adopting the magazine standard of commercialized sincerity allowed writers and publications to simultaneously overcome the corrupting forces of the market and abide them: the market, he reasoned, welcomed and rewarded displays of "personal integrity" and the disclosure of "truth." Recommending the power of "commercialized sincerity," Irwin draws on the logic of domesticity to imagine a feminized journalistic aesthetic that combines the moral authority of domesticated women with the disinterestedness of the market. While this might have represented a theoretically satisfying resolution for Irwin, for Cather, we can

imagine that this created an intrusive demand that she offer readers a commercialized version of her personal life and self.

Nearly a decade after Cather decided to leave journalism and *McClure's* to dedicate herself to her writing, Cather proposed a longer series of stories titled "Office Wives" to *Century* magazine but ended up only publishing three: "The Bookkeeper's Wife" (1916) and "Ardessa" (1918) in *Century* and in 1919, "Her Boss," in *Smart Set*. Of the few pieces scholarship that take up the series, all draw out the personal and professional connections between Cather and her characters, which are, admittedly, hard to ignore. Ardessa, for instance, works as an assistant to the managing editor of the magazine "The Out-Cry," "a red-hot magazine of protest" (105). Critics remark, of course, that the premise and setting of the story bears a striking similarity to Cather's own editorial experience at *McClure's,* a ten-cent magazine known for its "muckraking" journalism. Likewise, "Her Boss" represents a typist's relationship with her boss as she acts as his companion while he dictates his autobiography. Cather, too, famously served as the ghostwriter for Samuel McClure for the autobiography serially published in the magazine. Rather read these stories as reflections of Cather's biographical experiences, however, we might consider how Cather's fictionalization of her personal history and work experiences complicates and undermines prevailing distinctions between private and public, confusing and transgressing the notions of the personal and the impersonal. Although she was intent on effacing her private self from public view, she also continually confronts critics and readers with the temptation to see Cather in her own work. In so doing, the stories perform "commercialized sincerity," both submitting to and rejecting readers' gendered expectations for her work.

Consider Cather's "Her Boss," which takes as its primary focus the experiences not of the would-be office wife, typist and stenographer Annie Wooley, but rather, her boss: a wealthy lawyer, Mr. Wanning. Annie's rise from typist in the stenography pool to personal secretary to one of the firm's partners is not the central plot line, but a subtext of Mr. Wanning's own personal drama. Readers have limited access to Annie's thoughts, and instead perceive her as her employer does: as a "happy sort of little creature, [who] didn't pout when she was scolded, and giggled about her own mistakes in spelling" (101). Like the other stories in the "Office Wives" series, "Her Boss" represents Annie from the perspective of others, the narration drawing in existing discourses and narratives popularly used to figure typewriter girls as innocent and dim-witted servants, sexualized temptresses, or greedy gold diggers. Despite what the stenography magazines and conduct books recommend, however, Annie's labor—including her affective performance at work—is interpreted as an expression of her working-class status. While professional culture claimed to prize the "impersonal," and reward hard work indiscriminately, "Her Boss" more cynically suggests that the ethos prescribed by white-collar professions maintained inequalities and existing hierarchies. Although it takes place in a "modern" workplace, governed by an apparently distinct set of social codes, the story's main conflict between Annie and the partners at the firm is staged as a conflict between employer and servant that might have taken place in the antebellum home. Drawing an analogy between the "self-denying benevolence" that housewives demanded of their servants, and the "sacrifice" expected of stenographers by businessmen, Cather suggests that the notion that the typewriter represented women's emancipation from the patriarchal confines of the domestic sphere was both errant and dangerous.

The story opens with Mr. Wanning returning home to his bourgeois family home where neither his socialite daughters nor his wife express the least concern with the prognosis that Wanning's doctor delivered that day: he's dying. Maintaining the propriety and appearances characteristic of middle-class domesticity, the women offer Wanning platitudes and niceties, assuring him that the doctor exaggerates, asking, "You certainly don't look like a sick man, and you don't feel like one, do you?" (96) His son, an unsuccessful playwright, too, delights in the abstract idea of Wanning's illness, meditating on the "brutality" of scientists who "ought to be made serve an apprenticeship in art, to get some conception of the power of human motives" (100). His friends at the "club" treat Wanning's illness as an opportunity, competing with stories of the most "treacherous organs" and "ardently soliciting business" for their doctors (100). In contrast to the polite, but cold behavior of his family and friends—members of the professional class clearly and ironically motivated by commercialism—Wanning takes comfort in the affection of two figures: "Old Sam," a Black butler that's been with the family for over a decade, and "Little Annie," a copyist that Wanning "had several times kept after hours," and who was always "good-natured about it" (101). Each offers Wanning a convincing performance of sympathy and concern, which he accepts as an aspect of their nature and without question. When Wanning decides to spend the last of his days dictating his life story, he enlists Annie to serve as his personal secretary, requiring that she act as a kind of "companion," and answer his every beck and call. Annie's family and boyfriend permit this on the promise that the old man will remember Annie in his will. But when he eventually dies, Wanning's son disregards his instruction to give Annie $1,000, and the partners of the firm instead fire Annie, reprimanding her for transgressing her "station"

and, the men assume, acting as a gold digger and adultering mistress to the dying man. Despite following the direct instructions of the Remington typewriter manual, and the advice of stenography magazines, Annie is deprived of any "reward" for her affective labor or compensation for her stenography.

In difference with his previous personal secretary Miss Doane, whom Wanning describes as "scrupulous in professional etiquette… scarcely cordial," (101) Annie appears to him as earnest and sincere in her concern for his well-being. But moments of irony break through this illusion, revealing Annie's affect, too, to be a professional performance. From Wanning's perspective, Cather writes: "[Annie] was the only person to whom he had talked about his illness who had been frank and honest with him, who had looked at him with eyes that concealed nothing" (102). In Annie, Wanning sees an absence of the propriety or the "impersonal" which characterizes his relationship with Miss Doane. He interprets Annie's frankness and honesty as an uninhibited expression of the personal, a disclosure of her true self. It is an experience that, the narrative suggests, he has only had with one other person: Old Sam. Wanning reflects: "When she was there Wanning felt as if there were someone who cared whether this was a good or a bad day with him. Old Sam, too, was like that. While the old black man put him to bed and made his comfortable, Wanning could talk to him as he talked to little Annie. Even if he dwelt upon his illness, in plain terms, he did not feel as if he were imposing on them" (104). Wanning interprets his felt sense of intimacy with these servant characters as evidence of a genuine bond, denying the possibility that either is engaged in a class, gender, or racially-specific performance of propriety themselves. But glimpses of Annie's perspective and those of her family remind readers that, while the serving classes may

appear to be laboring out of love, they do so only as a necessary component of their relationship to their employer. Annie, Cather writes, "found that [Wanning] liked to be questioned, and [she] tried to be greatly interested in it all" (104). And though they initially protest, Annie's family gladly permits her to give up her Saturday afternoons and evenings to work with Wanning once he promises that Annie will be rewarded. Writes Cather: "Mrs. Wooley said she sometimes felt afraid he might disinherit his children, as rich people often did, and make talk; but she hoped for the best. Whatever came to Annie, she prayed it might not be in the form of taxable property" (106). Though Annie and her family are certainly sympathetic to Wooley, they also recognize that keeping up the appearance of affection had financial stakes. Even in the narration here, Mrs. Wooley only just maintains the appearance of genuine concern, which Cather playfully suggests towards the end of the paragraph as the commercial interests of the family appear in the reference to "taxable property." Even behind the most apparently genuine forms of commercialized sincerity, Cather shows, are the pressures of self-interested commercialism.

Whereas the pseudo-kinship relationships that might have been rewarded within the domestic sphere just as Mrs. Wooley describes, the public office workplace operates with slightly different rules. Annie's affective bond with her boss was evaluated not only by Wanning himself, but also his business partners. For them, who were more interested in protecting the public image of Wanning and the financial standing of the company, Annie

appears as one that has transgressed social boundaries. Says Wanning's partner, McQuinston as he dismisses Annie from the firm:

> Well, a young girl like you cannot render so much personal service to her employer as you did to Mr. Wanning without causing unfavorable comment. To be blunt with you, for your own good, my dear young lady, your services to your employer should terminate at the office, and at the close of office hours. Mr. Wanning was a very sick man and his judgment was at fault, but you should have known what a girl in your station can do and what she cannot do (107).

McQuinston's suggestion that Annie was too "personal" with her employer, that she should have drawn clearer boundaries between her work and private time comes as a shock to the girl whose been rewarded and promoted based on this very same qualities. Cather renders McQuinston as a chiding mistress, cautioning an "uppity" servant to remember her "station," and in so doing, suggests that the office operates according to many of the contradictions that had historically confounded women's efforts at upward mobility and "emancipation" from the home. Displacing the middle-class stenographer that was her superior, the working-class typewriter girl may have won the prized position of "personal secretary." But Cather shows that this comes at great cost. What Annie wins is the opportunity to act as a servant—not a partner or intellectual equal. The title of personal secretary neither guarantees nor secures anything in terms of either social status or wealth. Instead, Wanning and the partners at the firm perceive Annie as a member of the serving class that overstepped her bounds. The commercialization of sincerity, which allowed women to be compensated for affective labor, also created a situation in which their sincerity and "true" motives could always be questioned.

Cather's final office story, "Ardessa," demonstrates how the cultural debates about journalistic and artistic integrity, about the corruption of knowledge production and high art by commercial forces, mirrored those that attempted to settle the relationship between women and work. The only one of the three "Office Wives" stories that takes the stenographer's focal consciousness as one of the primary narrative perspectives, "Ardessa" represents the lady stenographer's fall from grace, and her usurpation by working-class, Jewish typewriter girl, Becky. Ardessa's interpretation of the events is starkly contrasted with that of her boss, managing editor of the leftist magazine, "The Outcry," millionaire Marcus O'Mally. The narrative sets in competition two visions of professional culture: on the one hand, Ardessa perceives the office as organized in a social hierarchy not unlike the domestic sphere, assuming the supremacy of her bourgeois, Anglo-American femininity and her affective role as office caregiver and hostess; and on the other, O'Mally and more commercially-minded clerical workers value the efficiency and "impersonality" of working-class women, deriding the former social order as antiquated and an impediment to progress and profit. Critics have interpreted this story allegorically as a representation of the displacement of the True Woman by the New Woman, a transformation about which Cather is cynical. But, within the context of others of Cather's "Office Wives" stories, and in relation to the history of service relations in the U.S., this reading reduces the complex classed, racial, and gendered dynamics that lead to Ardessa's "fall" and Becky's "promotion." As we have seen, Cather's stories encourage readers to be suspicious of the false promises that came with the title of "personal secretary" or office wife. While it's true that Becky is able to overthrow the rule of Ardessa, and implicitly, the anti-Semitic and elitist regime she represents, the story's

closing scene undermines the narrative triumph, throwing into question whether the working women actually have the agency or significance that they perceive themselves to have at the office.

As described from her perspective, Ardessa performed a range of essential duties for the magazine and O'Mally, taking charge of the office while he was traveling, which he often did. She sees herself "Like a sultan's bride,… inviolate in her lord's absence; she had to be kept for him" (107). In difference with the typists that worked in the stenography pool, those that have been regarded as a mere "courtesan," Ardessa conceives of herself as the professional ally and social equal of her boss, aligned with him in a position of royalty. Much like Beecher's metaphor of the housewife as the "sovereign of an empire," Ardessa articulates her power through the image of the "sultan's bride," a middle-class, Anglo-American woman that reigned over the various working-class and Jewish girls in the office with a discerning eye and a sharp tongue. Writing from her perspective, Cather describes Ardessa's leisurely relationship to the office: "She read and she embroidered. Her room was pleasant, and she liked to be seen at ladylike tasks and to feel herself a graceful contrast to the crude girls in the advertising and circulation departments across the hall" (107). Rather than self-indulgent, however, Ardessa understands her labor as self-denying and accommodating, an affective performance necessary for managing the social relationships among writers clamoring to get published and the perpetually intemperate O'Mally. She describes herself as "the card catalogue of his ever-changing personal relations" (107) that denied herself to nobody, was gracious even to "the Shakespeare-Bacon man, the perpetual-motion man, the travel-article man, the hosts which haunt every magazine office" (108). Positioning herself as a

hostess or gatekeeper, seeking to manage the temper of her boss by giving prospective writers selective access to the editor, Ardessa "had a pleasant sense of being at the heart of things" (107).

From the purview of her private office, what O'Mally refers to as "her room," Ardessa articulates her superiority and distinguishes herself from the typewriter girls running around the office by forging a white professional identity through the repudiation of a proximity to blackness and racialized forms of service. In particular, Ardessa treats Becky Tietelbaum, whom she got a job for at the office at the request of her father, Ardessa's tailor, as her subordinate and inferior. Cather, writing from Ardessa's perspective, embeds her description of Becky with the anti-Semitic rhetoric and racial slurs, gestures evocative of the nativism of Anglo-American domesticity. Ardessa explains: "When Becky first came she was as ignorant as a young savage. She was rapid at her shorthand and typing, but a Kafir girl would have known as much about the English language" (110). Ardessa describes hers as the role of "missionary-mother" to Becky, domesticating the "young savage" by training her in a performance of bourgeois Anglo-American femininity. In their first interaction in the story, Becky sheepishly asks Ardessa's permission to buy and wear white shoes at the office—a request that Ardessa flatly denies as gauche and impractical. But her interest in Becky is not selfless. Ardessa takes advantage of Becky's insecurities and compels her to do work that Ardessa herself is charged with, even if it means habitually staying late at the office. As Cather represents her, Ardessa embodies many of the ironic contradictions of the housewife, performing self-denial and maternal affection in the service of her own interests and in order to maintain power and control.

But Ardessa's sense of security and power is utterly at odds with O'Mally's perspective on the office and, when she is on a brief vacation, Ardessa is ousted from her comfortable position at the heart of things. A nervous Becky is brought in to type a few letters for O'Mally and he's quickly taken with her speed and efficiency. Calling her Rebecca instead, the narration writes from O'Mally's perspective: "With Rebecca he got on very well; she was impersonal, unreproachful, and she fairly panted for work. Everything was done almost before he told her what he wanted. She raced ahead with him; it was like riding a good modern bicycle after pumping along on an old tire" (114). O'Mally constructs Becky as a deficiency or absence of "personal" qualities, which he connects to her utility as a "modern" woman. In difference with Ardessa's performance of self-denial, which involved her efforts to manage the social and personal relations between the editor and the magazine's writers, Becky's self-effacement more effectively disappears her from the scene of writing and the production of the magazine. Whereas Ardessa ruled the office through the management of others' behaviors, including O'Mally's, Becky appears to O'Mally as "unreproachful," and apparently without any pretensions to power. But what O'Mally initially figures as an absence of qualities is better understood as a different affective performance altogether. Delivering the bad news to Ardessa that she would be moved to another office and replaced by Becky, O'Mally compares them: "You're too soft-handed with the has-beens and the never-was-ers. You're too much of a lady for this rough game. … Becky is as rough as sandpaper, and she'll clear out a lot of dead wood" (115). What he values in Becky is not just that she lacks the social etiquette of a ladylike Ardessa, but that she appears as "rough" and, through her working-class socialization, defiant of elite decorum.

It is the qualities which Ardessa tried to suppress in Becky that O'Mally finds most appealing. This revelation makes Ardessa's narration of her relationship to Becky seem illusory, and casts doubt on Ardessa's sense of herself as socially superior and equal to her boss. Ardessa asks herself, "Why had she ever civilized Becky? Why had she taught her manners and deportment, broken her of the gum-chewing habit, and made her presentable? In her original state O'Mally would never have put up with her, no matter what her ability" (115). Here, Ardessa figures herself as empowered to exercise influence over Becky as a "Woman," "civilizing" her and training her in the social codes of professionalism so effectively that she transformed Becky into an acceptable replacement for herself. But, this narration is undermined by the story's ironic ending. A month following Becky's promotion to personal secretary, and Ardessa's displacement to the business department, O'Mally and his business partner, Henderson, discuss the events of the story. Referring to Ardessa:

> O'Mally said to Henderson, as he feed the coat-boy:
> "By the way, how are you making it with the bartered bride?"
> Henderson smashed on his Panama as he said:
> "Any time you want her back, don't be delicate."
> But O'Mally shock his red head and laughed,
> "Oh, I'm no Indian giver!" (116)

In retrospect, the men render the intimate and intricate drama as a proprietary exchange between men. Deploying the rhetoric of imperial expansion, the men reconfigure Ardessa's relationship to conquest. Here, she is neither an agent for nor the sovereign of the "empire," but rather the goods of conquest. Although Ardessa believes she was successful at business and in "civilizing" Becky, and Becky believes her hard work has earned her the title and respect of a "real business woman" (111), the conclusion of the

story suggests that these are merely fantasies, as the fate of the women is determined by patriarchal powers at be. Adopting the racializing rhetoric that Ardessa herself had used to distinguish herself from Becky, the men claim power over their secretaries through a performance of white supremacist and imperialist masculinity. The conclusion empties the women's pursuit of the title of personal secretary of meaning, revealing it to be a foolhardy and naive attempt to gain power in a structure that figures them as either tools to be used or prizes to be won. Whether they perform an "impersonal," and servile affect, or a bourgeois self-denying and "insinuatingly feminine" affect, they are nonetheless made "not persons at all."

Whether to escape the racialization of service or the confines of housewifery, at the turn of the twentieth century, working-class and middle-class white women fled the domestic sphere to pursue clerical work as stenographers and typists. This historical process, named the feminization of clerical work, was achieved through the emergence of a professional culture that adapted the discourse of domesticity to imagine women's work in the formal economy as socially beneficial. To put to rest the anxieties associated with the "integration of the sexes" in offices and banks—anxieties about the introduction of sexualized bodies into commercial centers; the co-mingling of working-class, immigrant workers with middle-class, college-educated professionals; the potential proletarianization of labor increasingly automated and rationalized—employers, technology companies, and clerical workers themselves developed an appropriately gendered and classed affective performance embodied in the figure of the office wife.

This iteration of the New Woman may have appeared to be at odds with the True Women of the past represented by Cather's Ardessa. The professional woman and personal secretary might have affected the usurpation of the racist, bourgeois regime of Anglo-American housewives, replacing it with a regime that claimed to indiscriminately value efficiency, productivity, and "impersonality." However, as Cather's story shows, what's concealed in the culture of professionalism and impersonality is the extent to which it continued to rely on and reproduce gendered, classed, racialized differences and hierarchies. While in the case of clerical work, the culture of professionalism and rhetoric of specialization positioned working women as paradoxically empowered within a structurally disempowering patriarchal workplace, these shifts in the distribution and conceptualization of reproductive labor different affected domestic and garment industry workers. As we shall see, for the immigrant workforce that performed industrial piecework in tenement buildings, the rhetoric of specialization did little to empower them as workers or women, instead interpreting their participation in the sweated labor system as evidence of their failure to assimilate to U.S. culture. And for domestic workers, who shared an interest in reframing their work as "impersonal," the effort to specialize service paradoxically resulted in its casualization, as service was transformed from a lifelong position to daywork.

CHAPTER 5

STARVING SEAMSTRESSES, SWEATSHOP WOMEN, AND THE CRISES OF INDUSTRIAL HOMEWORK

Adapting a letter written to the editors of *New Masses* in 1934 by activist Felipe Ibarro, Tillie Olsen's poem "I Want You Women Up North to Know" sketches the relationship between department store shoppers and the homeworkers of the garment industry. She writes:

> I want you women up north to know
> how those dainty children's dresses you buy
> at macy's, wannamakers, gimbals, marshall fields,
> are dyed in blood, are stitched in wasting flesh,
> down in San Antonio, "where the sunshine spends the winter" (367).

Writing in an aesthetic that Michael Denning describes as the "proletarian grotesque," (*Cultural Front* 66) Olsen renders the exploitation of the Chicana workers as a physical brutality, graphically representing the economic processes involved in the manufacturing of ready-made clothes as a violence that exhausts and eventually kills these working women. Homeworkers, or industrial pieceworkers, like those in San Antonio, were part of a subcontracting system in which contractors distributed materials to women and children to sew and assemble at home and subsequently collect wages paid by the piece. This "outwork" was a known evil of industrialization that drove down the wages of "in work" at shops and factories, and, by the time Olsen is writing, relied almost exclusively on the labor of immigrant women. Olsen's poem calls on the women "up North," those buying clothes at department stores in urban commercial centers, to come to a consciousness about the suffering from which domestic goods are produced. In her poem, the "exquisite

pleats" "vanish into a bloated face," and the dresses themselves are stitched "in wasting flesh." The lacy, beautiful aesthetic of the children's dresses conceal "skeleton's bones clattering" and "the naked bodies of four bony children, / the chant of their chorale of hunger" (367-369). The labor of garment industry homeworkers, the poem argues, sustains the lives of children up North at the expense of the children in the South. Dispelling the myth that this form of "women's work" is an act of love, or an expression of care, Olsen renders the production of children's clothing instead a gruesome tragedy, a crisis of social reproduction.

Though taken up with new political urgency by proletarian authors, the tendency to represent the sweated workers of the garment industry as brutalized and starving mothers was, by 1934, nearly a century old. A mainstay in U.S. public culture, the sweated worker was a figure both reviled and pitied, an antiquated reminder of a pre-industrial past, a looming threat of the industrial future, and most often, a symbol of ethnic poverty against which a nativist conception of "American labor" was measured. Like many before her, Olsen's poem ends with a call to action—"Women up north, I want you to know, / I tell you this can't last forever. / I swear it won't" (369)—vowing to extinguish this sweated labor system that benefited the employing classes of native-born women. But, despite the legislative efforts to root out the problem, and decades of social reform decrying the sweatshop, the use of sweated labor in the garment industry and many others persists into the present. Scholarship about the industrial era garment industry has tended to focus on the organization of factory labor, revolutionary strikes, and industrial tragedies, studying garment industry labor within the history of capitalist production. Although labor historians have well documented the economic and social conditions that continue to

make the sweatshop possible, industrial homework has yet to be studied within the framework of social reproduction or in relation to other forms of women's work that emerged in the early industrial era.

This chapter will address this gap in scholarship, situating the figure of the sweated homeworker in the context of broader struggles to draw and clarify the boundaries between work and home, labor and care. As we have seen, industrialization and rational modes of production transformed clerical workers from "treasury courtesans" into professional personal secretaries, making women's automated labor into an idealized expression of their gender. Although clerical labor was an early form of homework, and seamstresses were similarly figured as "distressed gentlewomen" in the antebellum period, by the turn of the twentieth century, the processes of industrialization had contributed to these women's further degradation as they were figured as destitute and starving mothers. Industrial piecework performed by immigrant workers was not redeemed by the economic and cultural drive towards specialization and professionalization, but was consistently rendered a threat to working-class women, families, and the broader U.S. public.

In what follows, I recover the cultural transformation of the sweated worker from a distressed gentlewoman to a grotesque foreign threat in her representation by literature, policy makers, and social reformers. This was achieved, I argue, by constructing sweated labor as the logical outcome of immigrant women's inability to effectively perform as mothers and women. The foreignness of the home, interpreted as a sign of a corrupted domestic sphere, is taken as evidence of the workers' sexual and gender dysfunction—not the imposition of an exploitative system by U.S. corporations. Taking up the work begun

by Eileen Boris' seminal study, *Home to Work: Motherhood and the Politics of Industrial Homework in the United States*, this chapter examines the cultural production of the sweated homeworker, focusing on the relationship between the symbolic function of the figure and the persistence of sweated labor. The figure of the sweated homeworker functioned, I argue, both as evidence of the breakdown between the separate spheres—a cautionary tale against industry's intervention into home life—and as a foil against which images of the good immigrant and the hardworking American could be measured. Whereas Progressive era social reformers argued that the environmental conditions of home and work degraded the immigrant worker and family, by the mid-twentieth century, sweated labor was recast as a component of the assimilation process, an obstacle that immigrants workers would overcome as a part of the process of becoming American.

In relation to other figures of working women in the period, the sweated homeworker embodied the dangers of commercializing reproductive labor: diseased and abandoned babies abounded; dirty apartments dilapidated without the proper practices of homemaking; desperate women took on sex work as a more profitable alternative to sweated work. The symbolic threat of the degraded homeworker had the effect of reinforcing the necessity of the separate spheres, naturalizing the roles of women as mothers, and, cultivating a essentialist relationship between foreignness and sweated labor. The second half of the chapter turns to Anzia Yezierska's 1920 short story collection *Hungry Hearts* to consider how her representation of sweated women contests the social reformist approaches to seeing and producing knowledge about this form of women's work. A student of John Dewey who worked with him to collect data for his groundbreaking ethnographic study of Polish workers in Philadelphia, Yezierska rejects

social reformers' claim to objectivity, what Irwin might have called "commercialized sincerity," and in her own stories, uses the conventions of romance and sentimental fiction to explore the "hearts of the Poles." Critically engaging the common tropes, narrative arcs, and cultural mythologies which fated sweated immigrant workers to starvation and tragedy, Yezierska's stories reveal their incapacity to apprehend the complex innerworlds and revolutionary possibilities of the women of the garment industry.

Finding the Sweatshop, Figuring the Sweated Worker

This section will show how the efforts of social reformers and legislators to eradicate the sweatshop actually contributed to its permanence. From its early instantiation as a practice of "distressed gentlewomen," homework was represented as a potentially dangerous form of work, undermining the tenuous separation of spheres. However, as the industrial production of clothing changed, and the labor involved in making ready-made clothes shifted to shops and factories, homework was increasingly common among working-class and poor women. Understood as the commercialization of a feminized duty—sewing—homework was thoroughly condemned by lawmakers, social reformers, and trade unions who believed that their labor reduced women to mere bodies, void of the capacity to care and therefore prohibited from performing their role as wife and mother. By sexualizing and foreignizing homework, these agents of reform rendered it a threat to Anglo-American bourgeois domesticity that, they believed, would be remedied only by limiting immigration and more effectively assimilation of foreign women. As a consequence, by the 1920s, the sweatshop was no longer framed as an

industrial problem, but a personal one: when immigrants failed to overcome the obstacle of sweated labor, they were accused of maladjustment or un-American or backward attitudes, unfit mothers whose foreignness resulted to domestic dysfunction. In what follows, I argue that the sweated worker became a hegemonic cultural symbol, representing backward and inefficient modes of production, as well as the destructive effects of industrial modernization. As we shall see, instead of abolishing the sweatshop, a century of social and legislative movements instead ensured its place in U.S. production and culture, condemning immigrant women to labor regarded as dehumanizing and degrading.

The emergence of the sweated labor system can be traced to the invention of the commercial sewing machine and the production of ready-made clothes in U.S. commercial centers, two developments that initiated the reorganization of garment industry labor among so-called unskilled workers. Before the Civil War, the production of clothing was primarily the work of tailors, considered highly skilled artisanal work, or else the work of housewives caring for their families. Ready-made garments were imported from Britain with the express purpose of clothing slaves. With the passage of a protective tariff in 1816 that allowed U.S. garment producers to enter the market of ready-made clothes, and the necessity of mass-produced uniforms for the Civil War, the garment industry was restructured to produce most men's clothing as ready-made wear. The standardization of men's sizes and the increased demand for ready-made clothes expanded the production of garments beyond the capacity of shops and into factories. At the same time, systems of efficiency like those collected under the banner of Taylorism distributed work amongst greater numbers of workers who each performed a single,

repetitive task in order to maximize output. In the garment industry, this new method of distributing labor was achieved by old means: sending work home to housewives so that they could collect a little extra "pin money" to supplement their husbands' wages. Known as "outwork" or "homework," this form of industrial piecework was condemned by lawmakers, social reformers, and unionists who argued that the labor was degrading for housewives.

The figure of the distressed seamstress emerged in early American literature and culture to give voice to the anxieties caused by women's industrial labor and provided a possible symbolic resolution. A pitied symbol of dependency, the seamstress was often the central figure of seduction narratives that decried her vulnerability to economic and sexual predation. These narratives, at once sexual fantasies and nightmares, typically represented the fall of an otherwise innocent woman who turned to work following the death of her husband or father and eventually resorted to prostitution out of economic desperation. According to these narratives, when she was driven to "out work" as a seamstress, completing piece meal work for scant pay, the seamstress became vulnerable to the advances and exploitation of rakish tailors and wealthy strangers. Timothy Shay Arthur's 1859 novel *Lizzy Glenn: or, The Trials of a Seamstress* is representative of these conventions. Arthur's novel follows the life story of two seamstresses, the young, single Lizzy Glenn and the middle-aged, widowed Mrs. Gaston, who lost touch after having lived together. Deploying what Lori Merish describes as the figure of the "sentimental seamstress," Arthur constructs his protagonists as good women that fall victim to myriad social circumstances outside of their control. In the face of cruel and threatening tailors, or strangers in the street, both Mrs. Gaston and Lizzy display a commitment to the

conventional virtues of "true womanhood." Says the narrator about a conflict between Lizzy and the tailor to whom she turns in her piecework: "The appearance of this young applicant for work, who would have appealed instantly to the sympathies of any one but a regularly slop-shop man, who looked only to his own profits, and cared not a fig whose heart-drops cemented the stones of his building" (3). Articulating the classed opposition between the dependent working woman and independent tailor as a gender difference, Arthur envisions the women's gender as both the cause and solution of their predicament. Even when it is not in their best interest to perform self-sacrifice, these working women protect their innocence and their role as domestic caregiver above all else. It is not until a patriarch, Dr. R— intervenes, for example, that Mrs. Gaston even considers sending her son to work, since she was committed to protecting him from corrupting market forces, privileging the sanctity of the family over economic self-interest. By performing as good women and mothers, the seamstresses are able to be redeemed, in the end, when an encounter facilitated by Dr. R— reunites the two women who then live together in a pseudo-mother-daughter arrangement. The restoration of kinship resolves the threat posed by women's dependency by stabilizing the separate spheres once more. Novels such as Arthur's figured women's homework for the garment industry as an appropriately feminine duty, distanced from the degradation of labor, through which women could still perform the requisite subordination and submission to patriarchal authority.

Narratives like this one distinguished distressed gentlewomen, those who could be restored to the rightful role as wife and mother, from the radical needlewomen who resisted the patriarchal structures that conscripted their activity to unwaged domestic labor. In difference with Lizzy or Mrs. Gaston, activist workingwomen were frequently

represented as “unsexed” and “unfeminine,” rejecting their natural role as wives and mothers, and therefore traitors to their gender and a threat to would-be breadwinners. However, as we have seen in the case of the *Lowell Offering*, many early factory girls insisted that their labor was empowering and freeing, opposing the mill to the oppressive working conditions of the domestic sphere. Participating in this tradition, in a column for the feminist periodical *The Una,* an anonymous author wrote a serial column, “Stray Leaves from a Seamstress” (1853-54), which rejected the sexualization of dependency and the figure of seamstress as a suffering object of sentimental sympathy. The first-person narrator does not perform the characteristic self-denying benevolence nor affective performance of propriety associated with bourgeois womanhood. Rather, the seamstress narrator argues that the lot of women would only be improved through collective political action—not through more appealing performances of deference. She asks her readers: “Are women to be born for this, to toil, shrivel, die and rot? Is there never to be an avenue opened for their powers? . . . My very soul is roused with indignation. The women of France once rose in rebellion. Their cry was ‘bread for our babes’; will the women of our country ever utter this cry as they gather in crowds from attics, cellars, by lanes, and dark dens of filth and squalor? Alas! Yes, if no change comes for the better, they too will thirst for the purple cup of revolution” (134). Rather than a feminized duty associated with bourgeois womanhood, the author of “Stray Leaves” figures homework as a site of working-class struggle. Through their toil, that which confines them to dark dens and subjects them to filth, the author imagines that the women would come to a collective consciousness of their suffering and, through political action, come to live and work in cooperation over and against the capitalist structures that

undervalue their labor. For this author, middle-class women were not the seamstress' ally nor the object of her aspiration, but instead a class enemy.

Figure 3: "The Haunted Lady, or, 'The Ghost' in the Looking Glass," July 1863. From the Wellcome Collection.

The antagonistic relation among bourgeois women and working-class or poor needlewomen was given frequent expression in the trope of the suffering sweatshop worker. Poems, stories, and political cartoons featured images in which outworkers haunted the garments that they sewed and came back to remind bourgeois consumers of the human cost of beauty. Such images were mobilized by Progressive Era reformers that sought to end the practice of homework through boycott campaigns and protective legislation. John Tenniel's cartoon for *Punch*, "The Haunted Lady, or 'The Ghost' in the Looking-Glass" proves an instructive example this tendency (Figure 3). Tenniel's drawing represents the seamstress as a ghost that catches her mistress' eye in the mirror,

her dead mouth agape as the lady gasps and the tailor maliciously smiles. The sweated worker's ghost both undermines the lady's claim of moral purity and threatens to exact class vengeance. She is that which lies behind the lady's carefully crafted appearance, the laboring body whose work enables the lady's leisurely, refined aesthetic. "Madame La Modiste," the woman's tailor, assures the haunted lady that, "We would not have disappointed your ladyship, at any sacrifice, and the robe is finished *à merveille*." Ironizing the sentimental seamstress featured in Arthur's novel, Tenniel's seamstress has literally sacrificed herself for the interests of the lady. The dress itself is produced from overwork and eventual death, a fact that exposes the hypocrisy of the "true woman." Such renderings of homeworkers, while perhaps intended to advocate for labor reform, figured the working-class women as monsters—utterly inhuman creatures that, through the exchange of garments, threatened to destroy middle-class comfort and safety. The antagonist and foil of the housewife, the sweated seamstress is represented in term of her deficiencies, the absence of that which made women women.

Such was the theme of many Progressive Era campaigns against homework, whether launched by moral reformers, unionists, or policymakers that decried the destructive consequences of outwork for women's bodies and families—both those of workers and consumers. An investigation of sweated labor in Boston in 1889 uncovered the proximity of sick children with the garments that their mothers were sewing, exclaiming: "SICK BABIES…LYING ON UNFINISHED GOODS" (*Some Facts* 9). The trope of the diseased garment and the widespread panic about the use of child labor in the production of clothing was a central component of proposed moral reforms, and a frequent image that rendered the seamstress into not a distressed gentlewoman, but a

foreign threat whose poverty and malnutrition could be transmitted through the garments they sewed. At the end of the nineteenth century, in the context of rapid industrialization, urbanization, and immigration from Southern and Eastern European countries, the practice of "outwork" took on a newly and differently exploitative character, as the contracting system became more complex and entrenched in urban housing like the tenement districts in New York. Tailors "inside" the shop sent prepared materials to the "outside" shop of a contractor that distributed the work among people in his community, often women and children. In tenement housing that was developed for immigrant workers, contractors devised a systematic way of subcontracting industrial piecework for many industries including the production of ready-made men's and children's wear, cigars, the shelling of pecans, and the sewing of lace. Contractors would rent rooms in the tenement houses, designating some as workspaces and renting out others to their laborers as homes. Demands for productivity increased beyond the capacity of workers who were ever more indebted to the contractor that provided their work, home, and even food through tenement groceries. These sweatshops were decried as places in which industry violated the boundary between home and work, destroying women and their families, and threatening to destroy even more. Grotesque renderings of sweated workers were inflected by Progressive Era nativism, figuring homework as a distinctly foreign phenomenon.

To resolve the threats posed by sweated labor and the rapid influx of immigrant women into commercial centers, Progressive era reformers identified both the domestic sphere and the school as spaces where Anglo-American middle-class women could do the work of assimilation and "Americanization." Institutes like Jane Addam's Hull-House

were erected to help acculturate immigrant women to the norms of Anglo-American domesticity, expanding the housewife's maternal power to encompass a more sweeping portion of the serving classes. These training programs were themselves integral to the processes of social reproduction, as college-educated "New Women" performed their role as "missionary-mother" on a new scale and in an official capacity. As in the home, domestic education institutes for working-class women and girls framed domestic education as a pathway towards housewifery and the security of a bourgeois social identity. However, in spite of their avowed commitment to social elevation, these disciplinary structures tended to reinforce existing classed and raced hierarchies among women workers. Although Addams and her colleague Florence Kelley encouraged the celebration of ethnic and cultural differences, the women tended to frame their relationship to the communities that they served in maternal terms. In a description of their purpose, Addams explains that Hull-House would help immigrants "to develop whatever of social life its neighborhood may afford, to focus and give form to that life, to bring to bear upon it the results of cultivation and training" (125). Figuring the women as raw and uncultivated material, Addams rhetorically subordinates the southern and eastern European women to Anglo-American customs, which, for her, represent superior and modern practices. In the Labor Museum of Hull-House, for instance, Addams asked older immigrant women to display "traditional" ways of performing garment industry labor on looms and without sewing machines, celebrating the "old country" as a site of premodern, preindustrial forms of labor. The maternalistic approach of philanthropic middle-class women, despite its attempts to empower working-class women, reinforced

nativist logics which figured immigrant workers as antithetical to modern forms of production and domesticity.

In addition to settlement houses, moral reformers and scientific philanthropists in other major U.S. cities sent investigators into tenement districts to do "home visits" intended to educate and uplift immigrant workers. Drawing on the antebellum trope of the starving seamstress, Progressive Era reformers used medical and scientific discourses to diagnose the inhumanity of sweatshop living. Lead factory inspector Florence Kelley of Chicago, for instance, reported in 1892 that "Observation among sweated people confirms the opinion that a direct consequence of their occupation is the general impairment of health in both sexes; in men the debility takes the form of consumption, either of the lungs or intestines, and of complete exhaustion and premature old age; the girls become victims of consumption, dyspepsia, and lifelong pelvic disorders" (n.p.). In Kelley's report, the workers are not sexualized by their dependency, but are actually de-sexed by the grueling labor, reduced to mere laboring bodies and devoid of the feminized capacities for efficiency, cleanliness, and care. In the immigrants' homes, Kelley finds not only the absence of proper affective performances of gender, but, when she reports that girls experience "lifelong pelvic disorders," that their bodies have been disfigured to the point of sexual dysfunction. In her crusade against Chicago's sweatshops, even as she used rational modes of investigation and legalistic arguments, Kelley made appeals for reform that were based on sentimental notions of the sanctity of the family. She continues, "It is hardly necessary to establish the fact that children's clothing is sometimes thus exposed and thus infected with the most fatal maladies of childhood, for it is apparent that under the given conditions entire immunity from infection could not be

possible; yet the following instances of disease in the presence or proximity of garment-making, are cited as those which came under the observation of the bureau…" (n.p.) Kelley and others feared that the disorder and disease of the sweatshop would radiate outwards into middle-class Anglo-American communities, figuring the moral corruption as a contagion. Incapacitated from acting as proper mothers, the sweated seamstresses was represented as a moral threat to U.S. society.

A plethora of reform literature presented investigations into the sweatshop and tenements districts to middle-class readers, constructing the immigrants' home as a scene of social disorder where all boundaries and hierarchies have been broken down. And while the outwork system was, in fact, an Anglo invention of the antebellum period, reform literature increasingly revised this history to lay blame with the immigrants themselves. In his chapter "The Sweaters of Jewtown," Riis expressly links the existence of the sweatshop with increased immigration, writing that the sweater, a contractor, "In his effort to perpetuate his despotism he has had the effectual assistance of his own system and the sharp competition that keep the men on starvation wages; of their constitutional greed, that will not permit the sacrifice of temporary advantage, however slight, for permanent good, and above all, of the hungry hordes of immigrants to whom no argument appeals save the cry for bread" (122). Mobilizing anti-Semitic rhetoric that renders the sweated system one borne out of foreign greed and malice, Riis figures the homeworkers as enslaved by their dependency on the sweater. The metaphorical comparison of the sweated worker to the slave persists, as he describes the disarray and degradation that he finds in a Ludlow Street tenement:

> Up two flights of dark stairs, three, four, with new smells of cabbage, of onions, of frying fish, on every landing, whirring sewing machines behind

> closed doors betraying what goes on within, to the door that opens to admit the bulge and the man. A sweater, this, in a small way. Five men and a woman, two young girls, not fifteen, and a boy who says unasked that he is fifteen, lies in saying it, are at the machines sewing knickerbockers, 'knee-pants' in the Ludlow Street dialect. The floor is littered ankle-deep with half-sewn garments. In the alcove, on a couch of many dozens of 'pants' ready for the finisher, a bare-legged baby with pinched face is asleep. A sense of piled-up clothing keeps him from rolling off on the floor. The faces, hands, and arms to the elbows of everyone in the room are black with the color of the cloth on which they are working. (125)

In difference with earlier renderings of the sentimental seamstress, which figured her labor as an acceptable expression of her feminine subordination, Riis' representation of the Jewish tenement workers focuses on that which exceeds his reader's expectations of Anglo-American bourgeois domesticity: the presence of filth, "new" and offensive odors, disease, and industry. Riis' narrative presents a pseudo-cinematic description that aims to construct, in real time, the sensory experience of the tenement, oversaturated with sounds, smells, people, and garments. Here, the environment and the workers are set in symbiotic relation, each affecting the other, as the space becomes foreignized and, through their work, the people become that which they sew. That the Jewish workers are "blackened" signals the racial instability associated with working-class labor, symbolically associating their dependency with that of racialized slaves. Whereas the dependency of the antebellum seamstress was sexualized and figured as a sign of her femininity, the dependency of immigrant workers was foreignized by nativist social reformers that cast the poor immigrants as unable and unwilling to help themselves, recommending that middle-class educators and lawmakers intercede to save them instead.

The labor movement similarly expressed disgust with the living and working conditions in the tenements, and rather than aligning their interests in working-class

solidarity, often cast the immigrant workers as "scabs" that undermined American union labor. Like Riis, trade unionists used the language of violated domesticity to articulate the social problems posed by homework. In 1889, the Boston Clothing Advisory Board, a delegation of trade unionists, reported that in tenements there was "no such thing as privacy or modesty on the part of men or women," that the "girls were languid and listless," "bare-armed, some with their bosoms half bare and bathed in perspiration" (Barnes 156-157). The violation of the private sphere and the integration of the sexes at work, their report showed, led to disorder and hyper-sexualization, much like the "orgies" feared to have occurred in the Treasury Department. The breakdown of the barrier between private and public was represented as the improper proximity of gendered bodies with each other, and with machines and garments. Like Riis, however, the Boston unionists regarded this integration as problematic in decidedly nativist terms, representing the Jewish and Italian workers as dirty and diseased, reporting their conditions with, argues historian Eileen Boris, an "almost prurient interest in the physicality of the immigrant poor, whose body odors—indeed, whose very secretions of sweat, germs, excrement—mixed with the smell of garlic and the stink of rotting garbage and the dampness of faulty plumbing emitted by tenement living spaces" (58). The unionists described the homeworkers as "white slaves," distinguished from the respectable working-class tailors that worked in factories and mills and campaigned for consumers to refrain from buying tenement-made goods. Reinforcing the notion that these workers were enemies of American industry and families, the unionists in Boston relied on working-class consumers—the primary market for ready-made garments—to

extinguish the foreign sweatshops by investing in American-made goods with a union label.

Turn of the century lawmakers, too, framed sweated labor as a foreign problem, a failure of immigrant workers to conform and assimilate to American labor systems and domesticity, and proposed to correct the problem through protective legislation and immigration restrictions. In order to stabilize the separation of spheres and protect women and children from exploitation, by 1900, thirteen states passed legislation that prohibited non-kin sweated labor in the tenement houses without licensure and health inspection but left intact sweated labor performed among families. These policies intended to protect the family form and men's claim to private property by restoring them to the place of patriarch, which was threatened by either the tailor or the contractor. Additionally, in 1892, when a congressional committee was appointed to investigate the existence of the sweatshop and recommend methods for its abolition, their report drew into association foreignness, crime, filth, and poverty. "The conditions of squalor and filth," they argue, "are such as in a large proportion of cases to make even inspection impossible except by one hardened to the process, while the quarters toward which this work seems to tend are the eddies into which seem to have drifted the most wretched and ignorant of our population, and from which are scattered much of the crime and more of the disease that infest our cities" (VII). They continue to explain that "Unhealthy and unclean conditions are almost universal, while those of filth and contagion are common. The proportion of foreign-born and newly-arrived immigrants is so large that others form an inconsiderable proportion" (VII). The committee renders the foreign as associated with backwardness, disease, and filth, opposing it to the Anglo-American values of

domesticity and labor: efficiency, cleanliness, modernity, and temperance. In the tenements and sweatshops, the foreign mixes with the criminal to produce a contagion that threatens to destabilize the social order and destroy the comforts of middle-class leisure. They articulate the problems of the sweatshop by appealing to the sanctity of the family and domestic sphere, explaining that "No pretense is made of separating the work from the household affairs, if such a term can be used to describe the existence of these people. Children are worked to death by the side of their parents, who are dying from overwork or disease" (VIII). The workers' exploitation is represented as their own incapacity to protect the domestic sphere, and the most vulnerable therein, from the degrading effects of industry. This vulnerability is taken to be a sign of the workers' weakness, and the contractors' excessive power, a labor relation associated with the tyranny of monarchy and utterly antithetical to U.S. labor republicanism. The committee concludes that one immediately and unquestionably effective remedy would be the limitation of immigration, since this would curtail the growth of the sweated system by limiting the number of foreign contractors and sweaters. Such a proposal presumed that drawing firmer borders between the American and the foreign would protect the domestic sphere from further corruption.

These discourses coalesced in the series of events surrounding what is perhaps the most famous event in garment labor history: the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire of 1911. In the year before the fire, 20,000 Yiddish-speaking strikers demanded better wages, hours, workplace safety measures, and complained of sexual harassment, asserted their need for more equitable treatment on the factory floor and within the union that represented them. They demanded that the factory rid the practice of piecework, which took place within

the factory alongside tailors and seamstresses that were paid a weekly wage. The "Uprising of 20,000" gave life to the fantasy of the unruly masses as working-class immigrants rose up against the institutions that designed the conditions of their exploitation to face beatings and harassment by the police. Despite the strength of the strikers, the ultimate resolution that they reached with management failed to either end the practice of piecework or secure many of the safety measures that they demanded—including protections against industrial disasters like fires.

When a fire broke out in the New York factory in 1911, it easily spread throughout the building in which workers were trapped, having been locked in the rooms where they sewed. Reportage of the fire emphasized the gruesome brutality of the tragedy, rendering the workers as mutilated bodies:

> Thud-dead, thud-dead, thud-dead, thud-dead. Sixty-two thud-deads. I call them that, because the sound and the thought of death came to me each time, at the same instant. There was plenty of chance to watch them as they came down. The height was eighty feet.
>
> The first ten thud-deads shocked me. I looked up-saw that there were scores of girls at the windows. The flames from the floor below were beating in their faces. Somehow I knew that they, too, must come down, and something within me-something that I didn't know was there-steeled me.
>
> I even watched one girl falling. Waving her arms, trying to keep her body upright until the very instant she struck the sidewalk, she was trying to balance herself. Then came the thud--then a silent, unmoving pile of clothing and twisted, broken limbs. (1)

The industrial disaster bought to life the fantasy of the corpse-like sweated worker, shocking audiences who looked on in horror. The firsthand account aestheticizes the death of the young women and girls who become, in a "thud," a pile of "twisted, broken limbs." The spectacle of the fire and sweated workers' death dominated news coverage, which consistently included gruesome descriptions of their suffering. Many included

details about the factory's modern, "state-of-the-art" construction, its designation as "fire-proof," and its recent examination by the Fire Department which deemed it unsafe.

Despite the obvious and cruel flaws in its design, in the criminal investigation against the factory's owners, the company's defense, in their cross examination of the fire's survivors, attempted to discredit the witnesses on the basis of their femininity and foreignness. The Assistant District Attorney described the women to the jurors as "… of tender years—most of them not able to speak the language, not of great intelligence… working at their machines, working and working with no time to look up" (qtd. in Stein, 181). Accusing the Russian Jewish women of wearing tight skirts that restricted their ability to safely seek an exit, of unintelligence and unfamiliarity with American custom that contributed to their self-endangerment, the defense persuasively argued for the factory owners' innocence and the men were acquitted. By 1911, the specter of the foreign sweated worker loomed large enough in U.S. imagination to cast doubt on the workers' testimony, to render them untrustworthy narrators of their experience, and victims as much of their own ineptitude as the factory's design.

In the decades that followed, less sympathetic reports on the sweating systems emerged, as advocates increasingly interpreted immigrant workers' predicament as a consequence of their personal failure to assimilate or adjust to American modes of production. Accusing workers of resisting assimilation, or citing their unfamiliarity with English as evidence of their backwardness, these nativist reports admonished the workers themselves for lacking the ambition necessary to overcome the sweated system. "Rags to riches" stories celebrated the model immigrant who was able to achieve the "American dream" of social mobility, despite the many obstacles that the sweated system presented.

In the section that follows, we'll turn to the fiction of Anzia Yezierska, a Jewish, Polish-Russian writer in New York, who was memorialized as a "Sweatshop Cinderella," evidence that ambition and hard work could result in fame and fortune. By the time Yezierska is writing, reforms had: campaigned for the ethical consumption of union made goods, and the labeling of tenement-made goods; instituted a ban on non-kin outwork in tenement houses without licensure from the state; levied limitations on women and children's participation in industrial labor; restricted immigration; and proposed educational programs to assimilate immigrant workers into Anglo-American cultural norms. Each of these strategies presumed the superiority of the Anglo-American separation of spheres and organization of social reproductive labor, and, in different ways, attempted to stabilize the social order by reinforcing the distinctions between work and home. But, by constructing immigrant workers as an ethnic Other, against which the strength and resolve of American labor and housewives were measured, the place of sweated labor was enshrined as a permanent fixture in the segmentation of the U.S. labor market. Again and again, reformers mobilized the image of the starving sweated worker, the skeletal creature, enslaved by a greedy contractor, creating the sweated worker as a specter of unfreedom that threatened the rest.

Romancing Readers, Performing as Sweatshop Cinderella

When Anzia Yezierska published her story collection *Hungry Hearts* in 1920, it was a near instant success and she soon received an offer from Hollywood producers at Goldwyn Studios to adapt the stories into a feature film. Newspapers across the country celebrated Yezierska as the epitome of the American dream, a real-life rags-to-riches

heroine, calling her the "Sweatshop Cinderella." Figuring Yezierska as an analogue for the characters in her stories, reporters claimed that Yezierska "Worked in a garment factory. Was a cook. A domestic Stranger in a strange land, she was hungry-hearted." They described her rise to fame as the result of a successful self-making, consequences of her "ambition," and supposed that the film would be "realistic" because it included "pictures of Anzia Yezierska's heart." The reportage celebrated the storyteller's ability to capture and represent the truth of the Polish-Russian ghettos in New York, hoping that she could deliver unmediated the emotional experiences, suffering, and triumphs of immigrant Jewish women. The filmic adaptation promised to do this as well, by taking viewers into the depths of the ghetto, as well as the hearts and minds of foreign workers. In its production, however, control of the script was wrested from Yezierska and screenwriters imposed instead a sentimental happy ending with which Yezierska and critics were generally disappointed. Her affectionate representations of Jewish families and neighbors, she later told journalists, were reduced to harmful caricatures, and the immigrants' complex negotiation of the pressures to assimilate were made into slapstick.

Rather than a victim of either the empowered producers or discourses that suppressed Yezierska's voice and artistic vision, however, some critics suggest that the author and her fiction may have been complicit in crafting a public persona that traded on Jewish immigrant stereotypes. Though she was raised in the immigrant ghettos of the Lower East Side in New York, and she did have experience working in low-waged jobs, Yezierska was also college-educated in Domestic Science, and a trained actress that attended graduate seminars and fiction workshops at Columbia University. Despite this, in her interviews and many public statements, Yezierska presented herself as an "immigrant

autodidact, a 'Sweatshop Cinderella' schooled in hard knocks, whose compelling short stories reflected neither formal education nor literary sensibilities, but only a ferocious honesty" (Ebest 122). Even in an autobiography published later in her life, Yezierska strategically omitted details which might have contradicted her claim to speak with authority on the experiences of poor Jewish immigrants. There is not critical consensus about the extent to which Yezierska consciously crafted this persona, or the extent to which she would have had the authority and control over her public image to do so. As a result of these ambiguities, scholars have struggled to determine the value of Yezierska's work. Derided by scholars in the 1970s who saw her work as "awkward" or "clumsy," Yezierska was redeemed by feminist scholars of the 80s and 90s who argued that her fiction was "valuable as social history," if not as "literature" (Wexler 158; Kessler-Harris *v*). But both of these tendencies are weighted by assumptions about the aesthetic value of immigrant women's writing—either that it was lowbrow and amateurish, or else that it provided an authentic, first-hand account of tenement life. But the facts of her autobiography and the record of her public persona are so contradictory that neither of these assumptions can be sustained. Like the producers at Goldwyn Studios, or the journalists that were eager to represent Yezierska as an archetype come to life, critics have been hindered by their own presumption to read the author's fiction as the utterances of the oppressed. Ironically, the collection of stories themselves anticipated such a series of events, staging the struggle for narrative control waged between bourgeois Anglo-American consumers and the immigrant working-classes.

Instead of evaluating the aesthetic or sociological values of the texts, or using the stories to understand Yezierska's personal beliefs, in what follows, I explore how

Yezierska's work actively intervened into the cultural production of the sweated immigrant woman, the suffering seamstress. As part of a broader movement of ethnic immigrant literature that pushed back against decades of Anglo-American mythologizing about the ghetto and tenement districts, Yezierska's stories refuted the popular notion that sweatshops were a foreign import or evidence of immigrants' backwardness and inability to properly assimilate. Instead, Yezierska's writing suggests that the transformation of sewing from a feminized domestic duty to a degrading form of industrial labor was made possible by the commodification of the ghetto and the romanticization of immigrant women's suffering. Her stories mobilize the rags-to-riches narrative, the conventional marriage and seduction plots which confine women to the domestic sphere, the self-aggrandizing and cold perspective of the social reformer, and the sensationalist representations of tenement districts that saturated the literary market. These forms of representation, Yezierska shows, converged to condemn immigrants to the sweatshop, despite their stated interest in eradicating the exploitative subcontracting system. I use Yezierska's own writing, both her autobiographical or public statements, as well as her fiction, as a metafictional framework for understanding how she navigated the publishing industry and literary market, as well as how she understood the relationship between the figuring of women's work and the material conditions of labor. In the production of a public persona for the promotion of the book and film, Yezierska herself does the necessary affective labor to appeal to the sympathy of Anglo-American readers by conforming to sentimental and romantic images of poverty and assimilation. With *Hungry Hearts*, she uses the popular forms, popular press, and mass media to reclaim the images of the private hearts and experiences of Jewish immigrants, critiquing the

romanticization of poverty, the idealization of the housewife, and the nativist rhetoric that foreignized dependency. Countering the persistent dehumanization of sweated women as suffering bodies, devoid of the affect and the feminized capacity to care, Yezierska shows that seamstresses, too, are necessarily engaged in a performance of affective labor, especially when under public scrutiny.

The first two stories of Yezierska's breakout collection, "Wings" and "Hunger," represent the narrative battle to render immigrant women workers into objects of pity. In these, Yezierska stages the contest between the cultural mythologies that compelled immigrant women to uplift themselves through work, marriage, and Anglo conformity, and those racial scientific theories of poverty that figured the Russian-Polish community as inherently inferior. Yezierska's stories narrate this struggle not as a conflict among employing and working classes, but as the unrequited love and unfulfilled desires of Shenah Pessah, an avid reader of New Woman fiction and a "greenhorn" immigrant, and John Barnes, a sociologist that moves into her tenement in order to perform an ethnographic study of the community. Through dramatic irony, Yezierska narrates Barnes' failed attempts to interpret Shenah's behavior, and challenges readers to see her as something other than a "drudge" or "vibrant creature of joy" (28). Just when Shenah prepares to elevate herself through factory labor, and Yezierska's stories appear to conform to conventional mythologies about the romance of ethnic assimilation, however, the author swiftly undermines readerly expectations, which would have Yezierska end the story with Shenah's marriage. Instead, the stories reveal the extent to which Shenah's ways of knowing—while apparently unsophisticated in comparison to the sociologist John Barnes, and cultivated through manual labor considered degrading to women—far

exceed the imaginative limitations of U.S. literary and mass culture, as well as the disciplinary structures which fixed immigrant women as starving seamstresses. Revealing a complex inner world, imagination, and politics behind Shenah's apparently naive sentimentality, Yezierska demonstrates that immigrant seamstresses were not merely degraded, suffering bodies, but were in fact political subjects and narrators of their own experience.

In her most forthright public statements, Yezierska registers disgust and dismay with the publishing and film industries, the capitalists that took control of her stories and, paying her thousands of dollars, alienated her from her community. In a 1925 article for *Cosmopolitan* magazine, "This Is What $10,000 Did to Me," for instance, Yezierska adopts an affective persona, presenting herself as a naive and doe-eyed "greenhorn," as she reflects on the purchase of the rights to her book by Goldwyn. Yezierska writes that, desperate and poor as ever, she was surprised to receive a "little yellow telegram": "I stared at it. Who in the world would send me a telegram? I tore it open and read uncomprehendingly. It was from a well-known moving picture agent, saying that he could get for the film rights of my book the unheard sum of ten thousand dollars. In a flash the whole world changed! And I was changed" (265). Yezierska presents hers as a story of luck, work, fortune, and misfortune, explaining that thereafter she feels herself to neither be at home among the "capitalists" nor her community. Elsewhere in her fiction, however, Yezierska suggests that this performance, too, might have been a calculated charade. Consider her story, "An Immigrant Among Editors." Yezierska's protagonist, a Jewish immigrant writer much like Yezierska herself, attempts to pitch article and essay ideas to editors with three different "intellectual" journals. All three editors, relying on

Anti-Semitic and gender stereotypes in their assessment of the protagonist, reject the writer's ideas and decline her access to their publishing venue. The character resolves to turn instead to fiction where she might present, she says, "a story of myself—myself lost in America" (159). In her interview with the editor of a premier literary magazine, the writer alters her self-presentation, representing herself as an immigrant that has "worked in kitchens, factories, and sweatshops" (159), claiming that her stories will "wake up your readers like lightning" (157). Appealing to what she suspects the editors' assumptions of her value as an artist may be, the protagonist establishes her validity as an author by verifying her immigrant "credentials" and promising to deliver the sentimental affect of popular "ghetto fiction" of the period, that which promoted social conscience through revelation of immigrant suffering.

Figure 4: Lobby card featuring characters from Yezierska's "Wings." From Wikipedia Commons.

If we take this as a metafictional, tongue-in-cheek representation of Yezierska's own intellectual and artistic history, we might be inclined to agree with Lisa Botshon's claim that "Yezierska recognized the marketability of the stories in which she described the

impoverished and anguished lives of Lower East Side inhabitants who strove to achieve upward mobility. She was also aware that her very existence as a former Hester Street immigrant would allow her a certain privileged access to publication" (290). Although Botshon perhaps overstates the extent to which Yezierska consciously chose to adopt a public persona in order to capitalize on harmful stereotypes, it is true that, like the protagonist of "An Immigrant Among Editors," Yezierska elected to publish in esteemed literary journals like *Century, Harper's,* and *The Forum,* which frequently featured editorials and essays about the "Jewish Question" for an apparently Anglo and Gentile audience. She also welcomed the opportunity to adapt the stories for a Hollywood film, despite the fact that many "ghetto films" of the period, including *Hungry Hearts*, romanticized assimilation and "focused on the realistic representation of the unhealthful and severe living conditions in the ghetto" (Konzett 19). At the same time, however, she elected to publish her novels as dime novels, with those publishers that distributed fairy tale stories for working-class girls. While we can't say with certainty that Yezierska consciously capitalized on the commodification of the ghetto and the Jewish immigrant's voice, it appears that Yezierska consistently pursued venues for public representation that situated her texts among those that promulgated stereotypes of Jewish women and sweated workers in the period. Whether cynically for profit or politically in protest, her decisions add complexity to what might be otherwise taken as "clumsy," inelegant stories. Her strategic navigation of the market, combined with her metafictional commentary, suggest that she was aware of her role as an "exotic" interlocutor for middle-class, Anglo audiences, the affective and emotional labor necessary to make writing a viable career without betraying her community, and what was at stake in her

performance. Reclaiming the humanity of seamstresses through the representation of their "hearts," Yezierska challenges the prevailing conceptions of labor, gender, and foreignness that constrained her public persona and the substance of her work as a writer.

By the time she wrote *Hungry Hearts*, Yezierska had a great deal of experience negotiating the competing social codes and cultural expectations of the Jewish working-class and the Anglo-American bourgeois. In 1917, Yezierska enrolled at Columbia University and joined John Dewey's class, "Ethics and Educational Problems," where another student proposed the study that the group eventually undertook, seeking to discover why Philadelphia's Polish immigrants resisted assimilation. Her 1932 novel, *All I Could Never Be,* fictionalizes this experience and offers some of Yezierska's most frank commentary on the situation. Her protagonist, Fanya, feels at first privileged to accept a position to work with ethnographer Henry Scott, but becomes increasingly uncomfortable with the project that positions her as both an insider and outsider in the Polish community. Fanya questions Scott's method of inquiry: "How will you set about to know the Poles?…How can Americans with their cold hearts and clear heads ever come to know people burning up with a million volatile ideas?" (37) Yezierska draws stark oppositions between the world-views and politics of these characters, undermining the moral authority and omniscience that Progressive Era reformers claimed. Yezierska articulates this difference as one of rationality versus emotionality, charging Anglo-American observers with having a "cold heart" and failing to recognize the humanity of the immigrant communities they studied. Fanya accuses one of the other researchers of seeking out "ethnic entertainment" that "save[s] her from looking into the depths where things get complicated an unutterable" (82). For Yezierska, though social reformers

claimed to uncover the suffering concealed in the tenements, such studies ultimately remained on the surface of things, accounting only for what is visible and therefore producing a thin, aesthetic account of immigrant life. Ultimately, Fanya argues that Henry "know[s] nothing about the *heart* of the Poles" and asks, "Without love, what is there to write about?" (108) Fanya argues that by collecting data, the investigators actually know less than they did at the beginning of the study, since the collection of observable data comes at the expense of intimacy and empathic understanding. Rather than a tragic or suffering immigrant woman, Fanya is affirmed by the narrative, articulating a complex awareness of the social, emotional, and political dynamics among researchers and their subjects. Not devoid of the feminized capacity to care or counteract the corrupting forces of the market, Fanya is positioned as an expert in this field, over and above the imaginative capacity of the trained and highly educated Anglo scholars with whom she works. Not only a commentary on the limitations of emergent theories of journalistic and sociological "objectivity," Yezierska's novel also critiques the broader affective economy in which immigrant narratives were mass produced. If Scott's work will, says Fanya, amount to mere "words," and bring about no material change for the people of the ghettos, Yezierska proposes that fiction, the vehicle of sentiment and emotionality that Fanya calls for, can do much more, even if restricted by market forces that commodified the ghetto and romanticized assimilation.

Yezierska's *Hungry Hearts* nominally provides an example of the kind of exploration of the "*hearts* of the Poles" that Fanya calls for, presenting readers with deceptively simple stories about love, romance, and longing of different kinds among immigrant workers that negotiate the cultural pressures to assimilate and the economic forces which

condemn them to low-waged or sweated labor. Reclaiming the damning image of the starving seamstress, Yezierska appropriates "hunger" as a prevailing theme in her fiction, exploring the emotional components of what was typically rendered as a purely bodily experience. The figure of the "hungry heart" recurs throughout the collection, and takes on a multivalent meaning, depending on its context and who utters the phrase. As we have already seen, the term was interpreted by Anglo reporters as a metaphor for market ambition, a visceral drive towards self-improvement. But when the image first appears in the collection's opening lines, "Wings," twenty-two year old romantic Shenah exclaims: "My heart chokes me like in a prison! I'm dying for a little love and I got nobody—nobody!" (1) Shenah, living with her uncle and working as a janitor in his building for room and board, does not starve for food, but rather for affection, community, and human connection. Her pain is not articulated as the experience of "wasting flesh," but instead loneliness and isolation that result from her passage to a new country and culture. Watching young mothers with friends and families outside her window, Shenah is "crushed by her loneliness," "For a long time, she sat motionless, finding drear fascination in the mocking faces traced in the patches of torn plaster. Gradually, she became aware of a tingling warmth playing upon her cheeks, and with revived breast, she drank in the miracle of the sunlit wall" (2). While there is a moment in which Shenah's loneliness threatens to suffocate her, she is quickly "revived." Yezierska positions Shenah in a basement where she is shrouded in darkness, a setting familiar to readers of tenement literature, but immediately undermines the expectation that hers is a story reducible to darkness and tragedy, cutting the darkness with a shock of sunlight, the advent of spring,

and Shenah's awakening to hope. Within these opening lines,Yezierska throws into relief the reductive image of the starving seamstress and breathes new life into the archetype.

Countering the overwhelming representation of immigrant communities as sexually dysfunctional, their families failing to conform to the normative breadwinner-housewife ideal, Yezierska's Shenah yearns for the romance celebrated by marriage plot novels and sensationalized by seduction plots. Appropriating the narrative form which rendered homeworkers as fallen women, Yezierska embeds in her representation of Shenah the conventions of the seduction narrative and Cinderella story. An orphan without a maternal role model, Shenah is set up for potential disaster when from her basement window she first lays eyes on "a young man at the doorway—a framed picture of her innermost dreams" (3). In keeping with generic convention, Shenah falls immediately in love with a man that represents the opportunity for social elevation and economic security, as the narrator reports: "Shenah did not hear the words, she heard only the music of his voice. She gazed fascinated at his clothes—the loose Scotch tweeds, the pongee shirt, a bit open at the neck, but she did not see him or the things she wore. She only felt an irresistible presence seize her soul. It was as though the god of her innermost longings had suddenly taken shape in human form and lifted her mid-air" (3). Deploying the sentimental imagery of antebellum romances, and narrating from the focal consciousness of Shenah, Yezierska represents Shenah's erotic desire to transcend her present circumstances as those materialized in "Scotch tweed" and a "pongee shirt," distinctly middle-class and Anglo aesthetic markers. Shenah's desire to rise above her class status is thus articulated as a desire to become more proximate to Anglo-American sights and sounds. Her pursuit of John's affection becomes her primary preoccupation through both

"Wings" and "Hunger," as she attempts to become that which, to use Yezierska's phrase, "could never be"—native-born and Anglo. Through dramatic irony, Yezierska critically represents Shenah's sense that this Anglo-American professor is her "god" as woefully naive, the result of her internalization of nativist rhetoric and narratives which have persistently figured immigrant women like Shenah as inferior.

In her representation of John, Yezierska parodies the "cold hearted" and "clear headed" Anglo-American ethnographers that entered immigrant communities seeking out entertainment and the opportunity for self-aggrandizement. When asking Shenah to tell him about the apartment for let in her building, John is delighted to discover that she's recently immigrated from Russia: "So he was in their midst, the people he had come to study. The girl with her hungry eyes and intense eagerness now held a new interest for him" (5). Even as John perceives his subject as "hungry," the narrator suggests that it is his appetite that is whetted, as he asks her a series of questions meant to evaluate her as a potential subject for his study, "Educational Problems of the Russian Jews," but which Shenah experiences as the intimate, human connection for which she was starved. As he interviews her about her home country, her journey to the U.S., and her education, performing a "scientific inquisition," he becomes increasingly compelled by Shenah's potential. When she explains that she's taught herself to read English, and that reading "lifts [her] on wings with high thoughts," John interprets her particular, personal intellect and creativity through the lens of racial science: "'So even in the midst of these sordid surroundings were 'wings' and 'high thoughts,' he mused. Again, the gleam of the visionary—the eternal desire to reach out and up, which was the predominant trait of the Russian immigrant" (7). When she reports that the most recent book that she's reading is

Olive Schreiner's *Dreams*, a novel of the New Woman genre that taught readers to aspire to "reach out and up," the sociologist resolves to bring her different books and "help her by pointing the way out of her nebulous emotionalism" (8). Similarly, when Shenah tells John that she is "burning to learn," he responds by asking, "What can you best do with your hands?" (13)

By countering Shenah's self-perception with John's interpretation, Yezeriska illustrates for readers the extent to which John is unable to recognize Shenah's humanity or take her on her own terms. Instead, he consistently projects onto her the discourses and tropes used by scientific inquiry to explain cultural differences as deficiencies, fating her to work in a sweatshop even as she demonstrates for readers an interest in literature and a poetic imagination. While both are enthusiastic about the exchange, readers are told that his is "the enthusiasm of the scientist for the specimen of his experimentation—of the sculptor for the clay that would take form under his touch," (9) while Shenah "felt herself whirling in space, millions of miles beyond the earth. The god of dreams had arrived and nothing earth could hold her down" (10). Setting rationality and emotionality, the discourse of scientific inquiry and the conventions of the fairytale romance, in direct conflict, Yezierska represents both their failures to correctly interpret the affective performance and aesthetic markers of the other. These two narratives—the social reformist narrative of immigrant poverty, and the romanticization of assimilation—which both purport to share an interest in elevating immigrant workers from the degradation of sweatshops are shown instead to be incompatible.

Complicating matters more for Shenah, Yezierska interrupts her dreaming with the pressures and narrative conscriptions of her uncle and community, who, viewing Shenah

through a traditional gender analytic, regard her status as a single woman a potential economic and social problem. With Shenah, readers overhear the neighborhood "matchmaker" and Shenah's uncle Moisheh, discussing the girl's fate, as if out of her hands. While on the one hand, the matchmaker argues that Shenah's failure to marry will soon make her undesirable, especially since she is without a dowry, arguing that they must quickly find her a match, on the other, Shenah's uncle lays claim on her labor, arguing that he will not be able to get by without her acting as his unpaid janitor. The pair narrates Shenah as a pitiable woman, condemned by fate and custom to either serve as a wife and mother, or else a domestic servant. When they finally arrive at the conclusion that she may get married, but die from starvation anyway, Shenah bursts into the room to reject their attempt to script her life in this way, exclaiming: "I'm living in America, not in Russia. I'm not hanging on anybody's neck to support me. In America, if a girl earns her living, she can be fifty years old and without a man, and nobody pities her" (15). Rejecting their perception of her as a poor woman, restricted by the conditions and customs of her community, Shenah attempts to claim a new identity, performing the spunk and ambition of America's New Women. Determining that she will only be redeemed from this situation by John, whom she figures as her savior, she says "my whole life hangs on how I'll look in his eyes" (17). Yezierska makes literal the discursive problem that she and other immigrant women faced in terms of cultural and economic obstacles: in order to gain economic independence and autonomy, Yezeriska had to understand and overcome the way that readers like John looked at her, since these perceptions would have the effect of either trapping or empowering the author as a Jewish immigrant woman. To ensure her escape from the clutches of her uncle or the

threat of arranged marriage, Shenah resolves to transform herself from "nothing and nobody" into a New Woman worthy of John's affection. This involves, first, the shedding of the affective and material markers that connect her with the Russian community, which she begins by selling her feather mattress, the "only one thing left from [her] dead mother" (17). In keeping with the seduction plot, Shenah continues to court the affection of a social superior, even at the cost of her most intimate connection with her mother and home country.

Modeling herself after the Gibson girl, Shenah attempts to transform her appearance according to U.S. literary and mass culture in an effort to elevate herself above John's perception of her as reducible to ignorant hands. In an effort to craft herself into the type of woman that John might desire, Shenah arranged her "dark mass of unkempt hair" "to imitate the fluffy style of the much-courted landlady's daughter" (17). When she goes out to buy a new dress and hat, she selects a straw hat with cherries "so red, so luscious, that they cried out to her 'Bite me!'", explaining further that "the magic of those cherries on her hat brought back to her the green fields and orchards of her native Russia" (21). Here, Shenah's self-stylization involves the commodification of her Russian heritage into a more easily consumable form, even suggesting that she hopes the clothes might inspire a kind of hunger in John. Yet, despite her efforts to repackage herself as a more palatable symbol of Russia, and more proximate to American goods, John regards her clothes as "bold and garish," (28) and persists in perceiving Shenah as an ignorant and pitiful subject, comparing her "beseeching look" to that of a "homeless dog" (23). As Shenah attempts to navigate her relationship with John according to the conventions of romance novels, as well as the cultural demand to assimilate, she persistently misunderstands

John's perception of her and the meaning of his behavior. While for Shenah, their romance is one borne of mutual affection, for John, it is the consequence of their cultural and class differences. John's perception is paternalistic and objectifying, as when he refers to Shenah as a "young eager being…ordained by some peculiar providence to come under his personal protection" (28-29). It is her pathetic suffering, and his power to save her, that drives him eventually to embrace and kiss her, as he exclaims, "Poor little immigrant!… How lonely, how barren your life must have been till—" (30). Parodying the traditional seduction plot narrative, Yezierska eroticizes the sociologist's perverse fascination with the poor, showing that, for John, Shenah's dependency and foreignness are sexualizing, creating her as an object over which he can exercise power. Despite their formal differences, "Wings" shows that the seduction plot and the scientific inquisition of the sociologist share in common a desire to dominate the apparently powerless. Yezierska's literary investigation of the "hearts of the Poles" reveals that, even as Dewey and others claimed to adopt a disinterested perspective on immigrant communities, their gaze is nonetheless premised on a paternalistic desire to know and control. Overcoming the gaze which fixed immigrant women as suffering dependents, Yezierska shows, would require more than just aesthetic assimilation.

Unlike John, Shenah learns from her experience. Her desires for his affection, configured by assimilationist politics and Cinderella stories, are transformed by heartbreak and subsequent experiences with factory labor. Once John decides that the study is ethically compromised, the thwarted affair inspires Shenah to begin her "rags-to-riches" journey, heading right away to a factory where she can begin the assimilation process that starts with her sweated labor. Her situation, the narrative suggests, is

informed by distinctly Anglo-American systems—whether those that configure the desires immigrant women towards assimilation, or those that naturalize the immigrant's inferiority to American labor. Instead of waging her battle against cultural and economic forces on the level of her appearance, which proved ineffectual in persuading John of her humanity, Shenah tells herself, "Show him what's in you. If it takes a year, or a million years, you got to show him you're a person…. By day and by night, you got to push, push yourself up till you get to him and can look him in the face eye to eye" (34). Shenah's determination to elevate herself risks endorsing an assimilationist politics, and affirming processes of Americanization. However, "Hunger," in the end, instead subverts the conventional narratives of immigrant self-making through its rendering of Shenah as a self-determining authority of her own story. According to liberal social reformers, and even prevailing voices of the labor movement, working-class equality would be achieved through the stabilization of the breadwinner-housewife ideal, by bringing women home from the factory and into the domestic sphere. Rejecting marriage and domestic labor, Shenah pursues factory labor to elevate herself and become economically independent. Yezierka challenges the prevailing representation of sweated garment industry workers as degraded by their labor, and represents instead Shenah's experience of coming to consciousness through labor and community with other workers. Even if the sweatshop is designed by U.S. discourses and industrial modes of production as a "foreign" and backward site where immigrants must work hard to overcome their poverty and effectively assimilate, Yezierska suggests that, once inhabited, these spaces can also spur forms of community and inspire a sense of identity that exceed both the romance novel or the sociologist's gaze.

Yezierska shows readers Shenah from the perspective of other characters, each who claim to know better, who cast suspicion on her ambition and dreams of grandeur. As a result, readers may themselves wonder whether Shenah can be trusted as an narrator of her own experiences, an effect which gives Yezierska's eventual subversion of generic conventions additional rhetorical power. Shenah's coworkers at the Cohen Brothers garment factory all comment upon her "innocent-looking baby eyes" and her "greenhorn" attitude, a suitor and fellow Russian, Sam Arkin, remarking that "Her mother's milk is still fresh on her lips" (42). Her apparent naïveté is perhaps even evident to readers when Shenah proclaims to her uncle, "Everybody gets wages in America!" (39) Her blind acceptance of the factory as a site of liberation makes her an easy target for the foreman who hire her to work as a "learner" right away. But, in performing the most exploitative labor for the lowest wage, Shenah is not at all daunted or degraded. In fact, Shenah is energized and finds strength in her ability to learn quickly and work her way up in the company. To her coworkers, she appears to be an unknowingly lucky girl, destined not only to earn the affection of the eligible bachelor, Sam Arkin, but also to inevitably rise to a position of power at work. Like her coworkers, readers might begin to suspect that Yezierska's narrative endorses the myth of the self-made woman, and even the Cinderella story of the hard-working, innocent immigrant woman that, through marriage, is saved from a lifetime of poverty and degrading industrial labor. But Yezierska resists such a simple conclusion, presenting instead a much more ambivalent story of yearning left unsatiated. Although all of the pieces in her rags-to-riches story fall into place, Shenah is not seduced by the romance of assimilation, nor the temptation to quit work and become a housewife and mother to Sam, a handsome, kind foreman at the factory.

Rejecting the fairytale, the young romantic Shenah instead cultivates a sense of self and cultural identity that drives her to grow intellectually and as an independent person and author of her own experience. In "Wings," Shenah perceived herself as others did, as a mere domestic object that must present itself as pleasing and accommodating to men. When John Barnes passed her in the hall, Shenah thought to herself: "What was she to him? Could she expect him to greet the stairs on which he stepped? Or take notice of the door that swung open for him? After all, she was nothing but part of the house. So why would he take notice of her? She was the steps on which he walked. She was the door that swung open for him" (22). An astute observer of others' behavior, Shenah is well aware that her appearance in the basement of the ghetto apartment, her ethnic clothes and English, all marked her as a mere object of study for the researcher. Her project of self-making therefore involves not merely accumulating wealth, but becoming legible as a person to even the most prejudiced, scrutinizing eye. Shenah remembers with bitterness Barnes' "compassionate endearments," which "smite her flesh with their cruel mockery" (31). Once in the factory, Shenah undergoes a different and unexpected transformation, not merely a change of costume. She describes her new feelings to to Sam: "it makes me feel so grand to be with all these hands alike. It's as if I just got out from the choking prison into the open air of my own people…here, in the factory, I feel I'm with everybody together. Just the sight of people lifts me on wings in the air" (51-52). While she initially aims to become more American through her labor, Shenah finds herself able to breathe in her proximity to other Russians, other working people with whom she feels community. Whereas she had formerly felt herself to be on "wings" only through the vicarious experience of reading about Schriener's journeys, at work and among those

who she her experiences and background, Shenah feels surprisingly elevated. Comparing reading to working at the factory, Yezierska unsettles the private/public, feminine/masculine binaries conventionally used to figure labor as a threat to women's inherent ability to care and "influence." Not a scene of starvation, for Shenah, the factory floor becomes instead a place of nourishment, a place where she can finally breathe. The ironic rendering of the factory, which is typically represented as overcrowded, suffocating, and even deadly, as in the case of the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire, contests the prevailing assumption that industrial labor was, in and of itself, a danger to women.

Shenah's quest for self-knowledge culminates in her relationship with Sam, who is represented as a foil for John Barnes, as a self-made immigrant that earns wages as an illiterate manual laborer. When Sam proposes to marry her and make her a lady, Shenah balks at the suggestion, asking "Take your hard-earned money? Could I be such a beggerin?" (60) While she appears to be a romantic, longing for a man that she perceives as a "God," in the end, Shenah rejects Sam's marriage proposal, even when it promises to make her a "home, husband, babies, a breadgiver for life!" (61) She realizes, in articulating her feelings to Sam, that she does not want merely to elevate herself in order to marry John Barnes. Rather, her drive to become equal in the eyes of this Anglo-American would be in the service of her family and her people: "All that my mother and father and my mother's mother and father ever wanted to be is him. This fire in me, it's not just the hunger of a woman for a man—it's the hunger of all my people back of me, from all ages, for light, for the life higher!" (62-63) Rejecting the notion that women only went to work out of desperation, and only until they were married, as well as the notion that work was necessarily degrading for women's intellect, Yezierska suggests that

Shenah's experience at the sweatshop led her to create an identity and purpose for herself outside of and beyond the limitations of the many narratives that sought to fix the meaning of women's work. Articulating a revolutionary vision of equality in which the hierarchies which keep the poor and immigrant workers in the dark would be overcome, Shenah comes to see herself as not just a person, but a member of an ethnic working-class. Yezierska's appropriation of the rags-to-riches narrative, in which immigrant women's best option was marriage and unpaid domestic labor, subverts the logic of the separate spheres and the sexual division of labor to imagine Shenah's reclamation of her life's story, and agent of change. It is first by inhabiting these narratives and recognizing the terms of her life and self as they were dictated by U.S. discourses and institutions that Shenah is able to imagine beyond them.

If we interpret Yezeriska's fiction as doing the labor of social reproduction, as reconfiguring readers' desires away from Cinderella stories and the myth of the American dream, and towards alternative visions of community and autonomy, we can move beyond questions of the writing's aesthetic quality or its ability to capture the realities of tenement life. Instead, we may recognize how Yezierska actively intervened into the cultural production of the sweated immigrant worker, not only in her fictional renderings of Shenah, Fanya, and various other analogues for herself, but also in the creation of her own public persona. Transgressing the boundaries between private and public, fantasy and realism, romance and scientific inquiry, Yezierska's affective performance and her work as a writer destabilize the conceptual binaries that relegated women's work to the domestic sphere. Beyond the scope of her life as a writer, Yezierska also pursued imaginative and revolutionary alternatives to improve the lives of working-class women

by collectivizing domestic life. In her early life, she made several plans to start a cooperative nursery for working mothers, to build a feminist apartment house in which women would share a cooperative kitchen, laundry, and dining room, and in her personal life, did not endorse bourgeois forms of marriage and family life. Reading her fiction as an additional site of political struggle, Yezierska's stories and the cultivation of a persona as a Sweatshop Cinderella might be recognized as an effort to transform U.S. working-class culture, to reimagine what women's liberation might look like beyond the conventional marriage plot and fairy tale romances featured in so many dime novels. She rejects the foreignization of sweated labor, the displacement of the burden of reform onto individual workers, and the pressures of assimilation which would confine women to the domestic sphere or the factory floor. Shenah does not become an "efficient machine" like Remington's personal secretary, nor another "ghost in the looking glass" haunting bourgeois consumers, but rather an agent of change and author of her own future.

Ultimately, Yezierska's stories and career are illustrative of the difficulties involved in the commercialization of women's work, whether domestic, affective, or care labor, at the turn of the century. While sewing and homework in the U.S. began as a potentially suitable form of domestic labor for ladies to perform in support of their husbands, the labor was soon thereafter transformed into a dangerous, destructive, and spectacular practice to which legislators and reformers obsessively and fiercely objected. The proposed resolutions errantly sought to restore order and extinguish the exploitative labor system by instituting the patriarchal family form by law. Banning non-kin forms of sweated labor from taking place in tenement districts, advocating for protective legislation that limited the number of hours and kinds of work in which women and

children could engage, and inviting immigrant populations to be "Americanized" through institutions of domestic and industrial education, all presumed that the problem of the sweatshop would be eradicated by imposing the separation of spheres and Anglo-American cultural norms onto foreign populations. The foreignization of sweated labor that resulted persists in segmenting the U.S. labor market to this day, displacing the burden of reform onto individual workers who must overcome the obstacles of exploitation in order to become American. The rhetorics of efficiency and rationalization that had commercialized clerical work, empowering secretaries and typewriters to labor as "efficient machines," had precisely the opposite effect for sweated workers, providing not a way into "professional culture," but into a perpetual state of struggle. For Black domestic workers, the commercialization of service coincided, too, with the commodification of the figure of the Mammy, which had long and lasting effects on the workers' ability to be recognized as such.

CHAPTER 6

MAKING SERVICE IMPERSONAL:

AUNT JEMIMA AND THE BRONX SLAVE MARKET

> To this must be added such arousing of the public conscience as shall lead people to recognize more keenly than now the responsibility of the family toward its servants—to remember that they are constituent members of the family group and as such have right and privileges as well as duties. To-day in Philadelphia the tendency is the other way. Thousands of servants no longer lodge where they work but are free at night to wander at all, to hire lodgings in suspicious houses, to consort with paramours, and thus to bring more and physical disease to their place of work. A reform is imperatively needed, and here, as in most of the Negro problems, a proper reform will benefit white and black alike—the employer as well as the employed.
>
> - W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro*

In his sociological study of the African-American community in Philadelphia at the turn-of-the-century, W.E.B. Du Bois argues that "so long as entrance into domestic service involves a loss of all social standing and consideration, so long will domestic service be a social problem" (136). Like many reformers and Black activists of the period, DuBois names domestic service as a central obstacle in the struggle towards "racial uplift." A form of labor that was long associated with the degradation of slavery, domestic service remained the primary occupation available to Black women in the North and South long after emancipation. To remedy the low wages, long hours, and social stigma associated with service, DuBois proposes two reforms: "the diversification of Negro industry and the serious training of domestic servants" (139). His recommendation is more or less consistent with prevailing reform projects like those spearheaded by historian Lucy Salmon, philanthropist Jane Addams, and even DuBois' would-be opponent, political

activist Booker T. Washington. It was widely accepted that in order to uplift Black and immigrant domestic workers, the labor needed to be specialized, professionalized, and more decisively integrated into the formal economy of wage work. Institutions for just this purpose were founded in cities across the country where immigrants were acculturated to American domesticity, and Black women were trained in the technical skills of cooking, cleaning, and carework. But, despite these efforts, by 1935, domestic work was transformed into labor hired by the day or even the hour, as housewives chose from a lineup of economically destitute workers that waited on street corners to be hired each day—what journalist activist Marvel Cooke described as the "Bronx Slave Market."

To understand the myriad historical contingencies that led to this transformation, we might look to the final paragraph of Du Bois' analysis of domestic service quoted above. Here, Du Bois proposes one additional reform that, for readers of this dissertation, may come as a surprise. In addition to the expansion of employment opportunities for Black workers, and domestic education, Du Bois argues that a "proper reform" would also involve repairing the affective relationship between employers and domestic workers. That domestic workers no longer worked as "live-in" servants, he explains, and that employers have forgotten that their workers are "constituent members" of the family, has led to the degradation and even deviance of Black women in the Northern city. This argument bears striking resemblance to those advanced by slaveholders in the antebellum period. Capitalist market relations, their logic went, deprived Black workers of the paternalistic care that a slave master offered. According to slaveholders, the free market rendered the affective relations among workers and employers "impersonal," and therefore eliminated the "mutual obligation" inspired by the asymmetrical power relation.

The inclusion of this idea in Du Bois' study seems a strange contradiction: on the one hand, Du Bois sees domestic service through the lens of waged work, advocating for its incorporation into the formal economy; and yet on the other, he persists in seeing it from the perspective of patriarchal domesticity, affirming the sanctity and significance of the family form for American progress and the development of social character. In so doing, Du Bois' argument lays bare a contradiction that remains unresolved by Progressive era reform projects, and eventually culminates in a labor system that is neither formally professionalized nor protected by the family: that the attempt to bring domestic service into the realm of professional, public work neglected to consider that this work nonetheless occurred within the private household, a space governed still by paternalistic authority, but now rhetorically absent any pretense of mutual care.

Following the lead of Du Bois, who laments white employer's negligence and lack of care for the wellbeing of their employees, labor historians have long argued that in the decades following emancipation, the relations among mistresses and domestics were transformed from "maternal to managerial authority," resulting in the "severing of emotional ties" and the de-personalization of these labor relations. Consider, for example, this account of the Bronx Slave Market given by historian Alana Coble: "By 1930, the relationship between maid and mistress had begun to change. The Depression forced a major shift in it. The connection between employer and employee grew more impersonal, which had the short-term effect of creating an atmosphere that encouraged worker abuse. In the long run, however, the loosening of personal bonds gave workers more leverage in the relationship" (51). But, as we have seen in previous chapters, the discourse of impersonality did not name the *absence* of affective performances and relationships.

Rather, the impersonal more accurately names the emergence of new social and professional expectations that differently configured the relationships between social identities and labor, "private" and "public" selves. While it was certainly true that mistresses were no longer compelled to perform as missionary-mother to their live-in domestic charge, thus "loosening" personal bonds, the demand that domestic workers perform deference, servility, and obedience remained. Moreover, the labor relations between workers and their mistresses hardly took on the formal equality that one could theoretically find in workplaces like offices and department stores. In the home, domestics were sexually harassed and abused by husbands, and brutally surveilled by mistresses who watched them undress and dress for work, expressed utter disdain for their time, safety, or health, and rarely paid the negotiated wage in full. Though reducing the relationship to a market transaction should have, according to the theory of the free market, mitigated the raced and classed differences among mistresses and maids to render the women formally equal, it instead exacerbated the existing hierarchy such that domestic workers across the country described their conditions as no different than slavery. When labor historians interpret the transformation of domestic work through the lens of waged work, they fail to see the extent to which domestic service was a construct indissociable from the social categories of race, gender, and class. Taking service as a material act that preexists discursive production, they neglect to ask why the political and cultural project of professionalizing service ended instead in its casualization.

This chapter attends to this elision in scholarship by situating the discursive production of service as "impersonal" work in the early twentieth century in the broader context of service's racialization and the emergence of bourgeois professional culture.

The emancipation of Black women may have threatened the stability of the racialized organization of social reproductive labor established in an earlier phase of capital. But, the cultural prominence of the Mammy, and the institutionalization of domesticity in education and at the level of the state, combined with the rhetoric of professionalism and "impersonality," coalesced to position domestic service as a necessary, inferior, but hidden component of social reproduction. This chapter will survey the representation of Black domestics in consumer culture, literature, and debates about racial progress to show how the apparent de-personalization of domestic labor relations forged a new, and apparently no less exploitative, relationship between the affective, intimate dimensions of service and the market structures of commercialization. According to Coble, "this market restructuring increased the employer's control over the relationship. However, as time went on, the new market validated the living-out model and encouraged part-time work. This gave private household workers the opportunity to have multiple sources of income, which increased their bargaining power." (51). Such an arrangement may remind readers of the tendency of capital to make workers "flexible" in relation to market demands, a development that scholars typically locate in the emergence of *post*-Fordist labor relations. However, as this chapter shows, the restructuring of domestic service during the first half of the twentieth century presents a new road map for understanding casualization.

The depersonalization of domestic labor relations did not just fulfill slaveholders' predictions; rather, what emerged was a discourse and culture of professionalism and specialization that reconfigured the relationship between self and work. The final section of this chapter will turn to Alice Childress's experimental novel, *Like One of the Family*

(1956). Adapted from a serial column titled *A Conversation from Life,* Childress's novel features series of dramatic monologues spoken by an unmarried, outspoken domestic named Mildred. In her "conversations" with friend and fellow domestic, Marge, Mildred describes her confrontations with employers, debunking prevailing myths about service and Black women's relationship to the families they served. Although generally regarded by critics as an aesthetic failure, I argue that Childress' proletarian text uses the form of the "conversation" to empower Black domestics as storytellers and political subjects. The rhetoric of employing classes long presumed that the labor of domestic servants was an expression of their love, their true feelings and inherent capacity for care. To contest this, Mildred models and performs a transgressive affective performance, one that counters the mythology of the Mammy with the material realities of labor.

The Commodification of Mammy and the Casualization of Service

The industrial-era metaphor of the separate spheres made the home the site of social reproduction, the sphere in which women performed the care and domestic labor necessary to sustain their families. But, from its inception, the private sphere depended on additional sources of underpaid or enslaved labor, since the housewife alone was incapable of doing all the necessary work of sustaining human life alone. The domestic servant, figured as a pseudo-member of the family over whom the housewife exercised maternal power, provided a resolution to the deficit in reproductive labor caused by the separation of spheres. Following the emancipation of slaves, and as more and more women entered the formal economy of work, however, the distribution of reproductive labor and care work was thrown out of its already tenuous balance. The familial relations

among housewives and domestics appeared to be relics of an antiquated past as "New Women" expressed disdain for the "True Women" that preceded them. At the same time, Progressive era reform movements advocated for the formalization of domestic education, and domestic workers struggled to be seen as waged workers, demanding autonomy from the families they served. These movements and the subsequent domestic education programs that they championed reframed the pseudo-kinship relations of the home as "impersonal," as a form of waged work that claimed to transform service into a mere "market transaction." At the same time, the figure of the Mammy was reinvented and repurposed in mass culture and literature to evoke nostalgia for the "interracial care" lost with the fall of the Confederacy and the end of plantation slavery. As this section will show, these social, economic, and cultural forces struggled to navigate the transformation of the home and market that followed emancipation, attempting to stabilize the distinctions between work and home in order to maintain the organization of reproductive labor developed in the antebellum period. The figure of the Mammy became a central background for this debate, as Black artists, scholars, and activists rejected the minstrel symbol and white advertisers, authors, and sympathizers of the Lost Cause embraced it anew. In this section, I argue that the efforts to reform and specialize domestic service, and the reinvention of the Mammy allowed employers to justify the abuse and neglect of domestic workers by creating conditions in which domestic workers were perceived as both insufficiently servile in relation to the idealized domestic relations of the past, and no longer the housewife's responsibility in the wake of emancipation.

As we have seen in the preceding chapters, Progressive era reformers at the turn of the century advocated for the formalization of domestic education, believing it would

solve both the problem of the sweatshop as well as the so-called servant problem by acculturating foreign and working-class women with the practices of bourgeois domesticity, and "elevating" the esteem of the work such that workers could garner better pay and more respect. Educators like Jane Addams and Florence Kelley performed as the "missionary-mothers" to immigrant homeworkers, attempting to save them from the degradation of homework by acculturating them to the practices of U.S. bourgeois domesticity. These methods were also used to prepare newly free Black women to be competitive for work in Northern cities and respected in Southern homes, but this, reformers recognized, would involve reconceptualizing domestic service such that it was not associated with dependency or racialization. In her influential and respected 1897 study of domestic service, for instance, historian Lucy Salmon argued that: "The efforts to remove the social stigma that now brands domestic service will not alone accomplish the desired result. Another means of lessening the difficulties in the modern household is to put all household employments on the same business basis as are all employments outside of the household. The principles which lie at the foundation of modern business activities are division of labor and unconscious co-operation" (212). In addition to formalizing domestic education as a field of study in higher education, and elevating the cultural perception of service as a necessarily degrading form of work done out of desperation, Salmon argues that household labor should be specialized and integrated into the industrializing free market. With social reproductive labor distributed across more women who each specialize in a particular aspect of this work—whether preparing food, cleaning, or caring—the work would be more efficiently accomplished and the general welfare of all would be protected. Implicit in Salmon's argument is the idea that, by

reframing domestic labor as a specialized set of skills, or even a profession, reformers could dissociate service from the image of the Mammy and dispel once and for all the presumption that service was a racialized form of labor for which white women were unfit. The "social stigma" that attends service, she explains, results from a judgment about the "nature" as opposed to the "quality" of the work, a distinction that she believes would be corrected through specialization. Rejecting the articulation of domestic service as an act of love and loyalty, reformers argued that it should be reimagined as a "business activity," believing that this rejection of the "personal" and affective dimensions of domestic labor relations would result in more equitable, efficient, and profitable relationships among women.

It is in this context that Black reformers founded educational institutions and developed domestic education curriculum for newly freed Black women in the South. Unlike those designed to assimilate or Americanize, for these institutions, determining a course of study for Black women meant reckoning with the legacy of the Mammy and slavery's destruction of the Black family. There was both a felt sense of urgency to reject working conditions that appeared to replicate a structure of Black subordination, and a recognition that it remained economically unfeasible for most Black women to care exclusively for their own families, since wages for Black men remained well below the "family wage." Black women's education and work was therefore a central issue for intellectuals and educators like Du Bois and Booker T. Washington. Although often positioned as opposing political programs, in the case of Black women's work, the racial uplift agenda of Du Bois and the accommodationist agenda of Washington shared an ambivalence. On the one hand, Washington's famous 1895 speech in Atlanta, now known

as the "Atlanta Compromise," appears to accommodate white families' desire for the docility of the Black Mammy and concede the inevitability of Black women's continued service. Says Washington to a white audience: "As in the past, you and your families will be surrounded by the most faith-ful [sic], law-abiding, and unresentful people that the world has seen" (91). On the other hand, Washington's wife, Margaret Murray Washington, who led the domestic education program at the Tuskegee Institute, coined the term "New Negro Woman" in 1895 to describe a cultural and social ideal that Black women would pursue through their education—not the servile Mammy, but a refined, properly educated housewife and mother. Similarly, as we have already seen, Du Bois regarded domestic work as menial labor that inhibited the ability of their entire race to advance socially and economically. He writes that the "post-bellum generation of Negroes [has] been largely forced back into the great mass of listless and incompetent to earn bread and butter by menial service" (*Philadelphia* 139). Like Margaret Washington, Du Bois sought to reclaim Black maternity and maternal love for Black families, rejecting the memorialization of the Mammy as an ideal Black woman and servant. As critics have argued, Du Bois, too, idealizes the notion of the New Negro Woman as a housewife and mother whose domestic labor would serve the interests of her own family, and who would educate her own children in defiance of the image of the Mammy. In difference with the institutions in the North that reinforced the interdependence of the social categories of race, gender, and class with the performance of reproductive labor, Southern institutions needed to challenge the reduction of Black women to their capacity to serve, and firmly distinguish labor from care in order to reclaim the latter for Black families.

The romanticization of the Mammy was fiercely contested by Black intellectuals, artists, and reformers who advanced an alternative image of Black womanhood as a cultural and social ideal: the New Negro Woman. Positioned as the Mammy's opposite, the New Negro Woman was an educated, independent, and protective of her labor and care, which were reserved for her family. In a speech at the First National Conference of Colored Women, Margaret Murray Washington argued that to uplift the women in the South would be to uplift the entire race. This project, she argues, involves, first of all, domestic education: "Lessons in making home neat and attractive; lessons in making family life stronger, sweeter, and purer by personal effects of the woman; lessons in tidiness of appearance among women; lessons of clean and pure habits of everyday life in the home, and thus bringing to the women self-respect and getting for them the respect of others" (57). Through domestic education, Washington proposes to reconfigure the desires of Black women away from the white families they formerly served, and towards their own families and selves. Within this discourse, the Mammy is constructed as the foil of the New Negro Woman, as opposed to her predecessor. Charles Chesnutt's 1901 novel, *The Marrow of Tradition,* makes this distinction most clearly, offering a critique of the image of the Mammy from the perspective of a nurse of the new generation. Writes Chestnutt:

> These old-time negroes, she said to herself, made her sick with their slavering over the white folks, who, she supposed, favored them and made much of them because they had once belonged to them—much the same reason why they fondled their cats and dogs. For her own part, they gave her nothing but wages, and small wages at that, and she owed them nothing more than equivalent service. It was purely a matter of business;

> she sold her time for their money. There was no question of love between them (42).

The younger, educated nurse expresses disdain for both the family's old domestic, Mammy Jane, and the family themselves who, she says, love their servant as they would a pet. Though they both serve the Cateret family and perform feminized care work, she distinguishes herself from Mammy Jane in terms of their affective and labor relationship to the family. Rather than a relation of mutual obligation or affection, the nurse describes hers as a purely economic transaction, the equal exchange of service for pay. The nurse reframes her labor as a specialization and a "matter of business," in accordance with the reform programs and domestic education institutes across the U.S., asserting the wage contract as a tool that distinguishes her personal self from the family for whom she works. With this transformation in the nature and quality of service, the text suggests, Black women would be liberated from the emotionally exploitative demands formerly made on their labor, care, and selves. The novel and the image of the New Negro Woman reject the nostalgic renderings of the Mammy, repudiating the notion that Black women's service was bound to be an expression of love or devotion.

Redefining the public representation of Black womanhood in opposition to the figure of the Mammy was an especially difficult challenge as memorials and monuments to the Mammy and the Confederacy emerged across the South in the first decades of the twentieth century. The Faithful Slave Monument erected in Fort Mill, South Carolina in 1896 and the Arlington Cemetery Monument, commissioned by the United Daughters of the Confederacy in 1914, both featured renderings of the Mammy with a white child, as a passive body, emanating love (see Figure 5). As historian Kimberly Wallace-Sanders

persuasively argues, “the illustrations invite visitors to think of slavery as a time of relaxation and interracial caring,” (96) denying both the fact of Black women’s labor and the history of brutality that compelled it. According to Wallace-Sanders, these monuments both paid homage to “faithful slaves” and revised history to suggest that emancipation had been misguided.

Figure 5: Image of the east frieze of the Confederate Monument at Arlington National Cemetery, featuring a Mammy character. From Wikipedia Commons.

Wallace-Sanders argues: “In addition to solidifying a tradition of black servility for future generations of southerners, the monument was also intended as an indisputable message, written in stone to northerners, about the southern way of life….the flowery inscriptions and the structures themselves would prove to the nation that slaveholders ‘respected their [slaves’] good qualities as no one set ever did or will do… The monument would tell future generations that the white men of the South were the negro’s best friend then and that the men of the South are the negro’s best friend to-day’” (96). With the representation of the Mammy of the past as a revered friend and part of the family, the monuments projected into the future an image of mutual obligation in which Black women would continue to serve in the tradition of their foremothers.

Such a proposal is manifested most clearly in the 1911 plans for the "Black Mammy Memorial Institute" in Athens, Georgia, though it was never realized. Proponents of the school promised that it would both honor beloved Mammies of the past, actually naming classrooms after the nurses and caretakers of the institute's founders, and train domestic workers in the technical skill and affective performance of docility and loyalty associated with the Mammy. Practically speaking, the institute conceived of this as a resolution to the shortage of domestic servants following the Great Migration, better preparing a new generation to take over the work of service. Through the image of the Mammy, these efforts sought to reproduce a mythical version of the past in the present and reinforce an idealization of Black servility and loving subordination to the needs of the white family.

Black educators in the South had to reconcile white reverence for the figure of the Mammy with the practical need to educate Black girls and women for the scant employment available to them. The Alice Freeman Palmer Memorial Institute in North Carolina, founded by African American educator and orator Charlotte Hawkins Brown in 1902, provides an instructive example of how domestic education institutions negotiated the demand for Black women's docility and supported Black women's independence, providing them tools that they needed to protect private selves from the families they served. An acquaintance of Booker T. Washington, Brown founded the school with the mission of educating Black women to become "fine, clean mothers and good homemakers for themselves and others" (Denard xx). In its early years, the school therefore focused on agricultural, industrial, and domestic education for rural Black youth. But Brown, like other educators and reformers of the period, struggled to

successfully fund the school and relied on white patronage to supply scholarships. Doing so meant appealing to the terms of a white fantasy of Black women's labor, even as this conflicted with the school's mission. In an effort to raise funds for the Institute, Brown published a story in 1919 called "'Mammy': An Appeal to the Heart of the South," featuring a Mammy character that embodies love, loyalty, and generosity characteristic of the stereotype but tragically dies neglected by her employers, despite her lifelong service and unwavering commitment. In her "appeal" to white donors, Brown appears to endorse the logic of the plantation family and the supposed "mutual obligation" formed between Mammy and the white family she served. However, her use of this logic was strategic, drawing on white donors' nostalgia and guilt. Her story positions the Palmer Institute as the fulfillment of a white fantasy of interracial harmony and care, compelling readers to donate and support the Black women and institution, implying that a failure to do so would amount to yet another instance of neglect. Despite this rendering in public representation, the Institute itself provided educational opportunities for its pupils far beyond the domestic education or industrial training. Criticized by Washington's ilk for its "impractical curriculum," the Institute offered courses in Latin, French, art, history, and even preparation for college.[27] As such, the institution defied the reduction of Black women to an image of the Mammy, providing freedwomen both the tools that they needed to navigate a market economy that offered little opportunity outside of service, and non-utilitarian forms of education that would serve them as mothers, housewives, or individual persons.

[27] See Wallace-Sanders and Gilmore for an extended analysis of the Palmer Institute and Brown's use of the figure of the Mammy.

By 1919, Brown's appeal would have been especially well-placed, since by then the Mammy had become a mainstay in U.S. mass culture, featured in films, novels, and product advertisements. The reinvention and commercialization of the Mammy in mass culture at the turn of the century propagated a cultural fantasy about Black women's labor as a special kind of love for which white families longed and might access through the consumption of her image and associated commodities. An especially telling example of the commodification of the figure of the Mammy is the emergence of Aunt Jemima. At the same time that DuBois, Washington, and others called for the reinvention of Black womanhood and motherhood in the image of the New Negro Woman, the image of Aunt Jemima, an archetypal Mammy dressed in a checked turban with a wide smile, was debuted at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair by the R.T. Davis Milling Company, later renamed the Aunt Jemima Mills Company. At the World's Fair, former slave Nancy Green was hired to play Aunt Jemima and perform a cooking demonstration while telling stories of her life on a Kentucky plantation. All reports of the event remark on the wild popularity of Green and her performance, claiming that guards were called to manage the clamoring crowd.

The romanticization of slavery and the Old South proved profitable, and in the early twentieth century, the image of Aunt Jemima took on a permanent place within the white American home. The Company developed a mythology about Aunt Jemima's family and background, sold paper dolls, climbing dolls, and, eventually, in 1955, opened an Aunt Jemima Restaurant as Disneyland. Actively rewriting the history of U.S. slavery and domestic service, in 1921, the *Saturday Evening Post* featured a series of advertisements for Aunt Jemima Pancake mix that charted the character's journey from the plantation, to

the World's Fair, into the kitchens of millions of Americans; from renowned personal chef to "massa" Higbee to enterprising businesswoman. While in many ways these ads relied on an existing fantasy of the Mammy as a docile, faithful slave, they mobilized this fantasy in a new way to revise the history of Black subordination in the domestic sphere. In the first installation, titled "Aunt Jemima Bids Goodbye to the Old Plantation," the advertisement reads:

> A thousand memories flashed across her mind. How happy she had been on that old Louisiana plantation! How kind, how noble, had been her 'massa,' Colonel Higbee! She thought of the morning she first took her mother's place in the big kitchen of her master's mansion; of his unconcealed pride in her as she grew into fame through her skill as a cook. Then, crowding out these bright memories, came those of the war—sad memories of the Colonel's going; of the manse so desolate, long crumbled in ruin (66).

Drawing on rhetoric of the Lost Cause, the advertisement suggests that what was lost in the war was not only the wealth and stability of the Southern family, but also the site where Black women found meaning and happiness: the master's kitchen. Without this purpose, and without her loving Colonel to serve, Aunt Jemima is abandoned and alone, without purpose. The ad continues to trace her journey to the North where Aunt Jemima, determined to serve again, works tirelessly to perfect a recipe for instant pancakes. She is overjoyed when the recipe is finally discovered and pleased that she able to provide happiness for millions of families across the U.S. The ad curiously ends by reinforcing the reader's obligation to Aunt Jemima who, they say, has worked hard enough to warrant their patronage. In reference to the pancakes, the ad asks: "Are *you* having them? Aunt Jemima left the old plantation so that you might" (66). Mobilizing the logic of "mutual obligation" that formerly structured the relations among the plantation family, the ad sells

not only pancake mix, but the affective bond between Mammy and family. The white family's desire for and dependency on Black subordination was reconfigured in the twentieth century, as the value of Black women's labor was reduced to an actual commodity, and one that required only a consumer's paltry financial investment—not their affection, care, or pseudo-inclusion in the family.

The battle over the cultural significance and commodification of the image of the Mammy came to a head in the controversy surrounding Fannie's Hurst 1933 novel, *Imitation of Life.* Purportedly inspired by Hurst's relationship with Zora Neale Hurston,[28] whom she hired as a personal secretary and chauffeur, the novel represents the relationship between four characters: the mistress and widowed maple syrup heir Bea Pullman, her daughter Jessie, the Pullman's Black domestic, Delilah, and her white-passing daughter, Peola. Together, Bea and Delilah struggle to raise their daughters, with whom they have strained relationships, and build a successful chain of diners featuring Delilah's secret waffle recipe. Delilah and Bea each end up serving as the surrogate mother to the other's daughter, since Bea becomes overwhelmed with work and Delilah serves as the Jessie's primary caregiver, and Peola eventually renounces her Blackness, severing ties with her own mother to pass as white and work at a department store. Instantly a bestseller, the novel was adapted for Universal Studios within a year of its publication, and in their adaptation, producers changed the waffles to pancakes, and the restaurant chain to packaged pancake mix, drawing a direct connection to the success of

[28] Members of the literary circles in which Hurst and Hurston moved believed this to be true. In a letter to Hurst, Hurston writes that Sterling Brown criticized Hurston for furnishing the materials for *Imitation of Life*, which Hurston says she takes as a compliment. Hurston would later revoke her endorsement of the novel and film, and in her own work, critique the terms "pancake" and "Mammy" as derogatory.

the figure and pancake mix of Aunt Jemima. Despite their popularity, the novel and film became the subject of a debate among Black artists and intellectuals, who decried the works' use of the Mammy and "tragic mulatta" stereotypes, and Hurst and her defenders, who claimed that the works' social commentary was being misunderstood by "ungrateful" critics ("Letter" 121).

The debate that unfolded raised questions about what racial progress and gender equality in public representation might look like, some pointing to the obvious parallels between the novels' contents and the conditions of its production: like her protagonist, Bea Pullman, Hurst was profiting from the image and labor of a Black woman. Nonetheless, many Black critics praised the film, which was groundbreaking in terms of its casting, storyline, and locale, as the first mainstream film to a feature a Black storyline outside of the Southern plantation. While the film was apparently progressive in its gender politics and its determination to represent complex Black characters, and Hurst claimed that it "practically inaugurate[d] into the important medium of the motion-picture a consideration of the Negro as a part of the social pattern of American life," literary critic Sterling Brown argued that its representation of U.S. social life mobilized longstanding and harmful stereotypes used to figure the relationship and affective bond between Black and white women. Of particular offense was a scene in the movie when Bea offers to give Delilah a twenty percent stake in the business, which Delilah rejects wholeheartedly, pleading with her mistress, "Oh honey chile, please don't send me away. Don't do that to me… let me and Peola stay the same as we been doing. I's your cook and I wants to stay your cook." Brown argues that this performance of deference is reminiscent of "the old slave refusing freedom" (Brown 88). In his analysis of the film,

Brown suggests that Bea's innocence as a white woman is made possible by Delilah's affective performance of internalized inferiority and subordination. Delilah does not need to assert her racial privilege, in other words, because Delilah polices her own behavior. For Brown, there is little that he should be "grateful" for, since the film reinscribes racist assumptions about Black inferiority. The competing interpretations of the novel and film suggests that, on the one hand, the image of affectionate sisterhood among Black workers and white employers could be understood as a progressive and modern ideal, while for Black critics, the same image was evocative of the plantation family of the past.

The contest between idealized affectionate domestic relations and impersonal labor relations resulted in the transformation of domestic service in the early decades of the twentieth century from a personal, lifelong position premised on mutual obligation and dependency to an impersonal form of day work, totally bereft of any pretense of care. In 1935, the year after the debut of *Imitation of Life*, and in the midst of the Great Depression, activist journalists Marvel Cooke and Ella Baker published an exposé series about what they called the "Bronx Slave Market," where "Not only is human labor bartered and sold for slave wage, but human love also is a marketable commodity. But whether it is labor, or love that is sold, economic necessity compels the sale" (1). As the explain, Black domestic workers in U.S. cities were destitute and therefore vulnerable to the exploitation of housewives. By design, after all, the reproductive labor system had positioned domestic workers as the labor source that compensated for the deficiency created by the separation of spheres. Domestic workers were, for white families, a social safety net on which they relied. However, by this time, as a result of myriad historical transformations, there existed no safety net for the domestic workers. This meant that

especially when white families suffered economically, Black women were cast out and left to fend for themselves. This image of Black domestic workers sharply contrasted the vision of cross-racial harmony and mutual support that readers encountered in Hurst's novel, or even in the image of Aunt Jemima. In their first story, published in the magazine of the NAACP, *The Crisis*, Cooke and Baker describe not a mutually beneficial relationship, but a predatory one: "Paradoxically, the crash of 1929 brought to the domestic labor market a new employer class. The lower middle-class housewife, who, having dreamed of the luxury of a maid, found opportunity staring her in the face in the form of Negro women pressed to the wall by poverty, starvation and discrimination" (1). As Cooke and Baker describe it, the mass unemployment of domestic workers produced the conditions in which white women's social and class fantasies could be fulfilled, without either the financial or emotional burden of hiring a long-term employee. Many of the workers that stood on street corners were formerly employed by wealthy families in more or less stable positions, but by 1935 were desperately competing for daywork hired by middle and working-class women that aspired to have the class and purchasing power of bourgeois housewives. Here, mistresses felt no responsibility for even learning their workers' names, nor paying them at the rate upon which they agreed. Workers' bodies were routinely scrutinized by housewives who watched them undress and dress for work, and workers regularly complained of sexual harassment and assault. For Baker and Cooke, this set of conditions clearly replicated the slave market economy and subjected freedwomen to analogous gendered and racialized brutality. While scholars have documented this change in labor relations as a shift from "maternal to managerial authority," we can see in this reportage that the transformation not quite so benign, nor

progressive. Instead, the Bronx Slave Market and other slave marts around the country adapted the racial logic of the plantation system to the conditions of the industrial city.

The reform movements that sought to specialize household employments and reduce the labor to business transaction were mobilized by abusive white employers to justify their mistreatment and disregard for workers' welfare. Plus, the newly commercialized version of the Mammy persisted in socially producing white families' desire for the servility and love they could no longer access, while also standing as a reminder of what Black women no longer wished to embody. In the years to follow, the distinction of domestic service from other forms of waged work was codified in its exclusion from the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act, a bill that secured the minimum wage, 40-hour work week, overtime, and guaranteed unemployment protections for workers. Only domestic service and agriculture—both employments with a historical resonance with slavery—were omitted from this act, an omission which remains unresolved even in 2020. While intellectuals and reformers at the turn of the century argued that racial uplift would not be achieved until Black mothers and wives were returned to their place in the home, reinforcing the logic of the separate spheres, leaders of the Black Leftist movements during the mid-twentieth century approached the question of Black women's labor from a far more radical perspective. As we shall see in the following analysis of Alice Childress' novel, Black leaders of the Civil Rights era recognized that liberation would not be won through either the professionalization of service nor the housewifization of Black women—both of which concede to the organizing principles of industrial capitalism. Instead, Childress proposes a reconceptualization and redistribution of the labor of social reproduction.

Conversations with Mildred and the Reimagination of Care

In the decades following Cooke and Baker's 1935 exposé of the Bronx Slave Market, the conditions of domestic service did not improve, nor did the reputation of this labor as degrading and destructive of Black womanhood and the Black family. At the same time, the image of the Mammy was given new life in film and television as the idealization of the housewife-breadwinner ideal reemerged after World War II. In 1950, Cooke was hired as the first Black reporter for the *Daily Compass* in New York and went undercover to work at the Bronx Slave Market, again penning an exposé series, this time based on her firsthand experience. In this venue, Cooke decried the humiliating and cruel behavior of white housewives, as well as the failure of state programs to provide adequate support for the often isolated and difficult to organize workers. At the same time, Alice Childress published the first piece of a monthly column called *A Conversation from Life* in Paul Robeson's Black Left Harlem newspaper *Freedom.* Responding to the same crises as Cooke, Childress took a different approach in communicating with Black readers who worked as domestic workers themselves. In repudiation of the century-long representation of domestic workers as oppressed, silenced victims, or self-effacing, docile Mammies, Childress' column, too, features a firsthand account of domestic day work, but hers is fictional, featuring the dramatic monologue of Mildred, a domestic from Harlem. Each column stages a "conversation" between Mildred and her close friend and fellow domestic, Marge, though Marge's responses are omitted. With this column, Childress advanced a new interpretation of domestic service as labor neither romantic nor degrading. In a piece titled, "All About My Job," Mildred explains to Marge:

> Domestic workers have done a awful lot of good things in this country besides clean up peoples' houses. We've taken care of our brothers and

> fathers and husbands when the factory gates and office desks and pretty near everything else was closed to them; we've helped many a neighbor, doin' everything from helpin' to clothe their children to buryin' the dead. …
>
> We built that church that the bazaar was held in! And it's a rare thing for anybody to find a colored family in this land that can't trace a domestic worker somewhere in their history…. How 'bout that, girl! … Yes, there's many a doctor, many a lawyer, many a teacher, many a minister that got where they are 'cause somebody worked in the kitchen to put 'em there, and there's also a lot of 'em that worked in kitchens themselves in order to climb up a little higher! (36-37)

Whereas prevailing representations of Black domestic workers framed their labor as antithetical to freedom, a holdover from slavery and a leading cause of continued oppression, Childress here redeems domestic workers as those that made possible and maintained Black freedom and community. As wives, mothers, and breadwinners, their labor, Mildred argues, has not only sustained the family, but also built and sustained the institutions and structures necessary for achieving political enfranchisement and economic mobility. With Mildred, Childress gave domestic workers a voice neither meek nor tragic, challenging them to see themselves as political subjects, valuable not just for their capacity to care and love, but as the foundation of the Black community.

Despite the popularity of Childress' column, when, in 1956, the pieces were collected in a what scholars now describe as an "experimental novel"[29] titled *Like One of the Family: Conversations from a Domestic's Life,* the text was neither widely read nor well-received. Childress put out the volume with Independence Publishers, a pro-communist operation out of Brooklyn, with the help of her friend, Marxist historian Herbert Aptheker. But the novel was not reviewed in any Black journals of the period, even

[29] So-called by Mary Helen Washington in her essay, "Alice, Childress, Lorraine Hansberry, and Claudia Jones: Black Women Write the Popular Front," featured in the 2003 collection *Left of the Color Line: Race, Radicalism, and Twentieth-Century Literature of the United States.*

though Childress was a well-known playwright and actor and closely associated with myriad cultural institutions of the New York Left. Critics can only speculate about the conditions that led to the novel's tepid reception. Some suppose that the lack of attention from reviewers was a result of Childress's association with Robeson who, by 1956 was blacklisted, his newspaper *Freedom* bankrupted. Others argue that the novel simply failed to reach the column's audience—working-class Black women—and was taken up by a white readership instead. The only extant review that scholars have located from *Masses and Mainstream*, a Marxist periodical, may provide some insight into the question of the novel's reception. Argues reviewer Helen Davis, "As a journalistic device, Mildred is a perfect instrument to examine lightly—but with depth of insight—many urgent current questions. Formally placed between the hard covers of a book, Mildred has been ushered to the doorstep of literature, and we let her in with the usual critical questions—how real are you?" (51). Besides the reviewer's assumptions about the novel's requisite task of representing "reality" and the psychological development of its protagonist, we might also infer an assumption more specifically related to Childress' rendering of a Black woman's affective performance. Davis continues: "One longs also to penetrate beyond the 'typical' view given of Mildred to the private agony and unique courage of such a woman" (51). Davis appears to take issue with the extent to which Childress shields her narrator's innermost thoughts from readers' view, regarding it as a failure to satisfy readers' desire to "penetrate" the affective performance that Mildred offers, into the depths of suffering and the truths of oppression. While the newspaper's Black readership celebrated Mildred's irony, irreverence, and resilience in the face of the oppressive working conditions imposed on domestic dayworkers, readers and reviewers of her novel,

white or middle-class or something else, expected something different and the book quickly fell out of cultural memory.

In recent years, following its "rediscovery" by Trudier Harris and its subsequent republication in 1986, critics have taken up the novel again, yet come to many of the same conclusions as its 1956 reviewer. Most readily reclaim Childress as an important figure for the Black radical tradition and theatre, finding value in her column's political commentary, or else its formal experimentation with Black vernacular and oral story-telling. Although Mildred is vaunted as a "working-class heroine," it is nearly critical consensus that Childress' writing itself is not very good, especially as it compared to her work as a playwright. Mary Helen Washington describes the text as "static and one-sided, without the complexity required of a novel" (Washington, "Alice Childress," 189). In many cases, critics treat the fact of Mildred's employment as a domestic day worker as nearly incidental, and none have considered how the column and its novelization intervened into ongoing debates regarding the value and representation of domestic service. Instead, they approach Childress's column and its novelization as mere instruments for the communist political program, given meaning only by their placement in Robeson's newspaper where they would encourage women readers to personally invest in and engage with the paper's otherwise polemic and political content.

Evaluating the novel according to a bourgeois aesthetic criteria, contemporary and historical critics have failed to consider how the form of the decidedly proletarian text imaginatively crafts a transgressive affective performance, speaks to its audience, how even in its book form, Mildred's speeches work towards cultivating a collective consciousness among domestic workers. A departure from the individual, psychological

domain in which the novel form conventionally takes place, Childress' *Like One of the Family* uses the formal conceit of the "conversation" to enunciate the experiences that, though they take place in the isolation of the employer's home, are common and shared among domestic workers and working-class Black women more generally. Rather than representing a character's personal development, their individuated conflict or turmoil, Childress' novel projects outward to engage readers in a participatory, self-reflective exchange—and readers were compelled to respond to Mildred's provocations. In a letter to Harris, Childress writes that "floods of beautiful mail came in from domestics (male and female) telling me of their own experiences" (Childress xxvi). In what follows, I will consider how Childress' novel stages a conversation with fellow domestic workers to systematically debunk the mythologies surrounding domestic service and Black women's labor. I argue that, through this experimental form, Childress' text breaks down the distinctions between labor and art, private and public, and challenges the notion that service would be redeemed through either specialization or professionalization. Rather, as a working-class monologue, the novel models an alternative, empowering affective performance for fellow workers, imagining radically different alternatives for performing social reproduction and care.

As this dissertation has shown, since the antebellum period, domestic workers were systematically silenced by legal, social, and cultural forces, and their capacity to self-represent was undermined by an emergent set of labor relations that laid claim to their affective and emotional labor. The figure of the Mammy, in particular, propagated the dangerous mythology that Black women's affective performances were a manifestation of their interiority, that their labor was an expression of their inherent super capacity for

love and care. According to Darlene Clark Hine, this resulted in Black women's strategic self-erasure, a cultural dissemblance in which they outwardly performed—in both their role as a domestic worker and even in their artistic work—an version of themselves that appeared as a personal disclosure in order to maintain and protect a private self. A century after Wilson's *Our Nig,* Childress' *Like One of the Family* is among the first novels written by a Black woman in the U.S. to use first-person narration. While there are many novels which "take us straight into the insides of Black women," (Omolade, 290) representing the psychological and epistemological violence that they endured in a racist, patriarchal society, Childress' is among the first to adopt what Susan Sniader Lanser calls a "personal voice." Her novel stages a performance but does not glimpse the speaker's interiority. Without a narrator nor explicit authorial presence, readers can engage with only the details of the story that Mildred cares to reveal, giving her apparently autonomous control over the shape and meaning of her words. As such, Childress' representation of Mildred stands in sharp contrast to contemporaneous representations of domestic workers that seek to get inside the minds of their protagonists.

Gwendolyn Brooks's character Maud Martha, for example, is famously silent, speaking only a few sentences of dialogue in a novel that otherwise represents her interior experiences of existential angst and anger. And Marvel Cooke went undercover, impersonating domestic day workers, for a journalistic investigation that sought to embody and therefore understand the suffering that these women endured. More perversely, Richard Wright's radio comedy "Man of All Work" featured a Black husband who, when his wife falls ill, impersonates her and goes to work as a domestic, so convincingly embodying the feminized worker that he just barely evades sexual assault.

These works seek to contest the damaging stereotypes associated with Black femininity that render the women as hyper visible bodies by providing instead insight into their minds and feelings. But this aesthetic politics risks reproducing the invasive demands of plantation masters, housewives, and abolitionists that laid claim on and prized Black women's love and suffering. Childress departs from this drive to uncover private thoughts and feelings, instead replacing the affective performance associated with the Mammy and faithful servant with *another* affective performance and representing for her readers how to mobilize their anger to transform their working conditions and reimagine their "place" in U.S. society.

What's more, the novel's protagonist and speaker dispels what Patricia Hills Collins describes as the "Black matriarchy thesis": the argument that "African-American women who failed to fulfill their traditional 'womanly' duties at home contributed to social problems in Black civil society" (Collins 75). Throughout the twentieth century, this argument was advanced by both Black intellectuals and organizers, *and* conservative white politicians. On the one hand, thinkers like DuBois viewed domestic service as a form of labor that robbed the Black community of maternal labor, and therefore a cause of economic oppression. On the other, late twentieth century political discourse mobilized the image of the "welfare queen" to blame bad Black mothers for their family's poverty. Childress, herself a former domestic worker, repudiates the sexual division of labor and the private sphere as the site of care and social reproduction. Instead, Mildred performs and recommends models of community care and sustenance, reclaiming domestic service not as a site of Black women's oppression and shame, but as site of political action.

Childress' *A Conversation from Life* is presented as a textual rendering of oral storytelling in which Childress uses Black vernacular—sometimes marked orthographically, whether in spelling or with punctuation—and a speech pattern evocative of orality to produce the effect that readers are overhearing Mildred's conversation with her good friend, Marge. Marge's responses can only be inferred, however, where there is a break in the text marked with an ellipses. Rather than addressing readers directly, Childress positions them to overhear a conversation between two friends and moves the narrative scene into the privacy of Mildred or Marge's homes, often their kitchens. The stories she tells and her self-representation therefore take place in a the context of a personal relationship, though made publicly available for readers of the Black newspaper. Denying us access to Mildred's thoughts, or even the confessional quality of the soliloquy, Childress instead shares Mildred's contributions to the humorous, contemplative, and often angry dialogue that would, one imagines, emerge among women who share a strong bond and experiences at work. A further layer of mediation, a component of the form of oral storytelling that the column makes textual, is that Mildred's words are retrospective and reflective, describing events that have already taken place out of view. Holding readers at arm's length in this way, however, does not have the effect of creating an ambivalence about the truthfulness or "reality" of Mildred's perspective. Rather, the intimate nature of the exchange, which often includes coy self-deprecation or playful banter, reinforces the veracity of what Mildred shares. With Marge, Mildred has nothing and no reason to hide. In difference even with the epistolary form, in which characters render a personal narrative in writing, the mode of conversation creates a temporality in which Mildred's words are available with immediacy and without

the care and time taken to craft prose or even write a letter. Through this formal conceit—the rendering of a Black domestic's voice as that of an autonomous and empowered oral storyteller—Childress challenges the presumption that Black women's humanity would be recovered in the excavation of their innermost selves, with tales of their internal suffering and unspeakable abuse. Instead, Childress' *A Conversation from Life* ascribes agency to Black domestics, giving Mildred the voice to narrate her own experiences, and even protest the misdeeds and exploitation of her employers. Not only a thematic exploration of the figure of the Mammy, but also a metafictional critique of the production of the Mammy, the novel engages in an analysis of the conditions of the novel's own production. By vesting a domestic worker with authorial power, Childress has Mildred do the work of both deconstructing figurative and rhetorical fantasies about Black women's labor and constructing anew an affective performance and aesthetic that reclaims Black womanhood for the Black community.

Childress' invention of Mildred sharply contrasts the television and film representations of Mammy characters that emerged in the mid-twentieth century, those that shored up cultural support for the reinstitution of the breadwinner-housewife ideal following World War II and continued to justify domesticity as a structure of Black subordination. Childress rejects the deferential Mammy that readers of Hurst and consumers of Aunt Jemima might have desired, both in terms of Mildred's affective performance as narrator, and in the content of Mildred's monologues. The character recognizes herself the influence of cultural productions on the conditions of her employment, explaining the behavior of a recent mistress to Marge: "this woman had read "Gone with the Wind" four times and…and…well, it's just given her ideas…that's

all…" (52). In 1939, Margaret Mitchell's Pulitzer prize winning novel, *Gone With the Wind*, was adapted for film, and went on to win ten Academy Awards. A work in which "the Old South and its Lost Cause were glamorized, sanitized, and merchandised" the novel and film represent the family's Black servant as a stereotypical Mammy, loving and caring for her charge, Scarlett O'Hara, with characteristic self-sacrificing, surrogate maternal love (Howells 943). In 1950, ABC Television adapted the CBS Radio series *Beulah*, a family sitcom in which a Mammy-type character that migrated to the Northeast from Louisiana, Beulah, cares for the Henderson family. Ostensibly the title character of the show, Beulah's personal life is nonetheless secondary to the needs of the family, as most episodes witness Beulah's attending to a conflict among the Hendersons.

These disparaging representations appear as the topic of discussion for Mildred and Marge several times through Childress' collection. In a piece called "About Those Colored Movies," Mildred talks about Black actors' limited access to roles, Hollywood representations of Africa, and the celebration of the Mammy. For Mildred, these representations come to bear on her relationships with employers, as she explains:

> They're gonna come walkin' up to me expectin' me to laugh and grin, sing 'em a song, do a little jig for 'em, act simple and foolish, be lovable and childish, be bowin' and scrapin' and keep 'em laughin' at every word I say. I can tell you now that if that was to happen, I would most likely forget that they to them notions from some play or book, I would be too mad to be calm and cool and explain to them just what kind of person I am! I would probably cuss 'em out before I could do anything else. "What's the matter with you?" I would say. "Don't come walkin' up to me and actin' like I'm some puppy-dog or pet bird or somethin'! Are you out of your mind?" And then they would back up from me and say to their friends, "They're not like we thought they was at all. Here we was thinkin' that they laugh and play all the time, and the truth is, they are *mean*! (127)

Her narrative connects the cultural representation of domestics with the conditions of their work, revealing that employers' perception of workers creates conditions in which

they could be easily dehumanized, treated as pets or children. As Mildred names the many affective and behavioral expectations of her employers, they become increasingly absurd, building towards Mildred's eventual angry outcry. Defying the stereotypical docility and self-denial of the Mammy trope, Mildred models what it might look like for a domestic worker to speak out against their employer, and even imagines her employers' potential response. When Mildred lays bare for her employers the patronizing assumptions that underlie their expectations, she doesn't expect them to fully understand their error, but does imagine that it might transform the way that they thereafter perceive domestic workers. Rather than an object designed for their amusement and contentedness, domestic workers might be recognized as agents with the capacity to rebuff their employers' unreasonable requests and racist assumptions—rather than kind, contented, and docile, they might be "mean."

While she only imagines talking about to her hypothetical employer in this piece, there are many instances in Mildred's storytelling in which she recounts conflict with the women that she works for, and, in these, Mildred is most often the victor. In a piece titled "Story Tellin' Time," Childress' column becomes especially self-reflexive, as Mildred describes what happened when an employer discovered her reading a "colored paper" like the one in which Childress' appears (119). Her mistress nervously approaches Mildred to express her disapproval, explaining "I feel a concern for you and I'd also like you to *know* all about the kind of people that will make trouble" (120). Before "Mrs. B" can go much further, Mildred cuts her off to tell her a story about "an old slavemaster" that owned a slave named Jim. Through the personal relationship between these characters, Mildred recounts the history of the U.S. since slavery, explaining how Master

continued to abuse Jim long after emancipation, yet also continued to expect his loyalty. She describes the institution of Jim Crow laws, the solicitation of Jim's participation in the World Wars, and ends the story by finally revealing the Master's lie. All the while, the Master had purported to want to keep the peace and do right by Jim, but in the end, explodes with anger: "'I'll fight you with my last breath, blood will run in the streets and I'll spend my remainin' days seein' that your children don't get into the schools!'" (122) After this story, Mildred explains: "I looked full at Mrs. B. and said, 'That is all to the story but the object of this tale is simple: *I know who makes trouble for me!*'" (122) Using her own words against her, Mildred renounces the gender alliance that her mistress tries to forge, and instead lays bare the history of racial violence that forms the basis of their relationship. Mildred challenges the revisionist history propagated by the myth of the Mammy and undermines Mrs. B.'s performance of maternal care by revealing it to be an act that white mistresses and masters have long used to disavow responsibility for the brutality that they enacted. Mrs. B., Mildred happily reports, is rendered almost speechless, able only to repeat a nicety that Mildred herself has spoken earlier in the story: "She said, 'Yes, it sure is a nice sunshiny day, and I hope it doesn't rain'" (122). Challenging the notion of the natural intimacy between white and Black women, the myth that the hierarchical relation between them secured happiness for both, Mildred's stories consistently focus on moments of tension and conflict in which she confronts mistresses with the material and political realities that their "concern" disguises. While some mistresses are able to accept the validity of Mildred's perspective and try to correct the error of their ways, many others, like Mrs. B., are unable even to face what Mildred's speech has revealed.

In addition to contesting the historical basis of the myth of the Mammy, as she did with her story about Jim, Mildred also consistently challenges employers who mistake her labor for an act of love by reclaiming her labor as valuable work that she does for a wage, not out of affection. In the novel's first piece, "Like One of the Family," Mildred argues with her employer Mrs. C., who, in the presence of her friends, fawns over Mildred, drawing on the age-old rhetoric that framed their relationship as one of mutual affection. Says Mrs. C.: "'We *just* love her! She's *like* one of the family and she *just adores* our little Carol! We don't know *what* we'd do without her! We don't think of her as a servant!'" (1) Once the guests had left, Mildred confronts her employer, explaining that: "In the first place, you do not *love* me; you may be fond of me, but that is all…In the second place, I am *not* just like one of the family at all! The family eats in the dining room and I eat in the kitchen" (2). Mildred cites the spatial segregation of the house, which distinguishes them based on class and race, as evidence that theirs is not a familial relation, exposing the incongruity of the myth and the material conditions that structure their relationship. This transgression of propriety is amplified in Mildred's action, as she approaches her mistress in the living room—a space in which Mildred's subordination is expected—where she draws up a chair to confront her as an equal. Mildred contests the interpretation of her work as an expression of her love, arguing: "You think it is a compliment when you say, 'We don't think of her as a servant…' but after I have worked myself into a sweat cleaning the bathroom and the kitchen… making the beds… cooking the lunch… washing the dishes and ironing Carol's pinafores… I do not feel like no weekend house guest. I feel like a servant, and in the face of that I have been meaning to ask you for a slight raise which will make me feel much better toward everyone here and

make me know my work is appreciated" (3). Mildred undermines the hierarchical relation that structured their relationship as mistress and servant, even under the guise of "love." Approaching her mistress as an equal, she performs instead a relationship of mutual recognition, confronting Mrs. C. with the fact of her labor as labor, and uses this opening to improve her working conditions by securing a raise. Bringing that "nasty word *money"* (96) into the conversation, Mildred explains that if her employers wish to express their gratitude, or improve the affective relationships among the family and their servant, they should do so in the form of a wage increase—not through performances of affection by invoking platitudes and, worse, harmful stereotypes. With this story, Mildred challenges the commodification of Black women's labor in the figure of the Mammy by countering myths and mythical language with the material realities of labor, contesting the erasure of her labor as an act of love to remind employers of the truth: that she works for them because it is economically necessary.

In this first story, Mrs. C concedes to Mildred's demands and says that she will ask her husband about the raise, a fact which appears to astonish Marge who Mildred says has "messed up a buttonhole" while listening to the story. And while it is not always the case that Mildred is able to convince her employers of their wrongdoing, or transform their perspective, Mildred is again and again able to make these women look at best foolish, and at worst monstrous, through displays of righteous indignation which shock, amaze, and amuse Marge. Critics have registered suspicion with what they describe as the "unlikeliness of the stories' happy endings," interpreting this as evidence of the column's "unrealistic" or "rosy" view.[30] Rather than a reinscription of the mythology of

[30] See Mary Conde, "Some African-American Fictional Reponses to 'Gone with the Wind,'" *The Yearbook of English Studies*, vol 26, 1996, p. 211.

"sisterhood" among white and Black women in the house, however, these stories might be better understood as efforts to cultivate collective consciousness among domestic workers and create a new fantasy in which they overcome the fear of violent retaliation that stopped many domestics from speaking out. Consider, for example, a piece titled "Discontent," in which Mildred recounts to Marge a conflict with another working woman that complains when she hears a soapbox speaker decrying Jim Crow and unemployment that "if he's discontented he oughta go where he'll be content! After all, everybody ain't dissatisfied!" (175) Mildred argues with the woman:

> "Listen here, lady," I says, "you work eight hours a day instead of twelve or fourteen because a gang of dissatisfied folks raised sand until they made it law, and if they had all gone somewhere else you would still be on the job now instead of on your way home for supper.
>
> "Discontented brothers and sisters made little children go to school instead of workin' in the factory. A whole lot of angry, discontented women fixed things so that we womenfolk could vote. All these different denominations of churches were set up because folks were discontented with one or another of them. Look at these housing projects—they were built because some folks were fightin' mad about livin' in slums. And you get paid a certain amount of money per hour 'cause folks were discontented with less, and if you belong to a union you know full well that it wasn't started by folks that loved their bosses" (175).

Here, Childress stages a scene in which Mildred debunks the common interpretation of dissent as a sign of ingratitude, a logic mobilized by capitalists and housewives alike. In her story, she situates the present situation of working-class Black men and women in the context of long history of political and social struggle, justifying their "discontent" as generative rather than self-defeating. Anger, she claims, is mobilized to secure political and economic rights, as well as the resources necessary for social reproduction—housing, education, and religion. While Marge expects that the woman Mildred argued with would be angry with her, Mildred reports: "All she said was, 'My, I never looked at it that way, I

guess you're right'" (176). The story functions to reconfigure the desires of readers that are reluctant to try to improve their conditions through collective action *and* provide a model for already class-conscious readers to bring their fellow domestics into the movement. Rather than interpret Mildred's happy endings as unrealistic, we might instead recognize them as articulating the utopianism of communist revolution, participating in the reimagination and transformation of material conditions through shared struggle.

But her columns, and the novel that collects and revises them, are not mere propaganda or political messaging. There are many pieces that recount scenes of friendship, intellectual and artistic pursuits, family strife and support, and community-building. Rejecting the Aunt Jemima story in which Black women exist only in their relationship to white families, Childress' represents a multidimensional narrator whose life far exceeds the confining parameters of white domesticity. It is the friendship between Mildred and Marge—and not the relationship between Mildred and her employers—that is held most sacred. In "All About My Job," Mildred says: "Marge, I sure am glad that you are my friend. … No, I do not want to borrow anything or ask any favors and I wish you'd stop bein' suspicious every time somebody pays you a compliment. … I'm glad that you are my friend because everybody needs a friend but I guess I need one more than most people….Well, in the first place I'm colored and in the second place I do housework for a livin' and so you can see that I don't need a third place because the first two ought to be enough reason for anybody to need a friend" (33). Interrupting the sentiment with a joke that indicates the good feelings between the women, Childress here shows that it is not at work that Black women find fulfillment;

rather, the fact of her being "colored" and doing housework, it is implied, produce such a sense of alienation that she needs a friend like Marge, who shares her occupation, as a source of comfort. She continues: "Why, I do believe I'd lose my mind if I had to come home after a day of hard work, rasslin' 'round in other folks' kitchen if I did not have a friend to talk to when I got here…. Girl, don't you move 'cause it would be terrible if I couldn't run down a flight of steps and come in here to chew the fat in the evenin'" (34). Mildred's relationship with Marge, staged as more akin to familial than that of her relationship with her employers, challenges the longstanding assumption that if Black women were working as domestics, their care and attention would be too divided and they would be rendered incapable of caring their own families. As a single woman, Mildred has no husband or children of her own, and therefore does not perform the conventional of wife and mother. Instead, taking care outside of the realm of the nuclear family, and the housewife-breadwinner ideal, Mildred and Marge find the resources necessary for social and physical restoration in female friendship.

In her work as a domestic, Mildred may not find meaning, nor the mutual care that the mythology of the Mammy and the plantation family promised. But, as Childress renders her, she does gain access to the capital necessary to support her community. In a piece titled "Buyin' Presents," Mildred recounts her difficulty in finding a suitable present for her friend Angie and her husband with only five dollars. On her shopping trip, she witnessed another woman grocery shopping, who appears to be forced to make economical decisions at the expense of pleasure: "Marge, I followed her all around the store and saw her look long at the coffee and then buy a package of tea. She handled some of the fresh fruit and then bought a box of dried prunes. She stopped in front of the

strignbeans and then picked out a rusty old turnip" (17). This scene inspires Mildred who decides to buy Angie and her family "a big, beautiful sirloin steak" and "the best kind of coffee," "sweet biscuits," and a carton of cigarettes. She buys the children games, puzzles, and stories. In addition to supplying the family with sustenance, Mildred uses her wages to provide them with objects of pleasure that many economically precarious families would have had to otherwise gone without. She explains "Since we feel we must give gifts, wouldn't it be nice if everybody's pantry self was full after it was all over?" (18) In the end, Marge, too, takes seriously the suggestion that the community take up the practice of gift giving as a way of sustained the community, offering Mildred some coffee and rice. When the women take the wages earned as a domestic and redistribute gifts and resources among their community, they transgress the foundational designs of domestic labor relations that required servants' subordination to the interests of the white family. Childress imagines an alternative system for sharing in the labor of social reproduction, moving it outside of the private sphere and the family form to advocate for a broader network of mutual aid.

Breaking down the dichotomies between private and public, mind and body, art and labor which were long used to understand domestic servants as simply too intellectually degraded and economically oppressed to make art, Childress locates the creation of art in the act of labor, as Mildred crafts her experiences of labor into stories *and* tells her stories as she's laboring. An especially effective piece that demonstrates this is Childress' "The Pocketbook Game," in which Mildred tells Marge about how she dealt with an employer that clung to her purse the entire time that Mildred worked. She begins with the ironic apostrophe: "Marge…day's work is an education!" (26) Already undermining the notion

that domestic labor was bodily labor that deadened the intellect, Mildred promises the story will demonstrate how working in other people's homes "really keeps your mind sharp tryin' to watch for what folks will put over on you" (26). But Marge interrupts the tale to ask for Mildred's help: "What?… No, Marge, I do not what to help shell no beans, but I'd be more than glad to stay and have supper with you, and I'll wash the dishes after. Is that all right?…Who put anything other on who? … Oh yes! It's like this" (26). The interruption has the effect of placing the act of storytelling in the scene of domestic labor and social reproduction. Moreover, while they disrupt Mildred, for readers, Marge and her beans are an integral part of the story that contribute to its irony and humor. As Mildred continues, Marge persistently interrupts with her beans, her surprise, disdain, and laughter, and readers, at once, identify with Marge as a listener, and imagine her as a part of the comedic duo. Mildred says of her mistress: "she'd be propped up in a chair with her handbag double wrapped tight around her wrist, and from room to room with that purse hugged to her bosom…. Yes, girl! This happens every time! No, there's *nobody* there but me and her" (26). Marge, aghast at the employer, can hardly believe what she's hearing and is wrapt listening to Mildred, much like readers, as she proceeds towards the story's punchline. Mildred has to interrupt her own story to tell Marge to "keep shellin' the beans so we can eat!" (27) In the scene she describes, Mrs. E has asked Mildred to head downstairs to fetch the super and Mildred decides "*Today was the day!"*, contriving a theatrical plan to expose the racist assumptions that underlie her employer's behavior. Mildred pretends to go down the stairs, but instead of completing the task, she tells Marge:

> I rushed back to the door and knocked on it as hard and frantic as I could. She flung open the door sayin', "What's the matter? Did you see the

> super?"… "No," I says, gaspin' hard for breath, "I was almost downstairs when I remembered … *I left my pocketbook!"*
>
> With that I dashed in, grabbed my purse and then went down to get the super! Later, when I was leavin' she says real timid-like, "Mildred, I hope that you don't think that I distrust you because…" I cut her off quick… "That's all right, Mrs. E…, I understand. 'Cause if I paid anybody as little as you pay me, I'd hold my pocketbook too!" (27)

Mildred turns her labor into a drama, and her role as servant into a character that she performs, staging a scene that, through irony and parody, reveals the myriad implications that underlie her employer's behavior. Appropriating the performative component of domestic service to parody her employer's proprietary behavior, Mildred ironically reverses their positions, figuring her employer as the potential thief. In her final line—which nearly causes Marge to drop her beans all over the floor—Mildred even relates the employer's tight grasp on her purse strings with her own low wages, connecting her Mrs. E's racism with her miserly attitude. As she explains to Marge elsewhere in a conversation about laboring hands, Mildred finds art in the everyday: "you can take any article and trace it back like that and you'll see the power and beauty of laboring hands" (62). Eschewing the bourgeois distinction between aesthetic and labor, or art and the market, Childress' conversations advance an image not of the maid that overcame her circumstances to become an artist, but the maid as artist.

While for many mid-century domestic day workers, their life and work were most aptly described as "slavery," Childress' novel alerts us to the ways in which the restructuring of service as casual work might have radical potential. As service was transformed from a lifelong appointment to day work, it became differently exploitative, replicating the conditions of slavery in which Black workers were entirely dependent on white families for their livelihood. As we have seen, the Progressive era attempts to

specialize and professionalize service, transforming it from a "labor of love" to a market transaction, assumed that the free market was a potential site of liberation from the confines of the domestic sphere. But domestic education and the specialization of domestic skills were also tools for the subjection of women workers, mobilized by the state to produce a serving class population comprised of immigrant, Native, and Black women that gained social citizenship through the acquisition of domestic skills. Recognizing this fact, Childress' Mildred occupies and speaks from this position to contest the mystifying rhetoric of love which erased domestics' labor and subordination. Mildred lays bare the social, cultural, and economic forces that coalesce to position Black domestics "like one of the family," and shows how domestics might use this position to gain access to capital, redistribute this wealth among their community, reeducate employers, and reconfigure their desires away from the breadwinner-housewife ideal, and towards collective care and political action.

CONCLUSION

I have attempted, in this study, to offer an account of the cultural production of women's work as a social category and political concept in the industrial U.S. The archive of literary and cultural materials examined are suggestive of the contingency and mutability of the concept, illustrative of how the boundary between private and public spheres of life has been mediated by prevailing definitions of labor, but never fixed. Fictional renderings of women's work urge us to consider how the affective performance and emotional labor involved in service are unnatural and alienating form of labors, in contradiction to the nineteenth-century discourses that figured care and love as natural expressions of gender, class, or race. As reproductive labor is redistributed and reorganized, as a result of the introduction of new technologies, industries, the passage of labor legislation and civil rights protections, and the restructuring of capitalist modes of production, the discourses and tropes used to render women's work are transformed, but not abandoned. As we have seen in the case of clerical labor, piecework, and domestic service, even as the boundary between private and public spheres was interrupted and transgressed by working women, the rhetoric of affective bonds and the metaphors of kinship persisted in shaping the labor relations among workers, bosses, and customers. For scholars of U.S. literature and culture, this study offers a new approach to studying the cultural production of labor in different historical moments and context, including our own.

Investigations into present forms of work often trace our historical antecedents to the industrial past with the emergence of free labor. However, as my project has demonstrated, it may be far more illuminating to consider the ways that today's worker,

who confronts the affective demands of service even in professional contexts, is the descendent of the domestic servant. If we read this dissertation as a "history of the present," it is less that "we are all fast food workers now," as Annelise Orleck has argued, than "we are all women workers now" (Orleck). How might this suggestion change our perspective on contemporary practices, institutions, and rhetoric that figure the relationship between self and work? To look into the past of our present, my dissertation has suggested, would require an investigation into the cultural production of present forms of work. But how would we go about assembling an archive of contemporary materials that participate in the cultural production of women's work in a "post-industrial" economy in which nearly all workers engage in service labor?

Since, as Kathi Weeks has argued, "work" has become a depoliticized category, naturalized as an unavoidable fact of our economic and social structures, and service labor is still implicitly regarded as "non-work," there appears to be a limited number of cultural texts that take work as their subject. More often than not, in their marketing, novels that feature service labor subordinate concerns around work to narratives about personal strife, growth, and triumph. However, approaching mass culture and literature more broadly within the framework that this dissertation has developed, we may begin to *see* work where it might not otherwise appear to be. Consider these recent Academy Award winners: *Parasite*, *Roma,* and *Green Book* have all been featured prominently in U.S. popular media. Even as the films of Bong Joon-Ho and Alfonso Cuarón are introduced as "foreign films," they appear to U.S. audiences as familiar stories: *Roma* romanticizes the love between a domestic and the children she cares for; *Green Book* advances an image of harmonious cross-racial social relations found in service; and

Parasite explore the age-old anxiety of the employing classes: that the servants are not who they claim to be, that their affection is merely a front for more malicious intentions. At the same time, a spat of psychological thrillers about Uber rides gone wrong have been released, giving voice to latent anxieties about the faux-intimacy cultivated in service relations. Each follows a recently unemployed protagonist that takes a job as a driver for a gig company like Uber and ends up in the car with a sociopathic murderer. The films rehearse the logic of economic dependency as a threat to society, self-reliance, in some cases even articulating it as a sexual threat to a vulnerable woman.

Less literary texts feature service work, but Merritt Tierce's 2014 *Love Me Back* is a notable exception: a semi-autobiographical novel about waitressing in Texas, *Love Me Back* was a critically acclaimed novel of which its author remarks: "I Published My Debut Novel to Critical Acclaim—and Then I Promptly Went Broke." In an article for *Marie Claire,* Tierce explains: "the reality about making money as a writer is you hustle the fuck out of freelance pieces like this one. Or you teach. Or you drive a bus. Or someone supports you. Or you're independently wealthy. The reality is that somehow you have money, and somehow you write" ("Published" n.p.). In response to Tierce's revelation, we might ask, how have the conditions of the culture industries constrained waitresses' participation? And how does Tierce's work intervene in the cultural production of the waitress, the restaurant, and service work in general? To pursue this question, we might begin with an analysis of the material conditions of restaurant work.

The restaurant industry involves the food preparation necessary to sustain life, but also reproduces service relationships among customers and workers who are compelled to perform affective or emotional labor. While there is a near endless amount of cultural

artifacts dedicated to the representation of food, eating, and dining, there is little about restaurant labor itself. In public discourse, the service industry features most prominently in political debates about the minimum wage, as consumers, workers, and companies debate the economic and social value of fast food workers. Undergirding these debates are, clearly, longstanding assumptions about feminized and racialized forms of service and care, those which, in contemporary parlance, might be called "un-skilled." The logic of "skilled" versus "unskilled" operates in a similar way as the logic of domesticity which rendered housework the "emanation of Woman," presuming that the labor performed by service workers is merely a natural activity for their bodies and dispositions, one that required no "professional" training or the cultivation of a new skill.

While this logic is surely reproduced by racist and classist social attitudes, it might also be an effect of the affective labor involved in the production of a service experience. According to a pamphlet, *Abolish Restaurants: A Worker's Critique of the Food Service Industry*, put together by an anarchist collective, Prole, the restaurant delivers the experience of service and the production of a meal through multiple forms of self-erasure. Spatially segregated in familiar ways, and according to terms that are oddly domestic, the design of the restaurant conceals the manual labor involved in the preparation of food by separating the kitchen from the dining area, while also creating an experience of leisure for customers by enforcing a culture of accommodation among its waitresses, hostesses, and bartenders. According to Prole, the "front of house" staff, the waitresses, bartenders, and hostesses that greet customers and deliver their order to the cooking staff is usually "expected to look presentable, and be able to deal with the customers. Often are educated, and have useless degrees in things like 'English,' 'History'—or worse yet—'Art

History'" (20). Of the kitchen staff, Prole writes: "It is common for the entire back of the house to be illegal immigrants working under the table. They don't have any contact with the customers, and therefore don't have to look like or speak the same language as the customers" (19). The kitchen is the loudest, hottest, and most cramped part of the house where all of the "dirty work" takes place—prepping ingredients, cooking, and cleaning. Segregating the space of the restaurant such that the "foreign" workers are excised from the customers' affective experience, the restaurant appears to reproduce the organization of the nineteenth-century home that concealed domestic workers in the kitchen, enforcing a classed and racialized hierarchy through the management of spatial boundaries.

Tierce's novel represents the life and work of Marie, a new mother working in various restaurants is self-interrupting and temporally disorganized ways, reproducing the psychological and emotional experience of getting through a shift. Marie enters the service industry young following an unexpected pregnancy, swift marriage, and derailment of plans to attend Yale University. A somewhat tragic figure, Marie is insecure about her abilities as a mother, isolated and depressed. Her story of service labor is a story of self-destructive behaviors: drug abuse, self-harm, and a barrage of experiences of sexual violence. She is a narrator with whom readers in different positions may find sympathetic and relatable, or else frustrating and cold.

The novel recounts Marie's attempts to navigate her new responsibilities in the "domestic sphere" and the restaurant industry, both of which demand a new performance of femininity as a wife, mother, and waitress. Of her second waitressing job at Chili's, the narrator recounts: "I learned a lot of things while I worked there. I learned how to sweep aggressively and efficiently. I learned how to anticipate and consolidate, which is all

waiting tables is. I learned how to use work to forget. I learned how to orgasm, and I learned I was a bad wife" (33). In her narration, Marie describes her sexual pleasure and the demands of domestic coupling in terms of the acquisition of skills. For her, the two aspects of life intertwine, becoming inseparable processes. The conventional distinctions made between work and home are totally undermined by her experience, since they share common demands on her in terms of bodily sacrifice and the suppression of desires. In fact, she comes to prefer being at work, since there she was capable of meeting the expectations of her customers, whereas at home she felt unable to fulfill her duties as wife and mother. She awakens one morning and says to her husband: "This isn't real. I'm in the wrong life" (167). Marie experiences the pressure to love, care, and be affectively responsible to her husband and child as an impossible task. She resents the imposition of domesticity so much that she begins to redesign her apartment to look more like the restaurant, picking up extra chairs and tables and bringing them home. She thinks: "I felt like I had been living in restaurants forever and would never escape so I don't know why I wanted to feel restaurant at home too" (167).

Tierce's novel, perhaps inadvertently, reproduces the social and economic structures that produce of the restaurant. Just as actual "front of house" staff are the only visible workers at actual restaurants, so too in Tierce's novel. The "back of house staff" only exist in the background of Marie's story; they play a supporting role but are generally absent in the narrative of her experience. Marie's relationships with the Mexican and Salvadoran bussers and dishwashers that are structured by racial and class positioning. She speaks Spanish, as a consequence of her privileged upbringing, and experiences empathy for them, acknowledging their mistreatment. Her pathway to this

affective bond is complicated: slated to attend Yale, during her senior year of high school, Marie goes to Mexico on a missionary trip where she becomes pregnant. Although Marie's "fallen" from her elite position, her relationship to the back of house staff is nonetheless uneasy.

The scene serves as a curious metonym for the distribution of labor that has occurred in the era of globalization, as well as the methods of self-erasure that have developed in relation to new economic and social conditions. Workers in transnational networks participate in the service economy, but often on unequal footing and under differently exploitative conditions. Although all customer service workers all face the demand to perform affective and emotional labor, these demands are more acutely felt by "foreign" workers who confront the racism, xenophobia, and classist entitlement of customers. Workers in call centers in India, for instance, undergo accent, affect, and cultural training in order to speak with customers in the U.S. and U.K. They adopt a new life pattern, beginning their day when the sun rises in New York, a form of alienation that A. Aneesh describes as "disintegration of the self." "Although the story of globalization is often a story of integrations, connections, and flows," he argues, "it is difficult to ignore disintegrations, contradictions, and divides that constitute the experience of globalization to a similar degree" (528). Sustaining the "proper state of mind in others," to quote Hochschild, in the context of globalization requires a distinctly exploitative form of affective labor, but one that is nonetheless justified and modeled on historical service relationships. In order to serve customers, the call center workers assimilate Western service practices, attempting to efface their own accents and customs, adopting the idiomatic expressions of another culture in order to conceal their cultural and linguistic

differences, and even altering their somatic experiences of time and place in order to accommodate.

Globalized service practices do not merely emanate from the U.S., of course, but are cultivated through the social and economic interactions among workers, whether through migration, the circulation of goods, or cultural exchange. And, as Aviad Raz has argued, service culture and the demands that employers make are often specific to local contexts, emerging from a national culture. Although "smile training" has become a global standard, Raz shows that the employers' and customers' expectations of service workers vary widely between the U.S., where managers will settle for a phony smile, and Japan, where employers shame workers whose smile appears to be in conflict with their underlying "spirit." Nonetheless, when "foreign" images of service appear in novels, movies, or television, readers and critics in the U.S. interpret the images accordingly to a distinctly Western aesthetic criteria. For instance, Sayaka Murata's novel *Convenience Store Woman,* a 2016 best-seller and award-winning novel in Japan, achieved the status of "international best seller" in 2018 when it was translated into English by Ginny Tapley Takemori for a U.S. readership. Hailed by reviewers as the "7-11 *Madame Bovary*," a "Gothic romance between a 'misfit and a store,'" and positioned among renowned literary figures like Kafka and Beckett, Murata's novel is said by critics to elevate the "mundane" experiences of customer service to new heights. Holding the text in high esteem, readers appear pleased with its aesthetic indulgences and formal experimentation, which they place in either Romantic or Modernist traditions.

Critics are, in general, delighted with the novel's narrator, Keiko who is avowedly "not normal," a woman in her mid-thirties with no interest in romance, sex, or marriage.

Keiko's experience as a convenience store woman has utterly transformed her into, she says, *herself*. At work, she finally discovers her true self by imitating her coworkers, perfecting the warm and accommodating inflection that her manager prescribes for interactions with customers. The first-person narrator adopts a flat, cold, and analytical mode as she surveys her surroundings, an affect that is sharply juxtaposed to her performance of congeniality that she embodies at work. Off the clock, however, Keiko struggles in social relationships, since she has no proper "script" to abide. She offends and rubs people in her life the wrong way. The "real" Keiko is an alienated misfit who conforms to the demands of her boss but rejects the social demands of her family and community. In interviews about the book, Murata explains that the narrative emerged out of her own experience as a convenience store worker, the job that she held while she wrote eleven novels and two pieces of non-fiction. Reviewers are eager to draw out the comparison between Murata and Keiko, who are both cultural "misfits" insofar as they struggle to abide normative gender expectations. Murata distinguishes herself from Keiko, however, in their affective performances: who Keiko is, she says, ultimately a strong-willed "hero," Murata herself professes "timidity" and loneliness, finding expression in writing that she cannot muster in social life.

Cultural reception and interpretation of Murata's book point us to more questions and lines of inquiry that we might consider in order to understand how notions of women's work and the culture of women's' work have changed in the context of globalization and the expansion of the service economy. How has the ubiquity of service changed readers' experience of literature by and about service workers? Conversely, how do writers and other cultural workers craft their self-presentation in a literary marketplace where

workers across industries and professions perform affective and emotional labor? Despite the many historical and cultural differences, it appears to remain true that readers' aesthetic preferences are informed by an understanding of service labor as both an extension of and alienation from one's private self. They value in Keiko the apparent ease with which she discloses for them her "inner most self," the private feelings of alienation and angst that she shields behind her company smile.

This study, tracing the emergence and transformation of the concept of women's work, has demonstrated the continuity of the langauge of love, affection, and self-sacrifice for representing acts of service and care into the 21st century. In establishing the myths upon which the concept of women's work was founded, it also establishes the possibility of revising contemporary understandings of labor, based on the analysis of its structural and cultural conditions which are illuminated by fiction.

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