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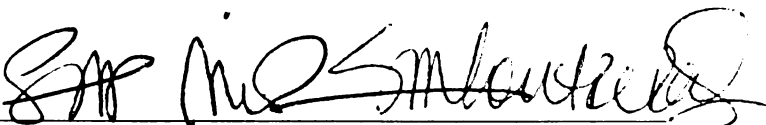
STUCK IN GO: THE RADICAL EXCLUSION OF 'MOBILE
WOMEN' IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY U.S. LITERATURE

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STUCK IN GO: THE RADICAL EXCLUSION OF 'MOBILE WOMEN' IN
TWENTIETH-CENTURY U.S. LITERATURE

By

Jennifer Nichols

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ABSTRACT

STUCK IN GO: THE RADICAL EXCLUSION OF 'MOBILE WOMEN' IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY U.S. LITERATURE

By

Jennifer Nichols

This dissertation examines twentieth-century American cultural representations of itinerant women laborers, or “mobile women,” arguing that textual representations of migratory women provide a device for critiquing the relationship of woman to both home and work. The concept of (being at) home – in one’s private residence, as a citizen in the homeland, in one’s own body – resonates in discussions about the itinerant working-class female subject, whose labor not only estranges her from her own home, but leads her, as a domestic worker, a transnational migrant, a prostitute, into intimate knowledge of other houses, nations, and bodies. At once included and excluded, hers is the ideal position from which to examine the discourse of “purity” embedded in the discourses of class, national identity, and gender.

An analysis of the cultural, historical, and economic significance of women’s mobility in Western society is followed by four case studies that probe the uses of mobile women characters as narrative devices and political metaphors. Chapter One employs Theresa Serber Malkiel’s *The Diary of a Shirtwaist Striker* (1910) to illustrate the links forged between “foreign-ness” and prostitution in times of increased national anxiety about immigration. Chapter Two builds on this link by analyzing the metaphorical significance of prostitution in Ken Loach’s film, *Bread and Roses* (2000); the film’s critical commentary on contemporary labor and immigration issues relies on uncritical assumptions about women’s sex(ed) work. Chapter Three argues that the graphic scenes

of poverty in *Madeleine: An Autobiography* (1919), a prostitute's anonymous memoir, ironically mimic the narrative conventions of the "prostitute confessional" to critique middle-class women's social purity campaigns of that era; the narrator's literal movement around the country metaphorically maps the relationship of a culture of consumption to a culture of gender exploitation. Chapter Four situates Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy: A Novel* (1990) as an American working-class story, reading its "mobile" textual strategy of multiple meanings, free association, and shifting viewpoints as a critique of the latent imperialist, assimilative impulses in U.S. progressive political culture. Collectively, these case studies demonstrate how mobile women characters implicitly and explicitly challenge the limits and exclusions of labor and feminist movements.

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For my sister, Jaquie, who really was always stuck in go, and
for my parents, with love

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Cabby and Cecil made sure I remembered the important things (playtime, naptime, mealtime). My family – Jamie, Justin, Jarel, Jimmy, and my parents, Jim and Renee – kept me laughing and kept me honest; to them I owe the greatest thanks.

This dissertation bears the mark of many fingerprints, but the responsibility for any and all mistakes rests solely with me.

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INTRODUCTION

Female freedom is always sexual freedom, even when – especially when – it is seen through the prism of economic freedom.

-- Toni Morrison, *Sula*

I use the term *displacement* to read against the grain of travel, that is, to question the modernisms of representations of movement, location, and homelessness in contemporary critical practices. . . Immigrants, refugees, exiles, and the urban homeless also move in and out of these discourses as metaphors, tropes, and symbols but rarely as historically recognized producers of critical discourses themselves.

-- Caren Kaplan, "On Location"

A specter is haunting American literature – the specter of the mobile woman. Rarely commented on in literary or cultural criticism, the mobile woman character nevertheless is a frequent element of American cultural production. She inhabits Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906) as the foreign inmates of his nightmarish depiction of brothels; she takes the lead role in the Academy Award-winning film, *Silkwood* (1981), as a divorced, migratory, overtly sexualized woman worker. The prostitutes in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970) are mobile women, as is Fannie Hurst's almost wordless, domestic servant in *Lummo* (1923). Meridel LeSueur's classic working-class novel, *The Girl* (written in the 1930s, first published in 1978), epitomizes the mobile woman turned heroine, and Agnes Smedley's fictionalized autobiography, *Daughter of Earth* (1929), includes the protagonist's Aunt Helen, a prostitute, as a critical secondary character. Ann Petry's *The Street* (1946) and Janet Fitch's *White Oleander* (1999) both have mobile woman protagonists. Just as some of these examples are autobiographical or biographical sketches, the mobile woman in literature reflects the experiences of her real-world counterpart: living on society's margins, she is cast as an illegal, un-American, and

unnatural threat to the dominant public discourses in the U.S. surrounding issues such as immigration (she represents the free flow of people across borders), citizenship (she lacks social recognition and equal access to the basic rights to labor, live, receive education and medical care), and sexuality (she demands women's free use of their bodies without sanction, violence, or coercion). Although the political trajectories of their stories vary, one theme remains constant: as my dissertation title, *Stuck in Go*, implies, these migratory women are "stuck" on the outside of society by their own transience and uncontainability; even so, their appearance and reappearance in working-class literature suggests the extent of the anxieties such difference and nonconformity produce.

Like the paths mobile women characters weave through American literature, the trajectory of this project's major argument is long and winding (though not, I hope, long-winded). To help the reader wend through its twists and turns, I propose the following main points as key features of my thesis: 1) in an American literary canon that is largely male, middle-class, and Caucasian, racialized, laboring women are virtually invisible, being misrepresented in both the figure of "the worker," who is male by default, and in middle-class-based images of womanhood; 2) lacking representation, working-class women characters thus travel back and forth between the worlds of commercial (male, public) and non-commercial (female, private) labor, a migration that metaphorically describes their homelessness in U.S. literature; 3) accordingly, as misfit characters, representations of working-class women are frequently reduced to a binary between the "good" character who aspires to middle-class acceptability and the "bad" character who rejects these values; 4) works that include the figures I am calling "mobile women" complicate this binary by destabilizing the assumptions on which such polarities rest; 5)

in U.S. history in particular, women's mobility – physical, economic, sexual – is seen as a challenge to the conservation of the perceived moral purity of the nation in times of swift social change; in this context, sex work and immigration have been imbricated as a double threat; 6) this threat is enabled by the way “mobility” itself has been conceptualized, especially, though not only, in a gendered context; and, 7) mobile women characters provide access points for examining the assumptions on which this “threat” is grounded. The chapters to follow provide four distinct case studies of mobile women characters' radical critique of the dominant depictions of working-class women in American cultural production.

The Working-Class Woman (Not) in American Literature

As any student of American literature is aware, the national literary canon of the United States overflows with stories that celebrate, critique, or reinscribe the long-heralded American values of rugged individualism, fairness, freedom, and the rewards of hard work, values that are noted in virtually every major text from deTocqueville's *Democracy in America* (1835) to Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851) to Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) and which echo a mainstream, liberal, middle-class sensibility. While many feminist scholars have made the observation that “all literary discourse is gender specific” (Marxist-Feminist Literature Collective [M-FLC] 348), Judith Fetterley pointedly notes in her groundbreaking 1978 work, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction*, that “American literature is male” (xii). The core American ideals mentioned above have been historically available to be practiced by men only, and as Fetterley neatly demonstrates in her reading of several canonical American

authors, U.S. literature by and large not only offers a specifically American protagonist that is inherently male, but also assumes a readership that is male-identified, too; such privileging of the male perspective, Fetterley explains, “immasculates” women readers, teaching them to “think as men, to identify with a male point of view, and to accept as normal and legitimate a male system of values, one of whose central principles is misogyny” (xx). Reflecting on women readers’ intellectual identification with male characters (because the female types available in the American canon rarely resonate with women’s own experiences of themselves), she adds, “‘Intellectually male, sexually female, one is in effect no one, nowhere, immasculated’” (xxii). I draw on Fetterley here because in her analysis of the woman reader’s split identification and its consequent mental “homelessness” (one is “nowhere”), I see a useful parallel construction for understanding the way working-class women have been split between their commercial (paid) and non-commercial (domestic) labors, a divide that is similarly an issue of the dominant cultural values surrounding gender in the U.S. (values premised on middle-class social expectations) and one that has rendered working-class women virtually invisible in American literature and culture.

Let me explain this further: the history of the nation is reflected in the history of its literature, and as a nation, America grew up alongside, and because of, capitalism’s own growth. The rise of industrialization in the mid-1800s, and more so, after the Civil War, greatly impacted women and the structures of family and home. Middle-class women were restricted to the home and to their new role as consumers, while working-class women were drawn into production as cheap laborers: “in both cases women were excluded from ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange” (M-

FLC 330). Although Friedrich Engels claimed that women's mass entry into the industrial workforce would end male domination, in part because it would "abolish" the individual family as the basic economic unit of society ("Origin" 744), this proved a false hope; contemporary feminist scholars have rehearsed this failure *ad infinitum*. Suffice it here to say that a wide range of feminist researchers recognize class as an inherently gendered phenomenon, and gender as a class system, yet many also believe that economic analysis alone is inadequate to the task of explaining the persistence of patriarchal hegemonies (M-FLC 330), such as the marriage contract or notions of romantic love. As Carole Pateman cogently argues in *The Sexual Contract* (1988), women are expected to abide by social contracts that they have not been party to creating and to whose advantages their access has been historically limited, including the institutional powers of education, law, economics, and government – structures that have greatly contributed to women's oppression. Class analysis does not sufficiently account for the specific subjectivities of the female body or the discourses that overdetermine these social particularities – such as race, sexuality, location – largely because class analysis is at least partially predicated upon contract theory (i.e., the move from status to contract as a method of social organization) (Engels "Origin" 748-750; cf., "Manifesto").

American literary discourse, itself a product of these same masculine institutions, has echoed this exclusion, as Fetterley notes. In addition to critiquing masculinist representations of women in literature, in the last four decades, feminists have worked to reclaim women's "forgotten" literary voices, reissuing a wealth of texts by women authors who had been selectively excluded from canonical circulation, authors such as Kate Chopin and Zora Neale Hurston. But even recent interest in women's

representation of women has perpetuated the liberal, middle-class American ethos of individualism, freedom, etc., possibly because the most prevalent literary genre in U.S. literature (as in the world, generally) is the novel, whose meteoric rise in popularity coincided with the rise of capitalism and its related middle-class, liberal doctrine of self-determination with which the American social fabric has been stitched. Consider, for example, the notion of “choice” as adapted by western feminists during the second-wave, in books such as Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963): bell hooks is one scholar among many who notes that privileged white women leaders of the women’s movement in the 1960s and 1970s pushed for women’s right to choose careers outside the home, and that this rhetoric of choice obscured the fact that a majority of women – women of color and working-class white women – not only had no choice but to work to support their families, but also that they had little choice in what kind of work they elected to do (*Feminist Theory* 2). Because choice is associated with moral decision-making and self-determination, the assertion underlying this argument is that certain women’s “choices” to work in low-paid jobs is a moral failure rather than a structural one: they “choose” to be poor because they lack the determination to strive for more. But, of course, one does not choose one’s class or race; at best, one is able to shape the parameters of one’s relationship to these socially scripted identities. Just as Engels miscalculated class struggle’s effect on women’s advancement, the second-wave women’s movement, which tried to carve a space for women in a masculine canon, on the whole failed to recognize class and race differences as impediments to women’s progress and, in literature, as crucial elements of the story.

Moving Targets: Where *Do* Working-Class Women Characters Stand?

Following from the assertion that American literature is by and large a literature for and about its middle-classes, one can readily see how working-class women – as writers of and as representations in literature – have had an uphill battle to be published and read. Consider the obstacles such representations face: as Pateman notes, “the worker” is always masculine (201), an excision of women’s role as laboring subjects; the complementary assumption, that the woman is confined to the home, which is not the site of “real” work, privileges middle-class women’s experiences. Paradoxically, Marxists have framed marriage as a relationship in which the woman/wife functions as the proletariat, and the man/husband as the capitalist (Engels “Origin” 744), because as the breadwinner, the husband ultimately controls the family’s capital. Hence, while a working-class man may inhabit at work and at home two different roles that correspond to his actual experiences (his masculinity is enhanced by his labor as well as by his familial authority), the working-class woman has no such comfortable place to rest (neither work nor home provides a direct correlate to her experience as a commercially laboring woman).

To produce fictional representations about the U.S. working-class woman generally has meant one of two possibilities: 1) toeing the party line and writing propaganda for the CPUSA or other leftist outfits, which, contrary to Mike Gold’s claims for proletarian fiction, produces writing fairly drowning in melodrama and quite lacking in “beautiful youthful clarity” (241-2), or 2) writing for a middle-class audience, which means, ultimately, dressing middle-class values in blue (or pink) collars, a practice resulting in what Dorothy Allison calls the creation of “the noble poor” (*Skin* 18). Just as

“the worker” is figured as male, he is also figured as white: the racialized woman worker rarely appears in working-class literature of the first half of the century, or perhaps more accurately, she *does* appear, sometimes, but not in texts that are recognized as working-class literature, and even then, only fleetingly; her absence makes this simplistic categorization easier to achieve, since race adds another layer of complexity to discussions of both working-class and middle-class political and social agendas. After World War II, her presence, especially as an African American working-class woman, in fiction grows more frequent, but her racial identity often obscures her class identity; such characters are talked about as “women of color” rather than as “working-class women of color.” Thus, representations of American working-class women tend to universalize whiteness and yield staunch agitprop-like unionists (coinciding with the masculinist image of the worker – and thus downplaying the marginalization of women in the labor movement) or middle-class aspirants who either succeed or fail (a replaying of the cultural privileging of middle-class womanhood as a universal female experience and desire). Shuttling back and forth between work and home, working-class women’s movement between the two resonates as a metaphor for their representational migrancy – the absence of a recognizable space in the cultural discourse that reflects their positioning in some place outside of the binaries of classed genders and gendered classes.

This motility is the basis for my reading of representations of working-class women in American literature. Since working-class women must navigate the public and private in ways specific to their gendered and classed circumstances, moving between and among these spheres; the ways mobility is depicted in working-class fictions offer fertile ground for achieving a fuller understanding of working-class women’s place in the

cultural imagination. For example, in Chapter One, my reading of *The Diary of a Shirtwaist Striker* includes an analysis of how this text, which is avowedly working-class in style and sympathy, nevertheless frames the heroine's growing mobility as a liberal, *upward*-mobility that ultimately champions middle-class expectations for working-class women who marry. Reading through the slim canon of works that attempt to address working-class women's experiences, too often one finds a facile illustration of the "good" and "bad" working-class woman, where the honor belongs to the sexually pure, self-sacrificing, static character whose loyalties lie with the middle-class gender values that permeate American fiction, working-class or not.

The Good and the Bad: A Brief Case Study of Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*

This flat rendering of working-class women's identities offers little cogent analysis of the issues that shape their lives from without or of the ways working-class women themselves construct their life narratives. Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905) typifies such superficial depictions in her heroine Lily Bart's encounters with two polarized images of working-class women. Mrs. Haffen, a char-woman who sells incriminating letters she has stolen from a character's wastebasket to Lily, evokes both disdain and a sense of danger in Lily. Nettie Struther, a grateful recipient of Lily Bart's charity, inspires in Lily an unexpected desire for domesticity. The distance between the two characters and what each represents is underscored by the narrative's structure: Mrs. Haffen first appears in the early pages of the book, and Nettie Struther, only towards the very end; in a sense, however, they nearly meet in the middle, both beneficiaries, in different but nearby scenes, of Lily's own sporadic sense of largesse. Haffen's and

Struther's physical appearance, exchanges with Lily, motives, and scene settings within the story work in concert to render two discrete products: the "bad" and the "good" working-class woman.

A brief reading of Haffen and Struther will illustrate how the governing factor in this qualitative categorization is, essentially, political ideology, particularly how each character imagines her relation to the ruling classes; ultimately, Haffen's disdain for the rich determines her punishing representation in *House*, whereas Struther's admiration for Lily Bart earns her a glowing portrait. The class politics embedded in the scenes involving Mrs. Haffen and Nettie Struther are obscured by Lily Bart's reactions to each woman, glazed over by visceral responses seemingly driven by Lily's finely-tuned aesthetic sensibility; each scene's narration, which privileges Lily's point of view, camouflages the political sentiments directed toward each woman by a pretense of describing bodies and spaces and their effects on Lily's mental state. Lily first encounters Mrs. Haffen on the stairs of a bachelor's apartment house:

There was no one in sight, however, but a char-woman who was scrubbing the stairs. Her own stout person and its surrounding implements took up so much room that Lily, to pass her, had to gather up her skirts and brush against the wall. As she did so, the woman paused in her work and looked up curiously, resting her clenched red fists on the wet cloth she had just drawn from her pail. She had a broad sallow face, slightly pitted with small-pox, and thin straw-coloured hair through which her scalp shone unpleasantly. (31)

Lily is nonplussed by the woman's stare, taking it for "odious conjecture" about Lily's appearance alone in a men-only dwelling-space, but she dismisses it as evidence of the "poor creature" being "dazzled" by the apparition of beauty and wealth that Lily unexpectedly presents in a place populated by men. Several chapters later, Lily

experiences a sense of *déjà vu* when she encounters the same char-woman cleaning the stairs of her aunt's home:

[G]athering up her skirts, she drew aside with an impatient gesture; and as she did so she had the odd sensation of having already found herself in the same situation but in different surroundings . . . [L]ooking down to remonstrate with the dispenser of the soapy flood, she found herself met by a lifted stare which had once before confronted her under similar circumstances. It was the char-woman of the Benedick who, resting on crimson elbows, examined her with the same unflinching curiosity, the same apparent reluctance to let her pass. (148)

In both passages, Lily is forced to maneuver around Mrs. Haffen's generous spatial presence and is subjected to her "curious" and "unflinching" gaze. The char-woman, representative of the lowest class of domestic workers, is unavoidable, un-ignorable, and un-submissive. It is Lily, privileged member of the upper-class, who must navigate a "reluctance to let her pass," a literal reversal of a figurative social mapping in which the lowest classes of workers must navigate society's margins, their labor taken for granted, and submit to the controlling gaze of the powerful (and their representative institutions – government, business, law enforcement, etc.).

A few pages later, Lily's initial perplexity over Mrs. Haffen's stare returns when the char-woman visits Lily unexpectedly to blackmail her with letters she mistakenly believes Lily has written:

The glare of the unshaded gas shone familiarly on her pock-marked face and the reddish baldness visible through thin strands of straw-colored hair. Lily looked at the char-woman in surprise.

'Do you wish to see me?' she asked.

'I should like to say a word to you, Miss.' The tone was neither aggressive nor conciliatory: it revealed nothing of the speaker's errand. Nevertheless, some precautionary instinct warned Lily to withdraw beyond ear-shot of the hovering parlour-maid. (151)

All of these scenes mark Mrs. Haffen as a grotesque, threatening, decidedly unwomanly character, offering nearly identical physical descriptions that emphasize Mrs. Haffen's

almost ludicrously extreme homeliness. She is disfigured by disease, and her use of space (“[she] took up so much room”), “clenched red fists” and “crimson elbows,” unabashed gaze, and “reddish baldness” all suggest a menacing masculinity that is reflexively heightened when Lily learns of Mrs. Haffen’s sinister financial errand. Although Mrs. Haffen’s voice betrays no emotion, Lily instinctively feels the need to protect herself from the char-woman, who, the reader is told, is “the woman to make the most of such fears” (157); if Mrs. Haffen’s language is neutral, “revealing nothing,” the reader must then assume it is her physical presence that inspires Lily’s “precautionary instinct” to take hold, but this implied explanation for Lily’s fear is contradicted in another passage, later in the scene, when Mrs. Haffen explains her purpose.

As she begins to recount the reasons that have brought her to Lily’s door, Mrs. Haffen’s physical repulsiveness is joined in Lily’s mind by an apparent mental incompetence that Lily associates with the char-woman’s poverty:

‘I don’t understand; if this parcel is not mine, why have you asked for me?’

The woman was unabashed by the question. She was evidently prepared to answer it, but like all her class she had to go a long way back to make a beginning, and it was only after a pause that she replied: ‘My husband was janitor to the Benedick till the first of the month; since then he can’t get nothing to do.’

‘[T]he agent had another man he wanted the place for, and we was put out, bag and baggage, just to suit his fancy. I had a long sickness last winter, and an operation that ate up all we’d put by; and it’s hard for me and the children, Haffen being so long out of a job.’ (153)

As Mrs. Haffen’s story continues, Lily becomes impatient and pushes her to speak more quickly, which has the effect of lengthening even more the woman’s “diffuse narrative” (153). The imbrication of class and narrative practice in this quote – “like all her class she had to go a long way back to make a beginning” – provides a wedge with which to pry open the underlying assumptions that help to characterize Mrs. Haffen as dangerous.

The quote may be read in two ways. First, as a jab at the mental deficiencies of the poor: the quote implies that “all [Mrs. Haffen’s] class” are unable to sift through information to select the most important items for their listeners’ review. Second, it suggests a wide cultural disparity in the ways social classes construct stories, and by extension, self-representations; Lily and Mrs. Haffen are definitively set apart from one another not only by their positions at opposite poles of the spectrum of physical beauty, but by their economically-determined ability to perform the self.

Although *The House of Mirth* was published well before the debates in the 1920s and 1930s among intellectuals and writers about the value of bourgeois modernist literary experimentation versus the creation of a proletarian literature whose merit would be based on its faithful expression of socialist ideals, the novel nonetheless engages, here and there, with modernist prose.¹ For instance, unlike Mrs. Haffen’s narrative, *The House of Mirth* does not “go a long way back to make a beginning,” but rather, begins *in media res* and employs narrative techniques conventionally associated with modernism – stream of consciousness, non-linear time, narrative shifts in and out of characters’ psychological states. In other words, the novel clearly champions a kind of storytelling quite the opposite of Mrs. Haffen’s.

Likewise, the blackmail scene between Mrs. Haffen and Lily offers a meta-discourse about narrative practice and who owns the right to self-determination and self-expression. Wharton is a practitioner and aficionado of sophisticated prose, so Lily’s impatient boredom with Mrs. Haffen’s story may well reflect Wharton’s own impatience with what she might deem simplistic, unartful prose – a complaint commonly lodged

¹ For a cogent, concise historicization of these debates among the literary Left in the late 1920s and throughout the “radical ’30s,” see Constance Coiner’s first chapter in her groundbreaking book, *Better Red: The Writing and Resistance of Tillie Olsen and Meridel LeSueur* (New York: Oxford UP, 1995).

against working-class writers by their non-proletarian peers. The perceived stylistic flaws in working-class literature are often attributed to its politics, which, critics argue, circumvent the exigencies of “real” art in order to be simply, and simplistic, propaganda. The underlying suggestion is that art is a matter of class, and only the elite have the keys to that particular kingdom. (Toni Morrison explicates a similar debate about African American literature in her Foreword to *Sula*.) In any event, Mrs. Haffen does not leave to Lily’s imagination any parts of her story. For her, the explanation of why she is selling the letters matters as much as the sale itself; it is an opportunity to counter the portrait of herself offered by Lily’s reaction to her. Up until this moment, the reader has only seen Mrs. Haffen through Lily’s eyes, but in this passage, the char-woman momentarily wrests the voice of authority from Lily to build a narrative independent of Lily’s viewpoint, to turn what Lily feels is “the presence of something vile” (154) on its head, so that the “something vile” is no longer Mrs. Haffen’s errand but the situation engendering it, her husband’s unjust termination from his job. This different perspective is peremptorily interrupted by Lily’s intolerance for the woman or her story: “‘If you have anything to say to me—’ she interposed” (153). Lily’s disruption of Mrs. Haffen’s story ignores what is obvious to the reader, namely that Mrs. Haffen’s story is precisely what she has to say to Lily – is, in fact, in the process of telling Lily when she is cut short.

Refusing to be cowed by Lily, the char-woman continues her long-winded story: “Yes, Miss; I’m coming to that” (153). This scene, in which Mrs. Haffen asserts her right to speak on her own terms includes other specific threats to Lily that resonate as political abstractions. First, when Lily asks if Mrs. Haffen has “found something belonging to [her],” Mrs. Haffen responds, “Well, if it comes to that, I guess it’s mine as much as

anybody's" (152), a claim to ownership of – significantly – letters removed from the trash. She has, in essence, rescued a discarded story, rewritten its narrative (by assuming Lily to be the letters' author), and then told the story to Lily in order to claim some momentary authority, "observ[ing] sententiously" that "the poor has got to live as well as the rich" (157). The fusing of wrested narrative power ("it's mine as much as anybody's") with the sentiment of equal right to survival ("the poor has got to live"), echoed in the reclamation of the letters from the trashcan, is the abstract "threat" that Lily hears in Mrs. Haffen's intonation (152). Mrs. Haffen is dangerous precisely because she threatens Lily's world, not merely on a personal level through blackmail, but because she does not recognize Lily's greater right, as a member of the privileged class, to speak and to own.

In contrast, Nettie Struther epitomizes the "good" working-class woman precisely because she adheres to dominant social values, believing in her ability to improve her life to some extent through hard work (as opposed to threatening the wealthy), and yet happily accepting her place in the social hierarchy and venerating Lily as a superior being who rightfully belongs at its top. Towards the end of the novel, Lily encounters Nettie Struther in a park, when she, Lily, is near the bottom of her tragic descent. Nettie, one of the hitherto unmentioned beneficiaries of Lily's uncharacteristic burst of charity several chapters earlier, is alarmed when she discovers her benefactress sitting tired and alone on a park bench, and invites her to her apartment to rest for a while. Compared to Mrs. Haffen's diseased body, Nettie is physically attractive; what she lacks is attributable to a large degree to outside factors – her shabby clothes, hard work – unlike the char-woman, whose ugliness comes from within (the smallpox contagion). Nevertheless, she is not as

beautiful as Lily: “Her face had the air of unwholesome refinement which ill-health and over-work may produce, but its common prettiness was redeemed by the strong and generous curve of the lips” (438). It is worth noting that Nettie’s redeeming feature is her mouth, described as strong and generous, because as the scene continues, Nettie speaks glowing words in praise of Lily and extends to her a warm generosity that revives the ailing protagonist: “a faint glow of returning strength seemed to pass into Lily from the pressure of the supporting arm” (439). As representatives of their respective classes, the women’s interaction mimics the supporting role the working- and middle-classes play for the wealthy; the wealthy exist in part because they are sanctioned and supported by those beneath them in the social hierarchy and who long to emulate them, too.

Nettie, though working-class, has improved her situation considerably since the time she accepted Lily’s charity through a women’s club, and although she does not imagine herself ever becoming a member of the elite set, she assuages her own heartaches both with visions of Lily’s luxury (“I used to remember that *you* were having a lovely time, anyhow, and that seemed to show there was a kind of justice somewhere” [439]) and with dreams of her newborn daughter’s potential (“Wouldn’t it be too lovely for anything if she could grow up to be just like you? Of course I know she never *could*--- but mothers are always dreaming the craziest things for their children” [443]). Wharton critics have commented upon this scene as the moment in which Lily first truly sees the possibility of happiness without wealth, of the promise of ordinary life as a wife and mother in a working-class household. When juxtaposed with the scenes of Lily’s interactions with Mrs. Haffen, the only other notable working-class female presence in *The House of Mirth*, however, the scene reads as a mainstream primer on “model” class

relations. Mrs. Haffen and Nettie Struther both struggle to overcome class hardship, but only Nettie's struggle is valorized – within limits. Nettie is simultaneously cast as a member of “the noble poor,” held up as an example to Lily of faith and courage – her “frail envelope was now alive with hope and energy . . . she would not be cast into the refuse-heap without a struggle” (439) – and as a distinctly inferior human being: she is “common,” the mother of a child who “never *could*” be Lily's equal. Even Wharton's description of Nettie's mouth, from whence she confirms Lily's superiority, dehumanizingly refers to “the lips” instead of to “her lips,” which has the effect of objectifying their owner. In the terms set by the novel, both working-class women characters are crude depictions of lesser human beings; Nettie Struther's saving grace is that she knows and accepts this fact. Neither provides a satisfactory representation of the experiences and struggles of laboring women independent of their relationship to middle- or upper-class individuals.

Roaming Charges: Defining the “Mobile Woman” Character

Although not easy to find, working-class literature does offer an alternative to the stagnant portrayals of working-class women described above, and this alternative – mobile women – is the focus of my project. In the chapters to follow, *Stuck in Go* examines mobile women characters' relationships to the narratives they inhabit, and the political philosophies informing these stories. What I call “mobile women”—that is, women who do not readily fall into either of the two limited characterizations of working-class women identified above and whose motility sets them apart from other characters—haunt much of the literature about working-class women characters. In the

body of fiction that strives to foreground representations of the experiences of working-class women in the U.S., mobile women – transnational worker, itinerant citizen worker, prostitute – hover in the margins of the plot, roam the textual landscape at a distance from the protagonist, and cast a pall over the often valiant depiction of working-class women engaged in fictional class struggles. These women eschew – deride, even – the dominant “take” on working-class women, but generally from the subordinated position of a secondary character; occasionally, they come to the fore, but in my research, only when the story’s author claims autobiographical experience that fits with the experiences of the mobile woman.

Mobile women characters literally and metaphorically interrupt the creation of an iconic working-class woman heroine; their extended metaphors of motion implicitly and explicitly force the reader to actively confront the assumptions underlying the static identity of working-class womanhood and imagine other ways of reading the laboring female subject. Often they are used as anti-heroines to highlight the selfless nobility of the “good” working-class woman, but just as often, their presence derails such projects. Mobile women characters are defined by their displacement: their danger lies in their rootlessness, their lack of home, where “home” is a referent for domesticity, community, and nation. Representations of migratory women provide a device for critiquing the social relationship of woman to home, and conversely, to the public sphere. The concept of (being at) home – in one’s private residence, as a citizen in the homeland, in one’s own body – is the subject of much feminist literature and theory², but it resonates especially strongly in conversations about the itinerant working-class female subject, whose labor

² See, for example, such edited collections as *Between Woman and Nation: Nationalisms, Transnational Feminisms, and the State* (Durham, Duke UP, 1999) and *Women, America, and Movement: Narratives of Relocation* (Columbia MO: U of Missouri P, 1998).

not only estranges her from her own home, but leads her, as a domestic worker, a transnational migrant, a prostitute, into intimate knowledge of other houses, nations, and bodies, particularly those in more empowered material circumstances. In spite of her access to such penetrating insights, she is a *persona non grata*, invisible, reviled, marginalized. At once included and excluded, necessary and forgotten, she occupies the ideal position from which to examine the exigencies of class and gender and their relationship to other institutional structures.

All the powers of American doctrine have contributed to a discourse intended to exorcise the real-world version of this menace, this woman who will not assimilate, conform, stand still: union leaders and Minutemen, feminists and religious fundamentalists, liberal reformers and conservative reactionaries, Democrats and Republicans – all have taken their turn in reviling the prostitute or mourning her degradation, exploiting the immigrant worker or disparaging her presence, paying lip-service to or mocking the demands of the poorest classes of women whose bodies, language, and sexual expression do not meet mainstream standards of feminine behavior or aesthetics. Public hand-wringing about the victims of international sex trafficking, the building of a wall between Mexico and the U.S., the Supreme Court's recent decision to deny workers' the right to pursue legal justice against pay discrimination on the basis of race or gender, new legislation that will rank immigration applicants according to skills and education (i.e., according to class) – these are not unrelated issues: on the one hand, the victims of globalization, poverty, and patriarchy are bemoaned; on the other, their victimization is created.

Thus, while newspapers condemn the ghastly serial killings of prostitutes in Atlantic City and the murders of migrant laborers crossing the Mexico-U.S. border for work, the U.S. government's foreign and domestic policies drive women into prostitution, break up families, and rewrite the immigrant story to exclude "the huddled masses yearning to breathe free" (Lazarus usinfo.state.gov).³ Meanwhile, American fiction reports the alienation of certain characters within their fictitious social worlds and their use as a repository for the fear and hostility of the majority. These roaming anti-heroines, ostracized in their narratives precisely for being women in motion, unstuck, challenge the stability of the public discourses on which their stories are modeled; their movement blurs the picture, yielding other ways of seeing.

"Mobile Women" as a "Dangerous Class": Historical Parameters

The twentieth century opened and closed amid intense social debates in the U.S. over immigration, as the industries (at the *fin de siecle*, steel, coal, textiles; in the 1980s and 1990s, tech and service) that enabled a massive consolidation of wealth unlike that of other eras also created huge demands for cheap labor. In both time periods, anxieties over large numbers of people migrating globally and entering the U.S., among other countries, in droves, also gave rise to another intense social debate: what to do about sex traffic, the now-common term for prostitution famously coined by Emma Goldman ("Traffic" 143). The phrase "sex traffic" implies mobility, as does, of course, "immigration," a shared connotation that lays bare the ideological connections that form

³ "In Glittery Atlantic City, Four Walked Dark, Deadly Path," *NYT* online (www.nytimes.com) 12/5/06; "Border Patrol Agent Charged with Murder," *NYT* online, 4/24/07; "Desperate Iraqi Refugees Turn to Sex Trade in Syria," *NYT* online, 5/29/07; "Overhaul of Immigration Law Could Reshape New York," *NYT* online, 5/30/07.

the heart of my project.⁴ In both of these historical moments – the early and late decades of the century – the movement of people was intrinsically linked to concerns over the nation’s economic welfare and women’s sexual welfare.

I focus on these two time periods for practical reasons: as Ruth Rosen amply demonstrates in *The Lost Sisterhood* (1982), the contemporary sense of prostitution as a profession, rather than as casual labor in and out of which women moved, originated in the U.S. and Britain at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, coinciding with the peak of immigration to the U.S.; the late-twentieth-century rise in concern over sex traffic again appears concurrent to increased immigration rates in a manner not seen in the middle decades of the twentieth century. The literature I have found in which mobile women figure is clustered most frequently in these early and late decades; my supposition is that mobile women figures are the literary reflection of heightened anxieties about women’s progress, class struggle, and national security (or purity). The titles I list at the beginning of this essay almost wholly fall into these two time periods. The hefty 2006 *American Working-Class Literature: An Anthology* – the first of its kind – lends further support to this thesis; a glance through its table of contents shows a dearth of working-class literature written in the middle decades: whereas the 1900s through the 1930s fill up nearly 400 pages of excerpted works, and the 1980s and 1990s together add up to more than 200, the “1940s-1970s” section falls well short of 100 pages. In these 100 pages, only three excerpts offer characters who might be classified as mobile women, and writing by or about immigrants is noticeably absent.

⁴ In point of fact, the word “prostitute” originates from the Latin verb *prostituere*, “to expose publicly,” which also connotes movement, in this case, from inside to outside, or from invisibility to visibility (*Oxford Concise Dictionary* 1148).

In the early 1900s, so-called anti-white-slavery reformers played upon fears that the nation's purity was being compromised by the influx of foreigners; prostitution was then considered a foreign vice, not only bringing prostitutes to America from Europe, but also jeopardizing American women migrants moving from rural towns to the big city, whose innocence was preyed upon by (foreign) men (Miller 83). As their victimization was decried, it was simultaneously linked to middle-class stereotypes about the working-classes and the poor: historian Ruth Rosen explains, "Conveniently, the large numbers of lower-class and immigrant women in prostitution could be explained by these women's alleged tendencies to be less moral, more animalistic, and less sheltered by upbringing and education from corrupting influences" (*Lost* 6). Again, the note of moral failure sounds a proscriptive measure against the work of addressing the failures of the system to redress social inequities.

In the 1990s, international sex trafficking again became part of urgent immigration debates. Sociologist Gretchen Soderlund parses the debate about sex trafficking's relation to immigration this way:

From the immediate post-9/11 vantage point, some critics of anti-trafficking legislation adopted in 2000 suggested that trafficking—with its emphasis on the unsanctioned movement of people—might mesh with pervasive fears of terrorism and become a powerful tool with which to curb immigration, while anti-trafficking lobbyists suggested that it would be a grave mistake if wartime led the Bush administration to forget the scourge of trafficking. (74)

Both sides of the debate make the link between prostitution and U.S. foreign policy their central concern. Soderlund's essay, "Running from the Rescuers: New U.S. Crusades Against Sex Trafficking and the Rhetoric of Abolition," connects contemporary U.S. efforts to save and reform "sex slaves" to the Bush Administration's efforts at home and abroad to "restore moral order to the world" (78) both by legislatively restricting all

nonprocreative sexual activity and by using anti-sex-trafficking agendas as a way to gain leverage in specific geopolitical arenas.⁵ Contemporary feminist scholars have criticized the rhetoric of sex trafficking, still a popular news story today, for making victims of women, even though such victimization may contribute to lessening their threat as “aliens” who, as countless media outlets warn, are invading U.S. society, taking Americans’ jobs and government resources. As Soderlund argues, “Like Progressive era anti-prostitution social reform movements, early 21st century [sic] anti-trafficking movements draw on the rhetoric of abolition to underscore the urgency of their cause. Central to such rhetoric is the construction of captivity and freedom as diametrically opposed states of existence” (64). Victimization rhetoric, both in early- and late-twentieth-century discussions of prostitution and sex traffic, erases the complexities of the issues that impact women’s participation in the sex work industry, reduces women’s perceived agency, and advocates protection over freedom. This last point, it should be noted, echoes similar arguments about national security and economic policy, too, where proponents of protectionism assume a beneficent patriarchal stance towards the public generally that seeks to limit the very liberation it claims to be defending.

I define “mobile women” as de facto members of the “dangerous classes” because women on the move threaten the institutions that try to contain them. If these mobile women are transnational workers, they trouble the sanctity of national borders; if they are itinerant citizen workers traveling within the U.S. seeking wage work, they are violating the social norms that dictate women’s place as anchors of their community – the

⁵ For example, Soderlund cites the annual report the Bush Administration issues that “grades” nations on their sex trafficking status. Not surprisingly, nations like Cuba and North Korea are listed as the worst violators of U.S.-sanctioned policies against sex trafficking, and these ratings have been used as rationales for negative U.S. relations with them: continuing economic sanctions against Cuba and the moratorium on diplomatic relations with North Korea (77).

stationary elements of church, school, neighborhood that ensure the stability of these social organizing structures; if they are prostitutes, they threaten the patriarchal norms that fetishize, sanctify, and commodify women's sexuality and try to contain it within the structure of heterosexual monogamy, which has been used as a tool for the reproduction of the nation – a point that brings us full circle to the transnational female laborer whose itinerant body breaches the protective boundaries of the nation.

A recent *New York Times* article estimates that more than 200 million migrant laborers currently work outside of their countries of origin, over half of whom are women. A full quarter of these come from the Philippines alone, and the overwhelming majority hail from Asia, South and Latin America, the Caribbean, and Eastern Europe (DeParle www.nytimes.com), a change from the beginning of the twentieth century, when the majority of immigrants arrived on American shores from Eastern and Southern Europe. High-sounding numbers notwithstanding, at the height of immigration in the early twentieth century, legal émigrés composed only one percent of the total U.S. population, and in the 1990s, only one-third of one percent (Knippling xvi); even taking into account the current (and disputed) estimate of twelve million undocumented workers in the U.S., contemporary widespread anxiety over immigration seems out of proportion to the numbers. So what is at stake in debates about immigration?

For starters, according to the *Times* article, globally, migrants' labor annually translates into \$300 billion sent home to families to be spent in local economies, "nearly three times the world's foreign-aid budgets combined" (DeParle www.nytimes.com). In spite of immigrant rights groups' arguments that capital unfairly flows much more freely than people through national borders, these numbers remind us just how symbiotic the

two – the movement of labor and of capital – truly are. Those opposed to the free migration of people rely on the rhetoric of theft in their arguments: immigrants “steal” jobs and resources from Americans and send the money back to their home countries, a kind of “there goes the neighborhood” discourse that pits the vice and disloyalty of outsiders against an imaginary American population of innocent victims. Additionally, 80% of immigrants at the end of the twentieth century were people of color; the racial and ethnic tensions that greeted Eastern European, Jewish, and Mediterranean immigrants in the early 1900s (to say nothing of the anti-Chinese laws passed in the late 1800s and the hostility towards Mexican settlers who were appropriated into the U.S. after the Mexican-American War) have not disappeared for these newer generations of immigrants, but instead have increased (Knippling xv). Benedict Anderson has argued that nations are imagined as communities whose members are united by common linguistic codes, a belief in their nation’s singularity (i.e., nations are universal, but there is only one U.S.), and the myth that the nation (in spite of all historical evidence to the contrary) is ahistorical, constant, and permanent (5-6). In other words, the imagined community Anderson theorizes is grounded in authenticity, not change – stasis, not mobility. Authenticity, stasis – both are concepts rooted in the idea of purity, and in the context of immigration, racial purity, an outcome achievable only through the control and inscription of women’s sexual practice.

Both immigration and sex work are now and have been historically associated with the “pollution” of the culture, to the extent that Congress, in 1907, issued a report naming prostitution a vice brought to the U.S. by the massive influx of immigrants from less civilized nations (Cordasco iii). Sex historian Heather Miller argues that in the late-

nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, prostitution “was inextricably intertwined with larger social issues: urbanization, industrialization, and, especially in the United States, immigration” (82), further citing the work of Havelock Ellis, a late-nineteenth-century sexologist who “noted that along with possessing a tendency to homosexuality, prostitutes manifested greediness, alcoholism, lying, anger, disorderliness, untidiness, *mobility of character, and need of movement*” (84, my emphasis). Pateman, among others, observes that until recently, no unqualified argument in support of prostitution was available; it was argued instead that prostitution was a necessary evil that saved (middle-class) women from their husbands’ sexual aggressions and kept the home pure by keeping “perverted” sex acts outside the domestic sphere (190).⁶ A similar rhetoric of “necessary evil” is used today to assuage anti-immigration proponents, when pro-immigration debates rely on the argument that the U.S. “needs” immigrants to do the poorly-paid, menial labor Americans do not want to do.⁷ In both instances, the “evil” comes with risk factors – social contagion, whether venereal disease, mixed messages about women’s roles, or changing racial demographics – that must be controlled and contained, a process largely effected by social marginalization (e.g., differential treatment, especially with regard to citizen and property rights, labor conditions, and access to the law). Likewise, in both instances, the arguments in favor of the necessity of both kinds of mobile subjects is the comfort of a third party; mobile women’s labor is

⁶ See also Ruth Rosen’s extensive historicization of this popular belief in *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900-1918* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1982).

⁷ Almost amusingly, in response to this argument one *never* hears the anti-immigration crowd suggest a hike in the wages of and greater cultural respect for those jobs – the necessary tasks of harvesting, cleaning, cooking, sewing, etc. – in order to attract more Americans to them and thus drive down the demand for immigrant labor.

grudgingly allowed, though despised, as a way of maintaining cultural restrictions on other groups that sustain levels of status and thus, social hierarchies of power.

The heightened anxiety over prostitution in both time periods under discussion here reflects women's continuing social role in literally and figuratively reproducing the nation, by giving birth to new citizens and inculcating in these new citizens the cultural traditions of the nation, but also by virtue of their role as symbol of the home(land): security, purity, stability. Women migrants, then, are a double-threat: they represent the abandonment of the domestic space (both the family home and the homeland) that traditionally delimits gender roles, and they threaten, through their reproductive capacities, to change the face of the nation by shifting its racial demographics. In the figure of the mobile woman, one confronts all at once the intricacies of sexual, racial, class, and national identity politics.

Conceptualizing Mobility: Some Context

A notable amount of recent scholarship has focused on "mobility" as an operative concept, especially in this twentieth-century context of massive waves of immigration, the rapidly globalizing economy, and the turbulence of decolonization and nation-building. Much of this work is in the fields of ethnic, postcolonial, and women's studies, where scholars have consistently used mobility as an empowering metaphor that can positively reframe the experiences and representations of marginalized groups, while still recognizing it as a central component of the "othering" process. The negative connotations of "mobility" in Western societies reach far back in history. In Hayden White's *Tropics of Discourse* (1978), he discusses the word "barbarian" and its

metamorphosis from the Greek word signifying non-citizens, particularly migrants who spoke foreign tongues, a legacy frequently present today in patronizing discussions of “civilized” versus “uncivilized” cultures, or developed and developing nations, where to become civilized or developed means to mimic the practices and ideologies of Western capitalist nations.

Karl Marx historicizes mobility’s association with criminal activity in *Capital* (1867), when he describes the vagabondage laws put into place in England in the 1600s to encourage stasis among the lower classes, in order to better bind them to industrial wage employment and create a large pool of available and dependent labor. Anyone caught begging or idling could be enslaved, beaten bloody with whips in a public flogging, etc.; the third arrest for such offenses was punishable by execution as a felon. Such laws demonstrate mobility’s criminalization in Western society; under these laws, the remedy for vagabondage was to submit to wage labor, no matter what the conditions, in order to avoid arrest (896-899). This, in effect, ensured the creation and establishment of the proletariat; it is no real surprise, therefore, that a traditional working-class community might look with suspicion and distaste upon migrant labor, women’s mobility, and so on, since such mobility was early on associated with criminal activity and its brutal consequences. Culturally, the effect was to divide those who fell in line from those who didn’t – to reject those who were mobile essentially became an expression of survival that was established through juridical, and then social, means.

Michel Foucault also examines mobility’s relationship to social marginalization in *Madness and Civilization* (1967), particularly in his historicization of the phrase, “ship of fools,” a fifteenth-century writer’s metaphor for the world that manifested in sixteenth-

century France as a way of dealing with the mentally ill, many of whom were forced to board destination-less ships traveling down the Seine away from Paris. In this instance, mobility became not the crime but the punishment for deviation from the social norm. Foucault's overarching argument, that the Western historical response to madness has been to both exclude and contain, aptly applies to the figures on which my project focuses: as my chapters demonstrate, a similar program of exclusion and containment has been practiced upon the "mobile women" who populate the texts I analyze. While these characters are not "mad" in the sense Foucault intends, they do deviate from social norms, question dominant belief systems (i.e., they are "unreasonable"), and, quite often, they are a different kind of mad – railing angrily against their circumstances and questioning what other characters mutely accept.

A wealth of contemporary scholarship considers mobility from the vantage point of mobilized populations; such work includes a wide range of perspectives, but can be broadly categorized as analyses of 1) how mobility has been constructed as a practice and metaphor, 2) how it has been used negatively to represent specific groups or agendas, and 3) how it has been or can be reframed as an empowering tool of resistance against circumscriptive rhetorics of race, gender, citizenship, class, or sexuality. For example, Chela Sandoval, in *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000), argues that out of several "modes of oppositional consciousness" employed in a variety of twentieth-century resistance struggles, a new rhetorical resistance has emerged, particularly in the work of third world feminists, and attributable mainly to the recent cultural and identity struggles of marginalized and socially and economically disadvantaged peoples. Sandoval names this resistance as a methodology of mobility – "differential consciousness" (58) or

“coalitional consciousness” (78) – in which oppressed subjects draw upon the available knowledges and resources of, or form alliances with, other individuals, groups, or identities that can contribute to the democratization of power without demanding their permanent assimilation into a static identity category. This kind of traveling – “self-consciously mobiliz[ing]” in order to journey “‘between and among’ ideological positionings” (58) – informs and propels the mobility of the roaming characters in the four texts examined in *Stuck in Go*’s four chapters.

The optimism of scholarship like Sandoval’s is tempered by the wary examinations of the contemporary thrall with mobility in books like Aihwa Ong’s *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (1999). Ong uses China (and specifically, its relationship, through immigration, with the United States) as a case study to critique the ways “mobility” has been conceptualized by academics who, intentionally or not, she argues, have cemented the periphery-core binary (where migration is pictured as a one-way flow of non-Westerners to Western nations), conflated the circumstances and experiences of the mobile and the non-mobile non-Westerner, and ignored the exigencies of material analysis in pursuit of an idealization of the diasporic traveler who fights the good fight against capitalism’s tyranny. Instead, she asserts, mobility – “flexible citizenship” – is better considered as “the cultural logics of capitalist accumulation, travel, and displacement that induce subjects to respond fluidly and opportunistically to changing political-economic conditions” (6). She argues against the oversimplification of mobility as a liberating practice (and liberal ideology) available to everyone in the globalized economy and instead insists on the necessity of reading the specificities of groups’ movements within frameworks of national policies, as well as

gender, class, and racial tensions (8-17). This argument is echoed in the work of other feminist scholars such as Caren Kaplan, who writes in an essay titled “On Location” that “feminist cultural critics must resist romanticized appropriations of the figures of exile, nomadism, and tourism in favor of historicized accounts of the social relations that produce material conditions of dwelling and displacement” (64). In the chapters to follow, I try to balance my accord with Sandoval’s claim to the political potential of mobility with a close analysis of the ways mobility as a tool is indeed often misappropriated and used to reinscribe dominant ideologies of class, race, and gender; the first half of *Stuck in Go* examines texts that practice this sort of appropriation; the latter half analyzes texts in which mobile women themselves contribute to a critical discourse on mobility through literary narratives of their own life experiences.

Mobility’s potential as a political practice also gets play outside the fields of ethnic and gender studies. In *Empire* (2000), Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue that contemporary globalization, particularly the continual, uncontrollable mobility of the “productive, creative” subjects of globalization, has caused an unprecedented permeability of borders (national and otherwise) that is breaking down the traditional power systems of nation-states. This multitude’s “deterritorializing power . . . is the productive force that sustains Empire [through its labor] and at the same time the force that calls for and makes necessary its destruction” (61). Hardt and Negri see the beginnings of this destruction in the unpredictable eruptions of the global multitude into volatile, spontaneous acts that both demand and generate (episodic) moments of sovereignty among its constituents. Hardt and Negri are specifically arguing for the revolutionary capacities of skilled workers, whose collaborative actions could

conceivably disrupt the massive machine of Empire; I part company with them insofar as I believe that unskilled workers – of the kind *Stuck in Go* treats, and whose demographic worldwide is mainly the province of women – also hold this power. (What would a global strike of sex workers, nannies, sweatshop workers, mothers, custodians, hotel maids, bank tellers, waitresses, and cashiers look like?) I wish now to turn to “mobility” in the particular context of unskilled, working-class women; my reading of mobile women in American literature depends upon the assertion that mobility and work are both thoroughly gendered concepts. Their literary embodiment in itinerant, laboring women characters opens a portal through which to glimpse both the possibilities and limitations of a working-class, feminist political imaginary.

In making their major claims, Hardt and Negri write that “[i]n a previous era the category of proletariat centered on and was at times effectively subsumed under the *industrial working class*, whose paradigmatic figure was the male mass factory worker” (52, emphasis in original). But as Chandra Mohanty, Carole Pateman and other feminist scholars have observed, while the factory worker may no longer be the emblematic figure of the proletariat, “the worker” nevertheless remains a male figure (Mohanty *Feminism* 151; Pateman 201). When working-class women are depicted in American literature or film, they are generally either mapped onto the male factory worker image as tough women fighting for a cause (à la Rosie the Riveter or *Norma Rae*) – the leftist narrative of working-class women – or portrayed as highly feminized workers, such as maids or store clerks, who are swept off their feet by well-to-do men with the power to lift them out of the drudgery of feminized wage work and deposit them safely into the more financially secure drudgery of housewifery (as George Hurstwood attempts to do in

Dreiser's 1900 *Sister Carrie*) – the conservative version. In the sphere of American cultural representation, the working-class woman is confined to two basic, and highly unsatisfactory, images. Much of what is “dangerous” about mobile women in literature is their rupture of these traditional notions about working-class women. Mobile women's behaviors and circumstances preclude their welcome participation in the communities represented in their narratives, and yet their alienation from the group is not enough to undermine the threat they pose to the group identity. My intention in the next section is to demonstrate how the mobile woman character in American literature subverts the limitations of leftist reformers and introduces a new way of thinking about the (female) proletariat, its conditions of membership, and its political praxes.

Mobile Women in American Literature

As I have indicated earlier in this essay, the figure of the mobile woman can be found throughout twentieth-century American literature. As seen in the work of the historians and theoreticians whose work I have referenced above, women's sex work (or perceived sexual promiscuity) has been linked in working-class literature to both transnational migration and the internal migration of (U.S.) women citizens in a way that conflates all three – leading to the creation of that group of literary characters I refer to collectively as “mobile women,” those who literally and metaphorically represent the opposite of women's domestic sphere. I have spent some space above describing the historical and political links between these three categories of mobile women; before outlining the chapters of my analysis, I wish to consider briefly the rhetorical links

among them in U.S. literature, links that have been shaped by American public discourses.

Hardt and Negri's claims in *Empire* – that the proletariat's composition in the twentieth century has been radically re-determined, that this re-composition is due largely to the modern-day mobility of laboring subjects, and that this mobility offers the potential for renewed resistance to exploitive systems of power – have been present, if overlooked or ignored, throughout the twentieth century in American fictive representations of working-class struggles. Bearing in mind my own claim that such resistance does not necessarily rest solely upon the shoulders of skilled workers, their arguments resonate in a close analysis of the “dangerous class” female characters populating twentieth-century American literature, where figurations of the working classes and dangerous classes frequently fight battles engineered in the imaginations of mainly middle-class authors. Such conflicts are, at their core, about definition: what is the working class, its philosophy, its relationship to other social categories, its agenda? Homi Bhabha's observation – “that cannot be knowledge that is stabilized in its enunciation” (303) – reminds us that knowledge itself is a quest, a continual motion of transformation. The roaming female characters that wend their way through so many American twentieth-century fictional works, transforming the literary landscape, offer us an opportunity to critique the stabilized assumptions on which hegemonic notions of “the” working-class woman are built. Their literal movement in the texts' geographies echoes the ways they, as characters, shake the philosophical foundations of the narratives across which they tread, both their own stories and the larger cultural stories that enveloped the time in which they were first written.

Literary representations of the tensions between dangerous and working-class women are not merely products of authorial imagination, but have roots in Marxist analyses of the working classes and their potential for resisting capitalist exploitation; in a Marxist framework, “dangerous” signifies a threat to class struggle, not to capitalism. In “Manifesto of the Communist Party” (1848), Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels use the phrase “dangerous class” as a catch-all category for members of society so marginalized from the mainstream that the authors did not (or could not) theorize their roles in communist revolution, or later, in the political economy Marx historicized in *Capital*. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, U.S. labor leaders and the radical Left emphasized the unionization of factories as a major step towards socialist revolution; factory workers’ shared experiences of strictly regulated time, space, and wage-labor created a hothouse in which solidarity could flower into political action. “The real fruit of [proletarian] battles,” Marx and Engels wrote in *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, “lies . . . in the ever-expanding union of the workers” (481), an effort that with few exceptions has centered on factory work. Both then and now, however, working-class labor has not stopped at the factory door; it extends into sweatshops, fields, hotels, restaurants, the homes of wealthy people, and a vast network of jobs within informal economies of *ad hoc* day labor, vice, itinerant work, sex work, and so on.

In the “Manifesto” and elsewhere, Marx and Engels recognize the existence of other forms of labor, other categories of social positioning beyond aristocracy, bourgeoisie, and industrialized proletariat, but dismiss their practitioners’ potential for revolutionary activity. In the “Manifesto,” they write contemptuously of these others:

The ‘dangerous class,’ the social scum, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of old society, may, here and there, be swept into the

movement by a proletarian revolution; its conditions of life, however, prepare it far more for the part of a bribed tool of reactionary intrigue. (482)

In *Capital: Volume One*, Marx again writes of the subsets of the relative surplus population off which capitalist exploitation feeds; these subsets are the demographic source of the revolutionary proletariat, but he again excludes from this group certain dangerous categories: “vagabonds, criminals, prostitutes, in short the actual lumpenproletariat” (797). His distinction between proletariat and lumpenproletariat is based on a moral categorization of activities that marks individuals as belonging either to a category of laborers that may contribute to revolutionary work or to one – the “dangerous class” or the “social scum,” as he calls them in *The Manifesto* – that can not.

The fictive struggles between dangerous and proletarian characters in American literature are rooted in this distinction, although it is not a pure translation, having been filtered through changing historical contexts and shaped by what White calls “extratextual agendas” – the expectations of audience, the social climate and political economy of their moment of production, etc. – that Marx did not consider or anticipate. That the author of some of the most enduring and revolutionary philosophies of the last two centuries could not find a place for these dangerous class figures, and indeed, found in them a threat to his own political vision, makes their ubiquity in politically-conscious novels about twentieth-century U.S. laboring women seem curious. Although Marx himself may not have theorized their role, the fact that they bear some meaningful relationship to the working classes is clear from the existence of the tangled representations in which we find them. A comparison between Marx’s terms – vagabonds, criminals, prostitutes – and those I have used earlier in this essay to describe mobile women’s representation – illegal, un-American, unnatural – will highlight the

rhetorical connections I see between the three figurations of mobile women (transnational workers, itinerant citizen-workers, and prostitutes) I analyze in this project, and the threat to institutional politics, national identity, gender roles, etc., posed by the mobile subject.

For Marx, whose theory of a proletarian revolution is predicated, in part, on the advancement of the nation-state as the primary social ordering system, vagabonds pose a serious problem, since these travelers have no stable location and may cross or transgress borders at will. Vagabonds imply transnationality, a freedom from the national identity that is often built at a local level through continual participation in a community that recognizes itself as part of a larger body of citizenry, the body-politic. In the context of the U.S. working-classes, the transnational subject renders problematic the smooth functioning of a labor movement that must rely on nation-state structures for change and which has premised many of its union campaigns on the idea of unity among workers who share a common national identity (for example, the “Made in the U.S.A.” campaign).

Marx’s term, criminals, is also tied, through negative definition, to national identity in many American literary works (and in U.S. culture generally): criminal activity is un-American in that obedience to the law, complicity with structure, and mass adherence to public opinion of what is right are necessary to maintain a coherent “America” of law-abiding citizens; the criminal and the dissenter are often metonyms for each other, as witnessed by phenomena like the Haymarket executions in the 1880s and the brutal beatings and arrests of anti-war protesters today. “Illegal alien” is the loaded term commonly used to describe non-citizen workers without visas; the term makes a tautology out of the criminal (“illegal”) and the non-American (“alien”). Criminality and

patriotism are tied together linguistically in other respects, too: the U.S. perpetrators of torture at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq in 2004 have repeatedly been referred to by national leaders and rank-and-file citizens as “un-American,” and one of the standard penalties for convicted felons is the revoking of their citizen rights, the literal act of “un-Americanizing” them.⁸ In the body of literature under consideration here, transience and prostitution are both criminal acts whose illegality is based largely on their common suggestion of instability or dislocation.

Lastly, Marx’s inclusion of prostitutes as a dangerous class repeats itself in the representations of prostitutes as figures that threaten the sanctity of gender roles and especially of American womanhood. For Marx and Engels, prostitutes are the overt manifestation of the real condition of bourgeois marriage, in which women are property, “mere instruments of production,” to be exchanged among men at their discretion. Monogamy, an institution premised on the concentration of power through inherited wealth forces a premium to be placed on women’s sexual “honor,” a contrived value whose result is the shame and degradation of prostitutes. In both instances, women’s sexual relations with men are premised on economic relations (Engels “Origin” 745). The proletarian revolution, they predict, in abolishing the capitalist system of production would naturally end “prostitution both public and private” (“Manifesto” 488). Prostitutes were thus part and parcel of the system of bourgeois gender relations, a reactionary class who could not be expected to play a role in revolutionary activity.

⁸ It is no small irony that many of the products bearing “Made in the U.S.A.” tags, which are meant to encourage U.S. consumers to support domestic industry, are actually produced in the rapidly-privatizing U.S. prison-industrial complex, by (racialized, working-class) prisoners coerced into working for slave wages by the threat of poorer treatment or reduced privileges if they dissent from joining the prison labor force. The activist website, www.nomoreprisons.org, provides a number of links to more resources on this topic.

Throughout American history, prostitutes often have been portrayed as “unnatural” women who shun motherhood and family, as well as monogamy; under the surface, the real cause of their unnaturalness is that they are women who profit from the sexual economy and who eschew the customary dependence upon one man that shores up the entire patriarchal structure. In other words, representations of the prostitute reflect Marx and Engels’ observation that she is reviled in order to convince the majority of women to sell themselves into the “legal prostitution” of marriage⁹, thereby upholding “the absolute domination of the male over the female sex as the fundamental law of society” (Engels 740). In political theories that rely upon structuralist philosophies, the elements that appear to escape the social structure (or perhaps more accurately, who own no particular place within it) represent danger because they suggest the limits of the grand, all-encompassing narratives offered by thinkers like Marx and Freud – thus their characterization as “unnatural.” That word, unnatural, has a dual function when used to characterize prostitutes: as Hannah Arendt has pointed out, natural and national have the same root, *nascere* – “to be born” (Agamben *Homo Sacer* 128). Prostitution’s characterization as both foreign and unnatural results in a *de facto* nationalizing and naturalizing of the convention of monogamous heterosexual marriage, which in turn leads to a frequently uncritical portrayal of women’s circumscribed lives. In American literature, “dangerous women” are dangerous because they do not aspire to the same middle-class gender values that the women of most working-class fiction cling to; Marx and Engels’ conception of “the dangerous classes” has undergone an Americanization that reveals working-class culture’s rather bourgeois adherence to the notion of purity.

⁹ According to Carole Pateman, this phrase was first used by Mary Wollstonecraft in her 1790 essay, “A Vindication of the Rights of Man” (*The Sexual Contract* 190).

The Way Forward: Chapter Itineraries

Stuck in Go treats its primary texts not chronologically but comparatively. The first two chapters analyze texts from opposite ends of the century – Theresa Serber Malkiel’s 1910 novella, *The Diary of a Shirtwaist Striker*, and Ken Loach’s 2000 film, *Bread and Roses* – which I pair together to illustrate the ways in which the central questions governing the characterization of the mobile woman by working-class champions fundamentally have not altered in the course of a century, even though the particular circumstances driving immigration, the economy, race relations, and sexual mores have undergone profound transformations in that same timespan. In these works, the mobile woman is a secondary character, and her presence offers a critique of the dominant narrative from its margins; rather than being an authorial strategy, she is a slippage – a site from which the reader may enter the text to read against the grain of its main arguments and assumptions. Many representations of working-class women precede Malkiel’s imagined account of the 1909 New York City shirtwaist strike, in which an unprecedented 25,000 women textile workers walked off the job and stayed out for three months: for example, Charles Dickens’s 1842 sketches of the Lowell mill girls in *American Notes*, Rebecca Harding Davis’s 1861 *Life in the Iron Mills*; or, *The Kork Woman*, and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps’s 1871 *The Silent Partner: A Novel* all exemplify this tradition. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Loach’s film about the early nineties’ Justice for Janitors campaign in Los Angeles keeps company with other contemporary works about working-class women, including novels such as Dorothy Allison’s *Bastard Out of Carolina* (1992), Fae Ng’s *Bone* (1993), and films like Patricia Cardoso’s 2002 *Real Women Have Curves* and Niki Caro’s 2005 *North Country*.

Some of these works feature characters who may be classified as mobile women, and others do not, but I believe that *The Diary of a Shirtwaist Striker* and *Bread and Roses* make a particularly well-fitted pair: both are dramatizations of major labor victories in America's largest cities, both tell the tale from the point of view of a heroine participating in the strike, and both take pains to complicate the central issue of class struggle by addressing the gender, citizen, and race issues that influence and problematize notions of class-consciousness. Each uses prostitutes and immigration to explore the fragmented nature of the labor movement, a conceit that demonstrates the entrenched notions of sexuality and race that have guided class politics throughout the twentieth century. Both works acknowledge the uneasiness and mistrust that can accompany working-class women's encounters with middle-class women, but they focus heavily on working-class women's relationships to that other group, the "dangerous" class whose terrain at the inhospitable edges of American society encroaches on the borders of working-class identity, threatening to taint its image.

In Chapter One, "'How some people do contradict themselves:' Mapping Solidarity in *The Diary of a Shirtwaist Striker*," I draw upon the protagonist's relationship to the prostitutes she encounters in the course of her strike activity to illustrate the tension between the iconic working-class heroine and secondary mobile women characters (the anti-heroines). Mapping the spatial and motional metaphors in the novella, I demonstrate how the book Americanizes "Jewishness," the dominant racial presence in the book, in contradistinction to its treatment of sex workers. The solidarity that Mary, the white American narrator, shares with her Jewish fellow strikers is contingent on their virtue, which "proves" their rightful place in the U.S.; her ability to

erase their “foreign-ness” parallels her increasing exposure to prostitutes of uncertain citizenship who frighten and repel Mary with their “monstrous” behavior. Tracing Mary’s increasing spatial proximity to prostitutes in her narrative, and reading it against the expanding mobility and map of her world which are meant to indicate her expanding politics, I argue that the prostitute characters perform the function of an ironic stance towards the story’s heroine: Mary’s gendered labor and the prostitutes’ share more in common the more determined Mary is to deny the link between sex(ed) labor and national identity.

Chapter Two, “Cleaning Up: Sex(ed) Work and the Troubled Gender Politics of Ken Loach’s *Bread and Roses*,” examines Loach’s use of two sisters divided by immigrant status and political beliefs as the protagonist and antagonist of his film about the unionization of Los Angeles janitors. Maya, the undocumented Mexican immigrant heroine, and Rosa, the legally-sanctioned anti-heroine, take opposite positions regarding the formation of the union. As the two sisters’ characters develop in the course of the film, I contend that the narrative establishes a parallel between their different sexual practices and their labor politics that is upheld by the camera’s use of space and motion to confine Rosa, the prostitute/anti-union figure, and to “liberate” Maya, the heroine. My analysis of the film demonstrates how it is the anti-heroine’s invisible labor, Rosa’s own literal and metaphorical mobility, which creates the conditions that drive the narrative and allow Maya to be the “good” working-class woman, a point left untreated in the film. A more nuanced treatment of gender than *Diary* provides, *Bread and Roses* nonetheless reinscribes the binary of the good and bad working-class woman through its underlying critique of Rosa’s choices within and understanding of the sexual economy (in which I

include both sex work and sexed work). “Mobility,” as a signifier of radical action, is a trait attributed to Maya, but Rosa’s character undermines this assignation, revealing instead the conservative gender politics that mar the film’s commitment to changing working conditions for the most disadvantaged workers.

The second half of *Stuck in Go* turns its attention to works in which the mobile woman character takes the lead. In Chapters Three and Four, I examine two texts in which the mobile woman figure appears as a conscious narrative device through which the authors critique the trope of purity (and related concepts such as authenticity) underlying American master narratives of race, class, and women’s sexuality. Like the first two chapters, these two texts represent the beginning and the end of the twentieth century; in general, there are fewer early-century works that foreground mobile women than there are works in which they function as foils or backdrops to the heroine, but they do exist. Meridel LeSueur’s *The Girl* (written in the 1930s but not published until 1978) fits this description, as does Theodore Dreiser’s 1900 *Sister Carrie*, Ellen Glasgow’s 1925 *Barren Ground*, and, arguably, due to its two different endings, Zona Gale’s 1920 *Miss Lulu Bett*. Late-century contributions to the fictional coterie of mobile women heroines include Bharati Mukherjee’s *Jasmine* (1991), Edwidge Danticat’s *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994), and Janet Fitch’s *White Oleander* (1999). I have chosen to analyze the anonymously-authored *Madeleine: An Autobiography*, published in 1919, and Jamaica Kincaid’s 1991 *Lucy: A Novel*, as particularly cogent applications of mobility as a tool with which to pry away purity’s hold on the American cultural imagination.

Madeleine: An Autobiography details the life of a prostitute in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Upon its publication in 1919, the book became the object of an obscenity

trial in New York State, and the court's decision not to hold the president of its publisher, Harper Brothers, responsible for its content set a precedent that helped overturn the country's rigid censorship laws in 1929. Chapter Three, "Progress Towards What?: The Politics of Prostitution in the 'Progressive' Era in *Madeleine: An Autobiography*," advances the argument that *Madeleine*'s unknown author paved the way for feminists to reconsider sex work and its role in labor politics through her story's refusal – singular for its time – to victimize prostitutes, including the author herself. In making this claim, I rely on the Gramscian notion of the organic intellectual to illustrate how *Madeleine*, through her travels, career, and writing, develops a counter-hegemonic position towards sex work at the turn of the twentieth century. *Madeleine*'s theorization of prostitutes' social function accounts for the ways concepts like citizenship, space, and place inform public discourses on sex work. I argue that, at a time when middle-class reformers relied on victim rhetoric to wage their anti-white-slavery campaign, her memoir analyzes prostitutes' relationship to both the working- and middle-classes and recognizes women's own agency in choosing prostitution; the literal mobility of her life – her migrations around the country and the world – becomes a metaphor for the fluidity of her self-construction, a process of identity-making that puts into practice her argument for prostitutes' agency.

The final chapter builds on my analysis of *Madeleine*, asking how a mobile subjectivity might offer new methods of navigating the structures that aim to freeze identity into a single, limiting phenomenon. Chapter Four, "'Poor Visitor': Mobility as/of Voice in Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy*," analyzes Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy: A Novel*, for its narrative technique, in which the story's formal elements create a space for critiquing

hegemony in its various forms, from colonialism to racism to nation. Through the viewpoint of Lucy, an Antiguan au pair who migrates to New York in the late 1960s to work for a wealthy white family, Kincaid fashions a resistant discourse that exposes the racialized limits of several liberal political agendas – second-wave feminism, the environmental movement, and the artists’ vanguard of the countercultural left – and imagines ways to shape their best attributes into a new political discourse informed by the experiences of the postcolonial laboring female subject. Lucy’s interactions with these groups illustrate how each employs a variation on the theme of purity to reproduce the homogenizing current of the U.S.’s hegemonic culture. Through a close reading, I demonstrate how Lucy’s literal mobility – she is always in motion, leaving people and places behind – is matched by Kincaid’s use of language and the formal structure of her narrative to deploy the text’s own metaphor of movement; drawing on the novel’s cultural references to contextualize Kincaid’s critiques of U.S. progressive political culture, I argue that the author’s textual strategy of multiple meanings, free association, and shifting viewpoints prevents her novel from becoming static and fully “knowable.” Thus destabilized, *Lucy* offers an applied model for the mobile methodology Kincaid advocates through her narrative – a suggestive example of the mobile woman’s paradigmatic potential for rewriting the relationship of the racialized, sexualized woman worker to the institutions that delimit her identity.

In its organization, *Stuck in Go* attempts to practice a version of the mobility it puts under consideration through a reading of four main texts. The project draws upon multiple genres to make its case for a wide-reaching application of the figure of the mobile woman and the necessity of expanding the purview of working-class studies to

consider texts heretofore neglected not just by working-class scholars, but by Americanists at large. In each chapter, I attend to the specificities of the primary text's genre, reading, for example, the camera-work in *Bread and Roses* and taking into consideration the conventions of autobiography in examining how the narrator of *Madeleine* fashions her persona. By highlighting similar treatments of mobile women figures in texts published in two different eras, and shifting my focus from the dominant understanding, in both time periods, of mobile women characters' metaphorical implications to alternative, marginalized readings of their place in American literature, I wish to establish mobile women's presence as an abiding undercurrent in American culture, one that prevents static representations of working-class women's identities and experiences from remaining unchecked. Perhaps mobile women characters' most important contribution to American letters is their ability to move the reader past her own built-in assumptions about working-class women.

CHAPTER ONE

“How some people do contradict themselves:” Mapping Solidarity in *The Diary of a Shirtwaist Striker*

American working-class women have historically been represented in literature and film by what they are not. That is, they are positioned as a group that occupies a middle step on the ladder of social class roles that belong to women in U.S. society: on the one hand, they are aspirants to the middle-class and its “angel in the house” mentality, in which women do not work outside the home¹⁰ but devote their time to childrearing, housekeeping, social clubs, and conspicuous consumption. On the other, they teeter dangerously on the edge of ruin, a twist of fate or a stomach’s growl away from the spatial and social rootlessness of the lowest class of women, namely, those who – depending on the time period – labor as sex workers, work “illegally” for starvation wages, fall prey to homelessness and addiction, or survive on welfare. Thus, working-class women are the knot in a systemic tug-of-war, now creeping towards social respectability and traditional gender roles, now sliding in the other direction towards the desperation of extreme poverty. Their cultural representations bear the evidence of their restricted place between these two groups. In literature and popular culture, depending on the sympathies of the author, working-class women characters are defined and stereotyped by two contradictory sets of traits, exposing their nearness to or distance from their (equally stereotyped) bourgeois or *lumpenproletariat* sisters: Christian or godless,

¹⁰ Although women, especially those of the middle-class, drastically increased their numbers in the workforce throughout the twentieth century, a March 2, 2006 *New York Times* article by Eduardo Porter noted that the number of American women working outside the home peaked at 77%, and that number is in decline, specifically among the middle- and upper-classes.

morally superior or sexually deviant, upstanding citizen or degraded immigrant, white or racially Othered.¹¹

Ironically, the space working-class women occupy between the two groups hides their proximity to each other, as political radicals like Emma Goldman and Agnes Smedley often noted. Smedley, a daughter of migrant workers, wrote of her Aunt Helen, who supported her family through prostitution, “To me her profession seemed as honorable as that of any married woman – she made her living in the same way as they made theirs, except that she made a better living and had more rights over her body and soul” (142). The (for many women) uncomfortable similarities between the situations in which differently-classed women found themselves is especially apparent in literature written in the early twentieth century, at a time when the word “feminism” was just entering the mainstream lexicon, battles for suffrage and for unionization were making newspaper headlines, and the crusade against so-called white slavery was in full swing. Possibly more than any other tribute to working-class women written in that time, Theresa Serber Malkiel’s *The Diary of a Shirtwaist Striker* (1910) depicts the complex social fabric that shaped working women’s lives in this era. As a result, *Diary* offers a more salient representation of working-class women’s political and social circumstances than its more strident Social Realism counterparts of the same generation of literary works, like Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* (1906), Arthur Bullard’s *Comrade Yetta* (1913),

¹¹ It’s important to note that the history of the working-classes in the U.S. begins not with industrialization but with the slave trade, the exploitation of indigenous peoples, and the creation of debtors’ prisons in colonies like Georgia (making poverty literally a crime). However, in this article, my focus is on literature that represents women’s wage work and their mass movement away from labor performed inside the home (for commercial purposes) and into the public marketplace, industrial production, and service industries, a phenomenon that peaked after the Civil War, as African Americans migrated en masse to northern cities, as rural women made their way to the cities to profit from the new industries being created, and as a new wave of immigration began in earnest.

or Zona Gale's short stories, frequently published in contemporary serial magazines like *Collier's* or *McClure's*.

The Diary of a Shirtwaist Striker sees a population of working-class women divided by diverse visions of morality, social justice, and citizenship, a world in which prostitutes represent the unspoken limit of labor and gender solidarity. For Malkiel, sexuality and the uses it is put to by various women signifies a subtler debate about immigration, the nature of citizenship and political community, and the insufficient, narrow visions of labor and feminist movements. Historically, the 1909 Shirtwaist Strike is a victory for labor, but the significance of *Diary* lies in its critique of "progressive" movements that tries to silence difference, dissent, and the individual subject in favor of the greater good.

Malkiel's *Diary of a Shirtwaist Striker* chronicles the three-month general strike of 20,000 women employees of New York City's garment district through the eyes of its narrator, Mary, a young white American girl who joins her striking coworkers on a lark but soon becomes a zealous believer in the labor movement and socialist ideals. Written as a diary, Malkiel's fictionalized work offers a day-to-day account of the strike (popularly called "The Uprising of the 20,000") that reflects actual events of the real shirtwaist strike of 1909; the strike began on November 22 and continued until February 15, 1910, when the last of the shirtwaist factory owners signed an agreement to recognize the demands of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) for increased pay and an end to the police brutality that had dogged workers since that August, when early rumblings of a strike had begun.

Diary follows Mary's growing social awareness as she is drawn deeper into the struggle, but it also illustrates the personal costs of her political awakening: her parents, who believe unions are a man's business, throw her out of the house when she refuses to give up the strike; her fiancé, Jim, begs her not to sabotage their relationship and to accept a submissive role as his wife; destitute, once her meager savings runs out, she must seek shelter in a rundown boardinghouse and learn firsthand what hunger feels like. As a striker, she is forced off the worn path between her home and the factory; her de facto identity as political dissident brings her to the homes of poor immigrants and wealthy American women, college campuses and Blackwell Island (a New York City prison notorious for housing arrested prostitutes), union halls and the New York state capital, street corners and the workhouse, in an odyssey survey of the American social landscape previously denied her in her role as docile daughter working for pin money until saved by marriage and homemaking. Throughout the journey, her ingrained gender roles conflict continually with her growing class-consciousness, and she struggles to harmonize the two, ultimately redefining her conception of femininity and feminism within a broader Socialist framework of economic and political ideology. The labor movement unexpectedly exposes her to the issues of immigration, "white slavery," and suffrage. Her fiancé, initially opposed to her political participation, undergoes a change of heart when he sees the strength of her commitment, and ultimately joins her on the path to social enlightenment in the days leading to their walk down the aisle.

My essay reads *The Diary of a Shirtwaist Striker* to examine the ways the presence of mobile women in literary texts that foreground the "ideal" working-class woman – one who is faithful to her union, to her country, and to her place in a patriarchal

society – intervene in what might otherwise be read as triumphant tales of working-class women’s empowerment. In doing so, I rely on three distinct but related research areas to “triangulate” the literary topography of my subject matter through the lenses of theory, history, and literary criticism. To ground my discussion of “mobile women” characters’ relationships to more traditional working-class representations in *Diary*, I draw upon the recent work of scholars such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty and bell hooks, who anatomize solidarity as a problematic construction that has been used to destroy rather than build bridges between and among women of different economic, racial, and geographical circumstances. To elucidate the historical context of Malkiel’s fictional diary, I utilize the work of feminist and labor historians such as Nancy F. Cott and Alice Kessler-Harris; their research provides important insight into the literary devices and metaphorical references encoded in *Diary*. And, finally, my literary analysis is informed by the research of working-class studies scholars Nan Enstad and Laura Hapke.

I rely on these three lenses to map not just my paper’s content but its structure, too. Beginning with a theorization of the use of “mobile women” characters as a counterpoint to traditional working-class heroines, this essay will offer a brief historical sketch of the influential factors that together helped to create “the” working-class female protagonist of early twentieth-century U.S. literature. Every portrait has its frame, and in this sketch it is mobile women who demarcate its margins. I contend, however, that like all binaries, this one leaks: turning to *Diary*, I examine Malkiel’s representation of the relationship between Mary, her proletarian heroine, and her “dangerous class” counterparts to find the spots where they overlap, as well as where they conflict. Malkiel’s protagonist is disturbed by her encounters with prostitutes throughout the story,

but in each work, this trauma is interrupted by irony; both authors make the point that all women's labor is sexualized¹² and challenge their audiences to make sense of the degrees of distinction on which acceptable and unacceptable behaviors and traits are based: how much sexualization is too much and how is "too much" calculated? By the degree of profit a woman makes? The level of clarity with which she recognizes her position and accepts or rejects it? The ratio of liberty attained to exploitation endured? The number of body parts employed in her labor? *Diary* ventures deep into the aporias in literary representations of working-class women that a century of cultural production has failed to resolve. *Diary* is remarkable for its attention to these questions of representation and definition, but within the work itself are contradictions that expose its creator's own limits. I conclude with an analysis of how *Diary*'s secondary characters muddy the landscape beyond, perhaps, even their author's intentions.

Keeping Body and Soul Together: "Dis-membering" the Feminist Body Politic

Surprisingly, little critical attention has been paid to *The Diary of a Shirtwaist Striker*, perhaps in part because the book was first serialized in a socialist magazine and went unnoticed by the mainstream press in its time.¹³ Shortly after its publication in book form in 1910, it went out of print until its revival by the labor press in 1990, but even the resurgent interest in working-class literature in the last two decades has produced no in-depth analysis of *Diary*. What criticism does exist is laudatory of the book's singularity:

¹² At the most fundamental level, the division of labor between the sexes demonstrates this point (see Marx and Engels *Origins of the Family*), but its public application in the U.S. is perhaps most apparent in the fact that, until 1965, newspapers divided employment classifieds into separate male and female categories.

¹³ In his introduction to the 1990 reissue of *Diary*, Francoise Basch notes that it was first serialized in the radical magazine, *New York Call*, from April 15 to May 14, 1910, before being published in book form by the socialist-oriented Cooperative Press (62).

scholar Laura Hapke calls *Diary* “the most outspoken novel of the strike” and “uncompromising in its certainty that women must neither trade marriage for the struggle nor relinquish their trade union membership or leadership roles” (95-96). Peter Kvidera, in an essay titled, “Rewriting the Ghetto: Cultural Production in the Labor Narratives of Rose Schneiderman and Theresa Malkiel,” praises *Diary* as a model “for reexamining the truth of [Malkiel’s] labor experiences and re-creating [the predominantly Jewish Lower East Side] ghetto” (1151). Francoise Basch, in his introduction to the 1990 reissue, claims that, “Reminiscent of William Blake, the book takes its theme of the corrupt city, the discovery of degradation and evil at every corner, from the same inspiration [of religious evangelical fervor]” (72). Basch goes on to argue that Malkiel’s *Diary* is important for its early recognition that “class and gender emancipation are inseparable” (73). All three critics offer brief assessments of the work’s socio-political insights and literary importance, but if, as they argue, *Diary* is a model for “reexamining the truth,” the “most outspoken” literary product of the shirtwaist strike and – in a departure from the wooden melodrama characteristic of American socialist fiction – delves into themes redolent of William Blake’s own endlessly explored works, then surely the story deserves more than a cursory analysis. Although I agree with Hapke and Basch that *Diary* has been wrongfully neglected (Hapke wonders what its “possible influence” might have been, had *Diary* “been noticed in its day” [95]), the textual nuances and writing strategies that make its neglect worth rectifying remain unexplored in either critic’s brief readings, and Kvidera’s reading, as I shall later explain, problematically ignores the work’s crucial component of gender.

More than Hapke, Basch tempers his praise of Malkiel's political arguments in *Diary* with a recognition of the work's limitations. His primary criticism is that, although the protagonist, Mary, "links class and gender oppression more forcefully than [Malkiel] ever did in her political pamphlets"¹⁴ (69), *Diary* nonetheless conforms to contemporary conventions by "sav[ing Mary] from spinsterhood" with the "providential solution" of a plot in which Mary lifts her fiancé, Jim, "to her own lofty heights" (69) of political enlightenment. In this way, Mary gets a happy ending that rescues her from the "sexist oppression. . . of an average socialist husband" while functioning in the "socialist gospel" tradition of woman acting "as guide and inspirer" (69). Basch argues that Malkiel's own views on the interrelated oppressions of gender and class, as enumerated in her other writings, were conflicted: "Although Malkiel saw the 'free woman' under socialism achieving equality in society and within marriage, emotionally she still adhered to the Victorian stereotype of pure womanhood" (61). By contrast, Basch sees Mary's political evolution as more radical than her creator's: Mary, then, for all the conventionality of her story's ending, trumps her creator's own politics by seeing more clearly the complex interworkings of gender and class political economies. Whereas Malkiel considered herself "a Socialist first, then a woman" (quoted in Basch 54), Basch praises Mary's greater understanding of the ways women, both in kinship networks and in radical movements, are subjugated to patriarchal dominance: "Inequality in the world of labor emerges as a much stronger theme [in Mary's diary] than in Malkiel's pamphlets" (68).

¹⁴ Malkiel began her career in the sweatshops of New York City, but upon marriage to a wealthy, radical-minded lawyer, she left the textile trade to work as an activist for several related causes. She maintained an active membership in the Socialist Party of America and frequently wrote political pamphlets about SPA agendas and philosophies. Scant biographical information is available about her, but Francoise Basch's introduction to *Diary* offers a detailed summary of her life as it has been pieced together by brief newspaper articles and pamphlets that reference her or her writings.

Essentially, Basch claims that Malkiel uses her character, Mary, to express a more profoundly radical political orientation than she expresses in her own non-fiction writing, and even suggests that Mary takes on a life of her own – for example, “refuting biological difference” (68) in direct opposition to some of Malkiel’s other writings which champion women’s special capacities as mothers and nurturers.

A close reading of Malkiel’s *Diary* suggests that perhaps Basch has it wrong: I contend that Malkiel uses Mary as the target of her own subtle critiques of the socialist women she encountered in her own daily activist life. Whatever record of beliefs Malkiel left in her pamphlets, the many instances of dual meaning and oblique criticism of the protagonist in *Diary* suggest the text presents a more deeply conflicted political agenda than Basch acknowledges. We may speculate that perhaps writing *to* Mary (through the other characters Mary encounters during the strike), as well as *through* her, allowed Malkiel to inhabit a political ideology less dependent on party approval than her pamphlets were. This notion that Malkiel talks to Mary indirectly in the text can be demonstrated by shifting the focus away from previous critics’ preoccupation with Mary’s relationships to men in the story. Both Hapke and Basch direct their readers to Mary’s relationships to her father, boss, and fiancé, rather than to other women in the story. Moving the critical spotlight away from Mary’s relationship to the men in the story and redirecting it onto Mary’s relationships with other women offers new ways of understanding this rich narrative. Neither Basch nor Hapke performs a close reading of Malkiel’s language, nor do they consider Mary’s specific interactions with prostitutes; they hypothesize that Malkiel’s choice of an American narrator over an immigrant one

might have been intended to prevent a WASP readership from being scared away, but their evaluation of Mary's interactions with the immigrant women strikers is scant.

Kvidera, on the other hand, centers his essay on Mary's relationship to her Jewish coworkers, in order to argue that Malkiel's vision of America is an amalgamating one; that is, Mary's evolving understanding of and participation in a predominantly Jewish-led strike enables her to "reenvision New York City" as a place (rather than a space) in which her American identity is shaped by "*where she is and what she does in that place*" (1149, italics in original). Kvidera's overarching point is that Malkiel's *Diary* uses an American narrator to investigate the ways ethnicity informs American identity, and to a degree, he is correct. Mary proudly declares herself a "free-born American" and the origins of the immigrant strikers are spelled out – clearly, national origin is of importance here – but Kvidera's discussion of the ways *Diary* imbricates class, gender, and citizenship ends its obligation to the "gender" part of the equation with the acknowledgment that the strikers are women. There's more to it than that. For example, it remains unclear what citizenship the prostitutes Mary encounters possess. Intentionally or not, Mary's silence on this score suggests literally and figuratively that the prostitutes have no citizenship, no membership in a national community, an important unspoken assertion in light of the attention the text gives to all other women characters' citizenship. This absence hints at the limits of *Diary*'s political vision, a limit not heretofore considered in the sparse critical writings on the book: *Diary* draws a line of exclusion at the (overlapping?) borders of citizenship and sexuality. Whether that boundary is the product of Mary's politics or Malkiel's needs to be examined in order to better understand the text's overall project.

Before delving into *Diary* itself, some historical context may be useful: the early years of the twentieth century were politically turbulent, marked by a number of movements and agendas centered on changing women's roles and improving their standing in U.S. society; a confluence of diverse women's organizations yielded the greatest coalition of women's political activism ever before seen in the U.S. The suffrage movement gained momentum, leading to the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920. Women workers conducted massive strikes that shut down the textile industry several times over the course of the century's first two decades as they pushed for equal pay and special legislative protections from overwork and unsafe factory conditions. The term "feminism" entered the popular lexicon, offering an abstract ideology in pursuit of women's right to free determination and individualism (Cott 13), just as American consumer culture was finding its target audience: women.¹⁵ As historian Nancy Cott writes, "That [the 1910s] was the only decade in which woman suffrage commanded a mass movement, in which working-class women, black women, women on the radical left, the young, and the upper class joined in force; rich and poor, socialist and capitalist, occasionally even black and white could be seen taking the same platform" (30). Women working for all kinds of political and social agendas united in the drive for enfranchisement, and the emerging feminist movement used the already-existing platform of suffrage as a stage from which to preach their own more philosophical doctrine of equality. While suffrage garnered the most media attention, women activists also helped each other in more specific causes: suffragists saw opportunities to build alliances with

¹⁵ For a detailed analysis of women's cultural role as consumers in early twentieth-century society, see Thorstein Veblen's 1925 *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions* (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1957), especially chapters 2-4.

working-class women by aiding them in their strikes, which created the opportunity to educate the strikers about suffrage and convert them into supporters of the cause.¹⁶

I do not wish to suggest, however, that harmony reigned among all women in all groups active in this era. Middle-class suffragists and working women fought loudly over their opposing interests. Suffragists were struggling to win women's legal and social equality while working-class women and union leaders pushed Congress to pass protective labor laws that recognized women's "special" social roles of mothering and wifedom, in order to protect women from overwork (because they also had a "second shift" at home) and from dangerous labor that might impair their ability to bear and raise children. As historian Philip S. Foner writes, "Working-class radicals of the [Women's Trade Union League] . . . found it difficult to work with the middle- and upper-class women of the suffrage movement. Too often, their paternalistic attitude, to say nothing of their contempt for workers, and especially immigrant workers, came to the fore" (483). Nonetheless, many activist leaders recognized the strength that numbers could provide in both suffrage protests and strikes, and tried to bridge their differences for the greater good of their respective agendas: "Many prominent suffragists did support the strikers" (482) and women labor activists argued that "workingwomen needed the vote . . . as a tool that would give them some degree of control over their miserable working conditions" (483).

¹⁶ Such opportunities were not brand new: similar efforts had been launched in vain in the late 1860s. This time around, however, the suffragists were more successful in gaining working women's support. A number of fascinating histories explore the nuances of women's political activities and cross-class coalitions in this era. Among the most notable are Dorothy Cobble's *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (Yale UP, 1987), Alice Kessler-Harris's *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (Oxford UP, 2003), and Philip S. Foner's *Women and the American Labor Movement: From Colonial Times to the Eve of World War I* (Free Press, 1979).

While these alliances were being built, the anti-white slavery crusade galvanized a movement to “rescue” women from prostitution and destroy the U.S. sex industry.¹⁷ The anti-white-slavery “movement” was reaching its apex in the 1910s, but this battle against vice was not routinely included or acknowledged as an agenda item in the groundswell of women’s activism for the causes that characterized the period. On the other hand, radical labor organizations like the Industrial Workers of the World used the issue of prostitution to galvanize potential recruits; Foner quotes from an issue of *Solidarity*, the IWW’s East coast paper, which pleads, “ ‘Our sisters and daughters have to sell their bodies in order to live – why? Because you and your likes didn’t organize so you could make enough to place the woman where she belongs – in the home’ ” (401). Such statements demonstrate the predominant thinking of the day, which precluded ideas like pay equity and unionization for women; instead, workingwomen were the invisible line between two polarities – house-wifedom or prostitution. (Many histories of the time period exclude that phenomenon from their narratives, possibly because contemporary investigations into white slavery yielded conclusive results that no such thing existed in spite of crusaders’ insistence to the contrary [Keire 6].) Whether real or imagined, however, the problem of women being forcibly led into brothel careers worked against women’s grassroots liberation efforts in two specific ways. First, white slavery stories provided a sharply contrasting image of the liberated woman, offering instead a weak, defenseless innocent at the mercy of a cruel social world. Second, many scientific researchers of prostitution during this time conflated the alleged depravity of prostitutes with the “deviant” philosophies of the emerging feminist movement, whose advocates’ sexual

¹⁷ My chapter on *Madeleine: An Autobiography* (1919) considers the white slavery scare in detail. I allude to it here only briefly, to help characterize the period 1900-1920 as a time of both women’s liberation efforts and of strong resistance to those efforts.

“normalcy” was suspect because they dared to question the “natural” gender hierarchy. Early feminists were commonly depicted as either hypersexualized vixens or overtly masculinized lesbians. As feminist historian Heather Miller argues, “sexologists [in the early twentieth century] drew revealing correlations at the time between feminists, prostitutes, and lesbians” (81-82). The anti-white slavery movement thus plays a role in understanding the tangled social relations that act as background scenery to the primary strike action depicted by Malkiel in her fictional *The Diary of a Shirtwaist Striker*.

Malkiel’s 1910 *Diary* is positioned perfectly to illustrate working-class women’s general situation at the time. Sexually harassed on the job, suspected of depravity, and generally considered one step removed from prostitution by virtue of having left the moral safety of the domestic sphere, working-class women, especially those who defied accepted gender norms by striking and otherwise pursuing their rights, were caught between, on the one hand, preaching solidarity and fighting against their economic exploitation and degraded status as “loose” women, and on the other, aspiring to opportunities that would allow them at least a whisper of a chance at climbing into the middle-class (the very class that helped to create the stereotypes about the loose morals of working-class women). A true product of its time, *The Diary of a Shirtwaist Striker* is rife with the conflicting ideologies of the early twentieth century: talk of women’s equality bumps up against arguments in favor of women’s special status as a protected class; praise for hardworking immigrants is dampened by racial and ethnic slurs; pro-union rhetoric is negated by anti-union commentary, and so on.

One way of understanding this tangle of oppositional ideas in the text, all set forth in the observations of its lone narrator, is to recognize that the political structure into

which the main story (women workers' demands for better working conditions) is trying to squeeze itself does not fit. *Diary's* narrator, Mary, champions a Marxist-socialist vision of the world, but the story's contradictions and conflicts demonstrate the difficulties of manipulating class-based theory in a gendered, racialized context. Marxism has been widely criticized by second- and third-wave feminists as an innately masculine theory of political economy, rendering what Chandra Talpade Mohanty calls the "fundamentally masculine definition of laborer/worker" (151). As Mohanty points out in *Feminism without Borders*, "The fact of being women with particular racial, ethnic, cultural, sexual, and geographical histories has everything to do with our definitions and identities as workers" (142). Mohanty is writing about the early twenty-first century, but her arguments help to explain the problems with the way Malkiel configures her narrator's understanding of sexual politics in the economy of *her* time. In the 1910s, however, such critiques of Marxism's theoretical limitations were uncommon; although Malkiel's contemporaries Emma Goldman, Lucy Parsons, and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn *did* criticize the gender and race politics of the movements – anarchism and socialism – they championed, their analyses were generally aimed not at the theories but at their material application. Laura Hapke's survey of working-class literature from the early twentieth century reports that even the most radical unions had few women leaders (*Tales* 98), and most of the AFL-affiliated unions denied women membership at all (90).

The contradictions and slippages in Malkiel's narrator's experiences as a striker and labor activist reveal the shortcomings in labor movement ideology and practice; her struggle to fit gendered and racialized experiences into this paradigm fails largely because the paradigm was not built to include them. While Mary often seems unaware of

the inconsistencies in her tale of her march to political enlightenment, a close reading of the language in Malkiel's text hints at a more sophisticated understanding of the complex social problems her narrator is trying to navigate. In other words, Malkiel's narrator is open to critique, too, within *Diary*; I contend that the disjunctures in Mary's observations and thoughts are part of Malkiel's larger project, in which even the (pro-union, pro-feminist) protagonist is shown to stop short of a truly radical political vision for the future of laboring women.

What follows, then, is a close reading of *Diary* in two parts: the first section demonstrates how Mary's strike participation tugs her away from the shore of her middle-class aspirations and casts her afloat on a metaphorical raft of increasing physical mobility; in this reading, she drifts towards a political awareness that recognizes the exigent questions that race and gender pose to the project of class solidarity. The second part of my *Diary* analysis reads the story from the opposite shore: Mary's literal and metaphorical travels pull her closer to the brink of marginality – or *lumpenproletariat* women – represented by the increasingly frequent appearance of prostitutes in the text; her brushes with these social outcasts induce waves of different emotions – fear, repulsion, pity – that contradict her surging commitment to solidarity with the oppressed and impoverished. I aim to show how *Diary*, a text that, more than most of its era, richly portrays the complex maze of social concerns affecting working-class women in the early twentieth century, nevertheless fails to bridge the fundamental gap between a socialist vision of women's solidarity and the deeply-rooted aversion to including in that vision those who embody society's margins. In the masculinist discourse of labor, these gendered margins are most visible in the realm of sex work, in which an overwhelmingly

female workforce turns patriarchy on its head by materially profiting from women's objectification and commodification.

Mohanty's scholarship on feminist solidarity focuses on what she calls "common differences," the idea that attending to the differences and specificities "within and among the various communities of women" (224), including differing levels of power, can elucidate the connections and overlaps between them. "The challenge," she writes:

. . . is to see how differences allow us to explain the connections and border crossings better and more accurately, how specifying difference allows us to theorize universal concerns more fully. It is this intellectual move that allows . . . women of different communities and identities to build coalitions and solidarities across borders. (226)

The solidarity that Mary tries to practice in *Diary* causes her to cross the borders of location, citizenship, and ethnicity; she finds in her fellow strikers' particular experiences the means of universalizing the cause of the strike, expanding her sense of community precisely through her exploration of difference, though her journey is not without its stumbles.

Malkiel's text, rich in historical context, tries to account for the myriad agendas and experiences of women in the era, but it runs up against an impassable wall in Mary's staunch refusal to consider the universal feminist concerns embodied by the "difference" she sees in the prostitutes she encounters. Mary's thoughts form the dominant narrative, but a faint counter-discourse implies Malkiel's discomfort with some of her heroine's views. The author's objections to elements of Mary's shifting philosophy becomes visible both in the narrator's own thoughts and in her recorded exchanges with secondary characters, whose words and actions subtly invest the text with critical distance from the narrator's own professed beliefs. This critical distance, paradoxically, allows the reader

to see more clearly the connections that exist between the circumstances of working-class women like the narrator and the prostitutes and immigrants from whom she dissociates. Mary's reported encounters with immigrant women and prostitutes both demonstrate Mary's own politics and offer moments of resistance to those politics; in these spaces, Mary's words, both her own and those she attributes to other characters, indirectly attenuate Mary's narrative, challenging its dominant trajectory and complicating the text's overarching agenda.

For example, on the second day of the strike, the narrator describes her emotional reaction to a meeting at strike headquarters:

Only a little while ago I would have laughed had somebody told me that I would take this strike in earnest, but this afternoon, listening to the stories of assault upon the girls, watching the poor, miserable creatures that don't earn enough to keep body and soul together, I believe I was as much excited as the rest of them. (84)

Two levels of distinction are being made here. First, the narrator separates herself from the other women strikers: she makes it clear she has joined the strike on a lark, but that her sympathy for the "poor, miserable creatures" she works with is strengthening her commitment to it. She sees herself as not one of them, even though these women are her coworkers, because she lives at home with her parents and uses her earnings for "pin money" rather than for actual survival. She explains, "Here am I that ain't got any board to pay, for ma don't need my money. Pa makes enough to keep the whole lot of us, so whatever I make is my own" (83). In contrast, she notes that her coworker Minnie's "brother Mack is out of work [and] her father never works" (84). Another striker, Ray, "has a hard lot with that whole family upon her frail shoulders" (83). Yet another, Rose, "is the supporter of the family ever since her father died three years ago, leaving five

children, herself the oldest” (96). Mary’s employment is an adventure; theirs is a necessity.

The second distinction is a subtle reference to the link between working women and prostitution. The phrase “keep body and soul together” recalls Marx’s concept of alienated labor, in which the worker is turned into a tool of production and robbed of the mental and spiritual enjoyment of human existence. Further, it suggests the separation of physicality and spirituality that characterizes descriptions of prostitution in this period: it was understood that the loss of one’s soul accompanies the degradation of sex work; only if a woman’s body were pure could her soul also be. The implication is that the sweatshop workers’ hardships make it difficult for them to maintain their womanly purity, because the necessities of physical life – food, shelter, clothing – tempt them to separate from their moral selves in order to fulfill the needs of their mortal selves.

When Mary is asked to go picketing with the strikers on the third day of the strike, she writes, “But I refused, of course. The idea of walking around the street corner as if I was a watch dog!” (85). Her comment seems curiously evasive of the real reason she initially refuses to picket: the image of women “walking around the street corner” more commonly evokes not watch dogs but prostitutes, and Mary is clearly aware of the connection between factory women and prostitutes. She expresses outrage when her boss, Mr. Hayman, calls her coworker, Sarah, “a street woman” (88), and yet, in discussing her own experiences, she appears loathe to even contemplate the possibility that someone might lob the same accusation at her. Instead, she stresses to her audience, first, the unlikelihood of finding herself in the dire financial straits that might lead a woman to prostitute herself (“pa makes enough to support the whole lot of us”), and

second, a comical image of herself as a public guardian (a watch dog), in order to ward off the more despicable image of herself as a street woman. These strategic moves, coupled with Mary's invocation of the phrase "keep body and soul together," suggest her commitment to the Victorian middle-class notion of woman's purity; her diary entries openly espouse this commitment, but Malkiel's textual strategy is to imbed her own subtle critiques of Mary's views within the words her character "writes." Mary undergoes dramatic shifts in her political reasoning, but her new consciousness remains more conservative than her own characterization of it would have the reader believe. Although her deepening commitment to the strike is accompanied by her professed abandonment of the middle-class gender values she has formerly espoused, her contact with prostitutes defines the boundaries of her expanding consciousness.

As Mary soon discovers, she is not immune to the rupture between body and soul that she mourns in the other strikers. After attending a lecture one day, she writes in her diary:

I was kind of upset by what the last speaker said to us. According to her notion the bosses consider us nothing but hands and don't care what happens to us. It was simply humiliating to listen to her string of words, but when I come to think of it she was right, after all. If I'm out of a job and pick up a newspaper to look for work I go for the page where it says 'hands wanted.' If I'm delayed and come too late the boss informs me he has all the hands he needs. And that's exactly what the woman said. It isn't the mother's daughter, or brother's sister, or Miss So-and-So that the boss wants, but a good, swift pair of hands, and, if they're used up, he looks for others. We don't count at all. (86)

The distance between this quote and the one above gauges Mary's political progress. From referring to the strikers in the third person, she has moved to include herself in the collective "us." Her experience of humiliation, a word whose Latin root, *humus*, means "ground," a literal expression of earthliness, further separates her from her own ego and

pushes her into the material realm peopled by “poor, miserable creatures” battling poverty. The lecturer’s speech has merely invoked Marx’s basic tenet of worker alienation, but for Mary, the revelation of the externally-imposed separation of her own body and soul – within this system, she is not a daughter or a sister or a properly-named social actor – is devastating in more ways than one.

In addition to recognizing her proximity to the class of “poor, miserable creatures” she would rather pity from a distance, she also sees herself cut off from the gender identity that characterizes her relationship to the world. The social relations she lays claim to are all gendered, familial relations, even the “Miss So-and-So,” which speaks her marital status (and consequently, eligibility for employment, since the title “Miss” denotes an unmarried woman and women who wed were often forced to quit their jobs). This is significant, since women workers were considered “unsexed” (in the sense of “unwomanly”), while middle-class women were largely defined by their familial relations, other social roles being routinely forbidden to them. Scholar Nan Enstad, writing about women’s fashions, notes the irony of middle-class women’s existence:

[T]he lady did not work outside the home. . . . In contrast, middle-class representations of white working-class and African American women usually depicted them as large, coarse, and matronly or as sexually ‘impure.’ The constricting fashion that so marked the middle-class woman’s lack of manual labor has often been critiqued on gender terms . . . , but these very symbols of femininity that could be highly oppressive also served as the central signals of privilege and status. (27)

In other words, middle-class women’s bondage, both in dress and restricted social roles, signified their status. Conversely, working-class women’s “liberation,” such as it was, from the confines of the home and from the constrictive fashions of the middle-class, meant the loss of their “proper” gendered roles as ladies, wives, and mothers. Mary’s

own upset emotions at the symbolic loss of these roles thanks to her position in the marketplace reflects her aspirations to the middle-class. Inhabiting the actual role of daughter or wife is not enough; she also wants to be seen as possessing the moral sanctity such roles imply, unmitigated by the fact that she works for pay outside the home.

When on the sixth day of the strike, her father takes her to task for participating in the strike, telling her that it is not “a woman’s place to be hangin’ around street corners, fighting with rowdies” (91), she indignantly responds in her journal:

His words just set my blood a boiling – as if it is woman’s place to go out of the home in order to be the breadwinner for the family. If she’s good enough to spend her days in some of the shops that ain’t fit for pig stys, she may as well stand up on the corners and fight for her rights. I’m sure it’s much better than standing on the corner for other purposes, which some women are compelled to do. (92)

Her indignation is sparked chiefly by the double standard being set, one which offends her belief that in an ideal world, women would not have to work outside the home at all; her father’s acquiescence to a world that breaches this division of labor carries the added insult of his suggestion that, even when circumstances force them to work for pay, women should still be bound by the same servility expected of them when they do not work. For Mary, fighting for better working conditions is equal to fighting to preserve the purity of womanhood by obtaining the same dignity in the workplace that women who stay home expect in the domestic sphere. Her earlier observations about the girls who must support their families because their male relatives can’t or won’t augments the anger of her words in this diary entry. Indirectly, she argues that if men will not uphold their end of this social contract, then women will fight to keep it in place, a throwback to the arguments of the middle-class temperance movement which also helped to foster the “angel in the house” mentality that has plagued women from the mid-1800s onward. She

again deliberately draws the distinction between working women and prostitutes, nudging her self-image closer to that of middle-class women and their assigned domestic roles and concomitant virtues.

As the strike wears on, however, Mary's commitment to being a properly gendered subject changes. The reader soon realizes that Mary's symbolic loss of her gendered familial role as "lady," daughter, and wife-to-be foreshadows the real loss of these identities. Growing tensions between herself and her parents over her continued participation in the strike lead to her being thrown out of her parents' house, penniless. Her fiancé, Jim, at first sides with Mary's parents, and Mary angrily breaks off their engagement. She is literally no longer a daughter or a betrothed, and consequently, also literally becomes a "street woman" (a contemporary slang term for "prostitute") in the sense that she loses her home. Unexpectedly "freed" from these commitments and their accompanying behaviors, Mary suddenly finds herself searching to fill these holes in her identity by traveling deeper into the "wilds" of the city and its politics than she has ever before gone. As her work for the strike necessitates more encounters with middle-class and upper-class women than she appears to have had previously, her allegiance to their agendas quickly begins to swerve confusedly back and forth. While she warms to the idea of women's suffrage pushed predominantly by middle-class women, she indignantly decries the indifference with which the upper-classes view the misery of the poor. In her November 29 diary entry, only a day after her heated disagreement with her father, she angrily challenges the wealthy women who come to gawk at the strikers as though they are a tourist attraction:

Here are those ladies that come around to look at us – they idle their time away with nothin' and it makes me real mad, when they try to tell us that it ain't

lady-like to go out on strike. Why don't they say that it ain't lady-like to go out into the factories and work from morn until night and the same thing over again the next day till we get to see nothing but work and the machine before us. (95)

While wealthy ladies idly traverse the city in search of entertainment, factory workers wear a path between home and the factory and home again. Mary's frustration with such monotony is ameliorated by her strike activity, which leads her to veer away from this linear path to embark on her own odyssey through the streets of New York City, to boardinghouses, union halls, night court, the mayor's office, immigrant ghettos, and so on. Her intellectual and political growth is charted by the expanding territory of the physical map of her travels, but the exception to this burgeoning mobility is her continued aversion to prostitutes; as the following "tour" of Mary's journey around the city demonstrates, Mary stops short of such radical inclusion.

Her initial travel merely swaps the local union hall for the factory, but by November 27, the strike's fifth day, she is ready to break from this routine and join the other women downtown where they are picketing:

I felt a bit shaky when I came downtown this morning. But picketing ain't half as bad as I thought it would be. And another thing – it's enough to get down in that neighborhood and see the way these cops handle our girls, to be mad through and through; there ain't no thought of shame in them. (89)

This passage shows evidence of the ways her traffic pattern is already beginning to change: whereas previously she referenced "the factory" or "the shop," she now thinks of the place she works as a "neighborhood" rather than a specific building. This fledgling sense of community helps her initial nervousness give way to proprietary indignation at the treatment of "our girls" by the police, who fail to respect the strikers as ladies and shamelessly "handle" them like objects. Their lack of shame suggests prurience in their

attitude towards the striking women that recalls the typical equation of working women with loose morals.

Mary's diary thoughts on her first day of picketing continue:

To tell the truth – it's only false pride – this imaginary shame is. There is nothing dishonest in standing up for one's bread. . . In fact, we're all union people, only we don't seem to remember it. This land is one big union, and us children were taught very early that united we stand and divided we fall. (89)

The shame belongs only to the policemen who mistreat her colleagues; she exonerates the women themselves from any accusations of impropriety for walking the streets. Her words -- "imaginary shame" and "nothing dishonest" -- reject the implied immorality of working-women's position of being in public; Mary is wrestling with her own hesitations here, but the idea of "standing up for one's bread" suggests that she believes there's nothing wrong with women working for a living. Nevertheless, her words imply that some work is still unacceptable: the unspoken opposite of "standing up" is obviously "lying down," as in "I'm not going to take this lying down," but this may also be read as an indirect reference to prostitution versus sweatshop work, which literally has women standing up all day working for bread.

More significantly, her conflation of unionism with citizenship has three particular effects: by thinking of Americans and American soil as part of "one big union," she distinguishes between Americans and the foreign-born; she legitimates union membership by making it "patriotic;" and, by expanding the space of the union to include "this land," that is, the entire nation, she vastly expands her own sense of what space she belongs in or to. At the same time, by limiting the "union" to those who are American citizens (presumably by birth, since she talks about early childhood education), she indirectly puts limits on who can legitimately belong in/to this space. She herself,

however, is free to travel not a narrow path but the entire length and breadth of this “one big union.”

As her world expands, Mary’s family life becomes more constricting. November 28, a Sunday, she stays home and gets into a fight with her father: “‘See here,’ was the first thing he said to me this morning. ‘I’ve never been very strict with you girls; you’ve always had enough rope to run about, but not too much. I won’t stand for it. I wouldn’t have my neighbors point their finger at me’” (91). Mary’s father’s words, “enough rope to run about,” indicate both her position as a pet on a leash and that the leash, intended to obscure her restrictions (compared to the “cage” of the home, perhaps), has at last made her aware of them now that she has tried to move beyond the leash’s slack. His words reveal him to be the sole determinant of what is “enough rope” but not “too much.” The scene teaches Mary that her mobility is controlled by the patriarchal authority whose chief interest is protecting his own social status – “I wouldn’t have my neighbors point their finger at me.” A few days later, on December 1, she notes that Jim, too, is trying to rein her in: “Jim thought it wasn’t proper for me to stay down town so late, that the day was long enough for this tomfoolery and that I’m getting to be as lawless as one of them darn anarchists” (99). Home is now becoming a regular site of confrontation and anxiety, where she’s reprimanded for her mobility, both in space *and* time. For Jim, it’s “lawless” for a woman to be out alone after dark in a strange neighborhood (specifically, “down town,” which, as the city center, carries the weight of public intercourse, population density, the sense of being the most public of public places, and therefore no place for a respectable woman). Her disregard (“lawless[ness]”) for the unwritten rules of a gendered social code with which Jim expects her to comply puts her in the company of

those extreme political radicals, the anarchists, who champion among other things the end of the institution of marriage.

The following day she learns that Jim and her parents have decided to hasten her wedding day, in order to disrupt her strike activity. She responds by increasing her movements around town; her journey the next day is her most frenetic yet. Her diary entry for December 3 reads:

Well, well, this was one of the busy days. Have been on the go since early in the morning. But I don't mind it a bit; we've had one of the finest parades I ever saw . . .

[W]e, that is, mostly the League women, thought of it first yesterday about 4 o'clock in the afternoon. Half-past 4 Ida and I were down at the Commissioner's office and got our permit. From there we rode over to a painter's and ordered the placards delivered at the theater at noon today. Then we rushed down to a couple of newspapers and got them to put in the announcement. From there we went to the headquarters, notified the people and appointed some of our committees. By this time it was getting pretty late, so we went home and early this morning a half dozen of us started to make the round among the different meeting halls, urging the girls to be on hand for the parade. (102)

This map of places she's been demonstrates the expanding locations she includes in her daily travels, but it also demonstrates the urgency and authoritativeness of her movements. Words like "rode," "rushed over," "ordered," "notified," "appointed," and "urging" differ sharply from the "giggling," "laughing," and "stacks of fun" that characterized her initial walkout ten days earlier. Her awareness of places, the diversity of her contacts, and her growing list of things to do (in contrast to "the same thing over again the next day till we get to see nothing but work and the machine before us") all contribute to her sense of empowerment. At the same time, her mention of "making the round among the different meeting halls" suggests the agreeable familiarity of a route she has traveled before, connecting through her own mobility the various points on a map of her growing community.

This sense of community reaches an apex for her on December 5, when she attends a mass meeting at a site called “the hippodrome,” whose rental has been paid for by Mrs. Belmont, a local millionaire: “The place was so crowded I had trouble getting in, though I did come rather early. But once I was in it was worth all the trouble of getting there. It did my heart good to see how happy every one of our girls looked. There, more than in any other place, I felt the kinship between all the girls and myself” (106). Mary’s vague language lends itself to metaphorical interpretation. More than just a crowded meeting, she seems to be referring more generally to the experience of the strike itself, which has brought her to a new site of intellectual and political awareness, one emphasizing solidarity as a radical practice. One of the first women to join the strike, she realizes that, although she “did come rather early,” the strike itself is a moment in a long tradition of radical political action that had previously been unknown to her; it is as though she has unwittingly stumbled into a side room in the house of history and found it peopled with activists and philosophers, “so crowded I had trouble getting in.” Literally, of course, she has difficulty moving through the crowds of people, but figuratively, her “trouble in getting there,” where *there* signifies a new cognitive understanding, refers to her personal obstacles to reaching this place: a family life that has not supported her growth as a person, a lack of knowledge about history and politics, the hard work of the sweatshop, hunger and cold, arguments with Jim, and her inner struggle to overcome her social conditioning in order to befriend immigrants and picket on the street. Mary’s understanding that what is so new to her – radical political philosophy – is not really new at all deepens her sense of moving into a new community: “Yes, when I come to think of it I realize that one person by himself, no matter how rich or clever he may be, can’t exist

for very long, unless he is helped and protected by everybody else. It is strange, that I've lived for over twenty years, gone through school and Sunday school and never gave it a thought until to-day" (107). Her feeling of "kinship" with the other strikers underscores her growing distance from her blood relatives. This moment of solidarity, however, is made possible by one of the rich women Mary has begun to scorn frequently in her diary entries; paid for by a wealthy socialite, the hippodrome, the physical site of Mary's epiphany, is a reminder that the shadow of America's capitalist culture and its influence on social norms of inclusivity and exclusivity still looms over Mary's increasing field of vision.

Her journal entries for the rest of the month continue mapping her ever-expanding peregrinations. She stops in Union Square to listen to suffragists' speeches (December 4), travels to the Thalia Theater to hear Mother Jones speak (December 9), hires herself out to a factory for the express purpose of convincing the women there to join the strike (December 10), attends a Socialist reception organized for the strikers (December 23), compares Salvation Army headquarters with the well-heeled denizens of Fifth Avenue during a stroll on Christmas Day, and spends several days wearing a sandwich board and walking up and down between Twenty-third and Wall Street, selling special strike editions of the *New York Call* to raise money for the union (December 29 to December 31). Her movement blurs her social boundaries to such a point that on New Year's Eve she writes, "I must say, I've become a different being . . . I don't seem to distinguish any longer what is respectable and what ain't" (162). This claim, however, is not entirely true; a close look at Mary's encounters with prostitutes shows she retains some very clear

borders between the acceptable and the unacceptable, and further, that these lines function as the framework of her own changing identity.

Mary first references prostitutes in her November 26 diary entry. She writes, “Sarah was crying bitterly this afternoon, and I don’t wonder. The idea of Mr. Hayman calling her a street woman! He surely knows better. Why, she has always been the quietest and most refined girl in the workroom. It’s just because she’s a foreigner. I’m sure he wouldn’t dare say that to me” (88). The passage demonstrates the nuances of class, gender, and citizenship that contribute to Mary’s reaction to prostitutes. Three related ideas surface. First, her indignation is sparked in part by the conflation of working women with prostitutes that historically plagued female workers in the era (and, I would argue, continues today); Mary claims that Mr. Hayman “surely knows better,” indicating she understands his comment as a tactic to break working women’s spirits by accusing them of immoral behavior. This early in *Diary*, she still idealizes the status of the domesticated middle-class woman, and is therefore especially sensitive to Hayman’s deliberate imbrication of paid women workers with sex workers.

Second, Mary indirectly defines her idea of “street women” by posing Sarah as their opposite, “the quietest and most refined girl” in the shop; Mary’s outrage at Hayman’s characterization of Sarah can be read not just as a condemnation of prostitution, but of the vulgar traits associated with improperly gendered female subjects – loud, flashy, coarse. Their opposites are the behaviors idealized by a middle-class notion of womanhood. Her assumption that a quiet, refined woman could not possibly engage in sex work shows both her stringent definition of womanly behavior and her

ignorance of the realities of prostitution as an industry catering to all tastes and discretions.

Lastly, the passage recognizes Mary's own privileged status as a U.S. citizen, and its opposite, the vulnerability of immigrants to the assumptions, insults, and exclusions lobbed at them by xenophobic Americans. This recognition, however unintentionally, draws a correlation between foreign-ness and prostitution: Mary's citizenship immunizes her against Hayman's slurs ("he wouldn't dare say that to me"), indirectly suggesting that sex work itself is un-American, since only foreigners could be so accused. This unspoken suggestion takes on greater significance when read against the November 27 diary entry I discussed earlier, in which she declares the U.S. to be one big union. These consecutive reflections suggest the following thought process: for Mary, prostitution and foreign-ness are linked through their shared status as undesirable, marginalized categories. By contrast, U.S. citizenship and unionism are linked as desirable categories that imply the strength, unity, and community membership of those whom they include. As the story progresses and Mary becomes increasingly accepting of "foreigners," expressing her admiration for the radicalism and courage of the Jewish, Irish, and Italian women who participate in the strike, she gains an increasing, paranoid awareness of prostitutes and insists on their unrelenting difference from herself. Thus, as she accepts foreigners' role in the union, and by extension, in the nation (since her November 27 entry has made unionism synonymous with citizenship), she dismantles that binary – foreigner:citizen – only to build up another – prostitute:American.

In navigating the tangled identity markers of class, citizenship, and sexuality, she is determined to delineate *some* kind of boundary; when the correlation between

citizenship and economic circumstances no longer holds, a more stringent demarcation of the relationship between citizenship and sexuality (or sexual practice) replaces it. In the December 2 diary entry, she maps this opposition literally: “I don’t see how anybody can look into the gulf on the brink of which our girls are standing without feeling a pang of keenest grief, without a desire to do something only to make their lot easier” (101). Here she envisions herself standing at a social margin with her fellow strikers, on the brink of an abyss. The reader is left to imagine a map in which “our girls” have reached the edge of the civilized world, looking into a “gulf” that represents a kind of sea of moral degradation, which, for poor women, would mean turning to prostitution to stave off poverty.

When she is arrested and spends the night in jail on December 7, Mary records her first up-close encounter with prostitutes as one characterized by fear and revulsion. The scene simultaneously conflates working women with prostitutes and works against such conflation, illustrating the way the text both celebrates solidarity and puts limits on it. As Mary and the other strikers await their appearance before the night court judge, they share the cell with arrested prostitutes, who “let out a shriek” of laughter each time the policemen taunt the strikers. Mary is “shocked beyond words” at the policemen’s insinuations, which, like Hayman’s comment to Sarah, are meant to degrade the women by questioning their morality: “‘They are silly, these girls are,’ assured [one policeman]. ‘Where’s the sense of their going on strike when a woman can earn plenty of money without working?’” (111). While the whole experience augments Mary’s sense of solidarity – she begins the passage by declaring, “And now I’m a real striker” (110) – she takes pains to distinguish the strikers from their drunk and disorderly cellmates: “I don’t

know what I looked like, but it was certainly a pity to watch the other girls – they were too scared for anything – on the one end the horrid policemen, on the other four drunken women [the prostitutes]” (111). The strikers, physically caged in the same space as the prostitutes and sharing the long night with them, are nonetheless a world apart, even as the policemen’s treatment of them suggests that the physical proximity of the two groups of women is mirrored by a moral proximity. Mary contends that her night in jail reinforces her commitment to the strike and her fellow workers – “every new arrest makes a firm convert to the cause” (113) – but the actual scene she describes is about exclusion, not inclusion, in which the striking women draw closer together to avoid contamination by the “beastly poison,” “terrible looks,” “cheap guys” and “funny museum” (111-112) of people that surround them.

A similar discord between Mary’s professed intention (an expanding solidarity) and the text’s actual function (critiquing Mary’s delimitation of solidarity with other women) arises a few days later in her December 11 entry detailing her talk at a “swell hotel” to ask rich women for monetary support. The strikers’ address to the socialites is multi-ethnic: Leonora is Irish, Clara is Jewish, and Mary is American. Leonora tells the story of immigration, Clara tells the story of the urban city poor, and Mary, the only American speaker, tellingly focuses on the fact that “us girls are just being pushed and tempted to take up a life of shame,” asking her audience, “if they found themselves in place of us girls if they were hungry and tired and just beaten and hounded for wanting to be honest, whether they wouldn’t turn the other road, if only for spite?” (120). While the other two speakers focus on immigrant workers’ material poverty, Mary is mostly concerned with working women’s potential for moral deviancy if not aided by a unified

coalition of the sympathetic. Her speech assesses working women's relationship to prostitution in three main points: first, she suggests that society tempts women to pursue a "life of shame," which may be interpreted as Mary's belief that a life of shame is tempting because it is easy, filled with the supposed luxuries of the prostitute's lifestyle, which, as the night court policeman suggested, isn't actual work; second, she threatens the rich women with the moral responsibility of driving women to prostitution out of sheer frustration for having been punished for pursuing their economic rights through striking – in other words, she argues that not supporting the strike is as good as supporting prostitution; and third, she declares the price of not having cross-class solidarity to be the building of spite and resentment among women.

In contrast, her diary entry, a meta-narrative of the event, rather than emphasizing the bridge the strikers have built across their ethnic differences, breaks down the speakers' own coalition by employing a labeling process that utilizes familiar stereotypes. Mary separates the speakers from one another even while describing how the three women all work together to make their pitch for monetary support. In describing Leonora, she makes fun of the stereotypical melodramatic storytelling of the Irish: "[A]s she started to talk, the tears commenced to roll from her eyes. I've often wondered where she gets so many of them" (119). The selfless martyrdom of Jewish women gets a nod in her description of Clara, "that simple Jew girl" who explained she "came there to ask for help, but added that it wasn't for us present, but for the thousands of young girls who've been working since they were big enough to turn a wheel" (120).¹⁸ Her speech at the

¹⁸ The text contains many similar illustrations of Mary's belief in ethnic stereotyping, such as her comment that "Italian girls . . . [are] good workers and bad thinkers – just what suits the bosses, but it is pretty hard on us. To tell the truth, I don't know as these simple souls can be blamed much – their thinking machines were never set in working order" (141).

hotel and her diary entry appear to be at cross-purposes: ironically, her speech focuses on cross-class solidarity, but her meta-narrative individuates each speaker according to ethnic typing. In other words, her speech tries to unify (at the expense of prostitutes, the absolute Other in Mary's worldview), but her meta-narrative divides. The daily events of the strike reveal the novel's political agenda, but Mary's descriptions inadvertently showcase her own tendency to delimit and exclude.

December 15 brings Mary another opportunity to ally herself with the marginalized when she is again arrested, and while her sympathy for prostitutes increases, her ability to recognize the ways their plight reflects her own does not. Hauled into "that living hell called night court" (127), she writes in her diary that she is "haunted by the memory of my night's neighbors" and offers this description of them:

The insect under our feet is thought more of than these unfortunate women, and yet they, too, were carried under a mother's breast, rocked, cuddled, and petted in a mother's arms. They, too, were once young and honest and pure like the judge who comes there night after night to sit in judgment over them . . . any sane person could understand after looking at them and listening to some of the things they say that none chose their horrible trade of their own free will. There was always some cause for their downfall, and man was always the one to help them down the slippery road. (128)

Mary relies upon white slavery's narrative trope of the innocent victim lured unsuspectingly into evil to evoke sympathy in her reader for the prostitutes she encounters, and she further alludes to male hypocrisy through her critique of both the judge (there were no female judges in 1910) and the men who, she claims, bear responsibility for prostitution's existence. The passage's accusations against men clearly pander to a female audience, indirectly working to unite women readers in their outrage against the victimization of fellow women, but still she stops short of acknowledging what the strikers and prostitutes share in common, even though the details she records

succinctly draw those links for the reader. For example, she describes one prostitute's fate: "The poor kid didn't have ten cents, not to say the ten dollars she was fined, and will have to go to the workhouse" (128). Three paragraphs later, she writes, "Our girls were all fined from ten to twenty-five dollars apiece," an amount none of the strikers could afford on their own, judging from earlier diary entries: "[Ray] wouldn't think of spending ten cents now-a-days, and do what I may she would not let me treat her" (90); "here is [Rose] who's supporting [a family of five] laid up in bed, and the Lord knows when she'll be able to earn another cent" (97); and, "most of our girls had to walk both ways in order to save their car fare. Many came without dinner" (107). The obvious similarities in the prostitutes' and strikers' circumstances show up in the text's factual record, but Mary will not acknowledge them. For example, neither Mary nor the prostitutes receive fair treatment from the judge, the Law's representative; both the strikers and the prostitutes try to defend themselves against social judgment without much luck; and, both groups of women, as Mary sees it, have been forced into their respective positions by their poor working conditions and desperation to survive. Nevertheless, she continues to put herself in the same position of remove as her readers, only perhaps more enlightened: "I was just all pity for the women I used to despise like so many of us do who don't know any better" (129). As Mary notes her own progress ("I used to [not] know any better"), her words continue to demonstrate her own willful myopia.

If Mary refuses to see the connection, her parents are not blind to it. The next day, when she returns home from night court, her father "just wouldn't listen to me telling him that I'd been arrested and taken to night court, where I was until I got home early this morning" (129). Instead, he accuses her of "being fickle" and no longer "kin of

his,” before throwing her “down on the floor like one would a poisonous snake” and “hurling a terrible oath” on her head (129). After her father’s exit, Mary’s mother enters the scene and verbally abuses her, calling her “terrible names and [charging her] with deeds that my worst enemy wouldn’t dare to do.” Mary counters her mother’s accusations of promiscuity:

I just told ma that I didn’t who would be to blame if I should go wrong, for she never gave us girls a thought since we were big enough to be out and about . . . If she had taken trouble to know something about her own children she would have been aware that I’d rather starve like a dog in the street or find consolation in the cold river than go to the bad. (130)

Once again, the details of events make the connection between sex workers and other women workers clear to the reader even as Mary tries to obscure them with her own opinions. In this scene, that connection takes the form of the stereotype of wayward sexuality associated with working women, a stereotype Mary’s own parents use against her. At the same time, the scene is set up in a way that distances Mary from this connection to the marginalized sex worker by demonizing her parents, the source of the link. If they are capable of making such accusations, it is because they are bad parents who don’t listen to their children.

Mary writes herself as the tragic, grossly misunderstood heroine. Her virtue runs so deep that she would rather drown herself or starve to death than turn to prostitution (“go to the bad”) to survive. (Interestingly, her euphemism, “go to the bad,” invokes a metaphorical mobility in which prostitution becomes a destination, not an act in itself. Although Mary’s mobility has expanded in direct proportion to her political awareness of her position as a working-class woman, she still envisions her daily life as a map containing un-crossable borders.) As Mary tries to create emotional distance between

herself and “the bad,” her words function in direct tension with the text itself, which places Mary physically and circumstantially in the same position as the prostitutes she pities and fears. In other words, first Mary is seen sharing a cell with prostitutes, then the night court scene shows unfair judgments being lodged against arrested sex workers, and finally, the following morning puts Mary in the same position, where her parents pass wrongful judgment on her. The two scenes’ physical proximity, appearing next to each other in the text, emphasizes their parallel nature, but Mary, having just urged her audience to sympathize with prostitutes, takes pains to reassure readers that her own moral convictions would prevent her from ever succumbing to the same pressures. She continues to separate her own plight from that of the prostitutes she encounters, against all indications of the text that such a coalition should be ripe for harvest.

Mary has one final opportunity to engage equitably with prostitutes and recognize their common exploitation as gendered laborers when she is sentenced to five days in the workhouse after her third arrest. Her first night there, she asks the woman on the next cot what she is in for, and her diary entry records this exchange:

‘I suppose for the very same reason that you are here,’ replied my neighbor.

The tone of her voice told the tale of her guilt. My face turned crimson and I shrank from the thought that every other woman in the room was here for the very same reason. I didn’t want them to think that I, too, was one of them and snapped at her proudly; ‘I didn’t want to work for starvation wages and struck; that’s the crime I’ve committed.’

‘An’ I couldn’t go on livin’ on starvation wages any longer and had to sell my body instead of my hands,’ said the girl calmly.

My first impulse was to turn away from the sinner. But who should be the judge of our conscience? Who has a right to blame a girl for what she turned out to be? It’s hard to tell what the best of us would do when pressed real hard. (183)

The reader once again witnesses the now-familiar battle between Mary’s political consciousness and her ingrained social mores, as the language of the passage recalls

earlier scenes in which similar tensions are in play: Mary's initial repulsion at the thought of being surrounded by prostitutes is augmented by her sickening fear that they might mistake her for one of them. To avoid this, her first reaction is to draw the line between herself and them – "I snapped at her proudly" – followed by the desire to "turn away from the sinner," a desire that is interrupted by a guard before it can be acted upon, as the "poor devil was caught in the act of replying to me and was taken out of the room" (183). Mary's Christian moralizing is apparent in her choice of language – "guilt," "sinner," "devil" – but the follow-up questions display her own nagging sense of injustice. Since the woman is removed from the scene before Mary chooses whether to act on her "first impulse," the reader remains uncertain which side of Mary's conscience might have won the battle.

The most telling words in this exchange are not the product of Mary's thoughts, however, but the words of the prostitute. The woman's comment that she "had to sell [her] body instead of [her] hands" brings to mind one of the earliest passages in the story, in which Mary realizes that she is, after all, only a pair of hands to her boss, rather than a gendered social identity – sister, daughter, betrothed (recall the November 25 diary entry I discussed earlier in this essay). The prostitute's reference seems deliberate, particularly because it is so awkward: Mary has said nothing about being a pair of hands to the woman, but the reader recognizes the phrase as an echo of the earlier moment marking Mary's political awakening, in which she suddenly comprehends the alienation of her labor that she shares in common with other working-class women. Although the reader recognizes the reference, it seems impossible that the prostitute could – nothing in the text indicates this link, and, in fact, Mary mentions the prostitute has several months to

serve in the workhouse, suggesting that she may, perhaps, have already been incarcerated at the time of the speech. Yet somehow, the statement reads as though the prostitute *does* know about Mary's earlier musings on the "hands" lecture and is deliberately citing it to gently reproach her. After all, if a woman can be reduced to body parts, does it really matter to *which* body parts she is reduced? How is selling hands any different from selling the rest of one's body? Since there is no conceivable way the prostitute would have been at the same lecture as Mary, the clear reference to Mary's earlier musings following the speech suggests that it is Malkiel herself speaking to her protagonist through the voice of this prostitute. The woman's reply is offered "calmly," a detail that both refutes Mary's claim that the woman is "guilty," and further suggests a rebuke of Mary's hyper-emotional response ("turning crimson," "shrink[ing]," "snapp[ing]," "turn[ing] away") when confronted by this particular material reality. While Mary seeks to position the woman as a victim ("who could blame the girl?"), the woman herself does not appear to see herself this way. Instead, her comment turns prostitution into a logical choice for women whose exploited labor does not give them enough to survive – that is, contrary to Mary's philosophy, it's better to "go to the bad" than go to the grave.

During the rest of her time in the workhouse, Mary speaks with two other representatives of the sex trade, Annie and Martha, who together represent the ends of a spectrum of "many inmates" who are serving time for prostitution – Annie is only sixteen years old, and Martha, sixty-eight. Annie, seduced by an older man who later abandoned her, was kicked out of her mother's house and left to fend for herself:

'But you see,' she added blushing, 'I was still green in the business and landed here instead of having a good time. But I'll be more careful when I come out of here.'

‘You don’t mean to say that you’ll return to the same life?’ I said with a shudder.

‘An’ what else am I to do?’ asked me the girl point blank. I had no suggestion or advice to give her. (184)

Martha has a similar tale of childhood trouble, as Mary explains: “At the age of eight her mother died from consumption and her father took to drink. She was beaten, neglected and starved until she fell in with a woman of the streets, and then, oh, so many things happened. I wonder when I’ll have my fill at the tree of knowledge!” (185). Mary renders these women as victims of adolescent innocence and poverty – as with earlier scenes, in both these instances, it is largely men who are to blame for the women’s lives as sex workers.

The language of these two quoted passages, however, ameliorates Mary’s horror at the women’s experiences by suggesting to the reader Mary’s own naivete: Annie recognizes that prostitution provides her with “a good time” – decent food and access to a more liberating lifestyle than that offered by remaining at her mother’s house – and Mary knows too little to counsel the girl with alternatives. Mary reflects that nobody can blame a downtrodden woman for wanting a “taste of gay life,” another suggestion that women who prostitute are merely giving in to a temptation that a woman of stronger moral fortitude (such as herself) would never brook. Martha, who cries when she tells Mary her story and confesses to alcoholism, nonetheless commands her own story more effectively than Mary; while she evidently paints in detail a life of operatic trials and adventures, Mary can only render them with a vague brushstroke – “then, oh, so many things happened.” Martha’s stories are, apparently, unspeakable for Mary, whose reference to Eve – “I wonder when I’ll have my fill at the tree of knowledge” – both implies that these women are educating her in matters of which she has been ignorant and suggests that her

proximity to them is endangering her own innocence. Rather than educate her own readers in a similar way, she censures Martha's words, becoming in effect a gatekeeper of what her readers are allowed to know about the group whose plight she describes: it is as though she wants to preserve her purity in the eyes of her audience by not repeating the horrors she has heard. As if to cement this purity, she then proceeds to characterize herself as an angel among the fallen, by preaching her desire to help her fellow inmates. Her reflections on their lives forms her most elaborate engagement yet with the project of mapping her relationship to other women:

Depraved as they may seem to us, they still shed many unregarded tears . . . They are neglected, suffer, sin, and are punished according to our laws. But when their term is up the doors close upon them, leaving them once more without shelter and food. They stop for a brief moment and then fall again a prey to vice and sin.

It may seem strange, but I've thought very little of the strike and our girls for the last three days . . . It seems to me that I can be of use to these shrinking, shivering, hopeless beings . . .

I'm mighty glad that I've the perseverance to jot down my thoughts. I shall try to make use of them some day. (186)

This diary entry firmly situates Mary in the role of leader, if not outright savior, of the prostitutes, instead of claiming a place alongside them as sister-comrades suffering at the hands of patriarchy. Her comments suggest a reversal of the fear she felt in her first experience with prostitutes at night court: now, it is they who shrink and shiver while she summons the will to minister to them. Even though they have replaced her fellow strikers in her imagination ("I've thought very little of . . . our girls for the last three days"), as "depraved . . . prey to vice and sin," they do not truly occupy the same space in Mary's thoughts as the strikers do: "Our girls," she writes elsewhere, "are as good as gold" (88).

Simultaneously, the entry is didactic: she gently admonishes her readers for their lack of sympathy for prostitutes, patiently explaining how the system robs them of their humanity. Presumably this moment, in which the reader learns from her published text, is the sly fruition of Mary's prediction that she will "make use of" her diary some day. This could be read as a climactic point in *Diary*, since she abandons her ladylike squeamishness long enough to reach out to "these poor, helpless beings," but ultimately, the moment is just the longest yet in a series of moments that show Mary's limited understanding of solidarity.

Her last entry about the workhouse, January 12, describes a scene in which a prostitute named Lina attacks the matron who had earlier punished Mary for worrying aloud about the fate of her friend, Ray: "I could have laughed and cried at the sight. Lina settled some of our accounts, but we all knew what it meant for her. Rough, callous, and degraded as these women are, . . . they all felt with and for their kind, or as some of the Socialist speakers had told us, they, these wretched beings, were class conscious" (188). This last sentence, a welcome relief after Mary's escalating white-slavery rhetoric throughout *Diary*, finally acknowledges the prostitutes' potential for political consciousness and community. It's significant, however, that this argument appears only as a paraphrase of "some" Socialist speakers; Mary, as though to offset the comment's impact on the reader, characterizes these class conscious women one more time as "degraded" and "wretched." This time, Malkiel, herself a "Socialist speaker," seems to be speaking through Mary to her readers but in conflict with Mary's own thoughts about prostitutes' suitability for progressive political action.

This profound, if conflicted, moment is short-lived. Once Malkiel proclaims the shocking news – “these wretched beings were class conscious” – the story devolves into a quick ten days of entries absorbed in Mary’s thoughts on blissful matrimony and critiques of middle-class women. The book’s most charged political statement – that the *lumpen* are not as lumpen as people like Mary believe they are – passes in six meager words, and following their appearance, it is as if the text rushes to distract the reader from their quiet presence. If Malkiel’s comment on the radical potential in prostitutes for the work of solidarity is given short shrift, then the prolonged rhapsody about Jim that follows in the book’s final pages seems interminable: “There ain’t a doubt in my mind but that Jim will always stand up for right against might” (195); “Lord! If men and women would only know how sweet it is to sit with the man you think most of in this great wide world” (197); “Now since Jim, too, is converted to my way of thinking, we shall be one in spirit as well as body” (199); “[I]t’s a great thing to be in love . . . especially if one loves a man like Jim” (201), etc., etc. This consuming, lovey-dovey pabulum functions as a final deterrent to the reader who, against Mary’s wishes, might otherwise interpret the conclusion of the workhouse scenes as evidence of Mary’s radical break from the gender politics of her time. Instead, Malkiel’s narrator ensconces herself in the role of future housewife, albeit with a marked bent to the Left – a bent that ultimately hinges on a class consciousness that still can not fully reconcile itself to addressing the ways class is informed and defined by race, gender, and citizenship.

The day after Mary reluctantly concedes the social conscience and political engagement of sex workers, she proposes marriage to Jim. Following on the heels of her

stories about women “gone to the bad” because of the follies of men, the scene reads as an antidote:

‘Mary,’ Jim said to me after we had talked a while about our future life, ‘I don’t know as I could be called a woman’s rights man, but it seems to me that these women ought to try and wake up us men as well . . . I’ve come to believe that us men do not understand the make-up of you girls. For we would know better if we did.’ (190).

The cure, then, for the poverty and starvation that lead women to sex work is to teach men to appreciate women more. Further, it is working-class women who are primed to undertake the task: “I’ve come to think that [Jim] and I are one . . . [T]o stand high in his account I’ve set aside my principle not to take a farthing if I didn’t work for it. I mean to do my share when Jim and I are married, and earn my living – every workingman’s wife does, although not all may realize it” (199). In essence, by expecting equality while assuming the traditional duties of housewifery and its concomitant financial dependency, married working-class women can transform gender politics, in a limited fashion, while not challenging the basic division of labor.

The subtext here – “I mean to do my share” – is that Mary will continue to work for the cause of labor after her marriage, but this is *not* the same thing as *laboring* after marriage. Her rhetoric, such as when she claims she would “rather go to work any time than see Jim scabbing” (203), is not a dismissal of the middle-class “angel in the house” mentality so much as a willingness to sacrifice her status as a non-working wife in order to serve the cause; in other words, her gender politics exist to further her class politics. Mohanty argues that “Marxist pedagogy silences race and gender in its focus on capitalism;” I suggest, instead, that in texts like *Diary*, they are given voice within Marxist frameworks but generally only in service to capitalist critique, which is, as

Mohanty and others have argued, a largely masculinist discourse. Ultimately, Mary's progress towards class consciousness has carved out a space for working-class women that refutes their social identification with overtly sexualized, morally degraded women (that is, prostitutes), and which also steps away from her strong identification with middle-class women and their values (in fact, she makes veiled references to *their* proximity to prostitutes, such as when she refers to a gathering of middle-class women as "painted ladies," a signifying phrase for "prostitutes"); although Mary's diary marks a path to politicization that is rather daring for its time, Malkiel's transgression of protective borders is largely veiled by her protagonist's inability to stop building them.

CHAPTER TWO

Cleaning Up:

Sex(ed) Work and the Troubled Gender Politics of Ken Loach's *Bread and Roses*

Ninety years may separate them, but Ken Loach's *Bread and Roses* shares much in common with Theresa Serber Malkiel's 1910 novella, *The Diary of a Shirtwaist Striker*. *Bread's* content complements my reading of *Diary* in Chapter One by demonstrating comparatively both the stagnations and the sea-changes that characterize the ways representations of working-class women have evolved over the course of the twentieth century. In both works, the heroine is represented as a "mobile woman," but falsely so. Though in each, the protagonist roams freely in the narrative and resists confinement by a variety of political structures, she is scrubbed of the danger implicit in women's "mobile" sexuality. In contrast, both Malkiel and Loach portray other, more dangerous women characters (dangerous because they truly do trouble the boundaries of women's sphere, national borders, etc.) under stricture – they are confined, blocked out, or silenced in these texts, but in my analysis, these real mobile women resist this confinement. They are, finally, the mobile force driving the texts' meanings, and by the end of each, they have recovered "mobility" – reclaimed it – from the central character who is falsely positioned as the mobile one. In other words, the texts try to claim and celebrate mobility as a liberal trope of freedom for working-class women, but they fail in this task because the invisible/marginalized presence of the real mobile women, and the danger implicitly inherent in women's mobility in their respective historical contexts, makes such a project impossible. The slippage is inevitable.

The two stories' contexts within major moments in U.S. labor history push the issue of solidarity – among women, workers, racial and ethnic groups – to the fore, since each articulates the break between its heroine and anti-heroines as the limit of solidarity. In the last two decades, the concept of “solidarity” has received considerable scholarly attention, particularly from Third World or postcolonial feminists who seek ways to unite women in local communities and around the world across vast plains of difference – an issue for feminism since its inception as a word and an ideology in the early twentieth century. Since those beginnings, feminism itself has borrowed heavily from labor movement tactics and vocabulary, so the use of “solidarity” in connection with feminism is nothing new in itself; what *is* new, however, is the renewed attention in recent feminist criticism to socio-economic class as a barrier that prevents women from working together to create progressive social change.

An overview of the evolution of labor's relationship to issues of gender and race in the twentieth century might be summarized thus: from the 1920s through the 1970s in the U.S., deep rifts existed between working-class women advocates and middle-class feminists over the question of the Equal Rights Amendment and the future of sex-based protective labor laws. In the 1980s, with the quiet death of the ERA and the struggle of unions against concessions, the class rifts appeared to lessen gradually, as, instead, the voices of women of color grew louder, rightfully addressing the racism of the popular feminist movement, with the result that “race” transcended “class” as a category of difference in feminist debate.¹⁹ In the 1990s, as rapid technological innovation continued

¹⁹ For example, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, a landmark anthology edited by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, was published in 1981. The following year saw the publication of another influential anthology, *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies*, edited by Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith.

to speed up the globalization of the economy and its devastating effects on racialized, laboring women both in the U.S. and around the globe, class once again became an important and visible component of contemporary debate, both within feminism and elsewhere. Ken Loach's 2000 film, *Bread and Roses*, nominated for the Palm d'Or award at the Cannes film festival that year, is a compelling example of the more sophisticated cultural imbrication of race, class, citizenship, and sexuality that has developed out of the processes and study of contemporary globalization.

Like Malkiel's protagonist in *Diary*, the central character in *Bread and Roses*, Maya Montenegro, navigates a unionization drive while simultaneously coping with family conflict, women's sexual exploitation, and the moral questions embedded in economic issues. Like Malkiel, Loach complicates his film's pro-union stance by contextualizing it within other concerns *du jour*: immigration, sexual harassment, class tensions – social issues that are unsettlingly similar to those of Malkiel's day, almost a century earlier. Both works use gender issues and sex work to strike the note of discord in what are historically billed as victories for labor.²⁰ And, again like Malkiel, Loach uses prostitution in his narrative as the representative symbol of a place from which to critique the sometimes-blind idealism of a labor movement that almost always holds itself in high esteem. Loach's use of this symbol in the character of Maya's sister, Rosa, however, reveals a subtext of conservative gender politics that not only upholds the status quo of a patriarchal labor movement, but also siphons the brio from her critique. The

²⁰ The actual gains for workers in each instance are arguable: in 1910, many factories never signed the contract and the wage increase given by those who did was not enough to offset the tremendous poverty of many of the women workers involved. Likewise, in the early 1990s, the JfJ strike resulted in recognition of the union, but the wage gains have not been as great as hoped for by the strikers (Fisk et al. 207-209). Both strikes were successful in other ways, however, specifically in drawing national attention to the plight of specific groups of laborers and in helping to ignite periods of heightened labor movement activity.

film establishes a parallel binary between the two sisters' sexual practices and their labor politics that is upheld by the camera's use of space and motion to confine Rosa, the prostitute/anti-union figure, and to "liberate" Maya, the heroine. My analysis of the film demonstrates how it is the anti-heroine's invisible labor, Rosa's own literal and metaphorical mobility, which creates the conditions that drive the narrative and allow Maya to be the "good" working-class woman, a point left untreated in the film.²¹

Bread and Roses's inclusive rhetoric belies an undertone of exclusion: it proselytizes the "universal" ideals of economic justice and solidarity while simultaneously creating a binary between the "good" and "bad" working woman, a

²¹ Chicana feminism, one field within feminist theory, is as useful a context for understanding Loach's film as the clash between suffrage (middle-class feminism) and protective labor legislation (working-class feminism) is for understanding the class conflict in *The Diary of a Shirtwaist Striker*. The feminist theorist Norma Alarcón describes Chicana feminism as an intellectual project that examines and reevaluates gender roles and identity in the context of nationalism, historical discourse, and the speaking subject. She writes, "It is through a revision of tradition that self and culture can be radically reenvisioned and reinvented" ("Traductora" 285). Alarcón is specifically referencing Chicana feminists' efforts to reclaim the historical figure of Malintzin, Hernán Cortés's translator and courtesan, from her place in Mexican history as a traitor to the indigenous peoples who were conquered by Cortés's Spanish army. Malintzin bore Cortés's child and is therefore considered the mother of the Mexican people, a miscegenation that signaled the demise of the "authentic" or racially pure indigenes. She stands accused of a double treachery: first, of translating for Cortés and thereby aiding his victory over the natives, and second, of mothering mixed-blood children, therein abandoning her maternal duty to reproduce (authentically) her people and thus, her culture (279-281); Malintzin is vulgarly referred to as *La Chingada*, "the fucked one" or "the whore." Alarcón explains how Malintzin's role as translator between two languages and role as mother of a mestizo race became metaphorically intertwined over time, so that she has long been the representative symbol of the defiantly independent woman, the figure who betrays her community (*vendida*/sellout) and her own proscribed gender role (*chingada*/whore) by speaking and acting out of self-interest.

Alarcón argues that a Manichean binary exists between Malintzin and *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, the mythical "national patroness of Mexico," an amalgamation of the Spanish Catholics' icon of the Virgin Mary and the Aztec goddess Tonantzin "capable of alternately evoking the Catholic and meek Virgin Mother and the prepatriarchal powerful earth goddess" (279). Guadalupe is the self-sacrificing mother, the one who protects and comforts all supplicants, in contrast to Malintzin, whom Alarcón compares to the biblical Eve: "Thus, Mexico's own binary pair, Guadalupe and Malintzin reenact . . . the biblical stories of human creation and the human condition" (279), divine purity and human corruption. I do not have the space in this essay to adequately address this binary as a way of contextualizing the relationship between Maya and Rosa in *Bread and Roses*, but I believe that in a discussion of the film's consideration of national identity and issues of citizenship, it could be insightful to examine the ways in which Loach's characterizations of the two sisters subtly (and unwittingly) replicates the dualism Alarcón sees in the two female icons of Mexican/Chicano culture. Such an analysis could usefully contribute to the ways this subtext might influence and inform the film's political narrative, particularly for an audience familiar with the Malintzin mythology, and shed light on the limitations of the film's inclusive, universalizing rhetoric.

distinction meted out on the basis of its two primary female characters' different understandings of and participatory levels in the "sexual economy," by which I mean both sex work and sexed work. As in Malkiel, while the "bad" character appears to offer much-needed commentary on the actions and beliefs of the heroine, she is ultimately condemned – and her critiques thereby dismissed – because of her association with sex work. The prostitute figure functions in a manner similar to that of the fool in *King Lear*, speaking truths that nobody heeds because of her degraded status. Virtually all of the female characters in *Bread and Roses* are subjected to the degradations of sexed work – harassment, low pay, the assumption that women's bodies exist for the taking – but like King Lear regarding his fool, Maya does not see the similarities between her own sexualization in the workplace and her sister Rosa's prostitution. The film demonstrates a revulsion towards sex work that situates itself at the point at which women's mere endurance threatens to become women's conscious profit, ultimately (although not intentionally) showcasing the existence of a bridge between sexed work and sex work that the labor movement has yet to cross.

In making this argument, I am not simply "repeating" my analysis of *Diary*. So far I've highlighted the two works' similarities, but there are important differences that require each to be considered within its own historical context, and which yield different fruit for the close reader. For starters, the racial identity and citizenship status of each one's heroine are quite opposite. Whereas *Diary*'s Mary is a white U.S. citizen, *Bread*'s Maya is a Mexican national who is in the U.S. illegally, a distinction that marks the difference between Malkiel's and Loach's approaches to their respective contemporary audiences: Malkiel tries to ingratiate her heroine to her audience by making her more

familiar, but Loach introduces his white American audience to a racialized heroine, an approach that demands some willingness to see the Other's point of view. The workers depicted in each also reflect the changing nature of the American workforce and the ways that workforce impacts its local communities. *Diary's* focus is mainly Jewish immigrants in New York City working in light textile manufacturing, a community that gave rise to perhaps the strongest expression of socialist thought this country has ever seen; *Bread*, in turn, recognizes that the primary concern of today's labor movement is the service industry, which cannot be relocated overseas as readily as have been U.S. manufacturing jobs, but which has drawn a large influx of workers from all over the globe, bringing immigrants to communities that have not in this century seen much inflow of foreign nationals²² as well as to large urban centers like Los Angeles.

Likewise, social debates have changed and matured in the intervening decades between *Diary's* creation and *Bread's*. In 1909, as Malkiel was writing, the term "feminism" was just coming into vogue, but *Bread* was written and produced in a world in which feminist theory exists as a recognizable, widely-studied body of research and practice that includes a dizzying number of tributaries – material, womanist, global/Third World, postcolonial, psychoanalytic, second-wave, third-wave, eco-, post-, etc. – whose considerations reach far beyond the scope of the feminism Malkiel knew. My reading of *Bread* tries to account for these differences while demonstrating comparatively that one salient feature of working-class women's representation is the way critical class and

²² A recent *New York Times* article, "Immigrants Swell Numbers Near New York," details immigration trends that are leading more recent émigrés to move to more affordable suburbs and rural communities, thereby changing dramatically the demographic make-up of hitherto homogenous towns (Roberts www.nytimes.com). The tenor of contemporary immigration debates in the U.S. speaks volumes about their racist nature; while anti-immigration arguments target Latin American transnational workers crossing the Mexico-U.S. border as the largest demographic of undocumented workers in the U.S., in actuality, a sizable number of workers comes from Poland and Ireland, a fact rarely mentioned in immigration debates. Ironically, the majority of these Poles enter the country through Mexico (<http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/illegal.pdf>).

citizenship debates get tangled up in decidedly uncritical characterizations of women's sexuality, conveniently turning certain working-class women into a symbolic repository for all of the hatred, angst, and fear aroused by these other divisive social concerns. In *Diary*, Malkiel ultimately champions the Jewish immigrants (at the expense of the prostitute characters); in *Bread*, Loach also tries to champion immigrant workers, but ultimately retreats back into formulaic representations of both immigrant women and prostitutes, essentially condemning both types of "mobile women" for their inherently flawed subjectivity – that is, for their mobility.

Before going any further, let me summarize the film and offer some brief historical notes about the Justice for Janitors (JfJ) campaign on which it is based. Set in early 1990s Los Angeles, *Bread and Roses* follows a fictional group of janitors, primarily immigrants from Mexico and Latin America, from the beginning of a union drive to its successful bid for recognition by the Angel Corporation, the cleaning service agency that employs them. The film's narrative is themed around issues of family ties, women's economic oppression, and immigrant communities; Maya Montenegro, the film's female protagonist, divides her time between two main plots, first, the union campaign, of which she is a ringleader, and second, the tense relationship between herself and her sister, Rosa. A Mexican immigrant who pays to be smuggled across the Mexico-U.S. border, Maya joins her sister, Rosa, who is a legal U.S. immigrant married to a white American man with whom she has two children.

Rosa works as a janitor at a downtown office building, and Maya begs her sister to get her a job there, too. Rosa eventually procures a place for Maya, and one night, as she is mopping the floor, Maya meets Sam Shapiro, an SEIU organizer who is being

chased through the building by security guards. She helps Sam escape, and a few days later, he shows up at Rosa's door to introduce himself and talk to the two women about the JfJ campaign. In Loach's film, Rosa becomes the spoiler, an anti-union worker who is unwilling to risk her own job for the cause; she asks the cynical questions that the other employees are too hopeful to utter and refuses to be charmed by Sam's talk of solidarity. Maya, on the other hand, becomes a model union steward, dedicated to the cause and to converting everyone else to it as well, including Rosa. Maya immediately supports the campaign and Rosa just as immediately opposes it, leading to an argument that concludes with Sam being thrown out of Rosa's house. The issue is dropped until an older woman coworker is summarily fired by the verbally abusive supervisor, Perez, for being a few minutes late to work. This prompts Maya to arrange a meeting between Sam and the janitors to discuss unionization; at the meeting, Sam draws a diagram explaining the basic components of a strategic union campaign – a narrative device that introduces the film's audience to the "new" labor movement. When Perez finds the diagram a few days later, he randomly fires several employees, leading an enraged Maya to a late-night visit to Sam's apartment, where he promises to help and a love interest between the two begins to emerge as a subplot.

Meanwhile, as the union campaign churns forward through a series of campaign events (rallies, altercations with management, the crashing of a party thrown by one of the building's most prominent tenants, and so on), tensions at home mount: Rosa's husband, unemployed because of his advanced diabetes, is getting sicker, and Rosa resents Maya's dedication to the union. Tensions increase at work, too, as coworkers take sides for or against organizing; Maya is dismayed when Ruben, who is romantically

inclined towards her, tells her he will not be part of a job action because he fears losing a college scholarship that requires him to pay ten percent of his tuition by the start of the school year; if he loses his job, he explains, he will be unable to make the payment and will lose the scholarship, too. A couple of scenes later, he is fired by Perez after being mistakenly accused of carrying out a job action; angry that someone ratted on coworkers, Maya accuses an anti-union coworker of selling out, only to learn that it was Rosa, her sister, who gave Perez her coworkers' names; in a climactic scene, Maya confronts Rosa, whereupon Rosa reveals that she has prostituted herself since her teen years, in order to support her family. Maya's own job, the audience learns, is the "remuneration" Rosa received for her latest trick, sleeping with their anti-union boss. To save Ruben's scholarship, Maya robs a convenient store to obtain the money he needs to pay his tuition bill. The janitors go on strike and eventually win their contract, but only after they are arrested for trespassing in the lobby of the building during a parade and rally. As news of Angel Corporation's acquiescence to their demands for unionization reaches the strikers' jail cells, Maya is singled out by a police officer: her fingerprints match those collected at the scene of the robbery. Instead of being prosecuted, she is detained and deported by the U.S. government. The movie ends as her coworkers and Rosa gather to wave to her through the windows of the bus taking her back to Mexico.

The film's historic counterpart is the campaign begun by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) in the late 1980s to organize L.A.'s janitors. JfJ has been the most successful organizing drive among U.S. unions in the last three decades, and the Los Angeles victory in 1991 was its biggest triumph to date. At the time, pay and benefits for these workers were grossly disproportionate to the development boom L.A.

was experiencing, which created a ripe opportunity for a union drive. A variety of factors overdetermined the janitors' poor working conditions: building owners/managers began outsourcing custodial work to cleaning service agencies instead of hiring janitorial employees directly; the severe economic downturn of the early 1980s caused L.A. unions to participate in the nation-wide trend of making concessions to employers, which contributed to widespread membership losses (from a peak of 5,000 unionized janitors in 1978 to a mere 1,800 in 1985, even though the overall number of janitors had almost doubled); as the building boom of the mid- to late-1980s created a demand for more janitors, those jobs were increasingly filled by Latin American immigrants (whose employment share grew from 28% in 1980 to 61% in 1990); the majority of new-hires were also women, leading to a primarily female immigrant workforce, a group traditionally paid the least for their labor (Fisk et al., 199-203).²³

As the workforce was changing, so was the SEIU: its new national leadership was instituting a shake-up of the "old order," hiring idealistic young college graduates to replace older organizers who had little interest in rebuilding a labor movement sagging beneath the weight of bureaucracy, wage concessions, and overseas relocation of jobs. The Justice for Janitors campaign was essentially forced onto the L.A. locals by the national headquarters, causing the resentment and tensions that are depicted in *Bread* in scenes involving the union organizer, Sam Shapiro, and his supervisor. JfJ implemented a number of practices new to union drives, key among them the mounting of a strategic publicity campaign, in which primary decision-makers and third-party interests are

²³ For a thorough background and analysis of the Justice for Janitors campaign, see Fisk, Catherine L., Daniel J. B. Mitchell, and Christopher L. Erickson. "Union Representation of Immigrant Janitors in Southern California: Economic and Legal Challenges." *Organizing Immigrants: The Challenge for Unions in Contemporary California*. Ed. Ruth Milkman. Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 2000. 199-224.

targeted for embarrassingly public pressure tactics. This media-based method of organizing workers draws ridicule from Perez, the janitors' supervisor in *Bread*, who mocks his employees' attempts to improve their conditions through media and public pressure: "The media?! What the fuck do you think this is, the White House?" In fact, a major component of so-called strategic union campaigns is the idea that the powerful are most powerful when the less powerful allow them to be; the campaigns try to address the class hierarchy in the U.S. by dismantling the pedestals on which the wealthy and powerful stand, both by empowering workers to have a public voice of their own and by sully the carefully crafted image of the targeted businesses and industries.

Bread and Roses situates itself right at the intersection of class, race, citizenship, and gender and thus offers an interesting study of the ways mainstream cultural production makes sense of the messy tangle of issues that compose what, in earlier times, was considered a simple opposition between the capitalist and laboring classes. Loach takes this tangle of issues one step further by working through them via Maya and Rosa's familial relationship. In discussing the film, I aim to draw attention to a few major scenes that best illustrate the ways Loach's characterization of the two sisters enacts the film's attitude towards the role of dissent in labor struggles; I look first at those scenes that define Maya's character, next at those defining Rosa, and finally, at the scene of their confrontation, when Maya accuses Rosa of betraying her coworkers. Ultimately, for Loach, it seems that border-crossing is the radical action *du jour*, except when it comes to crossing over into the margins of sexuality – where women might recognize that their bodies *are* tools of capitalism and use them accordingly. The film's apparent distaste for Rosa's choices superficially seems to be a sober recognition of the desperate "choices"

poor women must often face, but a closer look suggests that sexual politics – with its long history of black-and-white moralism – functions as a convenient metaphorical code for other political binaries that are less readily drawn in such simple terms.

Early on, the film spends several scenes establishing Maya as a likable protagonist, one worthy of her audience's sympathy. Loach wants her to be a true working-class heroine, or, in the words of one review quoted in the film's trailer, "this generation's Norma Rae." To manage this, he makes her into an engaging trickster figure, all guts and moxie. Her first scene, a tense border-crossing sequence, is perhaps her most impressive trick of all: as the film opens, the camera, documentary-style, follows a group of people hiding in, and then running through, thickets of trees and scraggly underbrush. A subtitle informs us we are at the Mexico-U.S. border. In Spanish, the first words of the film are: "Let's go, let's go, let's go." These first words, uttered as an angry command by an unseen speaker, suggests the forced nature of workers' global migration; they are compelled or coerced by the invisible hand of power to "go, go, go" to whatever place may provide opportunities for economic survival. The words also hint at what will later come: the establishment of the heroine's own unquenchable drive to constantly be at the heart of the action. This double meaning echoes the film's attempt at hybridity, best seen in its mix of Spanish and English throughout the film, with English-Spanish and Spanish-English subtitles supplied for a linguistically mixed audience (or, at least, what the filmmaker hopes will be such).

After we hear the command, the camera momentarily trains itself on a young woman in the group, then drops back into the action to simulate the audience's participation in the scene. The only sounds are the muffled harsh commands of the leader

and the labored breathing of the runners, including the camera-holder, as they crash through the trees, and the camera-work sets us, the audience, down among the runners. In the gray light of early morning, the group, amid the cursing and pushing of their shepherd, is hustled onto the floor of a waiting van and covered with blankets. The van takes off as a lively Mexican tune starts to play, and as the opening credits appear, the wilderness gives way to eight lanes of traffic leading into Los Angeles. The feeling of danger subsides: we are back on familiar ground, and the camera returns to its usual viewpoint as an objective eavesdropper. The opening sequence is a clever pun: the camera work “documents” the undocumented. The threat of violence in this first scene is compounded by its verisimilitude and invites viewers to understand for themselves what undocumented workers risk in coming to the U.S. in search of employment. That risk seems even more costly when the film begins to follow Maya, from the van trip onward, and we learn how little she gains for her trouble.

After surviving the danger of crossing into the U.S. illegally, several subsequent scenes embellish the details of Maya’s character. She tricks her way out of a rape scene with the coyote who ferries her across the border. In her brief waitressing stint, she puts in their place two male patrons who harass her. On her first day of work as a janitor, she deliberately antagonizes a group of office workers by punching all of the elevator floor buttons when she hears them approaching, much to the shocked delight of her coworker. When security guards are chasing Sam Shapiro, the union organizer, through the building, she helps him escape even without knowing who he is. As an undocumented worker, another *persona non grata*, she instantly sees in Sam a kindred spirit, one who, like her, flouts the law when necessary. Every trick is accompanied by upbeat ethnic

music²⁴, which we come to associate with Maya's freewheeling spirit.

Maya has all the components of the classic working-class heroine: she's beautiful, street smart, pro-active, and pro-union. The usual descriptors apply to her character: grit, determination, spunk, feistiness, strength, and so on. In this, she resembles the filmic and literary heroines who precede her: Karen Silkwood, Sister Carrie, Dolly Hawkins, and, of course, Norma Rae. Like them, she is also overtly sexualized, harassed and intimidated by men who appear content to believe the prevailing assumption that all working-class women are hyper-sexed and morally suspect. As historian Nan Enstad writes, "Regulatory norms originating in bourgeois conceptions of public and private deemed women sexually virtuous only when they were contained in the private realm" (91). Although these norms may seem hopelessly outdated given the number of women in the workforce today, their diehard presence can still be seen in contemporary works that characterize lower-income women as brassy and sexually "loose."²⁵

But Loach, like Malkiel in *Diary*, attempts to rescue Maya from this standard characterization and reinforce her virtuousness as a strong and upright union maid by inserting into the narrative a secondary character to deflect the sexualizing gaze away from Maya. This character is Rosa, Maya's sister, who is married, has legal status in the U.S., is virulently anti-union, betrays her coworkers, and, we find out later, is a prostitute. Rosa has used prostitution since the age of fifteen to support herself and her family, including Maya. Her husband's diabetes has left him without work, and so Rosa, as the

²⁴ The film's musical score was composed by George Fenton, who has worked with Loach on a number of films. Film reviewers have referred to the film's music as "Latin protest songs," "sprightly ethnic music," and "norteño music." The soundtrack was not released for purchase.

²⁵ Films like *Erin Brockovich*, *9 to 5*, and *Sideways* spring to mind. These all feature working-class women characters who are not just assumed by other characters in the film to be hyper-sexed, but who are, perhaps more alarmingly, characterized as such by the films' directors and producers.

sole breadwinner, occasionally uses sex work to augment her income and barter for her needs. Rosa does not appear in any sex scenes, but there is also no evidence of shared affection between her and her husband; she is simultaneously sexualized and unromantic. By contrast, Maya, the trickster figure, is chaste and virtuous. She has two love interests, but the most intimacy we see between them are rather bland kisses, and she makes it clear that her attraction is based on politics, principle, a shared cause – in short, solidarity. This is, of course, the hallmark of working-class agitprop romance: shared love for the cause of economic justice begets meaningful mutual attraction (for example, in *Diary of a Shirtwaist Striker*, Mary marries Jim only after he has converted to the socialist cause). Thus it is no surprise when Maya rejects Ruben because he decides not to endanger his job by participating in the strike. He accuses her of wanting to date Sam because he is white, but this claim is summarily dismissed as “shit” by Maya, who pointedly tells Ruben that Sam is attractive because he “believes in something.” (I will return to this scene later in this essay, in my discussion of Loach’s racial politics.)

An early scene in the film illustrates Maya’s determination to keep her virtue intact and showcases her gutsy nature. When Maya’s sister, Rosa, reaches the appointed meeting place without the entire sum of money due to the coyotes who have smuggled Maya across the Mexico-U.S. border, Maya is shoved back into the van. In a gut-twisting moment, her kidnappers flip a coin to see who will win rights to her body that night; the next scene takes place in a cheap hotel, where the winner of the coin toss lets down his guard as Maya, shyly at first, then more confidently, returns his advances. She croons a song with him to disguise the noise she makes as she searches for the room key while he showers, and as they sing together, “I always do what I want, and my word is

the law,” she embodies the attitude of the song’s lyrics. She steals her captor’s fancy boots, locking him in the room. He realizes her trick too late and runs out of the shower to the window, looking down on where Maya, liberated, stands waving his boots and her middle finger in the air. The moment is one of a series throughout the film in which Maya challenges the dominant narrative – the expected outcome – and creates an alternate ending, effectively cementing her role as a brave heroine, driving changes both within the context of the film (e.g., unionization) and to narrative expectation itself. The scene index to the DVD edition highlights Maya’s action-oriented personality; major scenes in which she dominates the screen emphasize her kinetic nature with titles like “On the Run,” “She Escapes,” “Run Around,” “The Fight Begins,” “A Walk in the Park,” “Moving Forward,” and “Departures.” (By contrast, Rosa’s major scene in the film is entitled “The Truth,” a heavily-weighted phrase that hardly bespeaks mobility or malleability.)

On her first day of work, Maya is kneeling on the floor, cleaning elevator door tracks with her coworker, Ruben, when three office workers deep in conversation step over them to enter the elevator. We see only their well-clad legs and clutched briefcases as they narrowly miss kicking Ruben and Maya without so much as a courteous hello. Tugging at the Angel Corp. logo on his shirt, Ruben leans into Maya and whispers, conspiratorially, “Did I tell you my theory about these uniforms? They make us invisible.” Maya’s sympathetic expression shows she understands Ruben is only half-joking, and when they hear another group of office workers approaching, she ducks into the other open elevator and presses all of the floor buttons. Grabbing Ruben’s hand, she runs, laughing, around the corner, where they hunker down and wait. As the office

workers, busy discussing “shareholder dividends,” step into the elevator, we hear a woman exclaim, “Who pushed all the fucking buttons?” Ruben shakes his head at Maya in delighted shock: “You’re nuts, woman! It’s your first day!” The scene pointedly announces that contrary to Ruben’s “theory,” Maya is the kind of woman who will make her presence felt, uniformed job or not. In that sense, her invisibility (she is unseen by the elevator-users but her presence is established by the delayed transit forced upon them by the elevator’s stop at every floor) echoes the politics of the new labor movement strategy: to threaten the smooth functioning of the system by rendering visible both the labor and the power – the ability to “press the buttons” of the system – of hitherto invisible workers.

Maya’s strong sense of solidarity gets established on several occasions, the first being her introduction to Sam Shapiro, the union organizer, as he is trying to escape the building’s security guards. As Sam looks around for a place to hide, she urges him to climb into her pushcart trashbin. The security guards round the corner, yelling questions about Sam’s whereabouts, and she calmly points them in the direction of a hallway onto which Sam has dumped a bucket of floor wax. Apparently more excited about the collaborative adventure than worried about losing her job, Maya pushes Sam to the service elevator; as the doors close, he guesses her name from a list he carries, and she laughs in surprise, both charmed and intrigued by the vanishing Sam. When Sam appears at Rosa’s doorstep to talk union, Maya refuses to place family loyalties above political beliefs, apologizing to Sam for Rosa’s rudeness and contacting him later when a coworker is unfairly fired. Much later in the story, even when Ruben has expressed doubts about participating in a job action that may threaten his income – in effect,

breaking the code of solidarity with his fellow janitors – Maya still puts herself at risk for him by robbing a convenience store to get him the money he needs, showing herself to be, like *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, a port in the storm even for those who have lost their way.

Loach's politics and its limitations are made apparent in the binary he constructs between Maya and Rosa. The film's title, taken from the slogan of the 1911 strike in New York City, makes a gesture of inclusion towards Rosa by echoing her name – bread *and* roses – in an apparent pairing of equals that never manifests in the film itself, which, as I will argue, establishes Rosa as the inferior character. Roses, in the 1911 strike, symbolized the strikers' desire not merely to survive (as on bread), but to live (to enjoy life, to afford the things that make life pleasant and aesthetic, to have time to "stop and smell the roses"). But roses also signify prostitution and seduction: for instance, the "primrose" path, which negatively connotes women's desire for aesthetics and pleasure as a selfish, soul-sacrificing desire for luxury at any cost, even whoredom. The film shapes Rosa as a self-interested character from the start, which later impacts viewers' reception of her sex work. Whereas Maya is from the beginning a heroine, one who has the ability to make things happen, Rosa is, in effect, the anti-heroine, as fiercely committed to her politics of cynicism and isolation as Maya is to idealism and solidarity. When Sam introduces himself as "Sam, from the Justice for Janitors campaign," she responds, "I'm Rosa, from the Justice for Rosa campaign." The conversation quickly turns heated, and Rosa accuses Sam of knowing nothing about the struggles of working-class people:

Rosa: I trust nobody. One mistake, I'm on the blacklist. Do you have any idea what those *pendejos* are like? . . . There's every chance you can get fired.

I've seen it before, so don't give me any shit. What are you going to do? Pay my rent? Feed my kids?

. . . . You know what? We might be at the bottom of the shithole, but we are doing our best.

Sam: We don't have to let them get away with it.

Rosa: We? We?! When was the last time that you got a cleaning job? You and your union – your fat union white boys . . . college kids . . . what the hell do you know? Don't *ever* say 'we.' I believe in nobody. *Nada*.

From a labor standpoint, the conversation is ironic, since statistics demonstrate that immigrant women more than other groups tend to be pro-union. Nevertheless, Rosa, as the anti-heroine, makes her position clear: self-interest above group interest, “trust nobody,” “believe in . . . nada” – the antithesis of solidarity politics, which demands a “unified front” that can “overcome . . . alienation from one another” (hooks 396-400). Her rejection of Sam, the “college kid,” signals her unwillingness to bridge class differences, but also puts her at odds with the film’s audience, which has already been encouraged to identify favorably with Sam’s character because of his interaction with Maya in the previous escape scene, in which he is constructed as the male counterpart to Maya’s likable, adventurous heroine character. Furthermore, it puts her in direct opposition to Maya, who, a few scenes later, will declare her own belief in something when she links her feelings for Sam to the fact that he “believes in something.”

Rosa’s willful rejection of unionization makes her the villain in a pro-union film, and Loach’s characterization of her emphasizes her un-heroic disposition: she is unable to keep her life and world together, even though she appears to be in a more stable position than Maya – married, a legal U.S. resident, more familiar with her job and coworkers. While Maya triumphantly scrabbles across the border, defying the authority of national governments, Rosa fails to complete the one task of finding enough money to pay the coyotes. When the coyotes demand the rest of the money, she tries to win their

compassion by telling them she has just been mugged (we learn later that this is a lie), but her attempted trick backfires, leaving Maya to her fate and forcing her to use her street smarts to escape the situation Rosa has put her in. She manages to find Maya a job as a waitress, but it is a job that Maya does not want. She is afraid to join the union because she might lose her job. Rosa's husband desperately needs medical treatment, but she is unable to navigate successfully the Medicaid system of clinics and waiting lists. In one scene, she shouts in impotent frustration at a hospital doctor, "I can't wait anymore!," only to be left standing alone in the hallway as he curtly excuses himself. The contrast between the two sisters is painfully clear: Maya is brave, heroic, and most importantly, successful. Rosa is afraid, unwilling to take risks, and as a result, impotent/helpless.

Although the two sisters' relationship is a major part of the film's narrative, Rosa remains a secondary character, watching silently from the corners of the screen in scenes that place Maya at the center of the camera's focus, or else yelling in helpless frustration as events unfold against her, Rosa's, wishes. Rosa is frequently framed by doorways or other confining spaces – seated at the far end of the table, standing in a sterile hospital hallway, hanging back from the crowd in an alley where people wait for their relatives arriving from Mexico. In Rosa's major scene, the camera pays her little attention, and even then, she is seen standing behind an ironing board, literally blocked into a small space. In the final scene, she runs after Maya, who waves to her from inside the bus. We see the two sisters' hands "touch" through the glass, but the camera's viewpoint is from inside the bus – our last image of Rosa is mediated by a framing glass window. Her placement on the screen and lack of consequential action in the film's narrative marginalizes her as much as her personality and anti-union stance, and yet, I see Rosa's

character as the very heart of the film.

In *The One vs. the Many*, Alex Woloch describes the debate among literary critics surrounding the issue of characterization in narrative, at the center of which is the question of whether to best understand it as a function of reference (humanistic representation) or structure (form). Woloch suggests the answer to this debate lies with neither of these options but in an alternative method of interpreting characters as “*character-space[s]* (that particular and charged encounter between an individual human personality and a determined space and position within the narrative as a whole)” operating within a “*character-system* (the arrangement of multiple and differentiated character-spaces . . . into a unified narrative structure)” (14). The point, he explains, is to consider characters as occupying *both* referential and structural positions in a text, not as mutually exclusive functions but as interdependent ones that help us to understand the narrative as a “socioformal” space shaped by “the larger philosophical, aesthetic, and ideological currents that underlie” (321) literary production.

Woloch’s study focuses on the nineteenth-century European novel, but he observes that the character-system he describes still greatly influences twentieth-century literary and film narrative. What most strikes me about Woloch’s arguments is that his character-system model mirrors the construction of our everyday reality in ways not discussed in his work. At all levels of daily life – local, national, global – his paradigm is relevant: throughout the course of regular interaction, individuals and groups are continually abstracted, reduced to allegory, momentarily highlighted before being again subordinated, and so on in what Woloch calls “compelling distortions,” in order to make way for the protagonists, heroes, celebrities, and cultural icons that form the center of the

social universe in which we exist and whose structure and meaning is mediated through the narratives of newspapers, television, the internet, and ordinary conversation.

Understanding Woloch's literary theory as a concept that holds some relevance for material reality, too, is helpful in analyzing Loach's use of characterization in *Bread and Roses* and what it means in the larger context of working-class politics. Art imitates life imitates art: in both Loach's film and labor politics, certain individuals or groups are reduced to two-dimensional positions whose purpose is to highlight, define, or otherwise privilege the idealized or *noble* working-class individual. The film's characters are not just implied human beings but placeholder devices in a structured political argument that has its counterpart in the strategic labor campaigns, like JfJ, being played out both in the streets *and* on the news. In *Bread*, Rosa's subplot – a mother of two supporting her sick husband and kids – is treated too minimally to develop audience sympathy. Instead, she is abstracted into a symbol of critique, approaching Labor neither from the Right nor the Left, but from a distant field generally overlooked by conservatives and progressives alike. Rosa articulates legitimate criticisms of the labor movement – the limits of its ability to protect workers, its top-down power structure, its blind idealism and groupthink – but paradoxically, her character becomes Loach's opportunity to render those critiques as superficial concerns that detract from the important work of unions. She figures as a foil to Maya's heroic idealism but, judging by her two-dimensionality and hostile persona, her creator is loathe to see her succeed in this aim. Physically placed on the edges of the screen, made silent or loudly incoherent, the only moments in which her character emerges from its flatness are in her conversations with Maya. As their competing viewpoints meet, Rosa's character shifts into a high definition image whose

real purpose is to cast Maya into sharp relief.

How could two sisters – blood relatives! – be so different? The answer comes in the moment in which Maya confronts Rosa about being a traitor to the union and Rosa responds by telling Maya about her work as a prostitute. After Maya learns that Rosa has sold out the janitors for the promise of a promotion to building supervisor with a pay raise and healthcare benefits, she leaves the worksite and runs home to confront Rosa. The scene recalls the border crossing at the beginning of the film: Maya runs silently, alone this time, through an unfocused background of brick and concrete. Instead of an open expanse of desert suggestive of the distant margins of civilization, the unchanging brick wall behind her implies a restricted path with little room to veer off in new directions, in spite of the mobility suggested by her running. She reaches home, and in the most powerful scene in the film, Rosa ruptures Maya's one-sided perspective when she reveals the history behind her individual campaign to survive. She opens the door to find Rosa waiting for her, ironing:

Maya: So you did it?

Rosa: Of course I did it. And I'd do it again . . . Life is *now*, Maya. Right now, stupid. It's not a fucking fairy tale, huh?

Maya: Why?

Rosa: Why what?

Maya: Why did you sell us out? . . . You're a fucking traitor, sis.

Rosa: A traitor? Is that what you think? You do, do you? Even when I was supporting everybody? You think so? Sending money to you and mama? When I was feeding everybody? . . . Did you guys ever wonder – how did Rosa manage to send the money? You know how I did it? Turning tricks. I was a hooker. What do you think about that? A hooker. I was turning tricks, honey. So that you guys wouldn't starve.

Watching this exchange, we feel Maya's stunned horror as she stares, dumbfounded, at Rosa as the truth pours out in Rosa's enraged words. For most of this scene, the camera stays trained on Maya, watching her reel under the weight of her knowledge as she begins

to cry: “Rosa,” she sobs, “what did we do to you? I didn’t know.” That Maya remains the central actor in this scene and throughout the movie is echoed in her question, “what did we do to you?” The implication is that neither Rosa herself nor any larger, systemic issues of labor, gender, class, citizenship, or race (especially because Rosa first prostituted herself in Tijuana, a place known for catering to American tourists’ desires for binge drinking, salable sex, drugs, etc.) contributed to Rosa’s choices; instead, Maya’s question assumes the blame for her sister’s actions and consequently takes agency away from Rosa.

It is Rosa’s confession – the gut-wrenching anguish in her words – as much as Maya’s reaction to it, that puts the emotion into the scene, but these words reach us from somewhere off-screen while the camera retains its dedication to Maya. When we see Rosa, she is standing behind the ironing board, effectively blocked into a small space with no apparent escape route, while Maya stands with the door open behind her, a positioning that privileges Maya’s mobility and suggests the expansiveness of her world and her mind. This is Rosa’s longest, most coherent monologue, the only time she is not being ignored or drowned out by other voices (reviewer David Edelstein describes it as having “the cathartic fury of an exorcism”), and she is not even visible for most of it. The physical space of the screen makes the binary clear: in the framing box of the camera’s lens, Maya; in the amorphous dark space beyond the camera’s reach (or interest), Rosa.

As Rosa concludes her admission by screaming, “I hate the whole fucking world! I hate it!,” her words crystallize into an interpretive moment: the difference between the two sisters stems from their different histories and experiences as sexualized, laboring

women. Rosa is bitter and hateful, and prostitution has made her this way: “For five fucking years in Tijuana, every single night . . . Fuck, Rosa, fuck, fuck. Come on, because your family is starving. Sounds awful, huh? Disgusting? . . . Nobody asked me, huh? My dad leaves, and who gets screwed? Rosa. . . . Blacks, whites, sleazeballs, slimebags. Let her fuck everybody, right?” Rosa sees herself as having been sacrificed by her family for their survival. Sex work has compromised her humanity, alienating her from coworkers and killing the fellow-feeling that is a prerequisite for solidarity. Tied to the openly hostile anti-union comments that begin the scene (“You sold yourselves out . . . When will we realize they’re much stronger than us?”), Rosa’s sex work becomes the explanation for her anti-unionism, defeatism, and apparent selfishness, and thus, prostitution becomes a symbol of “bad” working-class women, unorganizability, the antithesis of solidarity. In other words, sex work is a metaphorical expression of the limits of Loach’s pro-union politics.

What’s interesting here is that, although Maya is the heroine and is characterized accordingly – chaste, romantic, idealist, brave – she becomes a criminal in the film’s next scene, and is, from the start, an “illegal” immigrant. Conversely, Rosa, who has stolen from no one and is in the country legally, is the villain in the story, Maya’s antagonist and cross to bear. By making Rosa into a prostitute, Loach turns this good/bad binary on its head, an act that reveals an important point about his perspective on gender politics, women’s labor, and how the two play into the material reality of working immigrants’ lives. The film does not judge, blame, or question Maya’s actions. Nobody condemns Maya’s choices except the long arm of U.S. law, and since Loach makes his pro-immigrant, anti-authority stance apparent throughout the film, the U.S. government is not

meant to figure as a moral authority whose judgment is above reproach or with whom the filmmaker wants us to agree. Instead, Maya's deportation is treated as a matter-of-fact part of the system functioning as usual, even by Maya, whose happy-go-lucky self barely flinches when she hears she is being sent back to Mexico.

My question is not how Loach succeeds in lionizing a character like Maya, an undocumented worker guilty of robbery, but rather, how he traduces one like Rosa, whose crime, apparently, is her willingness to sell her body for profit and survival – a move that, because it is used to explain her unwillingness to be part of the organizing drive, predicates her conservatism. The emotion of this scene, which on the surface excuses Rosa's behavior – she's been sexually exploited, of course she's bitter – really acts as a judgment: the level of her rage, coupled with the enormity of Maya's horror and anguish, is a strong statement about how the audience should react to her revelation. Loach uses the scene's fraught emotion to instruct: sex work is bad, any woman who engages in it should feel bad, and she *will* feel bad, because if she is the provider of such services, it is because she is a victim who has been ruined, dehumanized, and brought to the brink of despair. Nowhere else in the film is the emotion so raw, leading the audience to conclude that sex work must be more traumatic, more degrading and terrifying, more *wrong*, than any other of the many experiences available to poor immigrant women that the film itself catalogs: risking being shot at by the border patrol or raped by a smuggler, watching family members sicken or die for lack of healthcare, harassment on the (poverty-wages) job, racial discrimination, long-term separation from children and other relatives, no job security, living in fear of the INS (or since 9/11, which occurred after the film was produced, fear of Homeland Security), etc., etc., etc.

How we read this climactic scene between Rosa and Maya both depends on our take on Loach's own view and determines how we read the rest of the film. First, if we "understand" why Rosa hates the world, we are tacitly agreeing with Loach (and technically, with Karl Marx) that there are some categories of people who are of no use to the labor movement and that sex work and the labor movement are incompatible. We further accept his assertion that sex work victimizes women more profoundly than other gendered labor they perform, judging by Rosa's complete disenfranchisement from her community and utter despair and hatred. We are also agreeing that solidarity is somehow linked, at least among women, to some notion of chaste behavior, since its opposite, sexual license, apparently destroys the potential for such alliances. (This ignores the reality that a majority of working-class women who migrate across national borders do indeed at some point find themselves engaging in sex work as part of their struggle to survive the often harsh conditions of their migration.) Second, this tacit agreement with Loach obscures the fact that Rosa actually raises valid concerns about unionization that Sam and Maya airily dismiss. As the book, *Organizing Immigrants*, observes, the SEIU's tactics in the JfJ campaign in Los Angeles put many workers in harm's way, and there were few, if any, protective measures available to secure workers' jobs during the campaign. Loach strives for a realistic portrayal of union struggle in *Bread and Roses*, but in fact, it is Rosa, not Maya, whose experiences and opinions ring true.

Finally, we must ask whether Loach's revelation of the driving force behind Rosa's animosity is in fact a calculated effort to discredit her arguments as questions fostered by misanthropy rather than legitimate concerns. How we answer that question depends upon how we read the rest of the movie; Maya engages in behavior that opens

the door for moralizing, too, but her characterization is not negatively affected to the same extent. After Maya learns of her sister's secret employment, the next scene finds Maya turning a trick of her own: playing the damsel-in-distress, she lures a convenient store attendant into the bathroom, locking him in and then emptying the till. As she exits, a burly, tattooed man walks in and she quickly explains that she has trapped the attendant because he exposed himself to her. She escapes as the man approaches the bathroom door, announcing his intention to avenge Maya's lost innocence. Ironically, he plays right into her ruse, which is anything but innocent; in spite of Maya's horror at Rosa's use of her body to extract material gain, the truth of the matter is that Maya has just used her body, too, to extract profit. By masquerading in the stereotypical image of a chaste woman in distress needing protection *from* men *by* men, she is able to commit the petty theft.

Seemingly, however, this kind of gender exploitation is permissible, even funny. Loach plays the scene almost as comic relief after the emotional intensity of the previous scene: Maya, the trickster figure, is at it again. Maya's actions only become a problem when her fingerprints lead to her deportation at the end of the film, and because we know she only stole money to help Ruben pay for college, it strikes us as unfair of the government to judge her so harshly. Nevertheless, Maya's actions reverberate with the anti-immigrant sentiments Loach tries hard to dispel everywhere else in *Bread*: the film glosses over Maya's theft, presumably because to Loach, it is a Robin-Hood-like act, but to an American audience steeped in national debates about immigration, such a glossing is problematic. Maya's actions resonate differently because she is an immigrant, and an "illegal" one at that; what remains unconsidered is what the act of stealing may imply

about Maya's innate nature to a U.S. audience. Although it is later made clear that Maya robs the store to help someone else, the choice reduces her to the stereotypical immigrant who does not share the "American" value of honesty or the belief that hard work will be rewarded (and its opposite, that crime does not pay). We may even go further to suggest that the scene microcosmically replicates anti-immigrant sortings, namely, that immigrants steal from American citizens (their jobs, their tax-based services, their charities), that they hurt the American working-class (the guy at the counter is presumably working-class), that they are dishonest (for coming into the country illegally in the first place), and so on.

Further, because she is the only character punished in the film for her crime, Loach, perhaps unwittingly, reinforces the status quo in American conventional wisdom about what is a punishable crime and what is not. The audience can recognize the crime of stealing and its punishment, deportation, as a related pair of actions whose "marriage" is sanctioned by the state; however, another crime, Perez's violent verbal and physical sexual harassment of his female employees is not linked in the film to a punishment. A generous viewer might read this disparity in the meting out of punishment as a critique of the society that allows sexual harassment to pass unnoticed, but, in the context of the rest of the film's representations of women's sexuality, such a reading would be an unearned gift. Instead, Loach's realist gesture here is complicit with *Bread*'s overall refusal to recognize the structural inequities that affect women more particularly than men, a refusal that uncritically reflects the dominant hegemony: sexual harassment is unfortunate, and its practitioners are jerks, but it is a fact of life that jerks and their actions will always be with us. Perez's escape from any consequences for his actions

(indeed, Maya herself does not even appear cognizant of his harassment) naturalizes the sexualization of her laboring body in a way that blinds the audience to such harassment's role in perpetuating structural inequities of class and gender.

At the same time, the casting of a Chicano man as the abusive boss complicates the film's racial politics in several ways that remain untreated in the film itself. First, it naturalizes the stereotypes about Chicano masculinity: "the common and pervasive stereotype held about Hispanics [sic] . . . of the 'macho' man – an image which generally conjures up the rough, tough, swaggering men who are abusive and oppressive towards women" (Espín 425). Upholding such a stereotype in a sense excuses Perez because, to an audience familiar with or tolerant of such biased portrayals of Latinos and Chicanos, his behavior would jibe with the film's realism. Next, Perez's mistreatment of his employees may be read as internalized racism, which in this instance leads him to what Gloria Yamato calls the "small solace [of believing] that there are others more worthless than you" (74); the film is not entirely clear on the actual level of power Perez holds, but it is distinctly possible that as a direct supervisor in an undervalued service industry, and as a racialized worker himself, he has little more control over his working conditions and job security than his employees have over theirs. Also, in pitting Perez as the brown anti-hero against the white hero, Sam, the film reifies a longstanding racist Hollywood legacy of white heroes and black villains, while simultaneously dampening a white audience's awareness of the film's racial politics, since Perez is a brown man treating brown people badly, and since the film privileges a union/anti-union antagonism over other political struggles. *Bread's* failure to address these issues directly perpetuates the stereotypes

underlying Perez's character even as it positions Perez as the lone gunman, as it were, the jerk, instead of a cog in a much larger (racial, gendered) operating agenda.²⁶

Maya, on the other hand, is treated by the authorities as a thief whose action threatens the sanctity of the private property credo on which the whole system turns, and therefore must be removed, the system cleansed of her contaminating influence. The film clearly takes a consciously pro-immigration stance, so its incognizance of the way Maya's actions in the convenience store could be contextualized by its audience suggests that Maya, in the director's view, has been sufficiently constructed as a wholesome heroine as to be able to play this scene without contracting the stain of moral corruption. Juxtaposed as this scene is with Maya and Rosa's confrontation, one might be tempted to read Maya's theft here as Loach's conciliatory gesture: perhaps Maya is taking a page out of Rosa's book, accepting that sometimes desperate need can lead one to, or excuse one from, actions that cross the boundaries of social acceptability. In that case, is Rosa any less a Robin Hood than Maya?

The line for Loach seems to rest at the juncture between self-interest and selflessness, choice and unavoidable circumstance. Maya is harassed by customers in her short stint as a waitress, and she, in turn, insults their masculinity; she is clearly nobody's tool. But when Perez harasses her, requesting that she pull her uniform tighter so he can see her figure while commenting that it's about time the company hired janitors who aren't old hags, she smiles slightly, as though eager to please. Somehow, she is unable to recognize in her own sexual exploitation the likeness of her sister's, even though the coyotes call her a *chingada* and the restaurant patrons call her a slut. Direct material

²⁶ I am indebted to Sheila Contreras for her thoughtful insights into the racial politics of Perez's role in the film.

profit defines the difference between what kind of sexual exploitation and harassment is acceptable or not. In other words, Maya's tenure at Angel Corporation may be contingent on whether she allows Perez to sexually harass her, but her actual wages are earned from the labor she uses to clean offices. Rosa, however, receives direct compensation for the sexualization of her body.

Chicana feminist Norma Alarcón argues:

[W]oman [has been constructed as] sexually passive, and hence at all times open to potential use by men whether it be seduction or rape. The possible use is double-edged: that is, the use of her as pawn may be intracultural – 'amongst us guys' – or intercultural, which means if we are not using her then 'they' must be using her. Since woman is highly pawnable, nothing she does is perceived as choice. (184)

Prostitution is socially construed as the victimization of women for use by men (think of the frequently used term, "trafficked," which implies women are only cargo) with the consequence that such women, having lost their "purity," are "ruined" for family life and motherhood. Rosa's *choice* to sell her body for profit clashes painfully not just with the purity of sex as an instrument of romantic love, not profit, but also with a cultural hegemony in which men make sexual choices and women are merely the passive accomplices to those choices. In the face of a deeply-ingrained belief that women's role is to perpetuate through reproduction one's people and culture (a belief in no way limited to Mexican or Chicano communities), it is unthinkable that a woman could *choose* to endanger such a duty. As a metaphor, then, the act of choosing prostitution signifies an appalling betrayal of group interest, but it also aggressively interrogates the myth of women's passivity. To protect this myth and the particular power dynamic it upholds, the

figure of the prostitute necessarily is rendered as a victim of dire circumstance.²⁷

According to this tradition, Rosa's anguish may be understood as the struggle between seeing herself as a victim of circumstance (look at the sacrifice she has had to make) and feeling as though she has betrayed her role as a woman (look at how she took an active part in her sexuality and used it for personal gain).

In Rosa's story, however, she has sex with Perez only to procure a job for Maya, who already has a job as a waitress, albeit one she does not want. We may speculate that Maya shared with Rosa the degrading comments of her unctuous customers, and Rosa chose to prostitute herself in order to save her sister from the same fate – i.e., being pimped (figuratively, if not literally) to men for a living. This would make her action an especially noble one, but the film does not offer any support for such speculation. Instead, from the film's rehearsing of the two women's relationship, it seems more likely that Rosa was prompted to action by Maya's continual pestering and nagging. Rather than selling sex to Perez to resolve a grave hardship, the evidence suggests that Rosa merely wished to grant her sister's wish and in the process, earn a little peace. Earlier in the film, when Maya berates Rosa for not having enough money to pay the coyotes, Rosa, clearly irritated, raises her voice in reply: "I've been penniless since Bert [Rosa's husband] got sick. I told you, but you bugged and bugged me. You've never listened to me." Maya's desire to work for Angel Corp. is a repeat of her earlier desire to come to

²⁷ In her essay, "*Traductora, Traditora*," Alarcón critiques Adelaida R. del Castillo's biography of Malintzin, writing: "del Castillo wants to appropriate Malintzin . . . as agent, choice-maker, and producer of history. Actually, the whole notion of choice, an existentialist notion of twentieth-century Anglo-European philosophy, needs to be problematized in order to understand the constraints under which women of other cultures, times, and places live" (287). While I agree with Alarcón that "choice" is a loaded term, I do not propose such an undertaking here. Instead, I wish merely to clarify that my use of the term is broadly conceived as an intervention into absolute binaries, signifying some level of agency in all players within a given power dynamic. That said, "choice" must be understood in its relation to access and to competing ideologies that use it as the rope in a political tug-of-war.

the U.S.: what Maya really wants is to follow in her older sister's footsteps, and Rosa tries hard to accommodate her. She even explains that she had sex with Perez to procure Maya's job because she was "tired" of Maya pressuring her. Understanding Rosa's actions in this way may not transform her into an unsung heroine, but it does offer an alternative way of understanding prostitution – as a means to an end, rather than as a statement about a woman's sexual identity, as an indicator of her commitment to family or nation, and as a gauge of her moral stature. In Loach's rendition, however, her sex work is the reason Rosa does not have the "solidarity gene" necessary to participate in the union campaign.

Why does Loach come out so strongly against prostitution when he seems to portray other acts of desperation – stealing, whether across the border or from the till – with nonchalance, even comedy? Rosa's big scene may be Loach's misguided attempt to express solidarity with women, recognizing that they are far more likely than men to resort to sex work as a way of surviving in an economy that pays men more than women, values women as sex objects more than as laborers, and encourages a culture of violence against women. The problem with his attempt is its idealistic, emotion-laden insistence on sex as a non-commodity, even as he tries to sympathize with the indignities and degradations women suffer *as* women. The sex work he deplors is condemned much more heavily than the *sexed* work that goes on throughout the film – the low-paid or unpaid, largely invisible labor that women have traditionally performed on demand and without relief – waiting tables in skimpy outfits, enduring lecherous comments from supervisors, cleaning, caretaking, ironing, cooking, and so on. One wonders, if Rosa's husband is unemployed, why doesn't *he* do the ironing? The irony is that the only *sexed*

work that gets rewarded is Rosa's sex work. Rosa profits directly from her labor, but what does Maya gain from being harassed on the job? Unlike Rosa, who chooses sex work as a means to an end, Maya has no choice; she never consciously decides to allow herself to be harassed or to accept harassment. While she openly rejects such treatment at the restaurant where she briefly works, she endures it from Perez at the janitorial job without comment.

When Maya accuses Rosa of being a traitor only to learn that Rosa's sex work is actually the reason Maya has a janitor's job at all, the revelation's narrative impact and implications are swept out of sight by the raw emotion of the scene. Its overwhelming affect manipulates the audience into focusing on the act of selling sex, rather than considering how, all along, this act has propelled the plot. The two sisters never mention the issue again, in any context, for the duration of the film, so its real importance is lost in Loach's determination to use it as a shock device. We have no time, then, to reflect on the fact that while Maya is portrayed as the one who moves the plot along – *Bread* begins and ends with her border crossings – it is Rosa, after all, whose labor as a janitor and a prostitute has paid Maya's way and made her mobility, northward and upward, possible . . . Rosa, whose actions throughout *Bread* seem to fail, be rendered ineffectual, or geared to destroy rather than to build. Rosa, as it turns out, has daringly crossed the border of socially acceptable labor long before Maya's illicit crossing of the border separating Mexico from the U.S. Loach's direction of the confrontation scene and subsequent dropping of the issue obscures the fact that Rosa's labor has essentially produced a union, because she brings Maya over, who then subsequently organizes the janitors' first union meeting with Sam.

The binary Loach erects between Rosa and Maya manages to stand only because he drastically minimizes Rosa's profound role in Maya's story (in other words, he reduces her character-space) and allows Maya to remain incognizant of the links between her own and Rosa's experiences as laboring women. So while Maya is the mobile character – she animates every scene and is the heart of nearly each one, except for a few in which she functions as a sideline interpreter of the scene, the one who gives each event meaning – ultimately, it is Rosa's radical mobility, her choice to depart from the strong social edict to stay within the proscribed boundaries of acceptable sexual practice and sanctioned gendered labor, that makes the narrative possible at all. In other words, the most condemned act in the film is the most powerful and, according to Loach's vision at least, should be considered the most progressive (literally, since it engenders the whole ability of the plot to unfold at all, to realize the formation of a union). Maya flouts conventionality and institutional control, but her main job in the story is to instigate a union – another form of institutionalization, but one Loach tries to paint as radically as possible. While he demonizes Rosa as someone who is trapped by (because she has bought into) the conventionality and bureaucracy of U.S. institutional authority, he downplays Maya's own tendency in that regard in order to make her into the radical heroine. Rosa's move is perhaps the most radical action in the film, even though it is the least visible: sex work by choice and for profit is the least institutionalized action in *Bread* (and, arguably, society-at-large). Loach's treatment of Rosa's anti-union character defies the film's desire to celebrate radicalism *and* to portray fairly a union movement that, in spite of its best intentions, still needs to address its assumptions about sex/ed work and to challenge the easy binaries (good/bad, male/female, pro-union/anti-union)

that shape its concept of solidarity.

I began this essay with the claim that *Bread and Roses*, while trying to put forth a sympathetic message about immigrant, working-class women, manages to reinvest in formulaic stereotypes about each of these identity categories. So far, I have focused primarily on women's sexed labor, but I wish to turn now to the ways *Bread's* pro-immigrant position is compromised by a liberal Left politics that oversimplifies the issues faced by the film's immigrant characters, who have moved to the U.S., often at great personal risk, to accrue greater material security for themselves and their families. It seems clear that *Bread* does not want to make race a major issue in the narrative, because the protagonist and antagonist characters are scattered among several racial identities: the workers are predominantly Latino/a, but also include African Americans, whites, and one Eastern European immigrant; the anti-union boss is Latino; the security guards are African American and white; and the union organizer, to judge from his name, is Jewish. But as Angela Davis recently pointed out in a lecture at Michigan State University, the 2000-2008 Bush Administration is simultaneously the most conservative *and* the most racially diverse presidential administration in the history of the U.S.; in other words, creating a group that is superficially diverse-*looking* is emphatically not the same as enacting a recognizably different racial politics that moves beyond the "add non-white people and stir" recipe for corporate liberalism (Davis "Youth"). Loach and his films do not advocate for the policies of the Bush Administration, of course; my point is merely that putting a racially mixed group of actors in any given situation does not in and of itself enact true diversity or end racial discrimination, and in the instance of *Bread and*

Roses, the racial diversity that cuts across ideological lines oversimplifies the material reality the film tries so hard to portray accurately.

Bread delicately disengages citizenship from racial politics by virtue of the film's two main female characters: blood-related, Maya and Rosa nevertheless possess different citizenship status, leaving the film's racial politics to be encoded (and subsumed) chiefly through class identity. The majority of the white people in the film play wealthy corporate lawyers and Hollywood industry types, but while the film contains a dominant racial division between Latino/a and white, the members of several racial groups are represented on both sides of the struggle, pro- and anti-union. In contrast, a clear boundary exists between the various classes represented in the film, with the middle-class office workers lumped in with the rich, anti-union crowd. This point is illustrated, for example, in Ruben's comment that the janitors' uniforms make them invisible to the white office workers. The idea that their invisibility may be in any way attributable to their brown skin – another kind of uniform in a predominantly white world – does not seem to occur to either character (perhaps someone ought to send Loach a copy of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*). In other words, in *Bread*, as in classic Marxist analysis, class transcends race as a divisive category, so that while race may tend to be a marker of class, it is not race that is the issue, but economics and citizenship.

The film works hard to expound this point: Sam Shapiro patronizingly smirks at Rosa's accusation that he is a "fat union white boy" and a "college kid" who lacks substantive knowledge of blue-collar workers' experiences; his expression tells the viewer that such accusations are not new, and further, that they are not true. His self-righteous expression is augmented a few scenes later when Maya cautiously asks him

about Rosa's claim, and he responds by disclosing his salary: "I make \$22,345 a year as a union organizer." To a janitor making \$5.50 an hour with no benefits, that amount might sound pretty good, but the line is a clumsily-crafted statement for the benefit of the film's main audience (bourgeois liberals), whose average salary is presumably much higher; to such an audience, Sam's choice to pursue union organizing, as a college-educated, white American citizen, labels him as an idealist whose personal income is the sacrifice he has made to stand in solidarity with the workers he is helping. The scene works to dispel the stereotype of unions who get rich off of workers' dues and locates Sam firmly on the good side of the struggle, which is, as the salary discussion reminds us, one of class, not race. Just in case we miss the point, Loach has his protagonist, Maya, angrily declare that race, as an issue, is "shit," when Ruben gloomily suggests that Maya is only attracted to Sam because he is white. Notably, the comment is more believable coming from a Latina woman than from a white man – Sam is never called upon to comment upon race as an issue that informs class struggle.

This scene is crucial to understanding the limits of Loach's politics (and why several of the film's reviews take it to task for being standard agitprop instead of the artful film one might expect given its inventive opening scenes). Maya tells Ruben she likes Sam because he "believes in something," thus implying that Ruben, because he will not participate in the strike for fear of losing his opportunity to go to college, believes in nothing. The dialogue, rather than challenging this indirect assertion, offers a music-swelling moment in which Maya soliloquizes about the many reasons she wants to risk her job for the unionization drive. Ruben's weak protests, which give way to silent misery, fail to convey accurately what Maya's melodrama ("I'm doing this for the forty

million people in this country who don't have healthcare") efficiently conceals, which is that Ruben, of course, *does* believe in something, namely, a college education and upward mobility. Maya's words also hide the difference between her position and Ruben's: Maya is in the U.S. on a lark, living with her sister and under no obligation to parents or children. Ruben, in contrast, is supporting his mother back home in Mexico; his dreams are as much for her as for himself. The exchange between these two characters operates on several levels to reinscribe the film's values, which lean heavily towards an all-or-nothing idealism that subtly undermines the very people the film wishes to champion.

Maya's implied dismissal of his plans as "nothing" ignores Ruben's belief that education can improve one's circumstances, a major tenet of the immigrant's dream of America's promise. Maya herself speculates that she may some day attend college, so it is not education itself she dismisses, but rather, Ruben's choice to prioritize his access to it over the workers' action. Her critique is that Ruben is not practicing solidarity but is, instead, a selfish individualist, a charge that ignores the fact that Sam already has a college education, which is one reason he can afford to "believe in something." In other words, Ruben's "nothing" – education – is obviously for Sam "something," since it has led Sam to his position as a union organizer; this important oversight belies Maya's romanticization of Sam and the labor movement. The scene pits Maya's two love interests against each other (although only Ruben is aware of the contest) in a comparison that gestures towards Loach's comparison of Maya to Rosa. Like Ruben, Rosa is characterized as believing in nothing; both characters' drive to do what they must to survive (for Rosa, sex work; for Ruben, relinquishing the union in favor of school) is

pictured as a moral flaw that renders them unable to practice solidarity. Just as Ruben's "nothing" is, in Sam's life, a factor in his occupational choice and thus a precursor to his status as the film's male protagonist, Rosa's "nothing" (she believes in nothing, her labor is not validated) allows Maya's "something" – her job, her labor organizing, her solidarity, her heroism – to exist. Rosa's work and Ruben's desire are both devalued, but ultimately, Maya and Sam owe their positions to the very things the film marks as absences (of solidarity, belief, morality, a higher vision). Sam never says any of this: Rosa proclaims her own belief in "nada," and only Maya passes judgment out loud. On the one hand, this gives Maya voice, but read another way, it excuses Sam from having to make judgments that could compromise his impenetrably idealized character to a liberal audience. While Maya's soliloquy to Ruben gives her the surface appearance of an anti-establishment heroine, it really shows her naiveté: she fails to recognize the contingent relationships between the things (and people) she values and those she denigrates. Maya's failure ultimately rehearses the film's failure in general; Loach's agitprop can not transcend the limitations of the genre to recognize fully the structural problems that bear upon his characters' choices (and lack thereof). As a result, *Bread* relegates to the fetid pool of liberal individualism any excess determining factors of the characters' lives that do not fit into the film's simple with-us-or-against-us formulation.

Beyond "Solidarity Forever"

The Diary of a Shirtwaist Striker and *Bread and Roses* offer two different examples of the trap that befalls the lion's share of cultural representations of working-class women: often motivated (and thus limited) by a specific political agenda –

socialism, unionization, economic justice – they strike out in search of a protagonist who can transform working-class experiences into a worthy topic for their (often biased) audience. In the process, they are caught in a double-bind. On the one hand, they must combat a culture in which “working-class” is already a devalued category; on the other, they must appeal to the values of their audience to succeed in their political objectives. To accomplish such a feat, these works adopt a characterization strategy that functions with a “separate the wheat from the chaff” mentality rather than with an eye toward debunking myths and stereotypes about the working-classes. Working-class texts that star a female protagonist tend to rely on gender as a tool with which to build an argument for a working-class political agenda that recognizes all working people’s rights to economic security, healthy working environments, the ability to support a family, and so on, rather than engaging “gender” as another area of critical inquiry that intersects with issues of class, citizenship, race, etc. In other words, class subsumes other identity categories to the detriment of the agendas these texts set for themselves.

This critical problem is exacerbated by working-class studies research, which tends to focus on texts produced pre-World War Two that highlight male, blue-collar factory workers; such texts, generally associated with Socialist Realism, frequently include American socialism’s conservative views about gender and race as working-class issues. By holding these texts out to us as the greatest portion of available representations of the working-classes, working-class studies as a field limits its own ability to penetrate the murky waters of the questions that comprise the field: what is “working-class”?; what is the experience of being working-class?; how is class identity constructed?; how is class influenced by, and how does it influence, other socially

constructed categories such as gender, ethnicity, race, nationality, religion, etc.?; how does class operate as a concept, identity, or practice in cultural production?; and so on and so forth.

Furthermore, the same tunnel vision limits examinations of working-class experience to works that envision the labor movement as the preeminent authority on working-class issues and concerns and that tout unionization drives as the epitome of working-class heroism. Such pro-labor works – as we have seen in *Diary and Bread* – are infused with the labor movement’s historically conservative approaches to other identity categories. (Consider, for instance, the overwhelming exclusion of women and people of color from organizing efforts by most unions throughout the twentieth century because of the prevailing opinion that these groups were too “lumpen” – scared, unskilled, weak, disorganized – to be unionized [Foner 84-86, 106, 398, 406].) As Chandra Mohanty explains in *Feminism without Borders*, the labor movement and its associated cultural productions – literature, art, film, newsmedia – have not properly dealt with the ways it alienates women and subjects them to capitalist-engendered conceits of womanhood and femininity. Relying on the labor movement, then, as a discourse and project by which to achieve justice for working women is problematic from the start. Yet that’s exactly what these texts do in their scramble to hold their audience’s attention and yield an easy answer to the problems they pose in their storylines. We cling to the familiarity of tradition, and unionization, with its romantic history of mass action and noble slogans, its illusion of equality, is a difficult promise to walk away from.

I attribute this problem in U.S. working-class studies to its conception of “working-class” itself as a masculine convention and to its reliance on a canon bounded

by the perceived “ownership” of works by one critical domain or another (African American literature, women’s literature, Asian American literature, etc.), so that what remains of “working-class” texts are those focusing on Euro-American, male workers in an institutionalized labor setting such as factories and mines. For example, Ann Petry’s 1940 classic, *The Street*, rarely gets play in working-class studies scholarship, but is a well-known, frequently-taught text in African American studies. Such exclusions speak volumes about the field of U.S. working-class literary studies and its difficulties in incorporating “difference” into its analyses. Two immediate steps are required: first, scholars of working-class literature need to examine more fully how representations of the idealized, “universal” worker are constructed by reenacting the hierarchy of values they have set out to topple. I hope this essay has contributed some small effort towards that end.

Second, the parameters of “working-class literature” itself need to be expanded. In spite of Marx’s call for a “ruthless critique of everything in existence,” I find it more useful to examine texts that *do* resist the clarion call of simplistic propaganda as a means of representing working-class women’s experiences. While the majority of working-class cultural texts opt out of the hard work of critiquing gender roles and the ways class plays into categories such as race, gender, citizenship, and nation, there are works, heretofore ignored by working-class scholars, that do perform such inquiries, and these will be my focus for the remaining chapters of this project.

CHAPTER THREE

Progress Towards What?: The Politics of Prostitution in the “Progressive” Era in *Madeleine: An Autobiography*

Although anti-prostitution sentiments seem to have peaked in the early twentieth century in the U.S., when the so-called “white slavery” paranoia reached its culmination in a frenzy of reform activity, concerns about prostitution’s role in society have not abated in the intervening decades. In December, 2006, the *New York Times* published three front-page articles about prostitutes, including news of serial killings of prostitutes in Atlantic City, New Jersey, and Ipswich, England, as well as the reemerging tradition in China of publicly shaming prostitutes by forcing them to dress in bright yellow uniforms and march, shackled to police escorts, through streets lined with jeering crowds.²⁸ In the same month and paper, an editorial by Nicholas Kristof claimed that forced prostitution today constitutes a “larger slave trade than slave trades of previous centuries”²⁹ and cites President George W. Bush’s policy revisions in sex trafficking as one of the few diplomatic successes of his administration. Just a few days later, London’s *The Observer* reported that Prime Minister Tony Blair had rejected a plan to legalize “red zones” in England because of fears that “‘hostile headlines’ would wreck plans to make sex workers’ lives safer.”³⁰ In spite of feminism’s advances in the last several decades towards changing perceptions of women’s sexuality and improving women’s overall economic status, prostitution – the nodal point of women’s sexuality and women’s labor – clearly remains a site of anxiety, fear, and violence in the cultural imagination of

²⁸ *New York Times* Online. Dec. 5, 2006, Jan. 7, 2007. www.nytimes.com. Accessed 2/04/07.

²⁹ Kristof, Nicholas. “A Cambodian Girl’s Tragedy: Being Young and Pretty.” *New York Times*. Dec. 12, 2006.

³⁰ Gaby Hinsliff, Mark Townsend and Anushka Asthana. “No 10 ‘blocked move to legalise prostitution’.” December 17, 2006. http://observer.guardian.co.uk/uk_news/story/0,,1973888,00.html

societies around the world. It is in this context that I undertake the following study of a memoir, *Madeleine: An Autobiography*, published anonymously in 1919 by a former prostitute, an American woman born in 1870 in the Midwest; upon its publication, *Madeleine* was quickly censored, and the court ruling in the case set a precedent that later helped to overturn a Progressive-era obscenity law, a history to which I will return later in this essay.

Although much of the anxiety surrounding prostitution arises from the larger issues at stake in the expression, suppression, exploitation, and commodification of women's sexualities – social control, capitalism, nationalisms, etc. – at least some may be attributed to questions about labor and class: sex work is popularly called the “oldest profession,” but it is just as popularly imagined in Western culture as “the primrose path,” the choice of working-class women who do not want to perform the “real,” unglamorous work available to them as low-paid wage laborers in a variety of service and light manufacturing industries. The choice to prostitute, then, is seen as both an aberration of women's “proper” expression of sexuality (monogamous heterosexuality) *and* an illicit rejection by working-class women of their assigned role in the economic hierarchy.

The almost total lack, until recently, of “pornografia” (literally, writings by prostitutes about their trade) has no doubt contributed to the mythification and warped representations of prostitution in the not-so-distant past. While contemporary historians and social science scholars have paid considerable attention to sex workers' accounts of their experiences through archival work and field research, feminist literary criticism has generally ignored the few documents that exist (prior to the 1970s) that were written by

women actually involved in sex work; their focus, instead, has been on more widely-read writers, primarily male, either cashing in on or determined to perpetuate prostitution as a trope (and explanation) for myriad social ills.³¹

Case in point: the American white slavery paranoia that climaxed in the early part of the twentieth century, a moment of perhaps the greatest historical groundswell of anti-prostitution sentiment on record, gave rise to the only apparent textual *resistance* from sex workers extant in American letters prior to the second-wave feminist movement. And yet, strangely, these few works, although republished in the last few decades as part of a general move to reintroduce forgotten women authors, have received almost no attention from feminist literary scholars, for reasons I will consider later in this essay – questions of genre, perceived historical importance, or a more general disregard for the subject matter. *Madeleine: An Autobiography* is one such text. A close reading of Madeleine Blair's representation of herself and her trade offers significant counterpoints to her contemporaries' representations of prostitution both as a lived experience and as a metaphorical device; the argument I will advance in this essay is that these counterpoints resonate strongly (and perhaps, presciently) with a small but vocal minority of present-day feminists who argue against the longstanding polarized representation of prostitutes as either victim or criminal and who recognize that issues of citizenship and place are intricately bound up in the representation of sex work.³²

³¹ Laura Hapke, in *Girls Who Went Wrong* (1989), her study of prostitutes in literature from 1885-1917, explains in her introduction that women writers of that era avoided controversial topics like women's sexual expression out of fear of the censure experienced by writers like Kate Chopin; Chopin's career foundered after the publication of *The Awakening* (1898), her novel about an adulteress. Thus, Hapke's own book is a study of male authors' fictitious representations of prostitutes.

³² For example, some of the more widely-discussed books include Gail Pheterson's *The Prostitution Prism* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 1996), Denise Brennan's *What's Love Got to Do with It? Transnational Desires and Sex Tourism in the Dominican Republic* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2004), Wendy Chapkis's

There was a seemingly endless supply of allegedly autobiographical accounts of prostitution published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but the majority of these were fake stories, written by social reformers as propaganda. The lack of credible details in these stories, as historian Ruth Rosen observes, suggests they were written by individuals who had little knowledge of brothel life (*Maimie Papers* xiv). *Madeleine*, the anonymous memoir of a prostitute, is one of three autobiographical texts authenticated by historians as having been written by American prostitutes during the white slavery paranoia. As evidence of *Madeleine*'s authenticity, historians have noted its lack of sensationalism, detailed notes on daily life in brothels, and overall narrative consistency.³³ The other two authenticated texts are *The Underworld Sewer*, Josie Washburn's reflections on her career as a prostitute from 1871 to 1907, and the letters of Maimie Pinzer, written between 1910 and 1922 after quitting prostitution, to reformer Fanny Quincy Howe, a wealthy benefactress who encouraged her to remain out of the trade. Both texts are worth mentioning as points of comparison that mark *Madeleine*'s singularity. Washburn self-published *Underworld* in 1909; it was reissued by the University of Nebraska Press in 1997, with an introduction by historian Sharon E. Wood. Pinzer's letters were first published by the Feminist Press in 1977 as *The Maimie Papers*. Both Washburn's and Pinzer's writings support the project of prostitute reform, a mainstay of social policy debates of the time; as Wood points out in her 1997 introduction to *The Underworld Sewer*, Washburn's "purpose in writing [is] to implicate her readers in the maintenance of the underworld," but her secondary motive is "to move

Live Sex Acts: Women Performing Erotic Labor (New York: Routledge, 1997), and Jill Nagle's *Whores and Other Feminists* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

³³ See, among others, Carlisle, 1986; Rosen, 1982; Hapke, 1989; and, Murphy, 1993.

them to action” (xv), to convince them, in other words, to solve the “problem” of prostitution.

Madeleine stands in sharp contrast to these two works: its narrator, like Pinzer and Washburn, recognizes the relationship of poverty to prostitution – a common enough formulation among progressive thinkers in the early twentieth century – but unlike these other two, *Madeleine* does not directly condemn prostitution itself. And while all three reveal “the economic and political structures that drive women to the underworld and profit from them once they are there” (Wood xvi), *Madeleine* is unique in refusing to make the prostitutes in its pages into powerless, asexual victims in order to comply with or manipulate its contemporary audience’s sentiments. Washburn writes that prostitutes use “paint” (i.e., cosmetics) “AS A MASK TO HIDE BEHIND, to shield our tortured feelings from the savages who defile the air with their hideous language The average underworld woman is a MOST TIMID CREATURE, made so by ill-treatment” (203, emphasis in original). *Madeleine*’s narrator, on the other hand, both refuses to wear make-up throughout her long career as a prostitute and salts her story with descriptions of women coworkers who are anything but timid: for example, “Mamie, as she called herself, had no reserve whatever” (53) or “Olga . . . looked upon me as being somewhat of a fool because I lacked self-assertion and was hampered by scruples” (150). In fact, a long scene midway through *Madeleine* wryly recounts the attempts of the women in one brothel to outdo each other in shocking Madeleine with their own “hideous language”; nowhere in *Madeleine* does the masked and frightened creature of Washburn’s book make an appearance.

The contradictions between *Madeleine*'s narrative and Washburn's or Pinzer's may emphasize the significance of the former's anonymity: *Madeleine* can speak differently about prostitution – avoiding the conventional wisdom of the social purity campaigns of the day – because its anonymity protects the author from the social repercussions of her arguments. Washburn and Pinzer have no such protective cover. Its author's anonymity also accounts for at least some portion of the memoir's attraction as an object of literary criticism; *Madeleine*'s anonymity blurs the line between fiction and historical or autobiographical narrative, because there is no historical figure to link it to or fact-check it against, with the result that its literary qualities – its metaphors, tropes, symbols, formal structure, etc. – assert themselves more strongly than they might in a memoir presumed to be a “factual” narrative of “what really happened.” Because *Madeleine* stands out for its literary aspirations, it's even more puzzling that it has been overlooked by literary scholars. Pinzer and Washburn both sought work as writers, but only *Madeleine* (the narrator's first trade name) achieved publication by a major publishing house in her lifetime, and the text reflects her artistic sensibilities as well as her political singularity.

But if *Madeleine*'s views and writing style are anomalous to both prostitutes' and reformers' writings, then how do we make sense of its place in the catalog of its own contemporaries' textual representations of prostitution? I want to suggest that one way to understand *Madeleine* is to read it as a textual model of Antonio Gramsci's conception of “organic intellectuals.” *Madeleine*'s account of her life shares much with Gramsci's ideas about the making of organic intellectuals: her self-education, the evolution of her understanding of prostitution's social function, her self-representation as both part of and

apart from her class, and her choice to represent and speak for her community against the current of popular opinion all resonate with Gramsci's conviction that only by organically producing their own intellectuals could oppressed classes develop "a counter hegemony, a method of upsetting the consensus, of countering the 'common sense' view of society" (Burke www.infed.org). Reading *Madeleine* in light of Gramsci's formulation can illuminate the ways Madeleine Blair's own class and work experiences shaped her anti-establishment views on prostitution long before radical feminists, as a group, took up similar arguments.

In his *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci argues: "Every social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of an *essential* function in the world of economic production, creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an *awareness of its own function* not only in the economic but also *in the social and political fields*" (5, my emphasis). In other words, every group rationalizes and perpetuates its existence through charging some of its members with the performance of intellectual labor the implicit function of which is to create the supporting ideology for such rationalizations.³⁴ Gramsci contends that what he calls "traditional" intellectuals (those whose primary profession or social function is recognized as intellectual work, such as the clergy, professors, and writers) consider themselves to be located outside of any one class. He dismisses this perception as a myth created out of self-interest: by placing themselves outside of the class hierarchy, traditional intellectuals relieve themselves of the burden of class struggle and grant their own labor and social position a degree of autonomy that denies their self-interest in maintaining the dominant

³⁴ Gramsci's own example of this is the capitalist entrepreneur who creates roles for other people whose work then supports his own: the economic analyst, the legislator who passes laws in his favor, etc.

hegemony, which recognizes their elite position and rewards them for it (*Notebooks* 8).

Gramsci instead proposes another category of intellectual laborer, the “organic intellectual.” In this formulation, he recognizes that all human beings engage in intellectual activity, although their labor may not be categorized as such: “This means that, although one can speak of intellectuals, one cannot speak of non-intellectuals, because non-intellectuals do not exist” (9). He distinguishes mental and physical labor using the terms “intellectual-cerebral” and “muscular-nervous” to describe them but observes that neither effort exists without the concomitant functioning of the other, an observation that demands the overturning of the traditional binary between the two in favor of the recognition that every human effort reflects “varying degrees of specific intellectual activity” (9).

In elaborating his theory of the organic intellectual, Gramsci makes the case that only by organically producing its own intellectuals can the working-class create a new social system, an argument premised on the theory that in order to create structural change, ideologies themselves must change – a new material reality could only arise from a new consciousness. The rationalization of a group’s social function comes from within the group itself through its intellectual labor (remember that for Gramsci, all human activity carries some component of intellectual work). Thus, working-class people’s consciousness of their conditions would arise organically from their reflections on their daily experiences, rather than from the exhortations of a vanguard of leaders who were themselves not part of the working-class (as was the case with the Russian Revolution led by Lenin). Essentially, Gramsci’s conception of the organic intellectual elaborates a link

between theory and practice in the drive for social and political change that demands that the oppressed group theorize its own exploitation and strategies for change.

In my reading of Gramsci, I find no passage that deals explicitly with prostitution or with prostitutes as a class of their own. And the question of where, exactly, to locate prostitutes as a social group is itself a theoretical problem. Prostitution's place in society is contradictory: on the one hand, at the time of Madeleine's career experiences (at the turn of the century, when the brothel-system dominated the trade), it was an industry composed almost exclusively of women working for pay in one of the only economically viable jobs available to women; on the other, working-class communities, in practice and in print, repeatedly denied prostitutes' membership in the working-class, largely on the grounds that the work prostitutes perform is not actually work at all, but criminal deviance.³⁵ As I have demonstrated in my chapter on Theresa Serber Malkiel's *The Diary of a Shirtwaist Striker*, working-class women hold a vested interest in denying any comparison between prostitutes' physical labor and their own, and no early-twentieth-century working-class intellectuals tried to "homogenize" the two groups by theorizing women's labor beyond the debates about whether women required special legislative protection in the workplace in order to preserve their ability to bear and raise children. Indeed, even the radical anarchist Emma Goldman, who recounts in her autobiography her own attempt to prostitute herself to raise money for the trial of her comrade, Alex Berkman (*Living* 91-94) – a clear expression of *her* own agency – described prostitution as a sexual phenomenon rather than a labor category:

³⁵ I am focusing on the early twentieth century in my argument, but these claims are no less true today. For example, sex workers have formed independent unions (such as C.O.Y.O.T.E. – Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics) to improve their working conditions in part because mainstream unions will not accept them as members.

Girls, mere children, work in crowded, over-heated rooms ten to twelve hours daily at a machine, which tends to keep them in a constant over-excited sex state. Many of these girls have no home or comforts of any kind; therefore the street or some place of cheap amusement is the only means of forgetting their daily routine. This naturally brings them into close proximity with the other sex. It is hard to say which of the two factors brings the girl's over-sexed condition to a climax, but it is certainly the most natural thing that a climax should result. That is the first step toward prostitution. Nor is the girl to be held responsible for it. On the contrary, it is altogether the fault of society. (*Red Emma* 182-183)

Goldman's position – "it is altogether the fault of society" – is one of absolute structuralism: these women are victims of the system in which they live; their own agency plays no role. Marx himself, in *Capital: Volume One*, characterizes prostitutes as members of "the actual *lumpenproletariat*" (797), a loosely defined grouping of individuals, among whom he numbers "criminals, vagabonds, and *prostitutes*" (797, emphasis added) and elsewhere refers to as "social scum" ("Manifesto" 482), who hold no possibility for revolutionary activity. And yet, Gramsci specifically states that every *essential* social class – in which he clearly includes the working-class – produces its own intellectuals in order to perpetuate itself and "give it homogeneity" (5).

In that case, prostitution presents an ironic phenomenon: it is commonly considered (and especially so in *Madeleine's* time) "a necessary social evil" (that is, a group of people who serve an essential social function – an essential class), but where are its intellectuals? They can be found only if we consider prostitutes part of the working-classes, and yet prostitutes themselves – Madeleine, Washburn, Pinzer – all deny that their trade is necessary or their class essential, a significant deviation from mainstream working-class self-representation. Instead, these authors argue that prostitution will exist only as long as women's economic subordination exists, and further, that there is nothing "necessary" or inevitable about women's forced poverty and subjugation. But although

these women set forth arguments that reflect some level of working-class consciousness about the causes of their material circumstances, as a group they are still characterized as an anomaly, a population victimized differently from other working women, with the latter group championed for their heroism in the face of extreme hardship and the former disgraced for lacking such heroism. Prostitutes, then, form a group of women whom society has labeled necessary, but who simultaneously deny their own labor's necessity; they are logically part of the working-class stratum, but are shunned by members of the larger class to which they ought rightfully to belong as laborers producing "necessary" product; and they have apparently failed to produce any intellectuals whose work has created a supporting web of rationalizations for their continued existence. And yet, despite these paradoxes, their existence persists, as do their representations in literature and film as a site of cultural anxiety.

Madeleine's significance is that it bridges these apparent contradictions, especially when the memoir is understood in the context of Gramsci's notion of the organic intellectual. Rather than being a member of no class, Madeleine imagines herself to have roots in both the working-class and the middle-class, and she draws on the values of each in shaping her story. Just as importantly, her life and politics are shaped specifically through her work as a prostitute; while her experiences form an anatomy of the trade, they also are the basis for her own theorizing of prostitution as a special class, part of, yet apart from, other working women. I do not want to overstate the case: Madeleine does not advocate revolution, but she does offer a counter-hegemonic view of prostitution that does not victimize or condemn its practitioners. She acknowledges the role that systemic exploitation has played in her own choices, as well as – and this is

crucial – her own agency in making those choices. She stoutly rejects the premises of, and refuses to participate in, any prostitute reform efforts, and the book itself, as the object of an obscenity case, is a telling piece of evidence supporting my claim for its counter-hegemonic ideas.

Madeleine: Transgressive Text of the Progressive Era

Upon its publication in 1919, *Madeleine: An Autobiography* quickly became the object of a obscenity trial. Written anonymously, *Madeleine* documents the experiences of its author as a prostitute in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. C. T. Brainard, the president of Harper & Bros., the book's publisher, was accused by The Society for the Suppression of Vice of breaking the 1909 obscenity law which forbade the production and distribution of pornographic material; the Society argued that *Madeleine* did not openly denounce prostitution and therefore condoned it, in clear violation of the 1909 law's requirement that materials with pornographic content were to use such content for morally sound instructional purposes only. Although Harper and Brothers won the trial on appeal, the book was pulled from store shelves (Hapke 167) and not widely reissued until its rescue in the 1980s by a feminist press.³⁶

Madeleine's narrator sets up scenes with language that anticipates a scintillating account of the prostitution trade, as audiences of white slavery narratives and "prostitute confessionals" in the 1910s would have expected. Ironically, *Madeleine* fails miserably either as an example of white slavery (she savagely denounces the widespread fears that

³⁶ My research has turned up copies of *Madeleine: An Autobiography* that were published in the 1950s as pulp fiction, complete with the era's trademark kitsch cover illustration of a buxom young woman, standing alone and frightened in what appears to be a seedy neighborhood. I imagine the contemporary reader who bought that edition was sorely disappointed to relearn the adage about judging a book by its cover – *Madeleine's* contents are nowhere near as steamy as that particular cover suggests.

white women were being abducted and sold into sex slavery) or of the “prostitute confessional,” the steamy subgenre of the time that promised readers a textual parade of obscene pleasures. Conspicuous in its absence from the text is the lubricious confessional that ends with a humbled prodigal woman begging society’s forgiveness; the obscenity court case and accompanying public outcry was occasioned therefore not by the book’s graphic sexual detail, but by its narrator’s refusal to bow her head in figurative shame over her life choices (*Madeleine* v). Instead, “Madeleine” (which was the author’s first “trade name”) flouts narrative convention and disappoints her contemporary audience by substituting, in place of repentance, an indictment of gender roles, patriarchy, and the U.S. class system, and the links among them, coupled with an unapologetic reflection on the author’s years as a prostitute.

Madeleine is divided into two parts, Book I and Book II. Book I tracks the life of its author beginning with her early childhood recollections and ending with the moment she leaves the prostitution trade. After the Civil War, Madeleine’s parents left the East Coast to settle in a Midwestern town, where they “had some means and a beautiful home” (6). Born in 1870, Madeleine’s idyllic childhood, filled with books, religion, and material comfort, ends abruptly at age eleven, when her father’s theretofore hidden alcoholism sets her family on a downward spiral of increasing poverty and despair. After Madeleine’s father begins a pattern of leaving home for months at a time, sending little money for food and clothes, her mother is left to raise her large family alone. The house is sold, and the family moves from neighborhood to neighborhood, until at last they find themselves in a neighborhood of flophouses and clandestine brothels. Young Madeleine,

malnourished and no longer attending school because the family can not afford books and clothes, finds herself the victim of more than just hunger:

One would have to live through it to realize the agony a high-spirited, sensitive girl may endure when she is the town drunkard's daughter, especially when that town drunkard had once been one of the leading citizens.

I was never permitted to forget that this was my position. I had no girl companions – my sisters were too small. Instead of girl friends, I made clandestine visits to ignorant, corrupt women who wore a scanty garb of respectability, and whose influence was far more pernicious than a public prostitute's would have been³⁷. . . . I was fair game for any predacious male who might be attracted by my youthful face or my well-developed figure.

Men who had been my father's friends made open or tentative advances to me. . . . I had not only lost my father's support in material matters; I had lost his protection as well. (12-13)

Physically, intellectually, and emotionally starved, Madeleine fails to “keep above the level of [her] environment” and gives in to the temptations around her. At the age of seventeen, she moves to St. Louis to live in the care of a former family servant and work in a laundry. There she learns that she is pregnant, and unable to tell her mother the truth, Madeleine runs away after making her guardian promise to keep her secret. Penniless and friendless, a series of misfortunes lead her to Kansas City, where she is befriended by a young prostitute who procures a place for her in a reputable house. After contracting a venereal disease from a dishonest man, her baby is born dead, and she returns home to her mother's house, only to leave again for Chicago, where she hopes to attend art school. It is there, while employed at a department store, that she receives the news of her mother's impending placement in a poorhouse and her younger siblings' dispersal to

³⁷ Madeleine's neighbors at this point are “occasional” or “clandestine” prostitutes, women who ostensibly hold other occupations and enjoy some form of socially acceptable income and whose prostitution is secret. This is in contrast to “public prostitutes,” who lived in brothels and openly proclaimed their trade. For most of her career, Madeleine works as a public prostitute, and as she explains later in her narrative, public prostitutes scorned private ones for their deception and hypocrisy in falsely wearing what she refers to as “the Mantle of Respectability” (190). She recalls one such woman who “was engaged to a rising young lawyer . . . and had deliberately chosen this means of earning money for her trousseau. . . . I thought that a girl who would deliberately deceive the man who was to marry her and whom she professed to love was beneath contempt” (188).

servant positions. In anguish, she leaves the department store job to work at a brothel, the only employment that pays well enough to allow her to save her family from utter destitution. Ironically, her father, upon his return to family life after a stint in prison, hunts down Madeleine in Chicago, learns of her sex work, and disowns her completely; she never sees or hears from her family again.

Significantly, Book I ends with her disownment, a division in the text that reflects her changing status, from a woman sacrificing her life's goals to sustain her family however she can to a woman cut adrift from such ties, free to make her way in the world. Book II details the rest of her career as a prostitute, tracing her moves from brothel to brothel and place to place, as well as her second pregnancy, her experiences as a working mother, the devastating loss of her young son to pneumonia, her decision to self-abort a third pregnancy, her relocation to a remote Canadian frontier town, where she becomes a successful madam, and her own downward spiral into the alcoholism that disabled her father. Although Madeleine recounts stories of her own and others' encounters with abuse and all of the degradation inherent to the trade, her memoir challenges the dominant moral code in which prostitution is condemned by repeatedly suggesting that in the sphere of limited choice that comprises womanhood, all of the options are equally poor. Her career carries her from St. Louis to Chicago to Montana and back again; she opens a brothel in Canada; she leaves North America to travel around the world, making the acquaintance of "the 'lost sisterhood' of the nations" (238). When her alcoholism threatens her business and ruins her health, she summons the courage to leave the trade in order to regain her sobriety. The book's "Afterword" includes a short reflection on her experiences trying to return to "civilian" life, in which she describes the necessity of

keeping her personal history a secret and her acquaintance with several people active in the anti-white-slavery movement, whom she chastises for their hypocrisy. She ends with a strong refutation of the existence of anything called “white slavery.”

Madeleine’s autobiography functions as a sort of anthropology of prostitution, detailing the workings of the brothel system and other forms of prostitution, as well as the economic and social hierarchies of the sex industry; in her account of the system, she challenges the stereotypes of the woman prostitute without yielding a comprehensive identity that could allow any firm line to be drawn between reader and (prostituted) Other. The story itself frequently states its politics point-blank (as when, for example, the author writes, “Why should one class of women be able to dwell in luxurious seclusion from the trials of life, while another class performed their loathsome tasks?” [143]), but far more interesting – from a literary standpoint – are the ways “mobility” operates in both *Madeleine*’s form and content to reflect Madeleine’s class and gender politics, her refusal to be pigeonholed into a category, her demand to be regarded as an agent of her own destiny rather than a victim. *Madeleine* pulls this off through a strategic narrative shifting in which the reader is continually led to expect one thing – the contrite prostitute – only to be surprised by something altogether different – the feminist, the mother, the intellectual, the political analyst. By creating an unexpectedly mobile text, one that sways back and forth between readers’ expectations and her own agenda, Madeleine leads the reader along a path of argument that she or he might otherwise choose not to tread. Therein lies the text’s irony: it is not obscene in the traditional sense, that is, it does not offer scintillating, graphic details of sexual prurience, but it *enacts* a pornographic sensibility by offering a promise (the alleviation of unlicensed desire) that it

does not fulfill. Where there should be sex, there is . . . something else. That “something else” will be my focus in the remaining pages of this essay.

Madeleine’s critique takes shape through her use of place and space to describe a map of social relations determined by the presence or absence of capitalism’s perversities, which she illustrates in the book’s many scenes of class culture and consumption, scenes that are saturated with the importance of place; she substitutes the details of these perversities for those of her trade. In creating a record of her geographic travels, she charts an intellectual journey that measures the distance between various points on the social map: between the frontier and the city, between prostitutes and wives, between poverty and education, between social equality and cosmopolitan capitalism. As she recalls her life from childhood onward, she creates for herself a mobile identity that refuses to submit to the demands of either “respectable” society or the sex trade, preferring to create a path of her own that challenges the codes of each. Her movement between and among society’s sharply delineated spheres blurs their distinctions through her adoption of what feminist geographer Kathy Ferguson calls “mobile subjectivities.”

In her essay in the anthology, *Making Worlds: Gender, Metaphor, Materiality*, Geraldine Pratt discusses Ferguson’s use of this concept of “mobile subjectivities . . . as a strategy to disrupt dualistic thinking and essentializing around any social categories” and then quotes Ferguson directly: “‘I have chosen the term *mobile* rather than *multiple* to avoid the implication of movement from one to another stable resting place, and instead to problematize the contours of the resting one does’” (18). This is a good way of conceptualizing my reading of *Madeleine*: the text’s presence, and that of its author, in any number of social locations throughout the narrative changes (or at least challenges)

the contours of those places, revealing their own malleability in spite of various groups' frequent protestations to the contrary (e.g., Madeleine's self-construction as a self-educated social philosopher warps both the image of what kinds of women practiced prostitution in the late nineteenth century, as well as what kinds of people were capable of rising above society in order to anatomize it). In analyzing *Madeleine*, my argument traces its multiple mobilities (to play with Ferguson's words): cunning narrative shifts that mock readerly expectations by providing politics where there should be sex; code-switching back and forth between native informant of the sex work economy, intellectual autobiography, and political treatise; and, its use of Madeleine's literal movement around the country and across the globe to map metaphorically the relationship of a culture of consumption to a culture of gender exploitation.

Accordingly, the following reading is divided into three parts, followed by a conclusion that considers *Madeleine*'s importance to both feminist and working-class literary studies. The first part, my analysis of *Madeleine*'s pornographic sensibility as a censored text, contextualizes the book within the history of the so-called white-slave scare in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. I also use this section to challenge previous critics' charges against Madeleine as a "self-interested," apolitical observer who "calmly accepts" the realities of women's sexual exploitation. The second part reads the multiplicity of narrative forms within *Madeleine* as a formal expression of Madeleine's own "mobile subjectivity," which allows her to participate in and travel among a variety of social discourses without the burden of being restricted to identification with one group of actors, one community. Here, especially, the idea of the Gramscian organic intellectual plays out: Madeleine's conception of her subjectivity

grows and evolves, and in so growing, she develops her understanding of the class stratum in which she finds herself. In the third section, I track the geographic itinerary of her career, interpreting *Madeleine*'s use of space and place with the help of feminist scholars such as Caren Kaplan and Doreen Massey. These three sections are not discrete readings; each informs the others, culminating in an overarching reflection on the reasons for *Madeleine*'s critical neglect since its reissue more than twenty years ago, a consequence, I believe, of feminism's deeply ambivalent views about sex work.

Pornographic Poverty and the Rich Imagination

In the early twentieth century, as thousands of working-class women, for the first time in U.S. history, took to the streets in a series of strikes to demand better working conditions, as the word "feminism" entered into the American consciousness, and as legions of women pushed their way towards the right to vote, another movement centered on women was also taking shape: the anti-white-slavery crusade. Reformers claimed "white slavery," the term applied to the phenomena of "involuntary brothel prostitution" (Keire 7), was a widespread occurrence, although virtually no compelling evidence has ever been found to support this belief. It is perhaps no coincidence that prostitution became the crisis *du jour* just as masses of women were loudly and publicly demanding suffrage and pay equity. As feminist historian Nan Enstad notes of that time period, "the historic association of unescorted women in public space with . . . sexual disorder" blurred the distinctions between prostitutes and other working women. Suddenly, the streets were filled with women, and the cultural response was to frame them all – strikers, suffragists, anarchists – as "compromised in virtue" (91). The growing interest in

prostitution as a large-scale social problem corresponded to the increasingly public presence of women in the U.S., and many historians today read the panic of the white slavery scare as a misguided attempt to restore the strict boundaries of women's sphere (ironically, one supported by a considerable number of female social reformers).³⁸ Other causes contributed to the panic as well, including the increasing urban population and the flow of immigrants into the U.S. Nancy F. Cott, in her introduction to a volume on the history of American prostitution, explains: "Reformers agitated by tensions between rich and poor, between men and women, and between differing racial and ethnic groups that now crowded into American cities, focused on ending the 'traffic in women' as a way to cleanse and revivify urban community" (*History* x).

From 1900-1917, the war on vice in America's cities attained historic proportions, as Congress took a deep breath and plunged into the nation's dens of iniquity, hoping to return with the morality the nation was thought to have lost in its purportedly widespread pursuit of illegal pleasures.³⁹ Culture vultures made sure that America's literary tastes marched in step with the anti-vice battle cry; members of organizations like the Society for the Suppression of Vice patrolled the streets eager to stomp out gambling and prostitution. Strict censorship raged during this time, and works that deviated from the

³⁸ Laura Hapke, in *Girls Who Went Wrong*, notes that the 1910 Rockefeller Grand Jury Report, commissioned to study the issue of vice in New York City, concluded that while it found "no evidence of vice syndicates or a traffic in women . . . prostitution was forced activity" (117). For an excellent consideration of more recent historians' responses to white slavery, see Chapter 7, "White Slavery: Myth or Reality?," in Ruth Rosen's *The Lost Sisterhood* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1982).

³⁹ A number of investigations and reports were commissioned by Congress throughout the first two decades of the century to assess the extent of the prostitution trade, its machinery, and its impact on a variety of communities, including newly arrived immigrants and women moving into the city from rural areas to obtain paid employment. Such studies include the 1909 Congressional Report, produced by the Immigration Commission, titled "Importing Women for Immoral Purposes" and reproduced in full in Francesco Cordasco's *The White Slave Trade and the Immigrants* (Detroit: Blaine Ethridge Books, 1981). This report, and its follow-up in 1910, resulted in the passage of the Mann Act, which made it illegal to transport women across state borders for "immoral purposes" (Lubove 253). Additionally, most major cities in this era had influential Vice Commissions, whose work included shaping local legislation to stamp out perceived social ills like gambling and sex work.

normative sexless depiction of hetero-monogamous marriage were deemed pornographic and yanked from the shelves. The works of authors like Nathaniel Hawthorne, Kate Chopin, and George Bernard Shaw were banned. The so-called white slavery scare did not begin to die down until the U.S. joined World War I, when Americans' attention turned to a presumably more real threat to national security (Hapke 11).

In the previous section, I summarized *Madeleine*'s publishing history and its trial for obscenity; like Chopin's *The Awakening*, and other literary works, the anonymously-authored text was sanctioned for its allegedly pornographic content at a time when prostitution was strictly contextualized as a moral deviation (as opposed to nowadays, where there is some debate among feminists about this judgment). My contention in this section is that *Madeleine*'s story, both because of its content and its context, complicates the standards for what is pornographic by challenging the two-dimensionality of the word's definition and attempting to rewrite the relationship of the reader of such texts to the characters being read. For clarification's sake, let me say that in making this argument, I limit my scope to certain textual representations of prostitution (the literal meaning of "porno-grafia"), specifically the white slavery narrative and the prostitute confessional. I do not claim to speak for or about actual sex workers, but rather, about the way one prostitute, in a historical moment of intense public scrutiny of sex work, has responded in writing to other textual representations of her trade.

Traditionally, pornography works as a mechanized reproduction of excessive consumption, or what Jean Baudrillard refers to as "ostentatious prodigality" (31). In pornography, the excessive consumers are those represented in this reproduction: the actors, models, and characters who gorge their sexual appetites for the viewing or reading

audience. Pornography, then, is supposed to create a relationship in which one vicariously enjoys the conspicuous consumption of another (that is, the viewer watching the sexual “deviancy” of others, where such deviancy is a stand-in for consumption, generally).⁴⁰ In *Madeleine*’s telling of it, however, the one being viewed is not a *consumer* but a *producer* of excess. Labor is everywhere present in her account of prostitution: “My soul revolted at the task, but I was anxious to make money” (139); “The elements of success in this business do not differ from the elements of success in any other business” (72); “In response to her question, ‘Do you understand what this life [of prostitution] means?’ I succinctly answered, ‘Yes, it means food and shelter’” (58). Thus, with the text’s representative consumer of excess, the prostitute, turned into a worker, the viewer then becomes the overt consumer; instead of being a mere witness to the prostitute’s pleasure, the reader is forced to acknowledge his or her intimate consumption of the prostitute’s work – they become part of the transaction. The result is a more immediate relationship to sexual excess than is comfortable, especially when that excess is directly tied to the labor, rather than the leisure, of the one being viewed. Instead of letting the reader be a passive, if aroused, vicarious witness to the sex industry, *Madeleine* implicates her readers – middle-class wives, johns, holier-than-thous – and exposes their direct participatory role in this system of production.

While censorship of purportedly scurrilous literature was rampant, America’s quest to destroy prostitution and restore American morality to its supposedly former superiority led to a flurry of publishing in a new genre critics now refer to as “white slavery narratives.” Some of these were simply cheaply-printed tracts; historian Marcia

⁴⁰ For an in-depth look at the medical history of women’s sexual “deviancy” and its relationship to “abnormal” female sexual appetites, see Heather Miller’s article, “Sexologists Examine Lesbians and Prostitutes in the United States, 1840-1940.” *NWSA Journal* 12.3 (2000): 67-91.

Carlisle writes that “[o]ne of the most famous of these, Reginald Kaufman’s *The House of Bondage*, went through fourteen editions within two years of its publication in 1910” (xxii). These stories were arguably much more scintillating – or at least more graphic – than many of the texts that had been banned in this same time period. As Katherine Joslin writes in her analysis of Theodore Dreiser’s *Jennie Gerhardt* (1911):

[W]hite-slavery narratives read like nineteenth-century novels of seduction and rescue. The story of sexual slavery, so popular in America, romanticized the prostitute, . . . presenting her as a slum angel. Armchair tourists read about the dark, sinful details of sexual debauchery from the safety of their bourgeois homes By telling the story of victimization, the narratives avoided the larger question of female sexuality, a subject no one wanted to discuss. (112)

Such narratives were sometimes mere pamphlets, circulated to scare young women away from the lure of prostitution, and others were published as cheap books for entertaining (but didactic) reading. The typical white slavery narrative is driven by two ideas: first, an unsuspecting female victim is kidnapped and sold into sex slavery, or otherwise lured into the business because she is helpless and alone in the world. Second (largely because the authors had to explain away the incidences of prostitutes who were rescued by anti-vice crusaders whether or not they wanted to be “rescued”), the narrative explains how exposure to the depravity of brothels warps the young victim’s mind and heart, so that over time, she loses all of her feminine humanity and is transformed into a kind of monster incapable of recovery (Keire 11).⁴¹

Published just as the white slavery scare was winding down, *Madeleine* counters white slavery stories with another version of the prostitute’s experience. As historian Mara Keire explains, white slavery narratives tried to elicit sympathy from their readers

⁴¹ This is a common trope among a variety of literatures from that time that include secondary prostitute characters. For example, Chapter One of this manuscript deals with such characterizations in Theresa Serber Malkiel’s novella, *The Diary of a Shirtwaist Striker* (1910).

by framing the economics of prostitution in terms of debt peonage – that is, they explained that the reason so many prostitutes would not leave the trade was that they owed their madams money and were too ignorant of the law to realize they could not be legally beholden to this debt (11). Madeleine, conversely, suggests that if the conditions were right, a decent living could be made by selling sex. She writes, “I do not know anything about the so-called white slave trade, for the simple reason that no such thing exists” (321). The deviation from the norms that critics found obscene in *Madeleine* were not sexual in nature, but political. In the 1986 Foreword to the new edition of *Madeleine*, historian Marcia Carlisle writes that: “the narrative is driven by *self-interest* and not by social concern. It is the image of the woman as legitimate social actor, not the woman as victim, that emerges from the story” (vi-vii, emphasis mine). Echoing Carlisle, literary critic Laura Hapke suggests that Madeleine exhibits “a *calm acceptance* of the system which, after all, as a madam she learned to exploit” and expressed anger only at “the prejudices concerning prostitutes: the charges of alcoholism, disease, degeneracy, and mental illness” (*Girls* 169, emphasis mine).

I disagree with both Carlisle and Hapke’s analysis. Rather than demonstrating conscienceless “self-interest” or “calm acceptance,” I see in *Madeleine* a strident commentary on the links between class inequities and social expectations for women, which leave women with no good options. Madeleine’s reflections on prostitution demonstrate a prescient understanding of the philosophy popularly associated with 1970s feminism, namely that “the personal is political.” Perhaps Carlisle is right in pointing out that Madeleine’s self-interest brings her to use prostitution to keep her mother out of the county poorhouse and her siblings from indenture (although since Madeleine gives up her

much-liked department store job to do this, I would suggest she is acting out of selflessness rather than self-interest), but Madeleine also exhibits an understanding that by speaking up for herself, she also speaks on behalf of other prostitutes. Of another woman working for an exploitive madam, she says, "I know I can't help her, but I must stretch forth my hand; if not to draw her back, at any rate to let her know that somebody cares" (*Madeleine* 219); is this not a gesture of sisterhood, fashioned from compassion rather than self-interest?

Nor do I find anywhere in the text a "calm acceptance" of the industry. Instead, Madeleine's contention that poverty, not sex, is the real obscenity afflicting women in American society gets played out in her conflicted account of the economic pleasures and hardships of brothel life. She laments her long-time lover's explanation of prostitution as "a necessary evil" and wonders several times throughout the text why "one set of women should live in degradation and in the end should perish that others might live in security, preserve their frapp  d chastity, and in the end be saved" (143). Rather than demonstrating approbation of prostitution, Madeleine mourns the hypocritical division of labor among women such that some are forced to perform the "loathsome tasks" of the more privileged ones. Throughout her story, these images of poverty and class inequity compete with descriptions of the illusory material wealth seen in the brothels. When she writes, "Why had nature given me the power to feel these things in every fiber of my being and then denied me the ability to express myself?" (221), we can understand the comment as an expression of frustrated desire, her inability to express fully the glaring contradictions in the life of a prostitute.

The typical pornographic text functions by providing the illusion of desire fulfilled, not by actually fulfilling the reader's desire. Its failure to quench its reader's longing is the essential factor in reproducing its audience: each encounter promises to be *the* encounter that will end its audience's longing, but each and every time, the reader is "tricked" (pun intended). The outrage caused by *Madeleine*'s publication, I contend, is due in part to its failure to fulfill the promise of its subject matter on two levels: first, it holds the promise of juicy, titillating details about sexual deviancy which the text itself completely avoids; second, it unapologetically recognizes the legitimacy of prostitution as an economic product of a capitalist patriarchal system. In other words, the product of prostitution, salable sex, is not the evil in *Madeleine*'s story. For *Madeleine*, prostitution and marriage are two sides of the same coin – "degradation" or "frapp  d chastity". Her refusal to be her audience's scapegoat for the sins of the system is an unforgivable breach of the social contract wherein *somebody* must be blamed for its excesses so that the audience themselves may ignore their own culpability. Simultaneously, *Madeleine*'s categorization of prostitution as legitimate work rubs away the stamp of salaciousness that attracts business in the first place. My interest then, in a sense, is in what is missing from *Madeleine*'s narrative: the absences and aporias of a text that is pornographic precisely because it leaves to the reader's imagination the conventions of the genre. Like a peepshow that finishes before its audience does, *Madeleine*'s power as an erotic narrative exists in the unrelieved desire of its reader.

As Hapke amply demonstrates in *Girls Who Went Wrong*, the expectation of the times was for literature dealing with prostitution to hint at prurience and then punish its object, the female character, so that her voyeuristic audience could feel relief or

guiltlessness over their own titillation, since their sins would have been more or less extirpated by the judgment hurled at the story's wayward woman character. *Madeleine* offers a counter to white slave narratives, contending that a) there is no such thing as white slavery, b) prostitution is a degrading but legitimate job, and c) the real obscenity is not sex work but poverty, the material circumstances that make selling sex women's best opportunity for economic freedom. The story substitutes illicit images of class for those of sex. What I am arguing here is that, as with representations of sex, there are acceptable and unacceptable representations of class in this time period. For instance, photographs of society women at a gala ball were commonplace in newspaper dailies, but images of poorly-dressed women strikers led to greater public disapproval of the strikers, rather than increased sympathy for their aims. (A good example of this is chronicled in literature and journalism articles about the 1909 shirtwaist strike.) In *Madeleine*, instead of turning their gaze upon the entertaining spectacle of women's sexual degradation cloaked as sinful decadence, readers are forced to look at both the possibility of the financially liberated woman who can choose the terms of her relationships with men *and* the violence and ugliness of poverty.

For example, consider *Madeleine's* description of her first encounter with prostitution as a pregnant teen runaway, circa 1870:

I, an attractive young girl, homeless, defenseless, hungry, and in a few months to become a mother, had no choice between the course I took and the Mississippi River.

And the well-dressed man with whom I spent the night, after I was shelterless, left me, with a derisive laugh, when I timidly asked him for money next morning.

It was a raw day, and the wind tearing through my thin clothes chilled me to the marrow as I left the lodging-house where I had spent the night. I went down-town and into one of the big department stores; in the rest-room I wrote two letters. . . .

I wrote that I was well and getting along nicely, although at that moment hunger was cutting me like a knife and I had nowhere to go when I should be forced to leave the warm rest-room. . . . As I hungrily watched [suburban shoppers] eat and then toss their scraps into a large wastebasket in the corner, my heart filled with bitterness that these women should have food to throw away while I starved.

When at length the rest-room was deserted I dived eagerly into the basket and, bringing forth all the scraps I could find, sat down and greedily devoured them. . . . At eleven o'clock that night . . . I stood on a quiet street corner shivering from hunger and cold. (36-37)

The passage's opening lines suggest a narrative course sure to lead to a lurid description of Madeleine's night with a stranger, a scene whose prurience is excused beforehand by the plea that she "had no choice" between prostitution and suicide; rather than fulfilling this expectation, however, she thwarts the prostitute confessional's convention of providing gratuitous details of her sex work *and* of admitting to choosing prostitution because of the lure of an easy life. In place of these conventions are violent, graphic images of poverty: the "raw day," the tearing wind, stabbing hunger pangs, forced departure, starvation, and body-shivering cold that make up her day. "Raw," "tear," "cut," "knife," "force" – these words are suggestive of a rape scene. In a "moral" story, the "attractive young girl" would choose to drown rather than willingly give up her virginity, but Madeleine's description of her circumstances challenge anyone to suggest she has taken the easy way out of her situation.⁴² The content of these images threatens and provokes the reader through their presentation of illicit ideas that, like descriptions of unbridled sex, have as much to do with want, desire, and consumption as with actual coitus, but in the sphere of class.

⁴² See Laura Hapke's *Girls Who Went Wrong: Prostitutes in American Fiction, 1885-1917* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State U Popular Press, 1989) for a thorough and engaging analysis of this literary tradition in works such as Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893).

Madeleine's story is obscene because, unlike white slavery narratives, her text does not acquit readers of their own guilt. The suburban shoppers who throw away food while she starves belong to the same demographic who, years later, will buy and read *Madeleine*, expecting a confirmation of their own values but finding condemnation instead. The historian Ruth Rosen points out that many people of the time believed prostitutes chose their trade because they wanted to live glamorously and scorned the drudgery of other work available to them: domestic service, light industrial and sweatshop work. From today's perspective, however, it is hard to see why a woman would choose domestic work over prostitution: domestic servants frequently lived in miserable conditions in their employers' homes, working sixteen- and eighteen-hour days, seven days a week, for meager room and board and two or three dollars' salary per week, and were often subjected to sexual harassment. They were, generally, treated no better than dray-horses. Female factory workers fared marginally better, but were kept both by factory owners *and unions* from learning the more skilled jobs that could earn them a living wage. Rosen notes that a living wage for a woman not living at home with her parents in 1910 was nine dollars per week. Most women factory workers made fewer than six (*Lost* 147). Comparatively, prostitutes' economic circumstances varied widely, but even at its best, prostitution afforded survival, not wealth. *Madeleine* not only explains that she was rejected from domestic and factory work because of her lack of experience, but also takes pains to correct this widespread belief in prostitution as "easy living."

For instance, she describes her changing feelings towards the clothes purchased for her by a man who had befriended her, or so she thought, out of charitable instinct for a young runaway:

“I understood thoroughly, though he made no intimation of it, that this man had found me starving in the streets; that he had fed and sheltered and clothed me; and that he did not demand payment. Nevertheless he did expect it, and pleaded for it. . . . I paid.

I had learned another of the lessons of the oldest profession, ‘Man gets his price for what man gives us.’

In the morning he was worried and not so sure of there being no risk [of venereal disease]. He hovered over me as I put on the garments that had been so beautiful the day before, when I had thought them a free-will offering; now that I had paid the price for them they were to me merely a covering for the body, a means of protection from the cold. He wearied me with his attentions, and I was glad when he was gone.

I was not at all apprehensive about the disease, partly because I had never heard of it before, and he did not seem to have suffered much from it. . . . [E]xposure to smallpox, a disease that at the time of which I write was looked upon as most deadly, would not have frightened me at all; this disorder of which I had just heard had no terrors for me. The thing which I most feared in the world was hunger. That was something of which I had personal knowledge. (51).

As in the earlier passage, the sex scene that might reasonably be expected to follow the description of the man’s coercion is absent. In its place is a reminder – “I paid” – of the real issue here: economics. The aesthetic pleasure of the clothes vanishes as Madeleine resignedly takes her place in the sexual economy of production and exchange. By recognizing the expectation the man has of her, she is forced to trade in one economy of values for another, relinquishing a system in which one human being may practice an altruistic, charitable action towards another. Reformers spoke frequently about the lure of luxury that drew poor young women into the trade, but Madeleine dismisses the idea, noting that the clothes’ beauty vanished when their emotional significance changed. Just as the clothes lose their meaning, so does her fear of the physical danger and shame associated with venereal disease; far more pernicious is the pressing need to eat.

This passage does evoke immorality, just not Madeleine's. Instead, it focuses on the false charity of her male friend and the impossibility of fearing the shame of sexually-transmitted diseases when the alternative is hunger. Madeleine's reaction to the man's belated concern for her health forces the reader to see that the more graphic violence of the two is death by starvation. Her choice of an article, "the," instead of a personal pronoun, "my," to describe her body suggests she is separating herself from her own corporeality: "the" body, just like "the" clothes, loses its significance as a site of emotional or spiritual exchange. More important than the need to feel pure (without shame) or beautiful (in her clothes) is the need to avoid the physical pain of cold and hunger. That she could be expected by society to ignore these realities in favor of some abstract quality – aesthetics, virtue – and further, that anyone could expect the latter to matter more is laughable to Madeleine. Her sarcastic overtones ("in the morning he was not so sure") and her sense of exhaustion from catering to the man's own guilt-inspired niceties ("he wearied me with his attentions") emphasize her disgust for a culture that prioritizes façade over need.

Her memory of this event includes a number of juxtapositions that underscore the distance between her reality as a prostitute and the mythology of womanhood, a duality reflected in the scene's night-time opening and daybreak ending. A belief in the primacy of the spirit (the gift of charity) is replaced with that of materiality (the gift is merely a transaction). The man's hunger for sex is compared mockingly to Madeleine's actual hunger: he is "starved" enough to risk *her* health, and she is fearful enough of actual starvation to accept that risk. One sentence in particular renders the stark contrast of reality and myth: Madeleine writes, "He hovered over me as I put on the garments that

had been so beautiful the day before, when I had thought them a free-will offering.” The sentence’s first image, of the man “hovering,” calls to mind Madeleine as a figure dwarfed by his shadow; its ending image, of the clothing being given as a “free-will offering,” evokes a sacrifice one might make in worshipping a goddess. The tension between these two images that support opposite ends of the same sentence reminds the reader of the way in which “women,” as a concept, were (and are) culturally revered but actually, as people, exploited and reviled, living in the shadow of male power while being told they stood raised on a protective pedestal. Rosen argues: “The singling out of a caste of degraded women served as an object lesson and a threat to other women. The specter of the whore was always before them as a reminder of what they might become or how they might be treated if they failed to live up to the angel image” (*Lost* 6). Thus, the pedestal’s existence relies on the shadow’s. Given that, as Rosen notes, “Conveniently, the large numbers of lower-class and immigrant women in prostitution could be explained by these women’s alleged tendencies to be less moral, more animalistic, and less sheltered by upbringing and education from corrupting influences” (6), it makes sense that the core obscenity of Madeleine’s narrative would be poverty, not sex.

Although the text provides graphic descriptions of poverty like those passages cited above, in several other scenes, Madeleine refuses to disclose her childhood poverty to people who know her to be a prostitute, because of her deep shame of it. When a former client falls in love with her and proposes marriage, she refuses not because she isn’t in love with him, too (“I had longed and hoped and dreamed of being this man’s wife” [165]), and not because she is a “degraded” woman (“I did not feel myself unfit to be the wife of such a man” [165]), but because he insists on meeting her family:

I was seized by panic at his suggestion to visit my home. Let this fastidious gentleman come into that poverty-stricken hovel! Never! Never should he know the horrors of my childhood . . .

This man who loved me had taken me at my face value, which was that of a girl who had been brought up in a good home. He should not learn differently. (166)

Such is her shame of the indecency of poverty that she willingly forgoes marriage to a man she loves, one who has promised to accept the unborn child from her second pregnancy as his own. The underlying implication is that, had she been from a good home, then her prostitution would merely have been the result of her own poor judgment, whereas, if Paul, her lover, were to learn of her family's destitution, he might relate her life in the trade to the innate moral poverty widely believed to accompany material poverty. The distinction is crucial, one of agency versus destiny.

Similarly, in an earlier sequence, when she is befriended by a doctor who helps her recover from venereal disease and her first pregnancy's stillbirth, she willingly shares her life story with him, but again draws the line at telling him about her childhood: "The struggle of later days and the black, bitter poverty which had darkened my girlhood were matters that must remain hidden in my own breast" (85). But her shame, as she explains, is gradually replaced by fury: "[T]o this day when I see 'kindly' philanthropists disposing of the bodies and souls of those whom poverty has delivered into their clutches, . . . I feel the brand of a potential Cain upon my brow, for I must exert all the self-restraint of a lifetime of training if I would withhold my hand" (99). It is a mark of how far Madeleine's social views progress throughout her life that she recounts the "hidden" details of her family's "bitter poverty" in her memoir.

Perhaps those elements of *Madeleine* which resemble an intellectual autobiography stem from Madeleine's desire to escape her family's painful past – by

emphasizing her education and intelligence (those qualities thought to be missing from the poor), she preempts any assumptions to the contrary. I wish to argue, however, that there are other valid ways to read this aspect of Madeleine's narrative, including through her changing relationship to her memories of poverty and in relation to the many identities she assumes throughout her narrative.

Madeleine as Intellectual Autobiography

Historian Marcia Carlisle refers to *Madeleine* as two texts: 'one . . . the history of Madeleine's career, . . . [t]he other . . . the literary self-portrait of a woman who struggled to achieve independence and self-knowledge" (viii). She writes, "The latter text [is] the more intriguing of the two, . . . at times, an appeal to the reader to understand her [and] at other times, . . . contrived, false, an attempt to create a fictional life more conventional, more proper than the one actually lived" (viii). Carlisle goes on to note that *Madeleine* anticipates many of the later conventions of women's autobiographical writing because, unlike most other women memoirists of her time, her "position outside the security of family and respectable work" allowed her to "develop a strong self identity before other women of her generation" (xviii) at a time when women's autobiography was characterized by the author's relativity to a larger social community, such as a reform effort, rather than by the writer's individual selfhood. In contrast, *Madeleine* stands out for its divulgence of its author's emotions and its detailed account of personal relationships (xviii).

I wish to suggest that in spite of Carlisle's assertion of *Madeleine*'s duality, it is impossible to read the text as two discrete stories, both because Madeleine's "self-

portrait” is inseparable from her career and because the story is not merely dualist, but pluralist. As a narrator and as an actor in her own story, Madeleine adopts a number of discursive strategies that allow her to move among social communities; rather than being limited to *either* the subject position of the prostitute *or* that of the middle-class ideal she remembers from her childhood, as Carlisle’s reading contends, Madeleine may be more accurately characterized as what feminist theorist Rosi Braidotti calls the “nomadic subject.” Braidotti styles such nomadism as both an existential condition and a mode of intellectual production (Birkeland 28). Scholar Elizabeth Gould explains, “as metaphor, [the nomadic subject] is an analytical and epistemological device that transgresses boundaries and subverts conventions, resisting the need for stasis, in which identity is not stable but ‘transgressive’” (Gould 150-151). Madeleine’s authorial identity, shifting as it does among multiple narrative personalities – the grieving mother, the self-educated intellectual, the proletarian, the prostitution insider, the traveling adventurer – subverts genre conventions and transgresses the social boundaries of her day as a means to enact her political analysis of her trade and the didactic message of her text.

Perhaps more important than her didacticism is the way in which Madeleine herself is transformed over the course of her life; her own developing understanding of the social systems in which she finds herself leads to what she calls the “birth-pang of the social consciousness,” a necessary condition for the formulation of her political philosophy,⁴³ which culminates in a scathing attack on middle-class reformers in the book’s Epilogue. This returns us to my earlier contention that Madeleine’s

⁴³ Cf., “Manifesto of the Communist Party”: “Does it require deep intuition to comprehend that man’s ideas, views and conceptions, in one word, man’s consciousness, changes with every change in the conditions of his material existence, in his social relations and in his social life?” (*Marx-Engels Reader* 489).

autobiographical sketch resembles the pencil-strokes of the Gramscian organic intellectual, that figure whose political consciousness arises from the act of theorizing her own labor and its particular social function, uniting theory and praxis in a manner that can pave the way for systemic change by creating counter-hegemonies out of which might grow new material realities. For a prostitute in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, life was transient by definition. To sustain business, it was considered *de rigueur* to change brothels frequently, since customers would not pay as much for services rendered or frequent an establishment as often whose inmates' bloom of newness had worn away. Likewise, harassment by law officials, rumors of more prosperous trade elsewhere, the financial winds that blew women into and out of the trade, and the lack of community and family that commonly characterized prostitutes' lives all contributed to the nomadism of the typical prostitute at that historical time. It seems appropriate, then, to conceive of the nomadic subject as a framework through which to understand Madeleine's own route to political consciousness. The literal mobility that describes the trade lends itself to being what geographer Geraldine Pratt calls a "representational strateg[y] . . . to think and articulate ways of being" (13) – in short, an apt metaphor. For Madeleine, nomadism is a crucial component of the labor she performs both as a prostitute *and* as an individual whose physical and intellectual labor function together to produce a critical discourse on her life as a member of a particular class of women.

Before going any further, I wish to consider the problems with this argument, issues that stem from the author's contradictions. *Madeleine*, as the casual reader will quickly observe, is not a typical representation of, say, the Socialist Realism popular at

the time, the political ideologies of which are openly on display in its stories of factory-work, boarding-houses, and unions. It is not a blatantly Marxist text, yet its class politics offer a serious critique of capitalist doctrine as it concerns women's sexualized labor. Neither are its politics perfectly progressive for its time (in both the capital "P" sense and more generally): Madeleine's xenophobia and racism appear several times throughout the book, such as in her descriptions of American-born prostitutes who are the children "of the most ignorant and degraded of foreigners" (116). These moments are contradicted as the book continues, however, by other passages that suggest her sympathy for and friendship towards people marginalized by America's racism, a reaction perhaps due to her own intimate knowledge of social exclusion. For instance, she frequently refers to Fawn Kee, the Chinese immigrant cook she hires for her brothel, as a "Christian, gentleman, and friend" (260) who "live[s] up to the spirit and letter of his belief [system]" (262); then again, in other scenes, she describes her irritation with the Black woman she hires as a nanny. Ultimately, Madeleine's racial politics do not undergo any real transformation in her story; the closest she comes to approaching anti-racist ideas is in her recognition that race and class inequities are connected. (I'll return to this issue later in the essay in a discussion of Madeleine's evocation of the frontier as a haven from capitalist exploitation.) The contradictions in her race politics have their parallel in her class aversions. In several passages, she distances herself from the poor and working-classes and from other prostitutes, singling herself out through her educated speech patterns, the refusal to comply with the norms of her trade (such as wearing make-up), and, to the reader, her frequent references to her artistic aspirations and love of learning. There is undeniably in Madeleine the impulse to remove from herself the taint of poverty.

On the other hand, she also displays her growing sympathy and outrage for these socially exploited and oppressed groups, at times as one of them and at other times as a comrade or observer.

Then, too, her relationship to her self-education is fraught with complexity. While she does occasionally use her books, speech, and knowledge to remove herself from the sordid surroundings of the trade (both in the course of the story and for her reader), she also uses these things as practical tools to effect specific outcomes. For instance, she uses her education to market herself favorably with certain middle-class and wealthy clientele whose preferences are for deflowering innocent, well-bred schoolgirls lured to the brothel by a madam for the client's pleasure. In other words, that which is supposed to consecrate her body – the moral uplift of a good education – is the means by which Madeleine makes her best money, by deceiving wealthy, craven old men who wish to pervert what they believe to be one of their own: "the sum [paid] depended upon her refinement, her education, her good looks, and whatever he estimated her loss to be; his price for a high school girl was naturally greater than his price for a servant-girl" (108-109). Madeleine also draws upon her erudition to showcase her belief that even the most socially degraded person can rise above social condemnation through self-education, thereby gaining access to social spaces otherwise closed to her: "Education meant more to me than amusement or recreation I had no teacher nor any one with whom I could discuss my plans and efforts. It was uphill work, but I was not to be deterred by obstacles" (96-97). Not insignificantly, particularly considering the memoir's anonymous publication, her knowledge and literacy lend her story credibility: she may be seen as an expert possessing both insider knowledge and the intelligence to understand

that insider knowledge, to frame it into useful ideas and theories about the world. In other words, Madeleine's intellectual stance helps to ensure that her readership will believe there is a reason to listen to and trust what she says – she is not simply “one of them” but also “one of us” (her educated readers).

While Madeleine's racism and internalized classism make it impossible, as I said at the beginning of this essay, to overstate the case or depict *Madeleine* as a revolutionary text, its overall trajectory is towards a counter-hegemonic view of prostitution and its role in society, and it is to this trajectory – and the theme of mobility – that I now turn. Madeleine's changing politics are closely linked to the multiplicity of narrative identities she adopts throughout the memoir. As a storyteller, Madeleine most often structures her life as a series of narrated events punctuated with her retrospective analysis of each event's importance – its meaning, impact, or “lesson.” It is in the way she interprets each major scene that this multiplicity of narrative identities – her nomadic subject position – emerges. To return to my earlier reference to Kathy Ferguson's “mobile subjectivities,” we can visualize this subjectivity as a movement among “places” that are themselves changing in response to their interactions with the subjects who briefly rest there. A close reading of major scenes in *Madeleine* charts the kinds of analysis or the conclusions yielded by her moments of retrospection, which in turn map the progression of Madeleine's political thought and its implications for the social categories that include or exclude her.

Madeleine opens with a narrative “hook” typical of the time: the description of a happy, innocent childhood gone awry, the downward spiral of Madeleine's family, the precarious position in which she is placed as the family's poverty forces their increasing

proximity to the town's centers of vice. These first few pages crucially identify Madeleine as the desperate heroine of her own story, a set-up that fosters the sympathy of the reader. She assures her reader of her noble background: "[My mother] met poverty and shame, as she had met prosperity and honor, with a poise and a dignity that I have never seen equaled" (10). She also sets up her singularity, as the family member subjected to intense physical abuse by her alcoholic father, in addition to suffering with her family in their communal misery: "This was but the first of many inexplicable beatings that I received. He never struck mother; he seldom whipped one of the other children. If any one [sic] crossed him when he was drunk I made vicarious atonement. When he was sober I was his favorite child. When he was drunk I was the one who suffered most" (8). After having named her noble heritage and the suffering that sets her apart from her siblings, and recounting her father's disappearance, she describes how she becomes prey to wanton male advances (13).

In this opening chapter, Madeleine adopts the identity of a tragic heroine: of "noble" birth, cruelly wronged, and led by fate into ignoble circumstances. I read this self-fashioning with a grain of salt; scholars of women's autobiography have commented upon women's need to "prove" the value of recording their lives since autobiography has traditionally been the province of "great men . . . whose accomplished lives and literary tomes assured their value as cultural capital" (Smith and Watson 5). Madeleine's rhetoric of tragic heroism, usually indirect, but sometimes overt, appears here and there throughout the text in a way that undermines the critique she offers of the public discourses on prostitution; these moments of self-aggrandizement may be her attempt to ingratiate herself to a middle-class audience seeking reasons to condemn her, but I am

inclined to believe that she is also trying to reassure herself that her life is worth recording. Her choice to remain anonymous – to this day, nobody has been able to identify her – limits the value of the argument that she self-aggrandizes out of self-interest. Nevertheless, Madeleine's self-construction needs to be read critically as an attempt to recuperate the actual prostitute from the chain of signifiers attached to her person. Postcolonial feminist Jane Haggis argues that in the drive to "place women in the history of colonialism . . . [scholars have taken] the texts and reminiscences of white women as literal accounts of their experiences, authentic and significant in their meaning" (163). In the same vein, *Madeleine* should not be understood as an autonomous account of prostitution, but as the product of multiple social forces (race, citizenship, war, industrialization, medical science, etc.), not all of which are dealt with clearly in the narrative. Madeleine's positioning of herself as a heroic actor is one such example of her deliberate construction to effect a particular response from her reader.

In spite of the ample evidence Madeleine offers to convince the reader that she is a victim, she tellingly accepts responsibility for her actions and is unwilling to lay the blame on anyone else, except tangentially: "I made a terrific effort to keep above the level of my environment and that of my forbidden companions. . . My environment and social isolation fought against it. The result was inevitable; I lost the battle" (13). Pictured here as a defeated soldier who went down only after exhausting her strength fighting the "inevitable," Madeleine constructs herself as both an object of pity and of admiration; even though superficially her account is self-reproving, her word choices mark both her courage and position as an underdog and (again, heroically) her refusal to taint her noble background by assigning blame to her parents. Instead, the abstractions of

“environment and social isolation” bear the balance of the responsibility for the premarital sex that leaves her pregnant and alone at the age of seventeen. More than just presenting an appealing character to the reader, this opening chapter marks Madeleine’s early affinity for middle-class values, particularly the veneration of the family and the purity of women. She aligns herself with her (presumably middle-class) readers in such a way as to not (yet) interrupt this value system, but this narrative strategy does not last long.

As I have shown earlier in this essay, *Madeleine* declines to provide any gratuitous prurience that might allow readers to take the moral high ground in their relationship with Madeleine, preferring instead to substitute decidedly wretched scenes of poverty for any voyeuristic rape or seduction scenes. Such scenes, which mainly occur early in the book, demonstrate on two levels Madeleine’s growing proletarian identity and her break from her middle-class childhood values: first, the images of poverty obviously relegate her to a different class standing than the one she had known as a child – her situation is that of the proletariat, propertyless and forced into selling her labor (in this case, her sexual labor); second, the adult Madeleine, the one reconstructing, through writing, her memory of these moments, makes a narrative choice to position these graphic *class* images in exactly the places in which one could logically expect to find *sexually* graphic scenes that in other, similar texts would be stripped of their economic implications. This choice suggests, perhaps, Madeleine’s shifting allegiance to the poor and working classes, those who know the violence and hunger of poverty, but also strengthens the reader’s recognition of the connections between economic inequity and the social production of female sexuality.

This allegiance is most clearly evident in the decision she makes to return to prostitution in order to save her family from destitution. Having left the trade after the stillborn birth of her first pregnancy and a bout with venereal disease, Madeleine returns home briefly and then moves to Chicago to study art and work at a department store, where she earns enough to support herself: “At the end of two months I had received an increase of salary and I was as proud of my ability to earn it as I was pleased to receive the additional money. Contrary to the story-books, the floor-walker did not try to make love to me and the head saleswoman of the department did not abuse me” (96). Her living conditions, in other words, are good. (And lest we miss the underlying implication of her reference to the lies of story-books, her memory is truthful.) Her relative success in the working world is interrupted by the news that her father has been jailed in a distant state, her brother is sick and unable to work, and her mother is being dispatched to the county poorhouse, her other siblings “given out into bondage” (99). Unable to find any other solution during the long, sleepless night following these bad tidings, Madeleine “made [her] decision and was perfectly calm” (100): “I was no frightened girl seeking refuge from the terrors of the streets. I was a woman driving the best possible bargain for the sale of my body and my soul” (101). In the space of a few pages, Madeleine has traded her verdancy for an acute awareness of her agential position: moved by “white-hot indignation” (98) over the condition of her family, she “calmly” *chooses* prostitution as a solution to her family’s poverty.

It is important to note that her heightened emotions apply to her family’s condition, not her choice to return to sex work. Now, instead of having “lost a battle” against temptation, Madeleine recognizes her (sexual) self as an instrument of labor that

must negotiate for herself. This shift in her identity, from debauched innocent to deliberate actor, introduces a simultaneous shift in the text's politics, too: against the grain of the prevailing belief in white slavery, Madeleine's description of this scene refutes any notion that she was coerced into sex work. Her decision is especially powerful because the reader knows that Madeleine has at least two wealthy male friends (the doctor, and her long-distance beau, Paul) who would gladly give her money to help her family; she refuses to ask for such help because of the shame inherent for her in such dependency (and its cause, poverty). Madeleine's shame is an expression of internalized classism, but not accepting the aid of her friends can also be read as her desire to reject the degrading pity of people in other classes. This refusal to seek help, then, is based on a subtle class antagonism between herself and these men that reflects the larger tension between proletarian and capitalist. Whereas her department store position carried with it a sense of upward mobility, her choice to return to prostitution may be read as a declaration of her place within the proletariat. There is no upward mobility in sex work, but the loss of social standing is accompanied by enough financial gain to save her family. Thus, Madeleine moves from a middle-class femininity whose dominant characteristic is weakness to a proletarian agency whose defining traits are sacrifice and solidarity.

This nascent display of proletarian consciousness feeds Madeleine's next narrative turn, in which she revisits the idea of women's victimization and her acceptance of the social repercussions for her actions. When her father returns to her family after his release from jail, he visits Chicago to make a quiet investigation into Madeleine's life and learns the truth. When he confronts her, she thinks he intends to kill her, but fearlessly

stands up to him: “I turned on him and all the pent-up bitterness of my childhood poured forth” (169). In earlier passages, she spares her father any culpability for her family’s circumstances or her own, following her mother’s lead in worshipping him and wishing only that his disease, alcoholism, had not so greatly affected their lives. In this passage, Madeleine assumes a new relationship to her past, recognizing for “the first time in my life . . . that any one [sic] else was in any way responsible for my downfall” (169-70). This scene further pushes Madeleine towards a re-imagining of the social relations in which she is caught. Her return to prostitution had marked her changing values: forced to choose between social honor and her family’s survival, she enters into the market economy as an agent of her own destiny. Choosing one set of values (e.g., sacrificing her life for her family’s sake, choosing hard labor over charity, rejecting middle-class morals) over another (e.g., saving her reputation at her family’s expense, supplicating her rich friends for aid, and so on), however, is not necessarily a recognition of the structural inequity or the exploitation of one person at the hands of another that creates the conditions for such choices. Madeleine’s return to prostitution is a calm acknowledgment of the limits of her situation, but her identification and naming of her father’s “dereliction to his family” (169) signals her dawning understanding of patriarchal violence, of a system in which women and children have little choice but to endure the consequences – economic, social, sexual – of male dominance. Calling out her father’s hypocrisy – he condemns her but spares himself – paves the way for Madeleine to continue to recognize the hypocrisies endemic to American society. Although she still claims agency for herself in making choices about her life, from this point forward in the

memoir, she does so with a conscious understanding that these choices exist in relation to social structures that are neither blameless nor morally unassailable.

This narrative turn to an intimate account of her family's experiences as an expression of a broader system of unequal power relations creates a logical path from daughterhood to motherhood; once Madeleine's father has disowned her (ironically, for saving the family in his absence in the only way she could), the memoir moves to Madeleine's reflections on her experiences as a mother. Book II of *Madeleine* opens on her difficult decision to leave her two-year-old son in the home of a hired nurse for the summer while she seeks better financial opportunities in Winnipeg. Madeleine's complaints must sound more familiar to a modern-day reader than they did to women of her time, when the issues of single, working mothers were little regarded, since the position's defining elements – working women and single mothers – were themselves little regarded. Jealous of the time her son spends with his nurse (the wife in a childless couple) and of his emotional attachment to this woman, Madeleine leaves him in Chicago for the summer with great misgivings:

“[B]ut circumstances forced me to make a change. I had returned to Allen's (a brothel) when Baby was eight months, where I lived under a terrific strain, for the expenses of living there were heavy, and the additional expenses of caring for a child made it impossible for me to save money. . . .

My health was breaking down under the continuous strain. . . .

With Baby's coming I had been compelled to put aside my cherished dream of studying art, for I could spare neither the time nor the money. I was, however, desperately resolved to acquire enough money to go into some legitimate business before he became old enough to realize that his mother belonged to the 'oldest profession'" (174-75).

Without the need for the expensive wardrobe and hairdressing required of women in urban brothels to compete for the best business, Madeleine could make enough money in the frontier outpost to support her son for several months upon her return. In spite of her

disownment and its cause in the previous chapter, prostitution is again rendered as merely a job (though not necessarily a respectable one), the work necessary to provide for her dependent.

She returns to Chicago four months later to find that the nurse has kidnapped her baby and left the city the week before, after telling the neighbors “his mother had deserted him” (181). Madeleine undertakes a search for her son and finds him in the home of the nurse’s parents, in LaCrosse, Wisconsin, where the nurse’s own mother, upon hearing Madeleine’s reproach to the nurse “for her treachery and for the lies she had told about my desertion of Baby” (184), becomes “an unexpected ally”: “She herself was a mother, and she thought that the claim of a mother, who had done what she could, came before all others. She peremptorily ordered Nurse to pack up Baby’s clothes . . . otherwise she herself would go with me to the proper authorities” (185). This scene is crucial to Madeleine’s construction of herself and of prostitutes’ “womanhood,” generally, since she collapses the mother/whore binary here and is supported by another woman, one not in the trade, in doing so.

The dispute between the nurse and Madeleine is a question of legitimacy: not the child’s, but Madeleine’s. The nurse’s husband, in the midst of the dispute, calls attention “to the terrible sin of a woman of my kind bearing a child, which was rather beside the question, seeing that I had *borne* one” (184). Because prostitutes, as Ruth Rosen has observed, were customarily considered a safeguard to the sanctity of motherhood – that is, with prostitutes available to absorb men’s unlimited sex drive, married women’s sexual activity could be limited to the amount necessary for procreation, not (illicit, unfeminine) pleasure – the kinds of sex these two “types” of women engaged in were

imagined differently (5). A prostitute's sex was no more meant to yield children than a wife's was meant to yield pleasure. Rosen observes that throughout the nineteenth century (Madeleine's child is born around 1889), "The female sex drive . . . was thought to be weak or nonexistent" (5) and quotes an 1865 medical text that claims, "'The majority of women are not very much troubled with sexual feelings of any kind. What men are habitually, women are only exceptionally'" (5). Heather Miller, a women's historian, has noted that prostitutes were frequently believed to have abnormal sexual appetites ("Sexologists" 75), a bizarre medical claim that served the dual purpose of rationalizing prostitution as the social outcome of "natural" freakishness and bolstering the definition of Victorian womanhood (i.e., since real women did not have sex drives, for a woman to experience or exhibit sexual desire would suggest her unwomanliness, and thus, her unfitness for wifedom, motherhood, and the other social "rewards" that accrued to women who performed their gender correctly).

Thus, Madeleine's motherhood is an affront to the proscribed sex roles of what were thought to be different kinds of women: she has bridged a deliberately carved chasm and again, as with her education, has placed herself not *before* but *among* her readership. Because the *idea* of a prostitute producing a child would have been anathema to Madeleine's contemporaries (a "terrible sin," as the nurse's husband claims), the *actuality* – that prostitutes, did, of course, produce children quite frequently in an era of inadequate contraceptive methods and illegal, dangerous abortion procedures – escapes representation or comment in most (if not all) of the literature on the subject of prostitution. Josie Washburn, Madeleine's contemporary in the trade, writes in her memoir, *The Underground Sewer* (1909):

There are very few children born in the underworld; the life the women lead is in violation of the laws of nature. . . .

Maternity is too sacred an obligation to happen often here. . . .

[Prostitutes] never commit the crime of murdering their children before birth. . . . I repeat, NEVER. . . .

In our circle it is considered that the most honorable thing to do [for the few children who are born to prostitutes] is to support and keep our child in a respectable home and give it an education – and at the same time keep it in ignorance of our business. (256)

Madeleine's plans for Baby are exactly this, but her experiences refute Washburn's claims; she herself is pregnant three times in her life, and ends her third pregnancy through a self-induced abortion. Moreover, her descriptions of her life as a mother position her to challenge the "laws of nature" that were thought to govern womanhood, as well as the divine decrees (of maternity as "too sacred an obligation") that support the belief in these laws. Madeleine's sarcasm in noting that the nurse's husband's claim is "beside the question, seeing that I had *borne* one" is a direct attack on the mythology of womanhood that makes it impossible for him to accept her role as a mother, even though the evidence of that event has become the source of the dispute between his wife and Madeleine.

Washburn's and the husband's positions represent a common paradox of the era. Whereas Washburn sees abortion as a terrible sin, the nurse's husband sees Madeleine's choice to violate her assigned role (as pleasure-giver rather than child-producer) as the "terrible sin." What is common to Washburn's and the nurse's husband's seemingly opposite beliefs is that there is no room for agency in prostitution: it is a sin for a prostitute to choose not to become a mother (Washburn), and it is equally a sin for her to choose to do so (the husband). Madeleine removes herself from this social dichotomy by telling her readers she has at different times chosen both. The narrative effect is the

transgression of the boundaries erected between the social ideal and the social deviant, the mother and the whore – a counter-hegemonic act with the potential to shift a reader's perspective on both of these categories.

The inducement to a reader's empathy grows when Madeleine's son dies of pneumonia within months of their return to Chicago, but it also opens up the narrative space for her subject position to again shift. His illness coincides with Madeleine's discovery that she is pregnant again, and his death prompts her to abort her pregnancy, railing against fate for choosing her "to be the mother of all the fatherless children that want to be born" and against men, "from [her] father down to the physicians who could not save [her] baby" (200). Financially broke after recovering from the near-fatal peritonitis caused by her self-induced abortion, she returns to Miss Allen's brothel, but, she writes, "I was spiritually dead. . . . Strangers . . . never sought my company, for I was that terrible incongruity, a living picture of Sorrow in a house dedicated to Joy" (201). This spiritual death and her declared hatred for men give Madeleine herself a new perspective on her career and lead to the most in-depth analyses of her work and life in her memoir, perhaps in part because her grief gives her a new relationship to the world; the dedicated working mother has been replaced by the jaded intellectual insider.

Madeleine's career trajectory at the end of Book II and throughout Book III brings her into more contact with the most troubling aspects of prostitution, and it is here, towards the end of her narrative that her politics become most pronounced; she expresses a more fervent belief that, contrary to popular wisdom, sex work is *not* a necessary evil. She travels west and opens a brothel in western Canada, working as a successful madam until, driven to alcohol for the first time in her life, her addiction threatens to ruin her

business and her health. It is in her travels to the boomtowns of the West that she first experiences the “birth-pang of the social consciousness” after encountering the horrible working conditions of prostitutes there and assumes self-consciously the voice of a social activist: “I have learned that there is a sheltered class [of prostitutes], and that I belong to it. . . . The iniquities of Butte lay as heavily on my heart as if I alone were responsible for them, . . . my soul racked and agonized” (219-20). This is Madeleine’s first conscious consideration of the possibility of sisterhood: “I know I can’t help her [a prostitute reduced to theft], but I must stretch forth my hand; if not to draw her back, at any rate to let her know that somebody cares” (218-19). Likewise, she gains an intimate knowledge of addiction, a problem that plagued brothel inmates everywhere, but especially in isolated outposts where there was little hope for escape and few other diversions. Her decision to leave the trade hinges on her desire to conquer her alcoholism before she ruins her life the way her father ruined his; this decision, too, is a return to the question of agency, the ability to shape one’s identity and life within the limits of the structures in which one finds oneself.

Most important to Madeleine’s intellectual growth is her far-flung travel; she supplies little detail, but at several points in this final third of her memoir, she takes what money she has and abandons her work in order to rejuvenate herself and see the world, “wander[ing] over the face of the earth” for nearly four years, traveling across Europe and to parts of Asia, as well as through the U.S. and Mexico. This global travel is what permits her to make the claim that white slavery does not exist; as an insider “anthropologist” of prostitution, she crosses the thresholds of places reformers would never be able – or want to – tread, and after meeting women in the trade in many

different places in the world, she confidently proclaims their agency in making the choices they do. She writes, “I saw them all, the ‘lost sisterhood’ of the nations. . . . But the one girl I never met in all these years and in all the cities and countries that I visited was the pure girl who had been trapped and violated and sold into slavery – the so-called ‘white slave’” (238). This is her strongest claim yet on behalf of women’s agency in making choices about their lives, even in spite of the iniquities that have tormented her soul. In making it, she precedes contemporary feminist scholars who have sought to reclaim agency for contemporary sex workers in today’s discourses on prostitution and sex traffic, for instance, Denise Brennan’s argument that “the media’s monolithic portrayal of sex workers . . . [are] overly simplistic and implicitly moralizing stories [that] deny that poor women are capable of making their own labor choices” (155).

Although she tempers her conviction with an awareness that women’s choices are limited, she clearly refutes the two opposing ideas that prevailed in her time, namely, that sex workers are either monsters who have chosen to live a life of sin because of their innate evilness or that they are the helpless victims of an evil society who are unable to rescue themselves and thus must be saved by reformers. To use a phrase borrowed from Donna Haraway, Madeleine’s rootlessness in this section is a literal reflection of her “epistemological homelessness” (Birkeland 28) – there is no place for her to rest, politically-speaking, unless she creates that place herself. In the next section, I will return to Madeleine’s mobility and consider the ways her political critique is related to her relationship with place and space, but for now, I wish mainly to point out that as the memoir draws to a close, Madeleine occupies a place apart from either major perspective on prostitution common at the time, and this place is shaped – made possible – by her

literal transience. In other words, she recognizes, much more stridently than any of her contemporaries, that the personal and the structural mutually operate upon each other.

One last note on the plurality of the identities Madeleine assumes throughout her narrative: the book is peppered throughout with unattributed quotes, and while, maddeningly, not all of them are traceable, those that are offer a tantalizing glimpse of Madeleine's reading material, which in turn may offer insight into Madeleine's evolving vision of herself, both as an actor in her own life and as a narrator of it. Early on, when discussing a comparative study she is writing about Job and King Lear, she quotes from the Book of Job, the long-suffering servant of God, a choice that reflects her feelings about both prostitutes and the poor more generally, who are exploited and used not because of any sin they have committed, but because they are subject to forces greater than themselves. In this same vein, she echoes Job's complaint elsewhere in her memoir: "So far as I could see, virtue was no better rewarded than vice. My beautiful mother was growing old in a losing fight with poverty. What had she ever done to deserve such a fate? I asked of the Powers that be" (93). She later quotes a poem by Robert Burns, the Romantic poet who is remembered in part for his writings on class inequity and who inspired early socialists. Her choice may merely reflect the Scotsman's popularity in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America, but it may also reflect Madeleine's affinity for his politics. And still later, Thomas Macaulay has a cameo when Madeleine quotes from his essay on the Roman Catholic Church, the main thesis of which is that the Church has successfully existed for centuries because it has handled dissent better than newer Christian sects who prefer to stamp it out. Madeleine, though, identifies the essay's poignancy in its reminder that she is "a tiny atom in this great scheme of human

progress" (146); quoted after the reminiscence of a particularly sordid encounter with a client, however, the choice of Macaulay perhaps underscores her momentary despair about the possibility for changing the system in which she finds herself. The quotes bolster Marcia Carlisle's claim that *Madeleine* is one-half intellectual autobiography, but my closer examination of the major scenes of Madeleine's narrative suggests that the memoir's shades of multiple genres (romance, bildungsroman, adventure story, tribute to motherhood, and anthropological field notes) and the narrator's own shifting identities (tragic heroine, intellectual observer, mother, proletarian, and so on) work together to create a much more kinetic text, one that defies easy categorization.

Reading *Madeleine* as a Map of Capitalism

Thus far, I have discussed *Madeleine*'s unexpected narrative shifts from sex imagery to class imagery, as well as the way its narrator reflects her own intellectual growth in the variety of subject positions she assumes throughout her memoir, each one pulling her farther away from her starting point as a tragic heroine of the middle-class. Both of these analytical points focus on some aspect of the ways mobility operates in the text to undermine both reader expectations and the hegemonic ideas present in American society in Madeleine's lifetime. What remains, then, is to examine mobility's *literal* presence in *Madeleine*, the ways in which Madeleine's geographic movement metaphorically maps her relationship to the political terrain of prostitution as a meeting ground for issues of class and gender. Specifically, I contend that Madeleine's comparison of urban and rural spaces critically identifies the relationship of the U.S.'s culture of consumption to its culture of gender exploitation, and in this section, I read

Madeleine's travel between urban centers and the Northwest Territory as a spatial model of the way she sees sexuality becoming "normalized" the further removed it is from capitalism.

It is when the young Madeleine's family first sinks into poverty that they move nearer and nearer the center of town, to the "bad" neighborhoods where she becomes acquainted with vice; this early association of urban centers with vice remains throughout the story. Although Madeleine describes moments of enjoyment in cities, notably her time spent at museums or attending the theater, it is in urban brothels that she encounters the worst kind of clientele as well as the most difficult financial circumstances. Her descriptions of men who are "repulsive old beast[s]" (110), "afternoons of horror" spent with "loathsome bod[ies]" (142), and "great, unwashed brute[s]" (218) all refer to her sex work in cities. Her single mention of brothel orgies is of her invitation to one being held in the basement of a Chicago brothel, and she recounts how it makes her "sick with loathing" because she had "never dreamed of coming into direct contact with such perversions" (104). Likewise, it is in Chicago that she pretends to be an innocent schoolgirl in order to please an elderly client's taste for raping virgins.

In Butte, Montana, a "boomtown" and portrait of raw capitalist speculation and waste, Madeleine is shocked to see the depths of its carnival-like vice, particularly the "cribs" in which women display themselves in windows "as if [they] were part of a live-stock exhibition" (216). Butte offers Madeleine a glimpse of capitalism stripped of its superficial gestures towards human interaction. Prostitution in this rapidly developing market is the sale of flesh, pure and simple, and the iniquities between madam, client, and sex worker ensure conditions that are very nearly slave-like.

When she leaves her first brothel job, in Kansas City, the motherly madam, Miss Laura, admonishes her to “[r]emember only the things that have shocked you and outraged your traditions and your sense of decency. Remember your sufferings at the hands of beasts who are miscalled men” (89). Miss Laura’s comment is an inversion of the experiences that trigger it: throughout *Madeleine*, recollections of events that have brutally dehumanized Madeleine or her fellow prostitutes are always urban encounters with the most outwardly “civilized,” prosperous, publicly well-regarded men.

These wealthy, powerful clients try to reduce Madeleine and other prostitutes to objects for sale, a relationship between consumer and product, rather than consumer and seller. Madeleine expresses contempt for these men’s belief that in purchasing her body they have also purchased the right to her mind, her history, her “authentic” self (as one might expect authenticating papers for a purebred dog or a valuable antique); she explains that for survival’s sake, she had “to learn that lying was a part of the profession and was included in the curriculum; that it was employed, not only as a means of advertising and arousing interest, but also as a measure of self-defense” (45). Her reduction to object status is made acutely apparent to her in the sex act itself; these are the clients who demand degrading, humiliating sex that leaves “every inch of [Madeleine’s] flesh . . . in a quivering revolt” (141). Some of her less sensitive housemates verbally abuse her for rejecting this aspect of prostitution, feeling that she demands more respect than she deserves:

‘What do you think of this one, girls? She don’t know she’s a whore. She thinks she’s a lady!’

‘Sure she does. The poor fool don’t know that men come here because they’ve got ladies at home and they like the change.’ (111)

Although Madeleine's sense of horrified victimization is a common trope in white-slavery narratives, in *Madeleine*, such scenes are reserved solely for men who represent the upper echelons of the social hierarchy, men whose money and power not only circulate in population centers but most probably have had a hand in creating them. In short, these "beasts miscalled men" represent capitalism itself. *Madeleine* associates extreme urbanism with extreme perversity or "unnatural" hungers; as Madeleine's political awareness grows, she equates all excess with cosmopolitanism and the crass consumption that is a central component of American life. These, in turn, for her reek of the unquenchable sense of entitlement of those in power, "*blasé habitués* of wine-rooms and bawdy-houses, seeking a new sensation by learning a new perversion" (180). One of the memoir's chief ironies is that Madeleine's most "civilized" encounters – moments when she is most conscious of a desire "to seek a medium for expressing the joy of life" (179) – occur when she is farthest from actual cosmopolitan centers. In other words, capitalism perverts and destroys, and life on the margins is what provokes Madeleine's belief in humanity again.

In sharp contrast to the warped consumerism that remakes her body into a novelty toy for her jaded clients, the vast tracts of undeveloped space and the sparse population of the Northwest Territory are described as the agents of Madeleine's "dawning womanhood," causing her to feel that "somewhere and somehow I should demand from life the things that had been denied me" (179). The men who frequent her houses in various frontier outposts in northwestern Canada contribute to her growing humanity precisely because they lack the cosmopolitan practice of converting women into mere objects for sale: "Here were men, fine and strong, courtly gentlemen such as I have never

met anywhere else in the world. Their visits to the houses were a part of their playtime; they were not seeking a new sensation, these red-blooded men of the Northwest; they brought their sensations with them, and they showed a tenderness and courtesy toward women which often brought a choking into my throat” (180). Her descriptors – strong, red-blooded, full of play, with simple expectations – suggest both the men’s working-class lives and their shy innocence, in polar opposition to her city clientele. It is here, on the geographical periphery of the nation, far from the coarse marketplace of gilded and gaudy urban brothels, that Madeleine experiences a happy relationship to her sexuality, a “spiritual and physical awakening” that makes her “nightly tasks so much less irksome than they had ever been; yes, and often made them a pleasure” (179). This declaration of her own sexual appetite is singular among the limited number of prostitute memoirs from this time period, a fact that suggests again *Madeleine*’s relevance for contemporary feminist scholarship. While she attributes this renewed sense of her own humanity to the concrete realities of the men and the prairies, I read the passage more abstractly as part of Madeleine’s ongoing critique of capitalist economy and its exploitation of women.

Most notably, Madeleine comes to the Northwest Territory to earn a living wage. She observes in several places that the cost of a woman’s upkeep in an urban brothel keeps her in debt to the madam and forces her to do work she might otherwise reject, just to stay afloat, and that women in the cities are often cheated out of their money by unscrupulous madams or clients. Out in the Territory, however, the clients pay well for the services they receive, and there is no pressure to reinvest that money in costly clothes. Not only does she experience pleasure in her work for the first time, but she is also fairly compensated for her labor, and these two points are not unrelated. Even though her

prostitution still constitutes wage-labor, her removal from the city makes her far less alienated from that labor than she has previously been, on two counts: first, her surplus labor is not lining the pockets of a greedy brothel-owner, and second, she is not reduced to mechanization but instead meets her male customers “with a glad response I had never before known” (179). There is, in the exchange, a sense of being equals – a transaction between two laborers, not consumer and product.

Thus, as I read them, in Madeleine’s comparisons three parallel binaries surface: city/frontier, upper-class/working-class, and object/subject. The first two metaphorically reproduce the critique of the center/margin binary common to postmodern analysis, and the third, ironically, implies by its relationship to the others that it is only at the margins that Madeleine can claim her subjectivity. This suggests that, although the narrative illustrates Madeleine’s nomadic subjectivity – her travel within and among several communities and categories of identity within the larger social sphere – she remains, by choice, a marginalized figure, particularly where that periphery indicates a rejection of the capitalist values of greed, materialism, and exploitation, especially concerning women’s lives and bodies. This point is perhaps best exemplified by her naming of the frontier region in which she spends so many years of her life: “the lure of the ‘Just Beyond’ . . . represented a land of great adventure. [O]nce I had heard the call of it my restless heart could know no peace until I had gone ‘to search behind the ranges’” (243). The “Just Beyond” signifies a physical location, but in the context of Madeleine’s memoir generally, it echoes her wish to remove herself to a social location of greater freedom from the restrictive yoke placed on her as a woman and a prostitute. The phrase “Just Beyond” also recalls the several passages in which Madeleine writes about meeting

other women who look down on her for being “beyond the pale” because of her work as a public prostitute; in combination with the memory of these snubs, “Just Beyond” becomes shorthand for “just beyond the pale,” an imaginary place that might put Madeleine out of the reach of the social reformers and other hypocrites she scorns.

Her newfound sense of freedom and equality is not without irony, however, given her location on the frontier, where the “red-blooded men of the Northwest” are displacing its original inhabitants in the name of capitalist progress; Madeleine’s reaction to the West needs to be contextualized within the politics of U.S. expansionism and its gender, race, and class politics. For example, Chicana feminist scholar Antonia Castañeda critiques studies of women in the West which focus on white women as the “bearers of culture and ‘civilization’” (515). In naming the Northwest as an escape from the white, urban culture that oppresses her, Madeleine does not acknowledge openly that she herself is a carrier of that culture into a geographical and cultural space that is, in turn, being crowded out – marginalized – by her presence and others like her. Her (unwitting?) incognizance allows her to retain the metaphorical distance that her travel westward gives her, which helps her to reconstruct her identity as a woman who found her sexual and class equality on the margins of society, but by entering the Northwest as a participant in U.S. expansionism, she actually is positioned in the center of this unacknowledged center/periphery narrative of the frontier.

Castañeda also notes that histories and depictions of the Western “frontier thesis” have been traditionally “male-centered” (508); part of this androcentricism is enacted by imagining the land as an empty (feminine) space to be conquered, a trope that simultaneously plays on gender stereotypes about female passivity and maps these

gendered social codes onto a politics of race in which the indigenous people already living in the West are to be tamed by the virile powers of the “kings of the wild frontier.” Further, the “devaluation of the sexuality of women of color” contributes to the devaluation of their communities, generally, which becomes an “element in the rationale for war, conquest, exploitation, and subsequently exclusion” (519). It is in this context that Madeleine increases her personal wealth out West; while I am reluctant to portray her wealth-making as a matter of privilege – the real privilege would be to not have to choose prostitution as the best economic opportunity – Castañeda’s argument indicates that the devaluation of women of color benefited white prostitutes, whose clients may well have been racially- as well as sexually-motivated to seek their services. It is a frustrating paradox that Madeleine lays claim to her sexually liberated womanhood at the moment that she steps into the masculine role of the expansionist, and that she extols the pleasure of living on the nation’s margin just as she utilizes her white privilege to contribute to the further marginalization of the racially othered. For a woman angered by her social invisibility in the city, an invisibility breached only by those who gaze at her with moral repugnance, the absence of *any* mention of people in the Northwest other than transient easterners like herself indicates that Madeleine’s new sense of equality is tied to occupying a place in the social hierarchy that enables her own choices to see or not see. Writing about Scott Momaday’s fiction, critic Jason W. Stevens observes that “in frontier mythology, two figures stand out: the White adventurer and the Indian savage” (600). In *Madeleine*, the first half of this stereotyping dualism (the violent Leatherstocking-type) is accounted for, but its counterpart (the uncivilized native American) is neither challenged nor repeated, but missing entirely, a silencing that mitigates the memoir’s championing of

margins as places from which one might speak courageously about social inequities and untruths.

Madeleine's Place in a Feminist Canon

At the beginning of this chapter, I posited the idea that *Madeleine* still has relevance for contemporary feminist scholars who seek to advance a different framework for conceptualizing women's (always-already) sexualized labor. While all women's labor is sexualized – that is, their bodies, because of their sex, are symbolically coded as “special cases” and consequently differentially treated from other (male) laboring bodies – the work done by prostitutes sits at the very core of this category, “sexualized labor.” Prostitutes' bodies enter the marketplace as do other laborers', but their particular kind of work offers up a paradox: on the one hand, their open sale of what is culturally buried beneath layers of mythology (the female body) strips capitalism of its pretenses that the worker's body is anything other than a product to be bought and sold and used. On the other, this transaction complicates, perhaps more than any other kind of work, the relationship between a body, its labor, and the signifying practices that make meaning of or represent that labor, particularly because the rhetoric of moral reform surrounding that transaction obscures the prostitute's labor.

As Heather Miller, in an article titled “Trick Identities,” argues, “Sex as work complicates traditional distinctions between prostitutes and other women, most of whom also sell or trade their services in some form” (147). Because the work prostitutes do is inextricable from the very basis (i.e., sex) of women's exploitation and oppression as women, representations of prostitutes tend to restrict them more stringently than other

laboring women to either the role of agent or of victim. Miller writes, “Some argue vehemently that sex work exploits women and reinforces patriarchal sexual hierarchies and the objectification and victimization of women. Others claim agency for the women who perform sex work, recognizing that while some sex workers are exploited and pushed or pulled into the business by poverty, drug addiction, or abusive partners or family, others choose to enter the trade and enjoy the job” (147). But, as Miller notes, there is a middle ground here – in fact, a wide space of difference that offers many interpretative possibilities for the coding of women’s bodies engaged in sex work. For Miller, that means re-imagining the definitions of “pleasure” and “enjoyment,” and conceptualizing the ways an individual woman’s sexual identity may coincide with or diverge from the sex acts in commercial sex. This is an important point, but I cite it with the suggestion of expanding its focus to consider the ways other identity categories – location, citizenship, class, race, education – bear upon the representation or reception of this binary of agent/victim and its critique.

I’ve shown in this chapter that *Madeleine* troubles this easy binary by achieving a sense of multiplicity that challenges its dualism and that of its historical cousin, criminal/innocent. Further, when *Madeleine* herself employs binaries, she frequently reverses them, inverting dominant values and adding weight to the position that is usually under- or de-valued. Both of these narrative strategies involve the movement across boundaries, the transgressing of borders, the mapping of imagined spaces. In that sense, *Madeleine* truly is a “mobile woman” and narrator of a mobile text.

To take one more example, the division between U.S. citizens and non-citizens with regard to sex work offers a final illustration of the ways *Madeleine* uses a typical

binary in order to reverse it, thus undermining it. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, prostitution in the U.S. was widely held to be a foreign vice, a social disease brought into the nation by immigrants working both as procurers and as sex workers. As I noted earlier in this essay, the U.S. Congress commissioned a study on white slavery in 1910 that supported this belief, and popular novels such as Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* commonly depicted prostitutes as foreigners. Evidence of this belief is present in *Madeleine*, too: she makes one comparison between the American women whose families have been citizens for generations and the American-born women whose parents are foreigners. The latter have been "promoted in the social scale" by becoming inmates in "a luxuriously appointed, high-priced house of ill fame" (116), having always, according to Madeleine, known vice but never luxury.

In spite of this one passage's xenophobia, in general, *Madeleine* stresses the heavy presence of American women who are employed all over the world in prostitution. For example, Madeleine remarks that the short street of brothels in Winnipeg is jokingly referred to as "the American Colony" because the overwhelming majority of the prostitutes employed there are American: "Our Canadian cousins seemed to think that the United States supplied the Canadian market with prostitutes; they expressed great surprise if they chanced to find a girl who had not come from the States" (177). And later, when she recounts her years spent traveling the globe and meeting "the 'lost sisterhood'," she writes: "And I met more American women than those of any other nation, for they were in every city and every land that I visited" (238). In a direct counter to the dominant belief in prostitution as a foreign vice (and its concomitant belief in American women's sexual purity), Madeleine not only refutes this popular conviction but

simultaneously uses it to uphold her critique of capitalism. Her unspoken observation is that the American market economy, the national economy most entrenched in capitalist values, has created a global population of American women who are themselves the “foreign” vice of other nations, presumably due to their limited opportunities in a capitalist society to support themselves on an equal footing with men. Perhaps more accurate, then, would be to say that she maintains the dominant belief but forces a question of perspective – in a culture as Ameri-centric, as steeped in its own national mythmaking as is the U.S., is it ever possible for its population to conceive of themselves outside of their national identity? In other words, can an American ever be foreign in the American imagination?⁴⁴

This is a fact little (if ever) studied by feminist scholars: that American women at the turn of the twentieth century made up, at least by one account, the largest percentage of a considerable population of transnational prostitutes. If *Madeleine* is to be believed, this is an incredible omission of a significant part of American women’s history, particularly in our longstanding national context of the racialization of women’s sexual “deviancy” and prostitution’s ongoing relationship to immigration debates, in which the imagined prostitute is always imagined to be traveling *to* the metropole, not *from* it. (As opposed to Madeleine herself, who preferred to travel away from it.) One could easily picture how a widespread historical recognition and cultural acknowledgment of such a

⁴⁴ To answer these questions, this discussion needs to be framed by a consideration of the ways in which “American” is generally synonymous with “white.” The experiences of women prostitutes of color are not treated in *Madeleine* beyond her references to immigrants’ daughters, and the text does not specify the ethnicities of these first-generation Americans. In the historical anthology, *Women’s America*, Beth Bailey and David Farber note that American brothels, including those outside the southern U.S., were racially segregated as late as the end of World War II, which coincided with the last gasps of the brothel system of prostitution in the U.S. (433). Presumably, the brothels in which Madeleine worked were all racially segregated.

record might have impacted the last one hundred years of the construction of American womanhood and its connections to American national identity.

Finally, perhaps what we can gain most readily from *Madeleine* is a historical certainty that feminist resistance to the easy dismissal of women's sex(ed) labor as an either/or question of agency or systemic victimization did not originate with the 1970s women's movement. Instead, as Madeleine's lonely voice poignantly attests, for those who have cared to see it, the ambiguities surrounding this most fundamental intersection of women and work have existed far longer than we have had explicit language in which to characterize the issue. Her perspective on prostitution differs from others' of her time because she rejects the dichotomy of moral degradation versus moral reform and instead, renders visible the relationship between class struggle and the social productions of female sexuality in ways that grant women some agency in their relationship to those productions; in so doing, she plants an early seed for the counter-hegemonic discourse that Gramsci argues is the necessary contribution of organic intellectuals committed to class struggle. Madeleine did not succeed, in the span of time encompassed by her memoir, in reconciling prostitution as work to prostitutes' marginalization by other working women, nor does the memoir outline a strategic plan for overturning the dominant moralizing discourse about women's sex work. But, as her self-construction makes clear, it is within the spaces created by the ambiguities between gender and labor that women may hope to find the greatest possibilities for a mobile subjectivity that can challenge the constraints of Western dualities.

CHAPTER FOUR

‘Poor Visitor’: Mobility as/of Voice in Jamaica Kincaid’s *Lucy*

Jamaica Kincaid crosses disciplinary borders by writing fiction that is simultaneously diasporic and national, but only one-half of this equation has received serious inquiry. In the last fifteen years, myriad critical essays have been published about Jamaica Kincaid’s *Lucy: A Novel* (1990), a fictionalized autobiographical account of the Antiguan author’s migration to New York in the late 1960s to work as an *au pair* for a wealthy white family. Nearly all of these articles study the novel as a postcolonial text, and some read it through the lens of global feminism; most focus on the character interactions in the novel that metaphorically explore the relationship of Antigua to its British colonial past and to the contemporary imperialism of global capital. While these essays contain excellent scholarship, none has yet considered the novel as a work of *American* fiction, one that resounds with commentary on U.S. domestic politics and culture, even as it considers these phenomena in a transnational context. This is a notable oversight in American letters, both because Kincaid is a U.S. immigrant and because the storyline openly critiques the cosmopolitan American Left of the 1960s, the setting for the book.

Kincaid’s *Lucy* argues that even the progressive communities in the U.S. are inescapably steeped in its imperialist culture. By resituating the novel into the field of American literary studies, *Lucy* can be mined for its valuable contributions to a body of immigrant literature that has sought to challenge and rewrite the U.S. myth of the melting-pot society. I suggest this shift not because I believe there is any inherent value in assigning a work a national identity, but because in a national climate imbued with

anti-immigrant sentiment and fervent nationalism⁴⁵, Kincaid's critiques of the failures of the American Left are more salient than ever. They go unrecognized, however, in postcolonial readings that favor analyses of Lucy's colonized subject position over her relationship as an immigrant to her new home. I begin my reading of *Lucy* from the premise that its critical placement outside the purview of American literary studies upholds the novel's own argument about the limited potential for radical change in U.S. culture.

Kincaid uses mobility as a literary trope throughout *Lucy* to examine the assimilative impulses that pervade U.S. progressive political agendas; by dismantling the mythologies that surround such concepts as family, sisterhood, conservation, and avant-gardism, she argues that the "purity" such terms metaphorically imply always contains vestiges of imperialism and racism. *Lucy* details its protagonist's first year in the U.S.; as the story progresses, Lucy encounters representatives of three different American Left communities – feminism, environmentalism, and counter-cultural art. Kincaid uses Lucy's interactions with these groups to illustrate how each employs a variation on the theme of purity to reproduce the homogenizing current of the U.S.'s hegemonic culture; one by one, these three groups attempt to forcibly assimilate, absorb, dominate, or delegitimize Lucy's outsider position.

Confronted with the circumscription of her identity, Lucy resists these attempts through continual mobility, both literally and figuratively. Literally, she leaves behind places and relationships that threaten her unlimited movement. Figuratively, the text's

⁴⁵ Two of the most pressing domestic policy issues in 2006 were the Bush administration's attempts to pass "Guest Worker" legislation, which will automatically criminalize thousands of transnational workers already living and working in the U.S., and its efforts to reinstate the PATRIOT Act indefinitely and without revisions to even its most unconstitutional revocations of civil liberties.

language and formal structure play across multiple meanings, disrupting the assumptions and unexamined claims of the secondary characters and interrupting the smooth functioning of the reader's sense-making processes. In both form and content, *Lucy's* mobility embraces multiplicity and variegation, and thus becomes for Kincaid the conceptual antidote to the problem of purity (sameness, stagnation, conservatism) that haunts American thought. In this chapter, I argue that Kincaid's vision of a mobile subjectivity might offer new methods of navigating the structures that aim to freeze identity into a single, limiting phenomenon. My reading hinges on Kincaid's use of language and the formal structure of her narrative to deploy *Lucy's* metaphor of movement; drawing on the novel's cultural references to contextualize Kincaid's critiques of U.S. progressive political culture, my analysis will demonstrate how her textual strategy of multiple meanings, free association, and shifting viewpoints prevents her novel from becoming static and fully "knowable." Thus destabilized, *Lucy* offers an applied model for the mobile methodology Kincaid advocates through her narrative.

The novel chronicles Lucy's arrival and first year in the U.S., weaving parallel accounts of her willful disengagement from her family back home and her developing relationships with her American employers, Mariah and Lewis, her friend, Peggy, and her lover, a bohemian artist named Paul. As the story progresses, Lucy experiences several free association moments, in which a word or encounter recalls a brief vignette from her life in Antigua, and correlations begin to appear between the restrictions placed on her in Antigua and new limitations imposed on her in the U.S. Mariah tries to act as Lucy's surrogate mother and mentor, compelling Lucy to draw comparisons between her relationship with Mariah and that of her own domineering mother. When Lewis's

philandering causes his marriage to Mariah to fall apart, Lucy decides to leave her *au pair* position for the relative freedom of a shared apartment with her friend, Peggy. Her newfound interest in photography lands her a job at a photographer's studio, and as her confidence in her own ability to express herself grows, the novel ends just as Lucy begins the process of abandoning all of the relationships that have shaped – and restricted – her first year in the U.S.

Although the memories Lucy recounts throughout the book are not in chronological order, the story's main plot, Lucy's first year in Manhattan, marches forward in linear progression. Thus, my analysis follows a similar trajectory, moving from chapter to chapter. The novel's first chapter functions as a painstaking introduction to the writing strategy Kincaid will employ throughout the rest of her narrative, as well as a full rendering of Lucy's subject position as a transient, non-citizen, racialized, colonized, laboring female subject. Building on these two elements, in the subsequent reading of the novel's middle chapters I aim to demonstrate two related points: first, the ways Lucy's subject position intervenes in the social movement/cultural institution highlighted in that particular chapter, focusing on each one's failures as a result of its conservative reactions to racial difference (metaphorically represented through characters' attempts to forcibly assimilate Lucy into their worldview), and second, how Kincaid's use of language and form reflects and complements that project. The last chapter offers an interpretation of Kincaid's vision for her protagonist – the mobile subject as a viable agent of change.

Getting Situated: Kincaid's Opening Moves

Lucy is nineteen when she arrives in New York City from Antigua, anxious to leave behind her family and the limitations of poverty, colonialism, and gender roles in pursuit of individual sovereignty and experience. She is literally in transit between two identities, the one assigned to her by her family and the one her American hosts assume she possesses. Metaphorically, Lucy's attitude towards "place" reflects her attitude about her own identity; the concrete realization of a place always disappoints her when compared to her fantasy of it. Likewise, she is most content with her identity when she feels it is dynamic, not decided and coherent. The novel can be read as a series of attempts to fix Lucy's identity countered by her own moves to undermine such an agenda, beginning with her decision to leave her family in Antigua and ending, more than a year later, with the nearly simultaneous dissolutions of her relationships to her employer, her friend, and her lover.

Two textual practices in particular function in concert with the storyline to develop an extended metaphor of the female non-citizen worker's encounter with U.S. cultural structures (and the concomitant privileging of citizenship, race, and class identities) as a debate about the nature of these institutions. First is the narrative order of the story. In the physical space of the text, Lucy controls the dissemination of knowledge to the reader, so that her point of view is always visible first and helps to shape the reader's perspective; this device enables the critique of secondary characters' assumptions (about Lucy, about themselves) to begin even before those assumptions are named. Second, Lucy's narration switches between two codes: she is both artist and

anthropologist⁴⁶, weaving together fantasy and fact in ways that underscore her desire to shape her own reality, independent of the identities forced on her by the cultural structures that frame her life. Lucy-as-artist can create escapes from these restrictive forces; Lucy-as-anthropologist can document the hypocrisies and blindness of those who routinely reproduce and benefit from them. Together, this creation and rejection allow Lucy to use the structures she comes upon as points of departure for her own identity formation; out of Western binary power discourses (the Manichean allegory) in which she is assumed by other characters (or the reader) to be the disempowered subject, she constructs a position for herself that sifts through the discourse and incorporates its most valuable knowledge into her emerging sense of identity. She escapes simple binary opposition by a critical synthesis and reworking of power positions made possible by her mobility.

Christine Prentice, in “Decolonizing the Allegorical Subject,” writes:

[Lucy’s] strategies include the intervention of disruptive questions, as well as of other knowledges, which despite official suppression emerge in unauthorized forms. They enact less the production of an alternative authority than a questioning of the forms of authority itself when its monologic address is interrupted by other knowledges, other memories that enter on it. (204)

Lucy doesn’t offer an alternative hierarchy of power or suggest that there is another structure in which she would feel more at ease; she critiques every authority structure she encounters and prefers to roam unimpeded by them all. Her character represents a

⁴⁶ I use these terms in a general sense. By “artist,” I mean one who works in a fine arts medium, creating works whose value is generally based on some appraisal of its combined aesthetic and political merit, but also one who, in popular convention, might be described as the artist Paul Gauguin describes his own work habits: “following my fancy, following the moon, and finding the title long afterwards” (*Intimate Journals* 17). By “anthropologist,” I mean broadly one whose practice is to study a defined community and its artifacts, especially in relation to other communities and historical phenomena. When Margaret Mead said, “Anthropology demands the open-mindedness with which one must look and listen, record in astonishment and wonder that which one would not have been able to guess,” I do not think she meant to erase critical evaluation from the process, and as I use the term “anthropologist” to describe Lucy, it is inflected with just that – the sense of an interpretive process underway that will yield judgments and conclusions.

different kind of political (non?)subjectivity. Prentice references Aijaz Ahmad's critique of Jameson's claim that Third World literature can be recognized by its use of the individual as an allegory for the collective, in which the collective always takes the form of the national. Ahmad rejects Jameson's perspective on the grounds that it essentializes Third World literature without acknowledging its immense diversity. He suggests Jameson's argument is too simplified on several levels, including his assumption that "nation" is both the collectivity of primary concern to colonized cultures, and the representation of the form of decolonization as such" (207).

Following Ahmad's cue, Prentice argues that many postcolonial writers and thinkers endorse Jameson's argument: for example, she quotes Frantz Fanon's assertion that "strong connections [exist] between the structure of the family and the structure of the nation" (quoted in Prentice 207). She contends that a central problem with this proposal is its uncritical emphasis on the nation as the ultimate collectivity, and that Jameson's claim creates a false binary between the individual sovereignty of First World texts and the allegorical nature of Third World ones.

Prentice offers an alternative proposal, through her reading of *Lucy*, which she argues represents both an individual voice and a collective one, "while critically interrogating both the 'individual' and the 'collective' as terms, ultimately dismantling the binary opposition, along with the contingent oppositions of private/public and personal/political" (211). This suggestion that *Lucy* represents both the individual and the collective supports my analysis of the novel as a reflection on the history of collective political movements through the eyes of the individual who longs for similar change. There are, however, important differences between Prentice's essay and my own.

Prentice's reading focuses on Lucy's relationship to her biological mother in Antigua and her "surrogate" mother/employer, Mariah, in the U.S. as an allegorical "mutually overdetermining discursive relation between the colony and the imperial metropolis. [*Lucy*] suggest[s] the need to decolonize that relationship, to release mother and daughter from their imperialist allegorical inscriptions, to project an altogether different mode of agency" (217). There is room here for discussion of Lucy's relationships to other institutions that are themselves shaped by their relationship to the (U.S.) nation. My analysis of *Lucy* draws on the work of postcolonial scholars like Prentice, but also looks to class studies and feminist theory for help in understanding both how *Lucy* "enact[s] less the production of an alternative authority than a questioning of the forms of authority itself" (204), and the ways Lucy, the character, performs mobility as a source of resistance against authority – familial, patriarchal, racial, national. Prentice argues the text points out the need for change; my reading sees in *Lucy* not just potential but praxis, beginning with the first page.

From its very first words, *Lucy* plays with the mythologies of the immigrant experience in the U.S., creating a challenge, which resonates throughout the novel, to the orientalist⁴⁷ ideas embedded in U.S. national identity. The narrative ordering of the story, in which Lucy's critiques of other characters' assumptions are offered to the reader before the assumptions themselves appear in the text, privileges her criticisms and destabilizes both the assumptions and their object (i.e., Lucy's preordained subjectivity) before they are allowed to take hold in the reader's imagination. The first chapter's title, "Poor Visitor," exemplifies Kincaid's deployment of this writing strategy; the title takes

⁴⁷ In my discussion of Chapter Four, "Cold Heart," later in this essay, I discuss "orientalism" at greater length and its significance in understanding *Lucy*.

on multiple meanings as the story unfolds, displacing the perspective of Lucy's employer-hosts, Mariah and Lewis, who coin the term "poor visitor" to describe Lucy, by positioning other interpretations of the phrase ahead of their own intended meaning. This reversal of order, foregrounding alternative meanings for the reader and pushing the "real" meaning of the phrase to the margins, invisibly correlates with what I see as Lucy's anthropological narrative role. Her gaze, which puts the U.S. and its representatives, her host family, under a microscope, allows a privileging, even naturalizing, of the outsider's perspective that ultimately contributes to the decentering of the (U.S.) reader's own position as voyeur, watching the immigrant bumble her way into a complacent American identity. By using the text's structure to force readers into a continual reassessment of its meaning, Kincaid ultimately demonstrates a political philosophy, namely, that the individual's positioning of herself in the world must be as dynamic and mobile as language itself.

The "Poor Visitor" chapter begins with Lucy's voice, recounting her arrival and first day in the U.S. She is indeed a poor visitor, from a world without elevators and refrigerators: "Everything I was experiencing – the ride in the elevator, being in an apartment, eating day-old food that had been stored in a refrigerator – was such a good idea that I could imagine I would grow used to it and like it very much" (4). Almost immediately, however, her tale gives a lie to the chapter's title; instead of being overwhelmed by the greatness of the U.S., she notes that the famous buildings, parks, and bridges that her driver points out to her look "ordinary, dirty, worn down" and observes that she "could not be the only person in the world for whom they were a fixture of fantasy" (4), but for whom the reality of them is a disappointment. It is the U.S. that is

poor, after all, disheveled and unattractive, a place where even the sunshine is poorer, robbed of its warmth by the winter air. “Poor visitor” now refers not to Lucy’s economic status as an immigrant from an underdeveloped colony seeking work in a wealthy nation, but instead to her status as one who has hoped for much and received little – the chapter title is a sympathetic tongue-clucking. And there is much to sympathize with; Lucy’s dismay is total: “If I had had to draw a picture of my future then, it would have been a large gray patch surrounded by black, blacker, blackest” (6).

She vacillates in this opening chapter between recording her observations in a dry, detached commentary and representing her life through colorful, idealized descriptions. Her “field notes” convey the sterility of her new surroundings: “The household in which I lived was made up of a husband, a wife, and the four girl children. The husband and wife looked alike and their four children looked just like them” (13). But when she writes home, she creates beauty for her audience: “I wrote home to say how lovely everything was, and I used flourishing words and phrases, as if I were living life in a greeting card” (10). Her travel between these different methods of narrating her experiences echoes her reluctance to maintain allegiance to a singular perspective. Reflecting on her initial encounter with Manhattan, Lucy describes her pull towards constant motion:

In a day dream I used to have, all these places were points of happiness to me; all these places were lifeboats to my small drowning soul, for I would imagine myself entering and leaving them, and just that – entering and leaving over and over again – would see me through a bad feeling I did not have a name for. (3)

Her imagined free motion, the dream of an endlessly repeated, unhindered crossing of the borders between outside and inside – “entering and leaving over and over again” –

rescues her from a nameless dread that appears whenever she encounters a moment of restriction or structure.

Lucy's desire to have unbarricaded entry *and* exit – admittance and acceptance without indoctrination, assimilation, or an inevitable transformation into something that prevents the individual from leaving again – suggests something new in the immigrant mythology Kincaid creates through Lucy. The fact that U.S. monuments and famous buildings hold the spotlight in Lucy's fantasy corresponds to an array of texts, popular and literary, that document the emotional experiences of immigrants seeing the Statue of Liberty or some other famous U.S. landmark for the first time. The usual accounts of such moments involve a consideration of the meaning of home, of the importance of belonging, of the anxiety over a new beginning; examples span a broad collection of novels, plays, films, and television shows, from Charlie Chaplin's *The Immigrants* to the 1980s television sitcom *Perfect Strangers*. In 1912, Mary Antin, a Russian Jew who immigrated to the U.S. as a child, published a memoir, *The Promised Land*, in which she writes:

Our initiation into American ways began with the first steps on the new soil. My father found occasion to instruct or correct us even on the way from the pier to Wall Street . . . He told us not to lean out of the windows, not to point, and explained the word 'greenhorn.' We did not want to be 'greenhorns,' and gave the strictest attention to my father's instructions. (185)

The immediate impulse to fit in that Antin describes, reproduced again and again with tragedy and hilarity throughout twentieth-century texts, is glaringly absent in Kincaid's text. Lucy's daydream veers sharply from this path – she is a visitor from the start; her intention is always already to depart, to keep moving. Lucy recognizes that “becoming” American means, in part, becoming unable to imagine a self that is not American; hence,

the future ends with Americanization. (Recall Lucy's despair about her future: "a large gray patch surrounded by black, blacker, blackest" [6]. Feeling trapped, she literally can see no future.) Drawing a parallel between the U.S. and the concept of progressive time (the future) isn't in itself new; Antin hails a similar phenomenon in naming America "the promised land," and her memoir's "Foreword" explains that Antin's immigration was "a move from medieval to modern times" (xii), a claim Antin herself makes throughout the book. Whereas Antin celebrates this conflation, Kincaid critiques it, both because of the American egocentrism inherent in it and because, as the rest of the book makes clear, such a future – defined by American hegemony – is hardly cause for celebration:

Mariah decided to write and illustrate a book on [the extinction of plant species] and give any money made to an organization devoted to saving them. Like her, all of the members of this organization were well off but they made no connection between their comforts and the decline of the world that lay before them. I could have told them a thing or two about it. . . . [But] I couldn't bring myself to ask her to examine Lewis's daily conversations with his stockbroker, to see if they bore any relation to the things she saw passing away forever before her eyes. (72-73)

Lucy readily connects U.S. economic power, and thus, political power, to the destruction of the natural world and its human communities, both within and across U.S. borders. The U.S. doctrine of competitive capitalism and constant material gain supersedes the rights of any other community. And, I contend, in criticizing the U.S. belief in itself as *the nation*, *Lucy* succeeds in also critiquing the *nation* in general, as a suffocating web of kinship ties that limits the individual's potential both within and outside of its network. The story moves between two countries and two families, but Lucy ultimately rejects either of them as her final destination.

That suffocating fear of being trapped motivates Lucy's mobility. The "Poor Visitor" chapter sketches this fear into the narrative through a sequence of images, each

building on the last. Lucy first describes her new room as resembling “a box in which cargo traveling a long way should be shipped. But I was not cargo. I was only an unhappy young woman living in a maid’s room, and I was not even the maid” (7). Her thoughts wander and she is reminded of a girl from home who gave her a bible as a going-away gift. She recalls how as children, the two of them would torment each other with passages from the Book of Revelations, the biblical tale of the end of the world. Thinking these thoughts, she drifts off to sleep and dreams of Australia, awaking to the sight of the maid looming over her, and the recollection that Australia was originally settled as “a prison for bad people, people so bad that they couldn’t be put into a prison in their own country” (9). In the next paragraph, Lucy tells the reader that an ocean separates her from her home, but even if it were only “a teacup of water,” she could not return.

The sequence of images in these few pages reinforces the idea that Lucy feels like a prisoner: her cell-like room dehumanizes its human cargo, and her friend’s parting gift of a Bible, loaded with the memory of her childhood terror of the ultimate punishment for wickedness, implies Lucy’s guilt over leaving Antigua. Following directly after her own lament that arriving in the U.S. has effectively killed her fantasy of continual coming and going, the implication is that her immigration to the U.S. feels like a prison sentence. The consequence of Lucy’s choice to experience mobility, rather than to only dream about it, is the penalty of finding herself grounded, in a new place, both unable to return physically to her own home and unable to reclaim the lost fantasy of motion that had formerly been her escape from unhappiness. Her dream of Australia echoes her own

sense of being punished for her transience: she is so bad that the wrath of god has sentenced her to imprisonment in a country not her own.

Several critics have noted the connection between this sentence and one later in the book, in which Lucy compares her mother to a deity: “That my mother would have found me devil-like did not surprise me, for I often thought of her as god-like, and are not the children of gods devils?” (153).⁴⁸ In these remarks, she succeeds in rewriting Antigua: instead of a “not very nice” (6) place, Antigua is re-imagined as a lost paradise from which she has been exiled. Rather than escaping, she only succeeds in leaving behind the good parts, her grandmother’s cooking, the warm sun. The “poor visitor” is now the one who has traveled to a new place at the expense of all that she valued about the old. Her rejection of Antigua in favor of the U.S. leads her into a new family relationship with Mariah, whose own claims on Lucy are not less stifling than her real mother’s:

 Mariah wanted all of us, the children and me, to see things the way she did. . . The children were happy to see things her way. But I already had a mother who loved me, and I . . . had come to feel that my mother’s love for me was designed solely to make me into an echo of her; and I didn’t know why, but I felt that I would rather be dead than just become an echo of someone . . . Thoughts like these had brought me to be sitting on the edge of a Great Lake with a woman who wanted to show me her world and hoped that I would like it, too. Sometimes there is no escape, but often the effort of trying will do quite nicely for a while. (36-37)

Happiness and freedom are located always in the site from which she is absent, and the text echoes her spiritual poverty in the juxtaposition of the spare prose she uses to describe her immediate surroundings with the rich language that suggests the heightened

⁴⁸ I will return to a discussion of this comment later in this chapter.

value of her past.⁴⁹ However, the parallel relationships with her two mothers, the real and the surrogate, keep these two worlds tied to one another, reminding Lucy that some of the structures she seeks asylum from have no national borders, while nations are themselves a kind of prison. The only reprieve comes from “the effort of trying” to escape, i.e., the pleasure of motion.

Following the sequence of images that capture Lucy’s sense of involuntary confinement, her anthropological field notes of her new environment resume. Her clinical voice reverses the role of native informant, suggesting the ennui of a modern-day Malinowski; it is through these field note observations that the chapter’s title is codified, finally, through the perspective of Lewis and Mariah, Lucy’s employer-hosts. She records a family dinner conversation:

They said I seemed not to be a part of things, as if I didn’t live in their house with them, as if they weren’t like a family to me, as if I were just passing through, just saying one long Hallo!, and soon would be saying a quick Goodbye! So long! It was very nice! For look at the way I stared at them as they ate, Lewis said. Had I never seen anyone put a forkful of French-cut green beans in his mouth before? . . . I didn’t laugh, though, and Lewis looked at me, concern on his face. He said, “Poor Visitor, poor Visitor,” over and over, a sympathetic tone to his voice, and then he told me a story about an uncle he had who had gone to Canada and raised monkeys, and of how after a while the uncle loved monkeys so much and was so used to being around them that he found actual human beings hard to take. (14)

In *Jamaica Kincaid: Where Land Meets the Body* (1994), Moira Ferguson explains this scene as a tournament match in which Lucy responds to “Lewis’s patronizing discourse about her cultural credentials” (110), as part of an extensive counterargument against critics’ comments that *Lucy* does not celebrate Black culture. While this is a valuable

⁴⁹ One example of this juxtaposition is apparent in the use of color to describe her memories of Antigua: “a bowl of pink mullet and green figs cooked in coconut milk” (7) or “she pinched up her scarred cheek. . . and twisted it until I thought it would fall off like a dark, purple plum in the middle of her pink palm” (25). In contrast, the only color that figures prominently in her descriptions of the U.S. is pale yellow, and most descriptions contain no color at all.

insight into the text, I suggest this scene can be understood as the culmination of a narrative power reversal which sets up the rest of the book as a string of related instances in which Lucy pulls the rug out from under the carefully balanced assumptions holding together the secondary characters' worldview. Mariah and Lewis misread Lucy's perspective and actions, which augments Lucy's own empowerment; their blind assumptions make Lucy's agency that much more possible, leaving her free to think things of which they would never suspect her. Instead of recognizing her gaze as that of the anthropologist who has put them under a microscope, Mariah and Lewis interpret it as the curious stare of the naïve primitive, who is fascinated by the banal everyday facts of the superior culture's existence: "Had I never seen anyone put a forkful of French-cut green beans in his mouth before?" The insult is heightened by the story of Lewis's uncle, with its implicit suggestion that Lucy occupies a similar position, unused to the company of civilized people and incognizant of her relation, however distant, to the niceties of culture; she is a border figure, occupying the space between the un-evolved and the highly evolved.

Up to this point, Kincaid has been preparing the reader's interpretation of this exchange by undermining Lewis's perspective through the other possible understandings of the chapter title that appear prior to this scene, which concludes the chapter. It ends on a similar note: after Lewis shares his story, Lucy tells Mariah and him of a dream she has had about them, in which Lewis chases her naked self along a yellow path that resembles cornmeal while Mariah calls to him to catch Lucy. They respond "in unison": "

Lewis made a clucking noise, then said, Poor, poor visitor. And Mariah said, Dr. Freud for Visitor, and I wondered why she said that, for I did not know who Dr. Freud was. Then they laughed in a soft, kind way. I had meant by telling them my dream that I had taken them in, because only people who were very important

to me had ever shown up in my dreams. I did not know if they understood that.
(15)

Lewis accuses Lucy of being unable to see her connection to them (“as if they weren’t like a family”), but ultimately, it is Mariah and Lewis who fail to see their connection to Lucy. In their ignorance of Lucy’s demonstration that they are indeed important enough to be part of her dreams, they become the natives who are unable to see past their own culture (Freud) in their attempts to understand her. Lucy doesn’t offer any further explanation of her intention; she allows them to laugh at her, but the reader is positioned to see Lucy’s perspective and recognize the limitations of Mariah and Lewis’s viewpoint. The disappointment that awaits Lucy upon her arrival in the U.S. empowers her: not awed by what she sees, she is able to exert control over her surroundings, can study them and draw conclusions about them that are her own, rather than those the secondary characters would like her to draw. The distance she creates for herself through her anthropological stance leads to the intended meaning of “poor visitor”: acting like a stranger in the house, her poverty, according to her employers, comes from her inability or lack of desire to assimilate. And this commentary from Mariah and Lewis becomes a focal point of Kincaid’s narrative; is it really a pity, as they say, that Lucy does not join in? Kincaid’s descriptions of the immigrant experience, through Lucy’s eyes, offer a sound critique of this claim. As Prentice states in her analysis, Lucy does indeed disrupt the authority of Lewis and Mariah’s point of view by introducing her own knowledge (e.g., the dominant Western discourse of psychoanalysis is interrupted when she suggests her dream signifies emotional bonding rather than repression), but additionally, the text, *Lucy*, provides instructive methodology for repositioning the reader’s gaze in order to

ultimately reposition the U.S. and its institutional structures, so that they are no longer the unexamined center of the immigrant myth.

In *Lucy*, as Ferguson points out, “[g]ender issues are tied to the colonial imperative” (108). Ferguson’s reading, like Christine Prentice’s, includes an analysis of Lucy’s relationship to her two mothers, setting up the discussion by reading the two characters as individuals representing their nation’s respective position in the binary of metropole and colony. I agree with both scholars’ assessment of this metaphorical configuration, but I would like to suggest another way to read Lucy’s relationship to Mariah: namely that, once Kincaid sets up the resistant dialectic of Lucy’s relationship with Lewis and Mariah (and through them, the U.S.), she uses the unfolding events to tackle several issues: the colonizing, racist practices of white feminism, the fear of difference that motivates an ideology of “sameness” or structural purity in progressive social movements, and the unreflective, self-absorbed politics of white intellectual elitism. What follows is an extended close reading of the four remaining chapters in *Lucy*, an attempt to demonstrate how Kincaid imagines the interlocking exploitations of gender, race, class, and nation and uses her protagonist to articulate what Angela Davis has called “difference. . . not as an objective in itself, but rather as a point of departure and a method for transforming repressive and antidemocratic social circumstances” (Davis xi).

The Imperial Impulses of Feminism

Feminist critics have long argued that women are mythologized as the keepers and producers of “the nation” (i.e., the homeland) through their literal and figurative roles

as reproducers, nurturers, and keepers of culture and tradition.⁵⁰ This mythology links gender, race, and national identity together in complex ways, and feminisms that do not address how women are made to embody “the nation” necessarily open the door to short-sighted, exclusionary political practice. Or, to put it another way, if gender is one of the structural apparatuses upholding the nation, then dismantling the politics of gender (including feminist political movement) can provide an access point to critiquing the nation. *Lucy* offers a solid example of this: Lucy’s vantage point as what feminist standpoint theorist Alison Bailey calls the “outsider within” allows her to see how Mariah’s place as a middle-class, white housewife both corresponds to and reveals a national politics of race and class ideology. Bailey writes, “Outsiders within are thought to have an advantageous epistemic viewpoint that offers a more complete account of the world than insider or outsider perspectives alone” (285). As a Black, transnational domestic worker, Lucy is privy to the intimate workings of her employers’ home as it is constituted by the practices and ideologies of their class, race, citizen status, and gender roles. As a “poor visitor,” however, her role is that of transient observer, not participant.

Lucy takes place as the U.S. second-wave feminist movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s is underway. One major tenet of this movement was the notion that all women are oppressed because they are “women;” the tie between this signifier, “woman,” and the experience of oppression aided a universalist assumption that all women share the same experiences under a patriarchal system. As Judith Butler explains, “the feminist ‘we’ rightly came under attack by women of color who claimed that the ‘we’ was invariably white, and that that ‘we’ that was meant to solidify the movement

⁵⁰ See *Between Woman and Nation: Nationalisms, Transnational Feminisms, and the State* (Duke UP, 1999).

was the very source of a painful factionalization” (15).⁵¹ Because the movement was predominantly led by white, middle-class American women, these “common” issues centered on the particularities of this demographic, to the exclusion of women of color, working-class women, and non-citizens (i.e., the American second-wave feminist movement was, in a very literal sense, a national movement, in spite of being influenced by the scholarship of European writers such as Simone de Beauvoir or Germaine Greer, who are in any case Western, if not U.S., citizens). As bell hooks writes in *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* (2000), “From the onset of the movement women from privileged classes were able to make their concerns ‘the’ issues that should be focused on in part because they were the group of women who received public attention” (38). Women outside this exclusive population resisted its call, arguing that sisterhood is not global, in spite of white U.S. feminists’ slogans to the contrary, and women of color resented the idea of a common oppression shared between themselves and white feminists (hooks *Between* 396). Maxine Williams, in “Black Women and the Struggle for Liberation” explained the problem well when she wrote in 1970:

Women in the women’s liberation movement assert that they are tired of being slaves to their husbands, confined to the household performing menial tasks. While the Black woman can sympathize with this view, she does not feel that breaking her ass every day from nine to five is any form of liberation. She has always had to work. . . .

Women’s Liberation must not isolate itself from the masses of women or the Third World community. At the same time, white women cannot speak for Black women. Black women must speak for themselves. (Williams scriptorium.lib.duke.edu)

Williams calls not just for a more inclusive feminism but also for a drastic shift in the distribution of power, such that all women’s voices may be heard in the movement’s calls for change. Throughout *Lucy*, but especially in the second chapter, entitled “Mariah,”

⁵¹ Butler makes the claim that this criticism was leveled “in the early 1980s,” but as the subsequent quote from Maxine Williams demonstrates, the argument’s origins are older than that.

Kincaid uses this conflict between white and black feminist agendas to explore the assimilationist imperative her mobile protagonist rejects; *Lucy* carefully links Mariah's feminist project to the subtler project of a national identity sustained by class, gender, and racial roles. She moves beyond national borders and takes into account not just white feminism's racism towards U.S. citizens of color, but also its colonizing tendencies. In this chapter, Kincaid shows how the feminist argument that women share a core experience simply because they are women disguises an ideology of sameness that demands assimilation as much as the immigrant myth that Kincaid dismantles in *Lucy*'s first chapter.

In *Lucy*, the symbols of a stifling, oppressive culture are also the symbols of a stifling, exclusionary feminist agenda. For example, Kincaid introduces the color pale yellow as a symbol of Western oppression in the first chapter, when she describes the weak winter sun (5) and the overwhelming blondness of Mariah, Lewis, and their four look-alike daughters (12) in the context of their desire to symbolically colonize Lucy by making her part of their family, pressuring her to become more like them (instead of being a "poor visitor"). The chapter finishes with the dream described earlier, in which Lewis chases Lucy over yellow ground that looks "as if it had been paved with cornmeal," while Mariah urges him to "catch her, Lewis, catch her" (14). Helen Tiffin has suggested this dream is a metaphorical reenactment of slavery, reading the cornmeal path as evocative of slaves' provisions (Tiffin 919); however, in light of Kincaid's focus on colonial aftermaths in her larger oeuvre, the yellow of the path combines with the yellow of Mariah and Lewis's family to signify more generally a suffocating colonization.

She builds on this yellow motif in the second chapter, when Mariah and Lucy clash over the springtime appearance of daffodils. Flowers and plants function as metaphors for gender identity throughout *Lucy*, and the daffodil – a yellow flower – does double-duty as a symbol both of colonization and patriarchy. This metaphor first appears as Mariah anxiously awaits the arrival of spring and all the seasonal offerings she will share with Lucy:

She said, ‘Have you ever seen daffodils pushing their way up out of the ground? And when they’re in bloom and all massed together, a breeze comes along and makes them do a curtsy to the lawn stretching out in front of them. Have you ever seen that? When I see that, I feel so glad to be alive.’ And I thought, So Mariah is made to feel alive by some flowers bending in the breeze. How does a person get to be that way? (17)

The conversation reminds Lucy of a childhood incident in which she was made to memorize and recite William Wordsworth’s poem, “The Daffodils,” an event which epitomizes for her the relationship of colonizer to colonized, since, in lieu of learning her own history and culture, her education centered on training her to be a good subject of the British Crown. (As Ferguson notes, the novel takes place right around the time of Antigua’s partial independence from England in 1967 [107].) Mariah describes the daffodils as an indistinguishable mass forced by the wind to curtsy, a feminine bow of deference originating in aristocratic custom, an image that both feminizes the flowers and subordinates them to the will of some external power (the breeze). When Lucy shares with Mariah her anger over the memory of the poetry recital, Mariah responds with envy: “What a history you have” (19), missing the point that it is precisely because of the colonial education system that Lucy *doesn’t* have a (national) history, at least, not one she learns about in school, thanks to the subordination of Antigua’s historical importance to that of England’s.

The yellow, which the reader comes to understand through this extended scene as a symbol of white or Western ubiquity (an inescapable presence caused by the colonial exportation of Western culture to the whole world), simultaneously represents Mariah:

Mariah, with her pale-yellow skin and yellow hair, stood still in this almost celestial light, and she looked blessed, no blemish or mark of any kind on her cheek or anywhere else, as if she had never quarreled with anyone over a man or over anything, would never have to quarrel at all, had never done anything wrong and had never been to jail, had never had to leave anywhere for any other reason than a feeling that had come over her. (27)

Yellow takes on many meanings here: it is the color of a flower species associated in Lucy's mind with Western imperialism, it is the color of privilege and the color of pure innocence. Kincaid's references to the color yellow link Mariah's own politics to those of Western imperialism. Throughout the story, Mariah is positioned as a second-wave feminist: she takes Lucy to her own doctor and introduces her to birth control (67); she offers her a copy of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (132); she doesn't shave her legs or underarms ("as a symbol of something") and had lost her virginity long before her marriage (80). Mariah uses feminism as a way to connect to Lucy (e.g., they are both women and therefore share a common burden); this is understood by Lucy as both naïve (an innocence born of privilege) and suffocating (because of Mariah's attempts to inculcate Lucy into her worldview – "Mariah wanted all of us, the children and me, to see things the way she did" [35-36]). By extrapolating the connections Kincaid creates between Mariah and Western imperialism via her use of the color yellow to symbolize both, the reader can connect Lucy's critique of her surrogate mother to Kincaid's critique of Americanization as a process that necessarily positions U.S. national identity as both beyond reproach and desirable ("no blemish or mark of any kind").

Lucy contrasts Mariah's "yellow" subjectivity with a memory that follows the conversation about the Wordsworth poem: Lucy remembers her mother's friend, Sylvie, whose face is scarred where another woman bit her in a fight over a man. As a child, Lucy "was sure that the mark on her face was a rose she had put there on purpose because she loved the beauty of roses so much she wanted to wear one on her face" (25). She continues on, referring to the scar as a "dark, purple plum" that Sylvie caresses with her pink palm as she (Lucy) explains, "though I might not end up with a mark on my cheek, I had no doubt that I would end up with a mark somewhere" (25). This interlude sets up the next scene, a return to Mariah's yellow world. As Lucy stands in the kitchen, "my thoughts centered, naturally, on myself" (26), Mariah enters and announces, "I have always wanted four children, four girl children. I love my children" (26). Her claim, set against Lucy's own self-centered thoughts and immediately following Sylvie's appearance, exposes the larger differences Kincaid is painting: between a white, middle-class femininity represented by flowers in the park and an unquestioning maternal instinct, and another kind of womanhood, marked by scars, self-interest, and doubt.

When, in the following scene, Mariah blindfolds Lucy and takes her to the park to see the daffodils, Lucy is engulfed with rage:

Along the paths and underneath the trees were many, many yellow flowers the size and shape of play teacups, or fairy skirts. They looked like something to eat and something to wear at the same time; they looked beautiful; they looked simple, as if made to erase a complicated and unnecessary idea. I did not know what these flowers were, and so it was a mystery to me why I wanted to kill them. Just like that. I wanted to kill them. (29)

Although Mariah tries to control Lucy's reaction (the blindfold may be read as a symbolic veiling of Lucy's mind), Lucy sees past the attempt. The daffodils function as a symbol of white U.S. feminism (and femininity) that Lucy rejects. For one thing, they

are all the same. For another, they are domesticated; as “something to eat and something to wear,” the daffodils call to mind both the gendered work of cooking and sewing and the image of bourgeois women dressing up (“fairy skirts”) to have tea (“play teacups”). And most tellingly, their beautiful simplicity tries to hide the complexity of gender identity (the “complicated and unnecessary idea”), especially when, as in Lucy’s case, that identity is always tangled up in issues of race, class, and nation. In comparison, Sylvie’s own “flower” is a wound whose presence clearly marks the differences among women and the violence such difference can foster. Her scar is a one of a kind reminder that no common identity – gender, national, or otherwise – can account for the individual’s own subject position in a field of complex power relations, and to think otherwise is a sign of immaturity: “That was how I came to think that heavy and hard was the beginning of living, real living” (25). The distinction between a field of identical, simple flowers and the singular “rose,” a flower of innumerable varieties and one known as much for its thorns as for its beauty and scent, represents the distinction between a naïve, second-wave, U.S. feminism and a more sophisticated feminism that has room for difference and the expression of the individual.

Unable to express in words her violent reaction against the daffodils, Lucy begins to cry, and Mariah takes her tears for a sign of joy at the sight. Seeing Mariah’s misrecognition of her own feelings, Lucy recovers:

I said, ‘Mariah, do you realize that at ten years of age I had to learn by heart a long poem about some flowers I would not see in real life until I was nineteen?’

As soon as I said this, I felt sorry that I had cast her beloved daffodils in a scene she had never considered, a scene of conquered and conquests; a scene of brutes masquerading as angels and angels portrayed as brutes . . . It wasn’t her fault. It wasn’t my fault. But nothing could change the fact that where she saw beautiful flowers I saw sorrow and bitterness. (30)

Kincaid speaks a judgment against second-wave feminism through Lucy's thoughts: Mariah's complicity in empire is not malicious ("it wasn't her fault"), just thoughtless and naïve. Nevertheless, Lucy's interpretation dominates the narrative – Mariah never offers a response to Lucy's criticisms – and a seemingly trivial object, the daffodil, becomes a glaring symbol of interlocking exploitations. The first half of Chapter Two identifies pro-feminist Mariah's racism and colonizing tendencies through the daffodil scenes; once established, the chapter's latter half builds on this complaint and confronts feminism's flaws directly as Lucy challenges Mariah's viewpoint in three ensuing scenes.

As Mariah, Lucy, and Mariah's four children take a train to a Great Lakes summer home, Lucy notices that all of the passengers are white like Mariah and all of the train employees are black like Lucy. Mariah is oblivious:

Mariah did not seem to notice what she had in common with the other diners, or what I had in common with the waiters. She acted in her usual way, which was that the world was round and we all agreed on that, when I knew that the world was flat and if I went to the edge I would fall off. (32)

Mariah erases difference by ignoring it: Lucy is with her and is therefore like her.

Mariah enacts here what Alison Bailey calls a "privilege-evasive whitely script" (293), a form of white liberal discourse on racism that chooses not to recognize race in order to avoid having to confront the ways white individuals, even supposedly anti-racist ones, benefit from white privilege. This pretend colorblindness also works to colonize people of color into a universality of whiteness by denying the presence of any other color.

Kincaid mocks this pretense at equality through Lucy's reference to the earth being round. By representing Mariah's worldview in terms of a proven scientific truth that, presumably, only the most illiterate or extreme fundamentalists would attempt to

dispute, Lucy characterizes Mariah's inability to consider other people's perspectives; in contrast, Lucy clearly sees a world with a safe center and dangerous margins. Mariah's privilege is that she has never had to leave the center – her comfortable subjectivity – and cannot imagine any other position in relation to it.⁵² This passage again reinforces the dynamic that Kincaid's text sets up between its characters through plays on meaning: as they travel through space together on a moving train, Lucy ascribes to Mariah a very literal interpretation of "the world." Then, having defined for us Mariah's superficial understanding of it, she uses this interpretation to launch her own more figurative, abstract understanding of the world as a plane governed by irrational social laws. While Mariah can assume that she and Lucy share the same position because they are sitting next to each other in the dining car, Lucy knows that despite their physical proximity, Mariah stands firmly at the center of the world and Lucy moves precariously along its edge. Paradoxically, in the act of naming this reality, the text decenters Mariah's position by privileging Lucy's perspective: it is Lucy that interprets both her viewpoint and Mariah's, and it is with Lucy that the reader sympathizes.

When Lucy wakes up on the train the next morning to the sight of "those freshly plowed fields [Mariah] loved so much," Lucy tells her, "'Well, thank God I didn't have to do that'," adding her own thought for the reader: "I don't know if she understood what I meant, for in that one statement I meant many different things" (33). This last sentence marks Kincaid's continued use of deferred meaning; the reader must guess what those

⁵² It might also be worth noting that Lucy's analogy calls to mind a central myth of white history: the apocryphal popular convention that the Columbian Exposition, which paved the way for the European conquest of the Americas, proved the earth was round. This fact was an accepted truth in several world civilizations long before Columbus ever set sail, but the myth's persistence demonstrates the tenacity of whiteness in centralizing its place in the history of the world's development. Lucy implicitly suggests Mariah's complicity with this aggrandizing Eurocentrism.

“many different things” are, in order to achieve some interpretation of the novel. Lucy’s multiplicity of views starkly contrasts with Mariah’s single-mindedness. This opposition continues into a scene I quoted earlier, in which Lucy observes that Mariah wants to escape from difference by retreating into the safety of her childhood and by shaping her daughters and Lucy into her own image (35-36); Lucy’s own wish is to put the past behind her so she can “be free to take everything as it came and not see hundreds of years in every gesture” (31), a desire to escape from sameness and from the repetition of a painful history.

The tension between the two characters’ different desires, coupled with Lucy’s resentment of Mariah’s impulse to smother Lucy’s individualism, grows in the next scene, when Mariah returns from a successful fishing trip:

She sang out, ‘I will make you fishers of men,’ and danced around me. . . ‘My fish. This is supper. Let’s go feed the minions.’ It’s possible that what she really said was ‘millions,’ not ‘minions.’ Certainly she said it in jest. But as we were cooking the fish, I was thinking about it. ‘Minions.’ A word like that would haunt someone like me; the place where I came from was a dominion of someplace else. (37)

Lucy then tells Mariah a story from her childhood: after her mother reads to the young Lucy the Bible story about Jesus’s miracle of feeding the multitudes with only a few fish and several loaves of bread, Lucy asks her mother, “‘But how did Jesus serve the fish? boiled or fried?’” (37-38). Lucy’s mother is amazed at the question, but to Lucy, there is nothing unusual in the idea that the multitudes “might go on to pass a judgment on the way the food tasted. I know it would have mattered to me” (38).

Several things are happening here. First, it is clear that “minions” has no resonant meaning for Mariah, and neither does the double entendre Lucy hears in her comment about being fishers of men; only Lucy sees that Mariah is trying to “collect”

apostles of her views (“[She wanted all of us . . . to see things the way she did” [35]), a colonization not unlike that of Christian missionaries. Second, Lucy says “it’s possible” that she misheard Mariah; this uncertainty reminds the reader that Lucy’s subjectivity stands between the reader and the text. Not only does Lucy routinely suggest multiple meanings for a word or phrase, but she even determines what words are spoken by other characters. Kincaid gives her protagonist control of the narrative, allowing her to malleate its substance; even as Lucy questions her own version of events (was it “minions” or “millions”?), she still sculpts the reader’s comprehension, since what follows Mariah’s comment is an extended interpretation of a word that may or may not have been spoken: what counts in this scene is what Lucy hears, not what was said. Although Mariah is really the character who occupies the speaking position in this scene, it is her audience, Lucy, whose voice is heard, a strategic repositioning of narrative power that is echoed in Lucy’s childhood memory of the biblical story.

By recalling her reaction to Jesus’s miracle of feeding the multitudes, Lucy confronts Mariah’s imperial attitude and reminds her that even though the “minions” are supposed to be grateful for Christ’s beneficence, they are still individuals with opinions and preferences (for example, “judgment[s] on the way the food tasted”). This fact is ignored both by the Bible’s narrative, which provides no commentary from the people Christ feeds, and by Lucy’s mother, who scolds her for trying to individuate the crowd. The young Lucy seems to be the only one bothered by their silence: how, in a country like Antigua, where fish is a staple food and its preparation a matter of personal and cultural significance, could such a detail be deemed unimportant? This childhood reminiscence brings Lucy back to the present, where Mariah is cooking fish for “the

minions” without having first asked Lucy how she would like her fish prepared. The scene has circled back around to its beginning: Mariah as fisherman leads to a biblical reference with imperial overtones that reminds Lucy of another Bible story in which individuality is disregarded, which in turn recalls Lucy’s own childhood as a colonized subject, which further reminds Lucy of her own cultural differences from Mariah. And just as a circle approaches its original point from the opposite direction in which it began, the scene is recast from the opposite viewpoint: Mariah is no longer the savior figure feeding her flock but a domineering presence who elevates her own status by assuming others want what she wants. Mariah has decided to cook the fish “[her] way, under flames in the oven, a way [Lucy] did not like” (39), without asking Lucy her preference. Mariah’s earlier comment about the minions (whether she actually used that word is no longer important) now holds concrete meaning. In Mariah’s view, Lucy should just be glad Mariah is feeding her. In the context of the chapter’s analogy between Lucy and Mariah’s relationship and the relationship of the colonized woman of color to white U.S. feminism, this scene equates Mariah’s feminism to a gift that should not be judged, just as the multitudes were not supposed to judge the food Jesus miraculously provided. The example used is feminism, but I think a deeper analogy surfaces here: through Lucy’s reaction to Mariah, Kincaid critiques not just white feminism, but all beneficent liberal political agendas that do not allow voices of individual dissent to be heard.

Mariah, perhaps to her credit, understands Lucy’s critique of her actions: “When I finished telling Mariah this, . . . her blue eyes . . . grew dim as she slowly closed the lids over them, then bright again as she opened them wide and then wider” (39). At first hurt by Lucy’s pointed recollections of her youth, Mariah’s eyes grow bright with

comprehension as she takes in the implications of what Lucy is telling her. Figuratively, she widens the narrow lens through which she has been viewing Lucy, realizing suddenly that Lucy is not another child to be shaped into her image. Mariah becomes aware of the rift between them – “A silence fell between us” (39) – and expresses her faltering confidence in their bond in the pages that end the chapter. After the dinner of fish cooked Mariah’s way, they are saying good night when Mariah spontaneously tells Lucy:

‘I was looking forward to telling you that I have Indian blood, that the reason I’m so good at catching fish and hunting birds and roasting corn and doing all sorts of things is that I have Indian blood. But now, I don’t know why, I feel I shouldn’t tell you that. I feel you will take it the wrong way.’ (39-40)

The “wrong way” for Mariah means not understanding the connection between herself and Lucy, a connection she bases on their shared essence, the humanist conviction that some core element unites them in spite of their different subject positions (in this case, the Indian blood, but elsewhere, the fact that they are both women). Instinctively (she doesn’t “know,” but she “feels”), Mariah recognizes there is a problem with her claim over Lucy’s heritage; by declaring herself part Indian (read: primitive -- “good at catching fish and hunting birds and roasting corn”), Mariah can absorb Lucy’s difference into herself, washing it away by making it part of her own identity. (Similarly, Euro-Americans’ claims to Indian ancestry can wipe away the history of genocide, and make colonizers into “native” Americans.) Her well-intentioned colorblindness, the “privilege-evasive whitely script,” again strips Lucy of her individualism, but this time, Mariah understands Lucy’s capacity for interpreting the situation independently and without deference to Mariah’s intended meaning. At the same time, Mariah still enacts a desire to control the narrative: she wants to be the voice that is heard, even as she tells Lucy she no

longer wants to speak (“I feel I shouldn’t tell you”), and in the very act of denying this desire to be in control, *does* tell Lucy, after all.

Since the previous scene has set up the reader to make a judgment against Mariah on behalf of Lucy, and Mariah appears to understand that some sort of judgment is imminent, it comes as a surprise that Lucy’s reaction is one of confusion: “[Mariah’s words] really surprised me. What way should I take this? Wrong way? Right way? What could she mean? To look at her, there was nothing remotely Indian about her. Why claim a thing like that?” (40). Instead of the binary opposition the reader expects, Kincaid offers an open field of potential meanings, in which even the concept of the binary – “Wrong way? Right way?” – is challenged. Lucy’s pause to interpret Mariah’s comments suspends the reader’s judgment while she waits for Lucy to offer her own analysis. Kincaid is shifting the discussion; instead of responding to Mariah’s configuration of her own racial identity, Lucy refutes the very understanding of race on which Mariah stakes her claim. Mariah sees race as a biological category with specific consequences (e.g., she is inherently good at fishing and hunting *because* she has Indian blood), but Lucy counters this definition: Lucy herself is one-quarter Carib Indian, but she does not like sailing as her ancestors did. Race, for Lucy, is an outdated category to be left behind, not claimed as a trophy; “my grandmother,” she insists, “is my grandmother, not an Indian. My grandmother is alive; the Indians she came from are all dead” (40). Again, Lucy individuates, while Mariah amalgamates.

Lucy’s frustration with Mariah’s naïve self-absorption (which threatens to absorb Lucy) concludes the chapter, when she asks herself, “How do you get to be the sort of victor who can claim to be the vanquished also?” (41). On the final page, as Lucy

sidesteps Mariah's good-night hug, Mariah is anguished by Lucy's rejection of her attempt to reconcile their differences, but Lucy gains a new understanding of the ways power and disempowerment can actively co-exist in the same subject. When she tells Mariah, "All along I have been wondering how you got to be the way you are" (41), Lucy is asking Mariah to account for her social privilege in light of her claims to the heritage of an oppressed people. The answer, of course, lies in what Mariah will not acknowledge: the brutality and conquest often responsible for such "mixed race" heritage. In a sense, this realization lets Lucy take a page out of Mariah's book, only in reverse – in spite of her disadvantages, Lucy is determined to deny brutes their angel masks by undermining traditional colonization narratives, including Mariah's. In her confrontations with Mariah, Lucy has contested three major tendencies in U.S. racial discourse: first, the "privilege-evasive whitely script" that chooses not to acknowledge white privilege; second, the argument that racial colonization can be justified by the material benefits that accrue to some of the colonized (through the "minions" scene)⁵³; and third, the popular assumption that if we are all of mixed ancestry, biologically-speaking, then eventually race itself as a category of social difference (and therefore, inequality) will no longer exist.

This final scene is one of victory for Lucy; her heart is too large to take pleasure in the triumph, but at least Mariah glimpses the critique Lucy is wielding. Although she operates from a critical standpoint, Lucy's rejection of Mariah isn't total: for example,

⁵³ The irony, of course, is that critics of feminism often tout the "benefits" of being "the weaker sex," living large on the paternal kindness of the male members of society, as an argument against feminism's push for pay equity, equal representation within government, and so on. In speaking of just such beneficence with regard to European colonization, anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski noted that the "'European gift' is always highly selective. We never give, and never shall give native people living under our domination . . . the instruments of physical power [. . .] political mastery, [or] the main part of our wealth and our economic advantages" (quoted in Aime Cesaire's essay, "Culture and Colonisation").

she accepts the birth control and medical information as a progressive contrast to the herbs her own mother indirectly taught her to use as an abortion physic in an embarrassed conversation; she readily admits she loves Mariah, and recognizes that in some circumstances, Mariah is willing to put Lucy's needs before her own wishes, unlike her own mother. Nevertheless, Lucy uses her relationship with Mariah as a place from which to redirect herself towards a different feminist subjectivity, one that can account for the complexities of her situation as a Black, transnational domestic worker living among white privilege. Lucy recognizes that the emancipatory feminism Mariah represents provides tangible benefits, but produces no true liberation. Mariah's project of making Lucy into an echo of herself is no different from that of the British education system or the American assimilation imperative. When Lucy ends her employment with Mariah near the novel's end, Mariah drops the veil and claims the position of master to Lucy's role of servant. But the reader, through Lucy's eyes, already sees Mariah in this role as early as the end of Chapter Two. The chapter establishes second-wave feminism's imperialist tendencies, revealing its stale, reformatory nature by virtue of its colonizing praxis, and Kincaid moves to the next stage of her argument in Chapter Three, "The Tongue," in which she pits difference against sameness using the trope of environmental conservation.

Conserving an Imaginary Past

Ecocriticism, defined as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty xix), fully emerged as a critical school in 1996 with the publication of *The Ecocriticism Reader* and the inaugural issue of the academic journal,

Environmental History. *Lucy*'s 1991 publication date might not support an argument that Kincaid's novel is influenced by the early work of ecocritics, but her writing certainly demonstrates an interest in the same issues, what scholar Greg Garrard calls the "'green' moral and political agenda" (*Ecocriticism* 3) of ecocritical cultural analysis. This interest can be traced through several works, notably the novel *Annie John* (1985) and the non-fiction *A Small Place* (1988), but this section will focus on Kincaid's use of the pastoral in Chapter Three of *Lucy*, "The Tongue."

According to ecocritic Terry Gifford, there are three kinds of pastoral tropes in literature: 1) the classical, which denotes a journey from the city to the country, 2) the romantic, which employs a distinct contrast between the urban and the rural, and 3) what Garrard terms "the pejorative," which "implies an idealisation of rural life that obscures the realities of labour and hardship" (Garrard 33). All three draw upon "the idea of nature as a stable, enduring counterpoint to the disruptive energy and change of human societies" (56), and as such, invoke a kind of purity that offers respite from the chaos of humanity. Whereas ecocriticism generally uses this formulation as the basis of its analyses, I intend to argue that Kincaid's use of the pastoral challenges the formulation itself, in order to expose it as an attempt to ward off an ever-more diverse social world and the problems it poses to established power hierarchies. In doing so, I draw upon the scholarship of Michael Bennett, who argues that African American literature has created a tradition of anti-pastoralism. As Bennett points out in his reading of Frederick Douglass's autobiographies, the use of the rural as a retreat is race-specific, a primarily European literary tradition; in the reverse formulation, African Americans, from escaping slaves onward, historically have sought relief from racism by moving to urban centers.

Bennett contends that African American literature, which documents the hardships of rural life and the hideous race crimes its isolation can hide from the rest of the world, disputes “mainstream assumptions about the universal appeal of ‘unspoiled’ nature” (208). In *Lucy*, the characters’ conflicting ideas about the purpose and value of the pastoral advance Kincaid’s assertion that “purity,” even when seemingly innocuous, is a concept laden with the ideologies of colonialism.

“The Tongue” centers on Kincaid’s characters’ symbolic interactions with the natural world surrounding their vacation home. In Chapter Two, Lucy accompanies Mariah and her four daughters to Mariah’s childhood summer home in the Great Lakes; Lewis joins them there in Chapter Three. Their days are filled with treks through the woods to the beach, and the nights with parties among the set of wealthy families who annually vacation there. Mariah energetically takes on the task of preserving the local wetlands from destruction by overdevelopment, as more houses intrude upon her childhood paradise, while Lewis occupies himself with a vegetable garden. In harmony with this narrative of the characters’ encounters with the pastoral, another story weaves its way through the chapter. Recalled by free association with the events of her summer at the lake, Lucy’s memories of her own sexual history frame her dawning realization that Lewis is having an affair with Mariah’s best friend, Dinah, and Mariah is trying to “conserve” her marriage. In contrast, Lucy’s tales of her sexual adventures and rejection of emotional attachments show her craving for change and difference. Lucy embraces variety and heterogeneity; unlike Mariah, her own preferences are for departures from the known quantity, and the comparison between the two women strengthens the other main topic of the chapter, the political implications of the notion of purity, specifically as it is

grounded in Mariah's environmental politics. Lucy again is the mobile subject who continually embraces heterogeneity, while Mariah, Lewis, and their friends see the world in terms as generic and limited as their personalities.

To these two parallel narratives, Kincaid adds the question of truth: all along, Lucy has been positioned as a woman from a land of colorful myths and stories, while Mariah and Lewis are from a place of fact and concrete reality, the holders of knowledge and logic. Lucy relates that "[Mariah] thought fairy tales were a bad idea" (45), and that, whenever Lucy mentions something Lewis finds interesting, "he would ask me all sorts of questions and then later bring me books, books that I did not even know existed" (48). In a sense, Lucy seems to represent the pastoral to Mariah and Lewis, who think of "the islands" as a place of carefree relaxation in contrast to the demands of their urban life. Kincaid's language in this chapter undoes this positioning, so that the reader becomes increasingly aware of the mythologies that makes up Mariah and Lewis's world, and of the truth in Lucy's seemingly fable-like stories of Antigua. Lucy again acts as the anthropologist, observing her subjects in their natural habitat, quietly taking notes, revealing to the reader what has not even been revealed to her subjects themselves; in several scenes, she watches her employers seemingly without their knowledge, providing a running analysis of her "findings."

Like the scene in Chapter Two in which Lucy contemplates the idea of the world being round, this chapter challenges the reader's assumptions about whose truth, whose worldview, is the "right" one, so that the dominant hegemony (Mariah's conviction that her habitat needs to be preserved or Lewis's that it is his for the taking) is destabilized. Motion implies a changing landscape, and even though Mariah has been rooted to the

same spot since childhood, the landscape around her continues to transform, a phenomenon she fears. Mariah's environmental efforts are not in the name of radical change but rather in the name of maintaining an established order and remaining in the past. Conversely, Lucy understands that self-preservation is not synonymous with conservation but with mobility and change.

Mariah and Lewis represent two different kinds of American pastoral that both ultimately demonstrate latent colonial impulses. Mariah longs for a return to a "pure" past, unpolluted by change or progress: "She moaned against this vanishing idyll" (72). Her conservation efforts are shaped by nostalgia for a lost golden age that mimics an elegiac pastoral. The irony of Mariah's anti-development stance is clear to Lucy, who sees the global economic relationship between Mariah and Lewis's material comfort and the decline of the rest of the world's environment, but Mariah's mental myopia blinds her to this contradiction. As in Chapter Two when she tells Lucy she's "part Indian," she again positions herself as the native who is a victim of other people's actions without recognizing her own culpability. Lucy inwardly cheers when Mariah's daughter innocently asks her mother what was in the region before Mariah's own family home was built, forcing the contradiction that Mariah has chosen to ignore: Mariah's ancestors, too, were agents of change, grafting their vision of the world onto a place whose former inhabitants were equally helpless to stop the forces of unwanted progress.

Whereas Mariah's reaction to the landscape highlights the problematic racial elements of environmentalism, Lewis illustrates a masculine pastoral in which the passive, virginal land exists solely to be subdued by human beings, "the strange combination of eroticism and misogyny that has accompanied men's attitudes towards

landscape and nature for thousands of years” (Westling, quoted in Garrard 53); his garden and his war against invading rabbits represent the agrarian pastoral, in which man triumphs over nature for his own profit and pleasure, an encounter with the wilderness akin to the American puritanical tradition. Lucy, meanwhile, exhibits what Bennett calls the anti-pastoral – “I knew [stories] about walking through places where trees live, and none of them had a happy outcome” (Kincaid 55) – and refuses to take sides in what she sees as a debate (between Lewis and Mariah) that is already a sham, since the differences represent two sides of the same coin: an investment in the suspect concept of “purity.” The tropes of sameness and conservation play off one another, until what emerges by the chapter’s end is an appraisal of “purity” (which can be read on multiple levels: sexual, cultural, national, racial, and geographical/environmental, etc.) as a structural source of Lucy’s unhappiness.

Mariah engages in her conservation efforts when she and her wealthy friends “become upset by what seemed to them the destruction of the surrounding countryside” (71). Lucy’s negative reaction to their efforts is partly based on her distaste for Mariah and Lewis’s social set, who conceive of the world as two distinct parts, theirs and everyone else’s. When her employers’ friends tell her they have been to “the islands” as tourists as a way of engaging her in conversation about herself, she resents their lumping of myriad cultures and geographical spaces into one homogeneous Other. (She begins an affair with Dinah’s younger brother, Hugh, for the sole reason that he is the only one who specifically asks her which island she is from.) Upon meeting them, Lucy remembers the mail-order catalogs of her childhood; their photos of severed torsos modeling clothes had caused her to wonder about the faces missing from the photos. She is struck with the

recognition that these are the people the catalogs represent, “the example all the world should copy. They had names like Peters, Smith, Jones, and Richards – names that were easy on the tongue, names that made the world spin” (64). The Anglo names, attached to the memory of the catalog, “the example all the world should copy,” recalls Lucy’s forced colonial education, in which copying Wordsworth by memorizing his poem was more valuable than writing one of her own. Ironically, the people who congeal the infinite diversity of culture around the world into a single opposing difference from Western culture are themselves the undifferentiated: faceless, two-dimensional, interchangeable heroes of a narrative written by capitalism. And like a catalog, whose goal is to continually reproduce desire for its contents, these characters perpetuate their own sense of desirability: Dinah has all of the same riches Mariah has, and yet still greedily wants Mariah’s things; Lewis, in desiring Dinah, a woman very similar to Mariah, practices pointless accumulation for its own sake. Read in the context of her social group, Mariah’s determination to save her childhood summer home from the impending changes of developers and shifting demography appears to be aligned more with a nostalgia for a racial and class purity than with concern for the environment; her historical claim to the land, both through her “part Indian” blood and her family’s longstanding ownership of it, ironically repeat the arguments of colonized natives the world over without the actual class or race exploitation to support her complaint.

Lucy observes that she is glad to see Mariah and Lewis get “a small sip of their own bad medicine” (72), a reference to the destruction that wealthy Westerners have wrought upon other localities in the name of profit, but she cares enough about Mariah to keep from pointing out that “if all the things she wanted to save in the world were saved,

she might find herself in reduced circumstances” (73). This line can be read in two ways. Primarily, it suggests that the costs of environmental protection are the relative comfort and convenience that modern technology offers those who can afford its luxuries, and the loss of profit to transnational corporations who benefit in the short-term by ignoring the long-term effects of their exploitative environmental practices (strip-mining, clear-cutting, toxin-dumping, inefficient energy consumption, etc.). Lewis’s financial investments in the capitalist machine enable Mariah’s life of leisure: “I couldn’t bring myself to ask her to examine Lewis’s daily conversations with his stockbroker, to see if they bore any relation to the things she saw passing away forever before her eyes” (73). This machine, then, supports Mariah’s pleasant life even as it encroaches unpleasantly on her idyll.

Secondly, the comment foreshadows two immediately following scenes: the first reveals the unhappiness in her marriage to Lewis, and the second, Lewis’s affair with Dinah. Lucy’s commentary on Mariah’s conservation efforts is also a judgment against the American cultural norms of marriage and nuclear family, shown through Lucy’s employers to be institutions that quell difference and dissent as a condition of their own existence – what exactly is it that is being preserved? Lucy neither knows Lewis well nor wants to know him, and is resolutely loyal to Mariah as their marriage dismantles itself, but throughout the chapter, Mariah’s attempts to save her marriage seem, to Lucy, to be misdirected. While Lucy likes Lewis well enough as a person, she knows that “all men in general could not be trusted in certain areas” (80), and cites as proof her own father, the sire of approximately thirty children by a host of jilted lovers. Her earnest quest to free herself from relationships that limit her own mobility (literally and figuratively) tints her

view of Mariah's situation: "reduced circumstances" for Lucy means being restricted to a static set of options and occupying a disadvantaged position within any power relation.

Several moments wrest narrative authority away from Mariah and Lewis and interrupt the story they have constructed about their lives. Lucy's keen eye for phoniness spots the lie of the happy family image Mariah and Lewis have created through the photos scattered about their home. One day, Lucy watches as Lewis embraces Mariah: "[s]he sighed and shuddered in pleasure. The whole thing had an air of untruth about it; they didn't mean to do what they were doing at all. It was a show – not for anyone else's benefit, but a show for each other. And how did I know this? I just could tell" (47). As in Chapter One, when Lucy repositions the narrative to undermine her employers' authoritative position in the story, Lucy's analysis of her employers' marriage again puts her in the position of knowing, making them the subject of her anthropological research. Mariah tries to occupy a speaking position when she undertakes a book project about the vanishing countryside, but Lucy quickly deflates the attempt: "all of the members of this organization [for which Mariah writes the book] were well off but they made no connection between their comforts and the decline of the world that lay before them. I could have told them a thing or two about it" (72). Her colonial experience makes her a more qualified speaker, even though the book is about the land Mariah grew up on, just as her position as outsider enables her to see past the façade of her employers' marriage. The chapter's two intertwined stories – the pastoral encounter and the crumbling relationship – both afford Lucy the opportunity to undermine the secondary characters' positions as purveyors of truth and knowledge.

One day, as Lucy gazes at Mariah, standing in shadows, she describes the image as Mariah's youngest daughter might see it – a vision of “her beautiful golden mother” – and then rewrites it as Mariah appears to Lucy in that moment: “what I saw was a hollow old woman, . . . her mouth collapsed as if all the muscles had been removed” (46). Lucy's description symbolically renders Mariah empty of substance (“hollow”), with nothing to say and no facility for saying it (“her mouth collapsed”). Of Lewis, she notes: “What was nice about Lewis was that . . . he didn't draw attention to anything about him” (48); although he is characterized as a well-read, wealthy, attractive father of four – practically the definition of Western bourgeois success – his best trait, for Lucy, is his invisibility, a peculiar statement that supports Lucy's narrative authority. Whereas the reader might assume Lewis to be exactly the kind of man that draws attention, he proves incapable of capturing Lucy's, thus putting her in the power position of the subject who decides what is worth looking at.

Later in the chapter, when Lewis kills the mother of a family of rabbits that Mariah has befriended, she accuses him of intentional violence against the animal Lewis thinks has been eating his vegetable plants; the two erupt in a loud argument – Mariah feels Lewis should show remorse, whereas Lewis views his triumph over the rabbit as the inevitable order of things – but they quickly silence their disagreement and bury the rabbit in a ceremony they perform for the children's benefit. For Lucy, the ceremony is “another one of those untruths that I had only just begun to see as universal to life with mother, father, and some children” (77). She subverts Mariah and Lewis's attempts to build an artificial peace by telling the reader what the family photo albums try to hide; the quote is significant because of her assertion that, rather than the universal truths her

employers believe in, she proposes the idea of universal **untruths**, a theme Kincaid carries throughout the chapter.

In addition to disclosing the parts of the story Mariah and Lewis try to hide, Lucy combats the verisimilitude of their perspective with a continuous flow of contradictory opinions that suggest Mariah and Lewis do not, after all, accurately reflect the world as most people see it. For example, while Mariah makes it clear that there is no other place to be in the summer but at the lake, Lucy longs to return to the city. She watches the seasons change, and observes that, with the arrival of summer, “It was as if the earth were a character with many different personalities” (52). This observation recalls her comment in chapter two, comparing Mariah’s view of the world as round to Lucy’s own conviction that it is flat with dangerous edges. As Mariah becomes increasingly fixated on preserving the world as she wants to see it, Lucy’s capacity to see a multiplicity of world views continues to grow. The changing seasons themselves seem to concur with her desire for uninhibited motion. Lucy says good-bye to the summer home a full month before the family’s departure, because she is determined not to wax nostalgic over place as Mariah does. She treats the land like another lover to be abandoned, used for a moment’s experience and then forgotten.

In contrast to Mariah, who seeks respite from a changing world through her efforts to hold her marriage together and to make her children into her image, family life and relationships for Lucy are not a haven but the source of an exhausting ennui; Lucy eschews familiarity and sameness in favor of the experience of difference, and she peppers her story with such references. Her friendship with Peggy, for example, is based on the fact that they have nothing in common: “The funny thing was that Peggy and I

were not alike, . . . but that is just what we liked about each other” (61). If rejection of sameness colors Lucy’s decisions in friendship, then a rejection of monogamy and commitment tints her sexual history. Her own encounters with romantic love in this chapter are stories of willful abandonment – she begins with Tanner, the first boy she ever kissed, and continues relating a series of experiences in which she sets the dynamic and is the first to say good-bye: a boy from her church, a school chum in Antigua, her friend, Peggy, Dinah’s brother, Hugh. The chapter ends with her saying good-bye to Hugh, “my arms and legs wrapped tightly around him, my tongue in his mouth, thinking of all the people I had held in this way” (83). The imagery aptly describes Lucy’s approach to relationships: what she describes as a tight embrace resembles an offensive defense that effectively prevents her own subjugation; her tongue, engaged in a seductive kiss, silences the other person’s voice, perhaps even speaking for him or her, as in Chapter Two, when she translates Mariah’s garbled word as “minions,” not “millions.” Although the visual image might make Lucy appear to be clinging on, Kincaid’s double-entendre suggests that “all the people [Lucy has] held in this way” have not been held in embrace so much as held in check in order to prevent the interruption of her own movements. Mariah’s desire to save the ground on which she stands, both literally (the countryside) and figuratively (her marriage) belies a territoriality that Lucy dismisses as counter-productive to her self-development.

While Mariah tries to save the land and her family, Lucy’s relationship to both is ambiguous. She dislikes the forest and associates it with unpleasant memories of home:

I hated walking through the woods; it was gloomy and damp, for the sun could hardly shine through the tops of the trees. Without wanting to, I would imagine that there was someone or something where there was nothing. I was reminded of home. I was reminded that I came from a place where there was no

such thing as a 'real' thing, because often what seemed to be one thing turned out to be altogether different. (54)

She follows these comments with a story about her mother's childhood, in which her mother throws stones at a monkey in the forest, missing every time, until one day the monkey throws the stone back at her:

When the stone struck my mother, the blood poured out of her as if she were not a human being but a goblet with no bottom to it. Everyone thought that she might not stop bleeding until she died, and then that it was a miracle she survived, though the truth lay in her mother's skill in dealing with such events. (54-55)

With this story as background, Lucy's complaint about the forest takes on multiple meanings, resisting Mariah's versions of the wilderness and of family, each an example of something that "seemed to be one thing but turned out to be altogether different."

While the other characters seem blind to such complexity – they insist on the beauty of nature, the fun of "the islands," the undisputed happiness of their family – Lucy challenges these grand narratives. She counters the peace and harmony that supposedly characterize the pastoral setting of a summer at the lake with associations of discord and hostility that play out in the remaining pages of "The Tongue," as her employers' marriage violently falls apart and Lewis kills the rabbit. For example, the monkey story defies Mariah's belief that the violence of human beings' impositions upon nature is the only violence in the wilderness. Nature fights back in the monkey's revenge against Lucy's mother's stone-throwing, suggesting the impossibility of complete human domination over nature and offering an alternative to the more typical story of Lewis's triumph over the rabbit later in the chapter; thus, a story that seems to be about humankind's subjection of nature "turn[s] out to be altogether different." The irony, of course, is that Lucy unveils several such false truths in "The Tongue," mainly pertaining

to her employers' lives. As Lucy alone grasps, Mariah and Lewis also come from a place where "there is no such thing as a 'real' thing," but they steadfastly refuse to see this. Mariah's idealization of the forests and marshlands of the Great Lakes corresponds to her wealthy friends' idealization of "the islands," and Lucy rejects both as willfully naïve attempts to ignore the brutal realities of each. Lucy hates the forest because "it remind[s] her of home." Lucy's antipathy to reminders of home stems in part from the misinterpretation of Antigua as a romanticized retreat for Westerners from their cosmopolitan cares: "somehow it made me ashamed to come from a place where the only thing to be said about it was 'I had fun when I was there'" (65). The poverty and hardship of daily life on the island that she remembers throughout the novel, coupled with the restraints placed on Lucy by her family, make Antigua a place of strife and limited freedom, rather than an escape destination, and she resents the attempt to rewrite Antigua without the input of its people.

Her conception of family also contradicts Mariah's: whereas Mariah strives to create the air of pure domestic bliss by fawning over her daughters and stocking their home with pictorial evidence of her brood's happiness, Lucy's mother figures in an autobiographical story in which she is both villain and heroine, at once the unprovoked bully and the object of a miracle. Lucy rejects the possibility of divine intervention on her mother's behalf ("the truth lay in her mother's skill in dealing with such events"). In doing so, she reminds the reader that there is more than one way to interpret an event and resists the characterization of the mother figure as a protagonist, another evocation of Lucy's desire to break away from the restraints of family.

In using Lucy's aversion to the forest to suggest alternatives to Mariah and Lewis's dominant outlook, Kincaid uncannily channels a scene from Frederick Douglass's *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), in which the young Douglass recalls his fear of traveling through the woods:

[My grandmother] often found me increasing the energy of my grip, and holding her clothing, lest something should come out of the woods and eat me up. Several old logs and stumps imposed upon me, and got themselves taken for wild beasts. I could see their legs, eyes, and ears, or I could see something like eyes, legs, and ears, till I got close enough to them to see that the eyes were knots, washed white with rain, and the legs were broken limbs, and the ears, only ears owing to the point from which they were seen. Thus early I learned that the point from which a thing is viewed is of some importance. (47)

Lucy's recognition that "often what seemed to be one thing turned out to be altogether different" echoes Douglass's description of the beasts that turned out to be tree stumps; like Douglass, Lucy embraces the importance of acknowledging the multiplicity of viewpoints, a lesson her employers have not yet learned.

Michael Bennett, in reading Douglass as a prime example of the African American anti-pastoral, does not cite this passage from *My Bondage*, but I think it's crucial for contextualizing the value of his argument that Black literature challenges "mainstream assumptions about the universal appeal of 'unspoiled' nature" (Bennett 208). In fact, the Douglass passage above challenges the very conception of universality with its understanding of shifting subject positions' relationship to what is "real." While Douglass may fear the woods, his imagination's dynamic interaction with it teaches him to engage in a practice of fluid interpretation, understanding that the slightest shift in position can yield new information and conclusions. Likewise, Lucy admits that her fear of the woods makes her strike up conversation with herself or the children every time she enters it, but eventually she begins to see "that there was something beautiful about it;

and I had one more thing to add to my expanding world” (Kincaid 55). Such moments as Douglass’s and Lucy’s instruct the reader not through a total rejection of the pastoral but through their metaphorical practice of imagining the wilderness in order to comment on an interpretative strategy of multiplicity. Lucy and Douglass encounter landscapes that respond to their own perceptions of it, thus calling for further engagement and interpretation. There is room in these passages for truth *and* untruth, as well as for uncertainty about which is which.

Let’s return to Garrard’s statement several pages back that nature represents a “stable, enduring counterpoint to the disruptive energy and change of human societies” (56). While for Bennett the pastoral recalls the terrible history of slavery, and for Kincaid, it is a reminder of the hardship and poverty imposed by colonization’s aftermath, the observations of young Frederick Douglass and Lucy (Kincaid’s fictionalized portrait of herself as a young woman) nevertheless suggest that the real value of their anti-pastoral expressions lies in opening up the field (so to speak) of analysis. In other words, rethinking nature as an **unstable** ground rather than as an authentic-but-eroding phenomenon, as Mariah would have it, undermines the notion of purity by refuting the idea that nature, or a nature, or “the natural,” has any essential, universal identity; instead, “the point from which [it] is viewed” establishes an identity that is as fluid as its viewers. Truth itself, as Lucy argues throughout Chapter Three, is never pure but multiple and complex, a ground that is always changing and that, like Douglass’s trees, often appears to be one thing but turns out to be quite another. Lucy’s contrarian position opens the door to other perspectives and decenters Mariah and Lewis’s truisms; Kincaid successfully leads the reader to consider whose views get

voiced and whose truth is accepted as the “real” truth, paving the way for Chapter Four, in which, I contend, Lucy metamorphoses into an interdisciplinary subject, embracing the language of both critic and artist.

Kincaid’s Gauguin

If Chapter Three concentrates on Lucy-as-anthropologist, deconstructing the lives and hypocrisies of those around her, then Chapter Four, “Cold Heart,” turns instead to Lucy-as-artist, creating spaces for herself to grow (and escape). In critical essays on *Lucy*, much ink has been devoted to the British colonial connection that Kincaid elucidates through her reference in the second chapter to William Wordsworth’s poem, “Daffodils,” but little attention has been paid to the other ghost-of-colonialism and lover-of-things-yellow who appears in the text, the French painter, Paul Gauguin. In this section, I will demonstrate how Gauguin’s brief role in *Lucy*, perhaps more so than Wordsworth’s, sheds light on Kincaid’s textual practices of outing “purity” as a deeply-rooted seed in American culture and using her protagonist to interrogate its conceits. In “Cold Heart,” Lucy’s encounter with a Gauguin exhibit, followed by her friendship with a group of struggling young artists, encourages her own creative expression. Up to this point, she has been chiefly occupied with developing social critiques of her new environment that strike at the complacent assumptions of the secondary characters; in “Cold Heart,” Lucy begins to see the world as something whose creation she may partake in, rather than as a completed project that may be resented but never altered. She contemplates art’s potential to imagine difference and grasps that it is not enough to merely observe and critique, but that her liberation depends upon her ability to paint new

visions of the world and of herself; her observations about her new artist friends, however, remind her that such liberation is a politically-loaded phenomenon whose achievement is largely dependent on one's perspective. In other words, what appears liberating from one standpoint may look altogether different from another.

My main focus here will be on Kincaid's use of the color yellow, which signifies heavily in the novel's earlier scenes describing Lucy's new surroundings: her employers, their children, Mariah's favorite flowers, the light of the weak winter sun, their home's interior, the cornmeal path down which Lewis chases Lucy in a dream. Yellow's dominant presence in Lucy's experience of the U.S. signifies once again the notion of purity that is critiqued throughout the novel. Kincaid plays on the color's ubiquity in Mariah and Lewis's life to simultaneously "other" these representatives of bourgeois American cultural hegemony (by recognizing them as all the same – i.e., not like Lucy with her dark skin and kaleidoscopically colorful culture) and depict them as a homogenizing force that threatens Lucy's identity. Lucy's encounter with Gauguin endows Kincaid's repetitive use of the descriptor "yellow" with subtle satire, recalling the omnipresent gold and ochre tones in Gauguin's characterizations of the indigenous Tahitians. Kincaid's borrowing of Gauguin's palette may cause some readers to remember the African American poet Audre Lorde's caution that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house," but I would counter that Lucy, in this chapter, becomes fully cognizant of another tenet, attributed to Mahatma Gandhi but often quoted by Lorde: "We must be the change we wish to see in the world." Lucy's burgeoning self-expression supports this claim, and Gauguin's specter in the novel, first as an iconic example of colonial-era avant-gardism, followed by his modern-day incarnation as an

artist named Paul, complements Lucy's metamorphosis by exemplifying what she chooses to accept and to reject of the American countercultural Left's vision, tainted as it is by Western imperialist ideology.

A close reading of some key moments in Gauguin's writings and paintings will illuminate the buried connections that link Lucy to him. I contend that Kincaid's brief reference to his legacy anchors many indirect references to him within the text; the parallels between his thoughts and Lucy's ultimately underscore Kincaid's development of her protagonist. Kincaid suggests the yellow color that dominates each one's vision of their adopted land exists not in Tahiti for Gauguin or in the U.S. for Lucy, but in the mind of the artist – whether Gauguin or Lucy. Gauguin painted his own politics onto Tahiti when he used the island as a weapon against the European bourgeois society that rejected him, never really questioning his own relationship to Tahiti. He assumed he was superior to the Tahitians even as he was touting them as superior to the Europeans; Gauguin's Tahiti is awash only in the gold he pours onto it through his own orientalizing vision. In linking Lucy to Gauguin and using his favorite color to describe Lucy's American employers, Kincaid throws the color back onto the West as a pale yellow, an indirect castigation of the cultural colonizing Lucy struggles against throughout the novel. Kincaid suggests that Gauguin painted his own mistaken assumptions onto every canvas, helping to render a world that, decades after his death, is still awash in the uniform tincture of Western assumptions about the non-Western world. In contrast, Lucy tries to infuse her narrative with as much color as she can, especially when remembering Antigua. The text's color scheme is a deliberate reversal of the monotony of Gauguin's yellow: in *Lucy*, the monotony occurs in the Western eye's insistence on seeing all non-

Western people and places in the same tones – the monolithic Other. Having recognized this habit in Mariah’s feminism and environmentalism, she now sees it in her community of artist friends, especially Paul, and tempers her appreciation for their rejection of middle-class values by rejecting their latent tendency to homogenize “the Other,” even as she pledges to always “be with the people who stand apart” (98).

“Cold Heart” begins with a cold October day, as Lucy reflects on the boredom and despair that have plagued her in both Antigua and the U.S. The arrival of her friend, Peggy (whose indifference to art and literature Lucy is just beginning to notice and dislike), prompts several following scenes. They attend a party at which Lucy meets Paul, the artist with whom she begins an affair that night. At the party, the sight of Paul’s hands fishing for an earring in a fish tank reminds her of a story of a girl back home, who confessed to Lucy that she had been molested by a local fisherman in return for a few coins. Lucy remembers her own reaction to the story: she is jealous that Myrna, and not she, has had such an amazing experience. Lucy’s new relationship with Paul strains her friendship with Peggy, but the two women decide to move in together to attain more freedom, Peggy from her parents and Lucy from her employers. Mariah and Lewis’s relationship finally ruptures, making the atmosphere in their apartment tense. Although Lucy’s own relationship with Paul is sexually enjoyable, she does not love him, and as if to reaffirm to herself her freedom from commitment, she has a one-night stand with the salesman she meets at the camera store. It is in this chapter that Lucy takes up photography. The death of Lewis and Mariah’s marriage is followed by the death of Lucy’s father, announced by the visit of a woman from her village who is also in New York. Lucy reminisces about her father, and finally the cause of her anger towards her

family is revealed: Lucy's mother's devotion, first to her husband and then to Lucy's younger brothers, breaks Lucy's heart, especially when it becomes clear that Lucy's mother's expectations for her only daughter are painfully limited simply because she is a girl.

[W]hen I saw her eyes fill up with tears at the thought of how proud she would be at some deed her sons had accomplished, I felt a sword go through my heart, for there was no accompanying scenario in which she saw me, her only identical offspring, in a remotely similar situation. To myself I then began to call her Mrs. Judas. (130)

Lucy's heartbreak over her mother's failure to imagine beautiful pictures ("scenarios") of her daughter, coupled with the suggestive name "Mrs. Judas," which carries an unspoken allusion to Lucy's Christ-like betrayal by her mother, reinforces the chapter's dominant theme: Lucy's awakening to her potential as a creative visionary.

As the chapter opens, Lucy is first surveying her own unhappiness, caused, she feels sure, by too much sameness and by possessing too little material security. But when her hosts depart for a family outing, she recognizes in their fake happiness that she "was looking at ruins, and [she] knew it right then" (88). It is her first real encounter with the idea that having too much could cause unhappiness: "To me it was a laugh and a relief. . . I had been so used to observing the results of too little" (87). The moment liberates her – cognizant now that both the dominant and the subjugated can suffer in the same system, she is able to reassert her desire to abandon the structure in whatever ways she can, noting her plans to "make [her] own quick exit" (88) before "the actual fall of this Rome," Mariah and Lewis's marriage. (Note the characterization of their marriage to an empire.) The urgency of this escape presses upon Lucy; after three seasons in the U.S., she knows the things she most despises, sameness, routine, low expectations,

unhappiness, have followed her across the ocean: “As each day unfolded before me, I could see the sameness in everything; I could see the present take a shape – the shape of my past” (90). Lucy is discovering that a total escape from the structures that govern her life may not be possible, but that by continually changing her relationship to or position within them, she might gain a partial liberation. The happy fantasy she describes on the first page of the novel, of leaving and entering places over and over again (3), returns in this chapter as a method of creating some sort of freedom from externally imposed restrictions.

A few pages after Lucy admits that her present is a reconstitution of her past, she recounts her introduction to the paintings of Paul Gauguin, to whose work Mariah has introduced her. Lucy connects with Gauguin in a way Mariah does not necessarily anticipate, but as the chapter moves forward, it becomes clear to the reader that this connection is forged through the colonial past’s hold over the present; Lucy and Gauguin are linked through the colonizer/colonized relationship that shaped his life as much as it has influenced hers:

[S]he had wanted me to see paintings by a . . . French man, who had gone halfway across the world to live and had painted pictures of the people he found living there. He had been a banker living a comfortable life with his wife and children, but that did not make him happy; eventually he left them and went to the opposite part of the world, where he was happier. I do not know if Mariah meant me to, but immediately I identified with the yearnings of this man; I understood finding the place you are born in an unbearable prison and wanting something completely different from what you are familiar with, knowing it represents a haven. (95)

Lucy empathizes with Gauguin’s desire to create a new life for himself, but she recognizes her own limitations, imposed on her by the exigencies of class, gender, and racial and national origins: “He was shown to be a man rebelling against an established

order he had found corrupt; . . . he had the perfume of a hero around him. I was not a man; I was a young woman from the fringes of the world, and when I left home I had wrapped around my shoulders the mantle of a servant” (95). In spite of these differences, Gauguin and Lucy share key similarities. She, too, is rebelling against the established order, reacting to the injustice of her mother’s betrayal and the stifling limitations imposed upon her by her family and culture in Antigua.

Lucy thinks of Gauguin as a well-heeled hero, but contrary to the legend that surrounds Gauguin’s trips to Tahiti, the island Lucy calls “the opposite part of the world,” more historically accurate accounts demonstrate that his flight was a desperate attempt to make something of himself in the Paris art world. In one of the many biographies on Gauguin, art historian Nancy Mowll Mathews explains:

By the end of the year [1890], he was like a ‘cornered dog’ – harrying friends, proposing new schemes – until finally he developed the right strategy to capture the attention of the Paris art market. He would, he proclaimed in the newspapers, sell off his remaining art at auction so that he might sail to the romantic isle of Tahiti, made famous by one of the most popular novels of the day, *The Marriage of Loti* (1880), and let the Paris public see in pictures what Pierre Loti had described in mere words. It was a desperate measure, taken by an artist who was scrambling to reverse a series of misfortunes, but it worked: on April 7, 1891, Paul Gauguin found himself on the dock in Marseilles, boarding a ship, alone, headed for the end of the earth. (145)

If Gauguin truly had any of the “perfume of a hero” about him, it was only because in the months leading up to his departure⁵⁴ he worked tirelessly to dramatize his plans through newspaper articles, dinners, and exhibits, creating a legend that exists to this day in popular perceptions of his life and work; in her biography of Gauguin, art historian Belinda Thomson insists his efforts had far-reaching effects on Western culture, arguing that his “flight from European civilization . . . did much to fuel the myth of the artist as

⁵⁴ Gauguin took two trips to Tahiti in his lifetime; the first lasted two years, 1891-1893, and the second, eight years, from 1895 until his death in 1903.

tortured soul, destined to be misunderstood and to live outside the bounds of civilized society” (*Gauguin* 7). But in both a material and emotional sense, his reality at that time resembled Lucy’s more than she knows: poor, with few real friends, eager to make something of himself in spite of his family’s doubts in his ability.

Kincaid’s choice of Gauguin as a reference is more than a passing comment on Lucy’s growing interest in art; her thoughts on the artist are documented in a brief reference to Gauguin that appeared in Allen Vorda’s 1996 interview with Kincaid, published in *The Mississippi Review*, which is worth quoting at length in order to contextualize Gauguin’s guest appearance in *Lucy*:

AV: Lucy identifies with the French painter Gauguin, who found his homeland to be a prison and wanted something different. Essentially, Lucy and Gauguin are much alike even though Gauguin escaped to the islands while Lucy left the islands. Do you feel much in common with Gauguin, whose painting *Poems Barbares* was used for the cover of *Lucy*?

JK: I hesitate to say I identify with this man. I must say as I was writing parts of *Lucy* I was reading one of his journals called *The Intimate Journals of Paul Gauguin*. I found it a great comfort. He was very selfish and very determined, yet there are two things that struck me in that book. His account of his friendship with van Gogh is the most hilarious yet cruel thing I’ve ever read. I never have laughed so much. He describes van Gogh cutting off his ear and you are just aghast because it’s all very astonishing. The second thing was when he asked Strindberg to write an introduction to one of his shows.⁵⁵ Strindberg wrote back a very long letter saying he could not do it because he disliked Gauguin’s work. So Gauguin used the letter as the introduction even though the letter stated what was bad about his paintings. Gauguin wasn’t afraid to use someone’s negative view of his work. He wore it as a badge. I rather admire that. So I think the criticism I most value comes from people who do not like my writing. There’s almost nothing to make you feel more superior, as the people who don’t like you. (<http://www.mississippireview.com/1996/kincaid.html>)

Kincaid’s reference to Gauguin’s journals, coupled with a close analysis of the chapter in which he appears, offers substantial insight into the development of the story’s themes

⁵⁵ Gauguin actually asked Strindberg to write an introduction to his catalogue: “You have set your heart on having the preface to your catalogue written by me, in memory of the winter of 1894-95 when we lived here behind the Institute, not far from the Pantheon and quite close to the cemetery of Montparnasse” (August Strindberg, from a letter printed in *Paul Gauguin’s Intimate Journals*, 45).

and symbolic devices. *Lucy* encases Kincaid's strident commentary on Western imperialist practices, and Gauguin's life and work are among the most blatant examples of imperialism's role in Western artistic tradition. Edward Said offers a succinct definition of this role when he anatomizes Orientalism:

The interchange between the academic and the more or less imaginative meanings of Orientalism is a constant one, and since the late eighteenth century there has been a considerable, quite disciplined – perhaps even regulated – traffic between the two . . . Taking the eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient---dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. (*Orientalism* 3)

One vehicle for this authority is fine art, and Gauguin's desire to be the authority on Tahiti, to construct the definitive vision of it for his audience back home, offers an applied example of Said's argument. In fact, Said includes Pierre Loti, the author whose literary interpretation of Tahiti inspired Gauguin to make his own career out of capturing the island on canvas, among his partial list of nineteenth-century authors who exemplify the orientalist tradition as Said defines it (99, 252). Gauguin's work in Tahiti was an open reproduction of the South Pacific as Loti described it. In choosing Tahiti, Gauguin not only walked in Loti's footsteps, but also rode on the coattails of the French government, which at that time was seeking French nationals to populate its colonial outposts in Polynesia; he received a discounted boat fare from the French government for his trip there, as well as its unofficial promise to buy one of the completed paintings (Mathews 163). Quite literally, then, Gauguin's Tahitian explorations were part of the larger colonial system.

By introducing Lucy to Gauguin, Kincaid allows her character to confront a legendary representative of Western imperialism, first through his work, and then through his contemporary likeness in the character of Paul, the artist with whom she begins an affair in Chapter Four. The outcome of this encounter is the novel's third and final demonstration of the ways that assumedly radical socio-political communities – feminism, environmentalism, and now, the artist-intellectual vanguard – are corroded by Western imperialist values and yet, for Kincaid, can still yield useful practices for the subject who is able to draw upon them selectively.

There is also a more explicit connection between Gauguin and *Lucy*: the Frenchman is known for his use of primary colors, especially yellow, in his works; comparing his use of the color alongside Kincaid's own use of yellow as a signifier in *Lucy* elucidates her careful appraisal of the Western bohemian avant-garde; its rejection of dominant bourgeois social values may superficially appear to be politically enlightened, but Kincaid breaks down this idea and reveals the limitations of a bohemian approach to the concept of mobility. Lucy's encounter with this group is emphatically *not* the answer to the kind of liberating mobility she seeks, but it does provide a working model, whose flaws are expressed primarily through Kincaid's skillful plays on the color yellow, a subtle engagement with Gauguin and the ideologies his paintings reproduce.

A brief background sketch of Gauguin is helpful for understanding his artwork and Kincaid's response to it. Born in 1848 to a Peruvian-French mother, who held a position in the Parisian community of wealthy and influential South American expatriates, Gauguin was raised with a consciousness of his "exotic" ancestry.⁵⁶ (His

⁵⁶ Gauguin's "exotic" ancestry recalls the wealthy Mariah's own fascination and pride in her native American ancestry; as Lucy observes, "Mariah says, 'I have Indian blood in me,' and underneath

French father died while Gauguin was an infant.) His grandfather, Andre Chazal, was an artist and printmaker, and his grandmother, Flora Tristan, a famed writer and social reformer (Mathews 5-6). From these beginnings, Gauguin eventually sculpted his own public image as an avant-garde, philosophically jaded, “civilized savage” (Andersen xi), at odds with the restrictions of bourgeois European society. A lazy student, Gauguin began his career as an apprenticed merchant seaman before doing compulsory service in the French navy and eventually finding a job in the stock market (Mathews 14-17). He married Mette Gad, a Danish woman, in 1873 (26), and after twelve years of marriage, left her and their five children in Copenhagen to pursue a full-time painting career in Paris (62). As a stockbroker, he had become interested in art dealing, which led him to form a friendship with Camille Pissarro, and through him, other Impressionist artists, such as Edward Degas and Mary Cassatt. He moved through artistic trends and communities, from Impressionism (Crepaldi 18-36) to Synthetism/Cloisonnism (40-41) and, ultimately, to Symbolism (56-59), the school with which his name is generally associated. Symbolism, the artistic predecessor of Surrealism, rejected the rigidity of Naturalism, preferring instead abstract images, unnatural colors, and distorted shapes; Symbolist art drew “exclusively from the imagination so that forms and colors could convey a rich symbolic significance beyond simple description or narrative” (Mathews 106-108), and “its influence was felt [in art and literature] until the early 1990s” (Crepaldi 58).

The years Gauguin spent developing Synthetism and then later, working in the Symbolist mode (a term coined in the late twentieth century to define a unifying set of

everything I could swear she says it as if she were announcing her possession of a trophy” (40). Gauguin also used his Peruvian roots to try to curry favor among those whom he thought it would impress.

characteristics among several related schools of art [Crepaldi 56]), produced the brilliantly colored paintings for which he is remembered. Gauguin's paintings, writings, and biography demonstrate his attachment to yellow as a symbolic color. Art historian Mathews titles a chapter in her biography of Gauguin, "The Sun God," and indeed Gauguin did his best to create a godlike aura around his reputation, most often represented by the color yellow as a symbol of divinity or unearthliness. Most famously, he reflected on his own wrongful persecution by the Parisian art world in a painting entitled *Self Portrait with Yellow Christ*, (1889), a piece following an earlier one in the same year entitled simply *Yellow Christ*, in which a bright yellow figure hangs crucified. Lucy's identification of her mother as Mrs. Judas may be Kincaid's oblique reference to Gauguin's own feelings of being betrayed by his family and the French art community, a feeling Lucy and he share.

The two *Yellow Christ* paintings are commentaries on Gauguin's spirituality as well, linking him with the mystic and other-worldly elements that Symbolism prized above naturalism and material reality. However, yellow paint represents not just otherworldliness but an Other world; his diaries refer to the beautiful gold and yellow tones of the Tahitian land and people:

Everything in the landscape blinded me, dazzled me. Coming from Europe, I was constantly uncertain of some colour [and kept] beating about the bush: and yet it was so simple to put naturally onto my canvas a red and a blue. In the brooks, forms of gold enchanted me – Why did I hesitate to pour that gold and all that rejoicing of the sunshine on to my canvas? Old habits from Europe, probably, -- all this timidity of expression [characteristic] of our bastardized races--- (Gauguin *Noa Noa* 20)

Gauguin thus uses color to create a binary between East and West that figures prominently throughout his work. This same golden color marks his vision of

Teha'amana, the thirteen-year-old girl he took for his bride on his first trip to Tahiti: "Through her excessively transparent dress of pink muslin the golden skin of her shoulders and arms could be seen . . . In the sunshine an orgy of chrome yellows" (Wadley 33). He contrasts her beauty to the dingy form of European women when he sees Teha'amana standing next to a Frenchwoman: "[D]ecrepitude was staring at the new flowering . . . And against that so blue sky I saw with grief this dirty cloud of smoke. I felt ashamed of my race, and my eyes turned away from that mud – quickly I forgot it – to gaze upon this gold which already I loved – I remember that" (35). For Gauguin, steeped in the artistic imperative to imagine the world through color and form, the bright yellow of the tropical sun became the associative symbol for all that he embraced about Tahiti, which in turn was a direct rejection of all things Western.

Yellow, or gold, was for him the symbolic evocation of preciousness, and he spent his adult years trying to create an alternative value system to the one he had known all his life: money, manners, names, influence . . . the "mud" or earthly materialism that looked cheaply pallid in the blinding glory of the Tahiti of his imagination. He deliberately constructed a vision of this new world in opposition to the one he rejected and assigned it a value he needed to believe it possessed in order to justify his own life choices, not unlike Lucy's own fantasy of the U.S., which gives way to the "disappointment of reality" (Kincaid 4). At the same time, Gauguin's self-portraiture in paintings like *Self Portrait with Yellow Christ* and his self-identification as avant-garde for using such a bold tone in such a bold manner, e.g., painting skin that color, allied himself with the Tahitians and with the "gold" standard. By painting himself with the

same tones he used to paint the Tahitians, he marked his own subjectivity as closer to that of the Tahitians than to the Europeans.

His obsession with the color yellow did not go unnoticed by his peers. Gauguin writes about his effect on his friend, Vincent van Gogh, claiming for himself the “task of enlightening [van Gogh].” He influenced van Gogh’s famous *Sunflowers*; van Gogh’s prominent use of the color yellow is attributed by Mathews, in *Paul Gauguin: An Erotic Life*, to be van Gogh’s paean of admiration to his friend and teacher, whose own work with the effects of sun seem to have inspired van Gogh’s consideration of light and shadow. Mathews’s claim is borne out by Gauguin’s own words: in his journal, published posthumously by his son under the title *Intimate Journals*, he writes that van Gogh’s use of yellow paint is confirmation of Gauguin’s own original ideas about painting. He adds that another artist, upon seeing van Gogh’s use of yellow in his series of sunflower paintings, cried, “*Marde! Marde!* Everything is yellow! I don’t know what painting is any longer!” (Gauguin *Intimate Journals* 32-33). Gauguin took delight in such negative comments, using them as confirmation that his ideas were revolutionary and therefore bound to be misunderstood by the average European.

In a letter to Gauguin, writer August Strindberg accused the artist of being always “fortified especially by the hatred of others, your personality delights in the antipathy it arouses, anxious as it is to keep its own integrity” (*Intimate* 42-46). There are shades of Lucy in this image of Gauguin; Kincaid’s protagonist also takes enjoyment from knowing others do not like her, to the extent that she wants “to have a powerful odor and would not care if it gave offense” (27).⁵⁷ Strindberg’s letter continues: “He is Gauguin, the

⁵⁷ This comment, coupled with Lucy’s description of Gauguin as having the “perfume of the hero about him” (95), acts as yet another link between the fictitious young girl and the legendary artist: *Noa Noa*, the

savage, who hates a whimpering civilization, a sort of Titan who, jealous of the Creator, makes in his leisure hours his own little creation” (46). Strindberg’s observation strikes a chord with the reader of *Lucy*, recalling that character’s creation of a perfect U.S. for her audience back home:

I wrote home to say how lovely everything was, and I used flourishing words and phrases, as if I were living life in a greeting card---the kind that has a satin ribbon on it, and quilted hearts and roses, and is expected to be so precious to the person receiving it that the manufacturer has placed a leaf of plastic on the front to protect it. (11)

Although Lucy herself cites the unlikeliness of her chosen role model, beneath their material differences of gender, race, class, and national origin, the two share a core philosophy: both Gauguin and Lucy feel the imperfections of their respective realities and try to displace those realities with their own vision. A key link between Gauguin’s work and Kincaid’s point is that Gauguin’s Tahiti is just that: **his** Tahiti, not some objective account of the island and its people as they were in the late nineteenth century. Besides suggesting that Gauguin failed in his efforts to bring the Parisian public an accurate pictorial chronicle of Loti’s textual narrative of Tahiti, acknowledging Gauguin’s subjective agenda clarifies his role in *Lucy* as a model for creative revaluation as a methodology for changing one’s relationship to institutional structures. Mariah may not have intended Lucy to identify with Gauguin, but the artist’s personality and vision seem to be the inspiration for Kincaid’s character.

title of Gauguin’s travelogue of his first two years in Tahiti, is a Polynesian word meaning “fragrant.” Gauguin explained the title thus: “In other words the book will be about what Tahiti exhales” (quoted in Wadley 141). Throughout *Lucy*, smell acts as a powerful agent of memory, and her observation that she, too, wishes to exude a powerful odor suggests Lucy’s determination both to speak (to emanate rather than absorb, to be noticed) and to live a life worth remembering, an agenda that reflects Gauguin’s own lifelong obsession with celebrity and legacy.

In Greek mythology, Titans were the firstborn children of Uranus, god of the heavens and first ruler of all rulers, and Gaea, the goddess/mother of the earth. Strindberg's accusation positions Gauguin in the role of Cronus, the Titan who jealously tried to usurp his father's position. Similarly, Lucy, the firstborn in her family, characterizes her mother as god, a force to be reckoned with, and herself as the devil, for "are not the children of gods devils?" (153). Lucy is the devil's namesake: "I asked my mother why she had named me Lucy . . . under her breath she said, 'I named you after Satan himself. Lucy, short for Lucifer'" (152). In Judeo-Christian mythology, of course, Lucifer, an angel jealous of God's power, was cast out of paradise and forced to create his own world. Lucy, the malcontent, leaves home, forced out by the jealousy she feels over the loss of her mother's love, and makes her way to what is supposed to be her own paradise, the realization of her often-imagined escape to an American fantasyland.

Lucy, like Gauguin, understands the competing values of different cultures and is aware, even before her move to the U.S., of the power structures that subjugate one culture to another. In *Noa Noa*, Gauguin relates a story that bears a strong resemblance to Lucy's tale of her mother's friend, Sylvie, whose face was scarred from her fight with another woman over a man they both loved (see my earlier discussion of the novel's second chapter). He writes of his attendance at a Tahitian wedding:

In the place of honour at the table [sat] the admirably dignified wife of the chieftain of Punaauia . . . Next to her sat a centenarian relative, a death-mask made yet more terrible by the intact double-row of her cannibal teeth. Tattooed on her cheek, an indistinct dark mark, a shape like a letter. I had already seen tattoo-marks, but not like that one, which was certainly European. I was told that formerly the missionaries had raged against indulgence and had branded some of the women on the cheek as a warning against hell, -- a thing which covered them with shame (not shame for any sin committed, but the ridicule of a distinctive mark). When I heard that, I understood the present-day Maori's mistrust of Europeans. (Gauguin *Noa Noa* 39)

Gauguin's story plays up the cultural differences between the Tahitians and their European colonizers through this example of sexual practices. A wide gap stands between the way each group understands the elderly woman's mark, and Gauguin positions himself as the outsider with an "aerial view" of the cultural battle. Whereas the European missionaries view the mark as a symbol of the woman's wrongdoing, the Tahitians see it as a physical separation from the community; the first group relies on a belief in the adherence to a set of externally imposed rules to make meaning of the tattoo ("a warning against hell"), whereas the second interprets the symbol as a loss of community through forced individualization ("the ridicule of a distinctive mark"). Gauguin presents this elderly woman as a criticism of the mores of the European Christian missionaries: her mark, "which was certainly European," separates her from the community. It is not the act itself (sex outside of marriage) that brings her shame but the act of having been, in effect, delegitimated in the eyes of her fellow Tahitians by having been permanently tainted with the mark of the colonist, just as Sylvie, in Kincaid's novel, is permanently marked by her jail term. Lucy presents Sylvie as a scorned woman whose mark is a constant reminder of the loss of her freedom. Her disgrace is not for what she did (the fight with another woman), but for having been subjected to the condemnation of the colonial authority through her jail sentence. Lucy, like Gauguin in his story, turns the dominant perspective around, so that readers can see through the Other's eyes rather than their own. In both stories, the individual's source of shame is her forced assimilation and subjugation to imperial rule, a metaphor for Gauguin's and Lucy's resistance to the institutional structures that attempt to govern their lives.

Lucy initially identifies with Gauguin's vision – she, like him, is trying to create a fantasy life for herself among the native population of a strange place. Thus far into the novel, she has had little success, seeing not fantasy but cold, hard reality (the anthropologist's perspective). Gauguin's life circumstances offer a photo-negative reflection of her own and invoke in her an empathetic response: her environment is a yellow world onto which she can paint her own brilliant colors and contrasting tones – at once a borrowing and reversal of the artist's viewpoint that continues when she is drawn into a world of artists she meets through Peggy. She demonstrates this at several points in the novel, describing in vivid color her memories of Antigua and indirectly comparing the ubiquitous yellow of her U.S. surroundings to her own bright dresses, dark skin, and black-and-white photography. One of many yellow-infused descriptions of her U.S. environment reads:

The yellow light from the sun came in through a window and fell on the pale-yellow linoleum tiles of the floor, and on the walls of the kitchen, which were painted yet another shade of pale yellow, and Mariah, with her pale-yellow skin and yellow hair, stood still in this almost celestial light. (27)

By way of comparison, consider her recollection of her childhood in Antigua at the end of Chapter Four:

[A]ll sorts of little details of my life on the island where I grew up came back to me: the color of six o'clock in the evening sky . . . ; the white of the chemise that my mother embroidered for the birth of my second brother; the redness of the red ants that attacked my third brother . . . ; the navy blue of the sailor suit . . . ; the absence of red lipstick on my mother's mouth . . . ; the day the men from the prison in their black-and-white jail clothes came to cut down a plum tree. (131)

I would be remiss not to note that the colors she remembers in this passage – white, red, blue – as she relives her decision to leave Antigua and her family's limited hopes for her, are those of both the Union Jack and the Star-Spangled Banner, twin emblems of

imperialism, and that their appearance is followed by a reference to the black-and-white stripes that signify literal and metaphorical imprisonment (the jail uniform and the restrictive binary of black or white thinking that does not allow for shades of gray). The double-entendre of these particular colors notwithstanding, the effect of these two different verbal color schemes, one yellow and one a multiplicity of hues, is a clear distinction between Lucy's own background and that of her employers'; the juxtaposition of these quotes highlights Lucy's metaphorical position as the agent of difference, variegation, and change.⁵⁸

It is her own penchant for difference that first attracts her to the group of artists she meets through Peggy. Her empathy with their perspective, first begun by her identification with Gauguin's life story, evolves into a critical examination of yet another Western cultural structure on par with her analysis of U.S. feminism in the second chapter. In spite of her attraction to this new group of people devoted to manifesting their fantasies through paint and clay, she resists assimilation, still aware that their "freedoms" hinge on a willful ignorance of their own privileged positions, an ignorance reminiscent of the attitudes she finds in the champions of feminism and environmentalism earlier in the novel. When, early on in the chapter, while reflecting on her summer vacation at the lake, Lucy comments, "I had come to see the sameness in things that appeared to be different" (91), the observation not only recalls her reaction to

⁵⁸ For some additional examples, compare Lucy's descriptions of herself, her memories, and her own room to descriptions of Mariah, her family, and the U.S. landscape: "my skin was the color brown of a nut rubbed repeatedly with a soft cloth" (5), "a bowl of pink mullet and green figs" (7), "a dark, purple plum in the middle of her pink palm" (25), "[a]ll around me . . . were photographs I had taken, in black-and-white" (120), "[t]he curtains at my windows had loud, showy flowers printed on them" (144) *versus* "a pale-yellow sun, as if the sun had grown weak" (5), "six yellow-haired heads of various sizes" (12), "the snow was the color and texture of a half-cooked egg white" (23), "the whole house was painted a soothing yellow" (35), "I had read of this lake . . . [but] it looked so ordinary, gray, dirty, unfriendly . . . not [like] the big blue sea I was used to" (35), "it was gloomy and damp, for the sun could hardly shine" (53), etc.

feminism and environmentalism earlier in the novel, but also acts as a fitting prelude to Gauguin's art and her artist friends' philosophy. The statement ironically underscores the pervasiveness of the ideology Lucy tries so hard to disrupt: feminism, environmentalism, and now art, all agendas that aim to move away from the cultural mainstream, prove not to be as refreshingly new as their proponents might wish to believe, since each, she discovers, has failed to part with the prejudices of a mainstream imperialist urge to conquer difference.

Lucy is bemused by her new friends' commitment to "freedom," the thing she herself has daringly sought in coming to the U.S., and the apocryphal object of Gauguin's journey to Tahiti (the real object being artistic success back home in France). Her initial enthusiasm for this new crowd is based on their seeming inability to harm others:

I thought, I am not an artist, but I shall always like to be with the people who stand apart. I had just begun to notice that people who knew the correct way to do things such as hold a teacup, put food on a fork and bring it to their mouth without making a mess on the front of their dress – they were the people responsible for the most misery, the people least likely to end up insane or paupers. (99)

In Lucy's mind, their creative ambitions imply a resistance to cultural imperatives like bourgeois etiquette, which in turn is a good indicator of one's political praxis. Art, then, assumes a political importance for Lucy, but her subsequent experiences with Paul, her artist lover, dampens this early assessment of her new friends and she comes to see in this representative of U.S. counterculture the same colonial impulses she has seen in Mariah, Lewis, and their friends. Paul's apartment, for example, is a stash of colonial treasure, containing, among other things, domesticated versions of tropical plants that grow wild in the Caribbean and an aquarium that cages an island scene. One day, after learning of her

father's death, Lucy tells Mariah of a conversation she has had with Paul while out driving one day:

As we drove along, Paul spoke of the great explorers who had crossed the great seas, not only to find riches, he said, but to feel free, and this search for freedom was part of the whole human situation. Until that moment I had no idea that he had such a hobby – freedom. Along the side of the road were dead animals – deer, raccoons, badgers, squirrels – that had been trying to get from one side to the other when fast-moving cars put a stop to them. I pointed out the dead animals to him. I tried to put a light note in my voice as I said, 'On their way to freedom, some people find riches, some people find death,' but I did not succeed. (129)

Paul misses the irony of his admiration for the explorers' search for freedom: their own quest for freedom did not stop them from subjugating and exploiting the Africans and indigenous Americans they met in the process. Lucy, however, immediately spots the interrelation between the language of colonialism and the language of freedom. As she points out, their own journey along the highway could at any moment collide with the journey of another creature along the road, and the collision would mean the defeat of the less powerful one's agenda. Privilege, then, is an important determining factor in achieving the dream of freedom. (A lesser irony is that Paul's predecessor, Gauguin, in trying to find freedom, found not riches but death from syphilis.)

Paul's inability to make the connection between one group's freedom and another's suffering casts doubt for Lucy upon her earlier conception that the artists' community Paul belongs to is really much different from Mariah and Lewis's set of friends. Like Mariah in Chapter Three, who fails to see the connection between the disappearing marshland and her own luxuries, Paul is blind to the position of privilege that allows him to pursue the "hobby" of freedom. Lucy's judgment against him is sealed in the final chapter of the novel, when she sees a photo he has taken of her, "naked from

the waist up . . . standing over a boiling pot of food” (155). She says, “That was the moment he got the idea he possessed me in a certain way, and that was the moment I grew tired of him” (155). His belief in freedom, she realizes, extends no further than himself; like one of Gauguin’s Tahitian subjects, Lucy appears to Paul as a native stereotype to be preserved for posterity, a domesticated primitive at the mercy of his camera lens. Paul, who, as a bohemian artist, likes to imagine he lives at the margins of society, still thinks from the center outward, just as Gauguin had done decades before in creating his golden fantasy world of the Other.

Lucy’s rejection of Paul is a rejection not just of his person but of all he stands for. It is her third confrontation with a major political philosophy and she recognizes in it, as in Mariah’s feminism and environmentalism, her own subjection. In response, she walks away, unwilling to be party to Paul’s warped vision of her. It is a crucial moment, since present-day Paul is the physical representative of the deceased Gauguin whose ideology of freedom, simplicity, and anti-authoritarianism, founded on the fetishization of what it exoticized as “the primitive,” continues to inspire uncritical devotion among a liberal bohemian subculture in the U.S.⁵⁹ Lucy’s rejection of Gauguin vis-à-vis Paul reflexively changes the meaning of Kincaid’s use of yellow throughout the novel. It is not homage but mockery. *Lucy* paints the West in the same condescending palette

⁵⁹ Consider, for example, the critique that white, middle-class America does not have a culture – how ridiculous! Of course it has a culture, if by culture one means the way a given society is organized in general around the distribution of resources and all of the systems that process of distribution gives rise to, like systems of food production and consumption, the production of shelter, language and symbols, etc. That, however, is not what is meant by “culture” as it is used to make this critique. Instead, the very word conjures up a quaint primitivism, untainted by modern technologies of mechanical reproduction (like fast food and chain stores – which are “cultural” in the most fundamental sense of that term, namely, “produced by human labor”). Ironically, those who mourn middle-class America’s lack of culture imply that culture is associated with societies that are more “natural” or less developed, the very antithesis of culture’s basic definition; while on the surface the critique appears to be of U.S. suburbia, underneath lies a condescending assumption that the middle-class is too technologically advanced to retain any “culture.”

Gauguin used to describe the East, a pointed application of his conflation of differences into one monolithic Other that makes its own contribution to the canon of postcolonial criticism.

When Lucy has told Mariah the story of her drive with Paul, Mariah reacts by recognizing the story as a metaphor for Lucy's experience in leaving home: coming to the U.S. to find her freedom, Lucy has lost her father and cut off her relationship with her mother. This acknowledgment of Lucy's loss leads to the final scene in the chapter, when the reader learns how Lucy's mother, "Mrs. Judas," has betrayed her. Mariah responds to Lucy's account of her mother's limited goals for her by offering her a copy of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. Lucy reads a few lines and then rejects the book as a misinterpretation of her situation: "My life was at once something more simple and more complicated than that" (132). Her rejection of an external authority's explanation of her identity, which she sees primarily as the result of her heartbreak over her mother's betrayal, paves the way for her to create her own explanation and resolution, a process she undertakes in the final chapter. By coupling the chapter's theme of death – Mariah's divorce from Lewis, the death of Lucy's father, the image of roadkill, the story of the fisherman's death at sea, the end of Lucy's relationship with her mother – to a second theme of artistic explorations, "Cold Heart" introduces a regenerative spirit into the text, suggesting Lucy's position as a kind of phoenix, poised to shape a new life for herself from the ashes of her disappointment in her first year in the U.S. and the communities she has encountered.

In Conclusion: “Making a new beginning again”

A year after Lucy arrives in the U.S., the final chapter finds her at the start of a new phase of her life, a fitting ending for a protagonist whose philosophy is to embrace life's continual motion. Her introduction to several kinds of American liberal thought and their underlying imperial impulses has armed her with the knowledge that she will, in a sense, always be a “poor visitor,” unwilling to assimilate into institutional structures that limit the individual's potential, but the final chapter's title is “Lucy,” signifying that she has reclaimed her identity from its circumscription by such institutional forces. She is no longer one more immigrant who has landed, but instead has an identity that bears no immediate relationship to the soil on which she stands. In this final chapter, Lucy abandons the relationships she has built in her first year in the U.S. in order to forge a new path independent of any ties. She leaves her job as the *au pair* for Mariah's children and takes a job in a photography studio. Her abandonment of Mariah has ended their familial relationship, and Lucy is happy to escape the tension when she moves in with Peggy even as their friendship is crumbling, using her as a roommate and halfway-point to wherever it is she will move next. Tired of Paul and his possessive exoticization of her, she allows a romance between him and Peggy to blossom, a convenient way to lessen her obligations to either of them and find greater solitude. She writes her mother a letter, telling her she is moving and giving her a fake address so she will receive no more letters from Antigua.

The chapter contains little action; instead, Lucy contemplates over several pages the passage of time, and how each moment separates her from who she was in all previous moments. Appropriately, the chapter that bears her name is a paean to the

fluidity of time, the inevitable motion of change that crumbles, sometimes softly, sometimes with force, the foundations of history. She understands that this year has changed her:

I had been a girl of whom certain things were expected, none of them too bad: a career as a nurse, for example; a sense of duty to my parents; obedience to the law and worship of convention. But in one year of being away from home, that girl had gone out of existence. (133)

In place of this girl is an unfinished project:

“I understood that I was inventing myself, and that I was doing this more in the way of a painter than in the way of a scientist. I could not count on precision or calculation; I could only count on intuition. I did not have anything exactly in mind, but when the picture was complete I would know. (134)

Lucy assumes the role of artist here, and the quote neatly sums up Kincaid’s narrative strategy throughout the novel, which has left open-ended interpretive possibilities – nothing “precise” or “calculated” -- scattered about for the reader to intuit through the surrounding context. This fluidity of meaning is both Kincaid’s device and Lucy’s resistance. When Lucy, looking out the window of her new apartment, observes, “Everything I could see made me feel I would never be part of it, never penetrate to the inside, never be taken in” (154), she is self-identifying as a permanent outsider. However, whereas at the start of *Lucy*, the reader and the secondary characters assume her outsider status is an unfortunate, fleeting circumstance, soon to be mitigated by the welcoming embrace of the U.S., this status has by novel’s end been rewritten into a chosen identity. Not only does Lucy choose to remain outside the institutions that beckon her, but she also makes the space she occupies into a field whose chief characteristic is its mutability; in other words, margins, generally defined only in opposition to the center, become, in *Lucy*, spaces to be imagined outside of that binary.

The margin gives Lucy – a transnational, racialized, female domestic worker – agency instead of robbing her of it, allowing her to define herself on her own terms; the story’s shifting ground always gravitates to Lucy’s perspective, and the reader finds Lucy’s perspective to be worlds more sophisticated than her employers’ and lover’s, a refreshing change from immigrant literature that reveres U.S. cosmopolitanism.

At the start of this essay, I claimed that *Lucy* has been overlooked as a work of American literature. Examined as such, the novel’s consideration of the outsider’s relationship to the U.S. translates into the possibility of “resizing” America on the world map, dismantling its position as a unilateral cultural agent that defines the rest of the world in comparison with itself. Instead, *Lucy*, positioned as an American novel, presents the opportunity to consider the U.S. in its interrelated global and domestic contexts, so that its “melting-pot” habit becomes a reflection of its imperial policies outside its borders. It connects U.S. domestic agendas, such as Mariah’s environmentalism, to global ones, not only illuminating American similarities to the French and British empires before it, but also making the case against U.S. exceptionalism: why put at the center something that is so clearly, for Kincaid, neither unique nor praiseworthy?

Perhaps most important is the metaphorical use Kincaid makes of Lucy’s role as domestic worker: Kincaid is a spy in the house of American liberalism, much as Lucy is the ever vigilant observer of her employers’ lives and philosophies; the reader benefits from her critique by seeing things through a narrative that shifts the dominant perspective out of the limelight. Through her protagonist, Kincaid intervenes in the story American liberalism likes to tell about itself and points to the soil of racism and imperialism in

which it has flowered. Seen from the margins, American liberal agendas do not give much cause for hope; instead, the marginalized themselves must find ways outside of such institutionalized agendas to paint their own new visions of the future. Kincaid has the advantage of hindsight as she critiques 1960s America's liberal bourgeois elite (although she is strangely prescient, writing in 1991, in predicting a major argument of the ecocriticism school that emerged in the mid-90s), but nevertheless her criticisms feel new because of the way she conducts them. The motion and fluidity that shape *Lucy* mentally move the reader to make sense for herself of Kincaid's words by engaging in the perceptual shifts Lucy orchestrates in her telling of the story, so that, for the reader as much as for Lucy, "what seem[s] to be one thing frequently turn[s] out to be something altogether different," enabling the breakdown of readerly assumptions and prejudices that are that much more effective for having been unexpected.

(IN)CONCLUSION

In a chapter titled, “What’s Wrong with Prostitution?,” in her book, *The Sexual Contract*, Carole Pateman reminds us that prostitution is a blanket term used to describe a host of practices that vary by time period and location, including, for example, religious rites in ancient Rome or *Malaya* women in Nairobi, whose services mimicked “truncated” marriages that helped to house migrant laborers (195). She argues that the contemporary definition of prostitution as a profession, rather than as casual labor, only emerged around the turn of the twentieth century, and then, primarily in the U.S., Australia, and Britain, where concerns over vice districts led to a variety of legislation and shifts in the sex work industry itself that made it more difficult for a woman to leave prostitution once she had entered (196-197). Denise Brennan, in her decade-long study of women working as prostitutes in the small town of Sosúa in the Dominican Republic, argues against the victimization rhetoric that accompanies the tendency to universalize prostitution as a simply-defined phenomenon that affects all women the same way. Her study of the women in Sosúa, she argues, demonstrates that women migrating to Sosúa to pursue sex work are “engaged in an economic strategy . . . [of] attempting to capitalize on the very global linkages that exploit them.” Rather than using sex work as “a survival strategy[,] they are using it as an *advancement* strategy” (153, emphasis in original), working freelance in jobs procured through a network of female kinships in hopes of finding foreign men who will sponsor their visas to Europe. Brennan’s point, then, is that the women of Sosúa use their sexual mobility literally to fuel their global mobility. Brennan’s project readily acknowledges the difficulties these women encounter, the

racial stereotypes and economic disparity that fuel their trade, and the high rate of failure in achieving their quest, but her larger thesis is that the women of Sosúa are not mere pawns in a game not of their own making but that “individuals react and resist . . . even the so-called powerless” (168).

I make mention of Brennan here because, as with understanding “real-life” mobile women, the difficulty and the fascination of exploring mobile women’s roles in the literature under discussion in *Stuck in Go* has been due to these characters’ own resistance to easy definition. A monolithic conclusion about mobile women’s categorical role in American literature has escaped my eager search. I have juxtaposed mobile women with traditional representations of union-maid heroines in the first half, and with a number of supposedly progressive political movements in the second half; unlike the members of these other groups – labor, feminism, the avant-garde, and so on – whose membership demands a certain level of self-effacement that, paradoxically, leads these characters to engage in similarly loud proclamations of individualism, self-righteousness, and self-love, the mobile women characters in the four preceding chapters have very little in common with one another. As characters who eschew belonging to groups or living in circumstances that demand assimilation, these figures do not even belong to each other. For the literary critic who wants to identify mobile women as *a* trope or *a* type in American literature, this poses a problem of sorts: beyond the linkage between their sexualization and their status as migratory (transnational or not), the connections are few. The only real commonality among these many versions of mobile women is that their presence is a visible slippage in public discourses about women’s sexuality, labor, citizenship, and racialization, but this slippage is enacted in endlessly different ways.

To this end, *Stuck in Go* has raised more questions than it has had space to attempt to answer. For example, might the analysis of a greater number of texts yield trends in the characterization of mobile women that remain unavailable to me through this modest study? What are the implications of mobile women characters for American literature? As I noted in the introduction, works that have mobile women protagonists are much easier to find among the literature of the late twentieth century than in its earlier decades; will this trend of their increasing presence and foregrounding continue? If mobile women characters are, as I have argued, the literary product of a specific set of influencing social factors, does that mean they will slowly fade from view in future literature when and if U.S. immigration debates cycle through another relatively calm period of tolerance or even welcome? Particularly when they are used as secondary characters that are subordinated in the text to a dominant discourse that excludes them, how are mobile women figures an expression of anxiety over the challenges that globalization and women's advancement pose to the preservation of a national American literature that is premised largely on the belief in "the American character"?

For that matter, what insights would a comparative study of mobile women characters in other national literatures offer? How are "mobile women" portrayed in other national literatures where the history of women's sexuality and its links to immigration may be different? Or which lack the same obsession with purity that operates as a strain in much American literature? Is there some way in which representations of the mobile woman rehearse "presciently" the future of American literature, its characters, its preoccupations?

One of my main intentions in undertaking this study was to find new doors – or windows – for working-class studies scholars to enter in order to expand a relatively new, or resurgent, interest in a fairly limited field. Those limitations have been set by the difficulty of “naming” a discipline or field that takes on too many items for analysis; the obvious examples would be gender studies or ethnic studies research that subordinates ethnic or critical race issues to the study of gender or vice versa. Working-class studies, which does not have an identity even close to approaching institutionalization in the form of being a recognized academic department, is perhaps in greater danger of subsuming these other major modes of inquiry into the nature of class because it is on such precarious footing itself as a legitimate field of scholarship. Thus, I believe, the trend among working-class scholars has been to foreground those texts that are *clearly* the province of working-class studies, which has meant relying on a narrow set of texts, mostly issued pre-World War II, that address the concerns of the white, male blue-collar hero of socialist realism.

The study of mobile women characters creates some interesting implications for working-class studies that may help to address its limitations. In the mobile woman character – a figure who is equally racialized, (trans)nationalized, sexualized, and classed – I see the nexus, the “ground zero,” of the construction of identity, individual or systemic, by which issues of power, the distribution of resources, and their related dominant social discourses are determined. The mobile woman character, as many of the authors I have read in preparation for this study seem to recognize, is positioned at the absolute margin of these identity categories, and from that vantage point, can offer different perspectives than readers and writers glean from looking out towards the

margins from feminist or class or critical race positionings that are not quite the center, but not quite its opposite either. What does it mean for working-class studies that so many of the texts written by people who are working class do *not* have a specific, ideological agenda as they often did in the early twentieth century, or that new “working-class texts” often do not make class their primary signifier? Mobile women’s increasing presence in texts that do foreground class suggest the impossibility of ignoring the American working-class’s heterogeneity any longer; how will working-class studies’ emphasis on (refuting stereotypes about) a white working-class change to recognize the crucial task of imbricating a number of methodological and discursive modes of class analysis to intensify the complexity, and maintain the relevance, of its own academic discourse? How might the growing cosmopolitanism of a globally-migrating working-class, set against the backdrop of an increasingly insular American middle-class, change the nature of conversations about class in the U.S.? How might “mobility” as a metaphor shift in usage?

I began this project expecting to find some buried set of stable conclusions about the cast of mobile women characters that populate twentieth-century American literature. What I have found, instead, is a fluid, changing application of women’s literal and metaphorical movement to express reactions – sometimes resistant, sometimes not – to a wide range of political and social ideas. Fittingly, mobility is a hard thing to pin down, and in making the effort, I find that my own ideas and questions about women’s movement in American literature themselves continue to be – forgive me – stuck in go.

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