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An Unoccupied Woman:

American Women's Writing, The Literary Spinster, and Feminist Care

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in English

by

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Writing a dissertation, like being a spinster, is thought to be a lonely, alienating existence—it is either a sign of conventional wisdom's error or my own good luck that I have found the opposite to be true. While technically I have written many of these pages huddled alone in front of my computer, unmarried and uncoupled and sometimes unoccupied, I have also written them in frenetic conversation with some of the most brilliant people I've ever met and in the company of an ever-expanding family to whom I am indebted more than any dowry could compensate. I must thank first and foremost the generous, supportive, incomparable members of my committee, Virginia Jackson, Rodrigo Lazo, and Jayne Lewis. Rodrigo and Jayne have given me space to think when I needed it, clarifying questions when I lost the plot, and such attentive care to my writing that I could never point to all of the moments in which they helped this project to take shape. Without Jennie's generosity of spirit and labor, I would almost certainly still be trying to revise my prospectus—I cannot thank her enough for pushing me forward, even when I insisted I wasn't ready. Though this dissertation theorizes feminist caretaking in many ways, I have always been able to find its paragon in Jennie: as an advisor, as a mentor, as a colleague, and as a friend, she demonstrates what it looks like to take care of people and their words with wisdom and warmth. I am grateful to Oren Izenberg, Daniel Gross, and Elizabeth Freeman for the conversation and feedback that have contributed so much to this project's development.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

An Unoccupied Woman:

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by

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Professor Virginia W. Jackson, Chair

"An Unoccupied Woman: American Women's Writing, the Literary Spinster, and Feminist Care" takes seriously the question of what it means to care for and about a text—to like or even love a piece of writing and its author, in spite or because of its difficulties and its contradictions, its frustrations and its irrelevances. It considers what it means when to care for such a thing is embarrassing or unfashionable, or when that care is overlooked or underappreciated. It does so by tracking two connected yet disparate figures: that of the literary spinster and of the feminist critic. The spinster, in popular thought, hovers just outside the boundaries of legitimate care—neither maternal nor marital, any care performed by (or for) the spinster is inherently unproductive. The spinster herself, in fact, is inherently unproductive: she spins in place, never progressing toward marriage or reproductive coupledom and instead breaking or otherwise frustrating those plots for others. Despite these frustrating contradictions which so often render her illegible, the spinster is a figure to whom feminist criticism returns time and again, in a cycle of reclamation and disavowal that too often smooths over her messy incongruities. Across

three chapters, “An Unoccupied Woman” reads the spinster as a particularly resonant figure for women’s writing at the end of the nineteenth century and a metonymic representation of the feminist literary critic as caretaker in the late twentieth century. Operating both as a thorough analysis of women’s writing in the late nineteenth century and as a theoretical revision of feminist critical practice, “An Unoccupied Woman” opens important lines of inquiry into gender and sexuality at the turn of the twentieth century, the history of feminist literary criticism, and the larger project of American women’s writing.

INTRODUCTION:
The Spinster is Dead; Long Live the Spinster

"They do not know that today an old-maid aunt is as much of an anomaly as a spinning-wheel, that she has ceased to exist, that she is prehistoric, that even grandmothers have almost disappeared from off the face of the earth."

- Mary Eleanor Wilkins Freeman, *The Whole Family,* 1901

"Don't be facile. I don't care if you liked it—this isn't book club."

- Unnamed professor at the University of California, Irvine, Fall 2014

At last, the age of the spinster is upon us: an unprecedented number of women are delaying marriage or choosing to stay single altogether, technological and cultural shifts have made it easier than ever to remain connected with one's community while maintaining independence, and popular media is rife with depictions of stubborn singles charting their own paths forward in a world seemingly made for couples. In fact, singledom is so normal—the proportion of married to single American women first fell under 50% in 2009[1]--that it scarcely merits attention. Gone are the old maids of yore; young women today are well aware of the alternatives to marriage available to them. If they are not, they need only browse the popular non-fiction shelves of their local bookstore to find E. Kay Trimberger's *The New Single Woman* (2005), Eric Klinenberg's *Going Solo: The Extraordinary Rise and Surprising Appeal of Living Alone* (2012), Kate Bolick's *Spinster: Making a Life of One's Own* (2015), Rebecca Traister's *All the Single Ladies: Unmarried Women and the Rise of an Independent Nation* (2016), Glynnis MacNicol's *No One Tells You*

This (2018), or any number of viral articles declaring a new era of singledom.[2] In fact, we have moved past the need for such an outdated concept as an old maid. The age of the spinster is over.

News of the spinster's untimely end would be remarkable, perhaps, if feminist thought had not already played out her life cycle in an amnesic loop for at least the past century. Writing in 2009, feminist and queer theorist Heather Love called for a "[timely] return to the figure of the spinster" as a way to bridge the gap among contemporary feminist thought, radical and lesbian feminism of the 1970s, and the intimate female worlds presented in late-nineteenth century women's writing in which '70s feminists had claimed ancestry.[3] Citing Mary Daly's attempted reclamation of the spinster figure thirty years earlier, Love acknowledges that a return to the spinster well-worn territory:

> [Daly's] argument on behalf of the spinster's radical potential, however, sounds an odd note today because the spinster is no longer at the center of feminist struggle; in fact, for many, she is long gone. Recurring to the matter can seem passé or out-of-date—another reason for the "apology" in my title ["Gyn/Apology: Sarah Orne Jewett's Spinster Aesthetics"]. Still, I do want to ask a question about the contemporary irrelevance of the spinster: has this figure faded from view because the single woman's situation has improved so much, or is it because she is no longer able to hold our interest?[4]

Here, Love puts the spinster's causality dilemma on full display. What came first: the spinster, or our disinterest in her? Feminist insistence on the irrelevance and outmodedness of the spinster is often paired with an embrace of her in new form, be it the new millennium's Carrie Bradshaw, Helen Gurley Brown's 'Single Girl' (1962), or even the

New Woman of the Gilded Age, followed soon thereafter by a call for a 'return' to the forgotten spinster, who now represents a way forward for feminist thought. As this cycle continues to repeat, the call for the spinster reads more and more as paralepsis: we invoke her to demonstrate our disavowal, and we deny her to signify her endurance.

Another constant in the cyclical recovery and disavowal of the spinster is the affective performance one must give when claiming interest in her. Even when infused with a level of irony, as Love's 'apology' no doubt is, most attempts at reclaiming the spinster are suffused with guilt or embarrassment.[5] *I'm interested—I'm sorry, but I'm interested—in spending more time thinking about unmarried women*, critics seem to say. Such apologies are rooted, as I explore in this introduction, in a sense of embarrassment over feminism itself—or at least the sort of feminist thought that focuses on the (white, moneyed) women who have traditionally claimed the mantle of spinster. I am interested nonetheless in this figure who hovers at the edges (and not infrequently the center) of feminist thought, whose relevance has been made clear by countless critical calls for her return and by her eternal utility as a literary device. Just as the spinster fascinated second-wave feminists in the mid-to-late twentieth century, so did she preoccupy professional female novelists and their readers at the turn of the twentieth century. "An Unoccupied Woman" focuses on the intimacies and carework with which the spinster is entwined, tying that work to the collaborative, underrecognized labor of (often unmarried) women writers and critics who sought to print her story. "Care" in my project takes on multiple resonances, referring not only to the domestic labor of maintenance and ministration (to take care of a home, of children, or of the ill) but also to the affective dimensions of investment (to care for or about someone). In popular thought, spinsters exist just outside the boundaries of

legitimate care—neither maternal nor marital, any care performed by (or for) the spinster is inherently unproductive. "An Unoccupied Woman" contends that the literary spinster allows us to consider what plots run parallel to the marriage plot, to discover narratives that are affirming, alternative, and generative rather than full of rejection and disappointment. It finds, moreover, that these possibilities have always existed on the page but that our ability to read them has been limited by our critical and disciplinary politics.

In placing the spinster at the center of this dissertation, I continue the cycle. Such a cycle seems nonetheless appropriate, whirling endlessly as the spinning wheel from which the spinster takes her name. The paradoxical simultaneity of the spinster's disappearance and reemergence is appropriate for a figure bound up in contradiction. She is at once childlike and elderly, sexless and dangerously available, stunted and unbound. She is also, as I explore in the following pages, a curious and frustrating mix of inutility and production. Across three chapters, "An Unoccupied Woman" reads the spinster as a particularly resonant figure for women's writing at the end of the nineteenth century and a metonymic representation of the feminist literary critic as caretaker in the late twentieth century. In careful analysis of three deceptively experimental novels (María Amparo Ruiz de Burton's *Who Would Have Thought It?* [1872], Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs* [1896], and Mary E. Wilkins Freeman's contribution to the collaborative *The Whole Family* [1908]), each of which demonstrates a contention between second- and third-wave feminist thought, I track the ways in which the literary spinster pulls at the threads of sentimentality inherited from earlier generations and of narrative form more broadly.

At the same time, I track the many ways we feel about the spinster. She embarrasses: critics reluctantly admit a desire to return to spinsterly study despite her

apparent irrelevance and old-fashioned significance. She frustrates: her inability to hew neatly to established narrative structures denies any easy understanding of the text to which she belongs. She unsettles: in her endless contradiction and unclear narrative purpose, she denies us the comfort of predicting her motives. Despite all this negative affect, she interests us enough to return to her time and again. This dissertation seeks to understand why. To begin, I attempt a rudimentary overview of the spinster's place in literary criticism over the past fifty years.

In the introduction to her 1984 anthology of short stories by nineteenth-century US women writers, *Old Maids*, Susan Koppelman begins with an innocuous enough statement that nonetheless reads as scandalous: "I like each of these stories."[6] As a burgeoning literary critic who had been instructed throughout her graduate education to leave emotion out of her scholarship and instead dissect texts' political and artistic merit, I felt somehow shocked to witness the boldness with which Koppelman states her interest in the stories she has collected. She presses forward:

> I like each of these stories. Each moves me in its own way; the women portrayed seem real to me, my sisters in one way or another. These stories open outward, leading me to knowledge of experience not my own, and yet, having read the stories and thought about them, now my own.[7]

Koppelman goes on, of course, to present her critical bona fides and to succinctly narrativize the bias with which (primarily white, male) editors have excluded women from critical anthologies and elected to enshrine a mere handful in the literary canon. The literary merit of her subjects is undeniable: Koppelman collects together for the first time stories of singledom and independence from oft-overlooked stars of America's first century

of writing, including Catharine Maria Sedgwick, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, and Rebecca Harding Davis. But it is the frankness with which Koppelman states her attraction to these texts that stands out to me. I *like* these stories, she insists. I feel *seen* and *represented* by them, and I want to ensure that they are not forgotten; I care for and about the longevity of these texts.

Such language is not uncommon in the work of feminist literary critics throughout the 1980s and 1990s, as (primarily women) scholars worked to undo the deeply-entrenched masculinism of the American canon and bring into the light the scores of prolific female writers whose work had for decades been sidelined. Emily Toth introduces her 1984 edited collection *Regionalism and the Female Imagination* as "a kind of literary archaeology," while Judith Fetterly and Marjorie Pryse describe their two decades of work on women's regional writing explicitly as a project of recovery and reclamation.[8] Over and over, the language of discovery merges with that of convalescence, as scholars describe their attempts to uncover, restore, collect and rehabilitate centuries of women's writing.

In so doing, these critics push against the then-prevailing narrative of American literary history, codified by mid-twentieth-century scholars like F.O. Matthiessen and Hugh Kenner. American literature, critical wisdom held, came of age in the early nineteenth century after decades of important groundwork laid by colonial and early republic writers, only to transcend into greatness by the mid-nineteenth century's 'American Renaissance,' with quintessentially American writing by Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, and Walt Whitman; literary trends shifted from romanticism to realism at the end of the century as titans William Dean Howells and Henry James took center stage. Aside from a few bright spots in naturalist writing (Stephen Crane,

Theodore Dreiser, Frank Norris, etc.), the turn into the twentieth century represented fallows years until the magnificent fecundity of American modernism's Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, F. Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway, et al. Women's writing, aside from a few exemplary cases (the most prominent of which being Emily Dickinson), signified only popular, niche-interest literature that set its sights not on artistic value but on readerly impact--sensational, conventional, and unworthy of critical attention.[9]

Feminist literary critics, buoyed by Nina Baym's essential 1978 *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America 1820-70*, spent much of the last two decades of the twentieth century resisting that narrative by recovering and reclaiming writing by and about the inhabitants of the domestic sphere. Far from fallow years, Elizabeth Ammons argued, the 'unimportant years' at the end of the nineteenth century "saw the artistic triumph or emergence and maturation" of dozens of women writers without whose writing we have a tragically incomplete understanding of American literary history.[10] The work of Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Sarah Orne Jewett, Edith Wharton, Willa Cather, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Pauline Hopkins, Sui Sin Far, Mary Austin, Jessie Fauset, and more were just as essential to the canon as that of Henry James or Mark Twain. This is not to say, however, that the work of recovery was not tinged with a comingling of defiance and apology. Baym clarifies in the introduction to the second edition of *Woman's Fiction* that the winning narratives depicted in domestic fiction are "nothing like a success story of today, since it seldom involves more than domestic comfort, a social network, and a companionable husband."[11] Tompkins admits that her "embrace of the conventional" in sentimental writing "led [her] to value everything that criticism had taught [her] to despise: the stereotyped character, the sensational plot, the trite

expression."[12] The puzzle, it seems, is how to further a feminist agenda (the reincorporation of women writers into the canon, the legitimation of women's studies departments as sites of necessary and essential scholarly pursuit, etc.) through the recovery and analysis of conventional, sentimental, domestic writing? One clear avenue, taken up by many critics, was to admit one's personal investment in the literature ("I *like* each of these stories") before going on to demonstrate the texts' transgressive qualities and subtle political power.

Regional or local color fiction from the Gilded Age (those years previously thought to be merely an era of throat-clearing before modernism's entree) perfectly served the needs of feminist scholars: it was a field dominated by women writers and populated by the stock characters and narrative concerns that spoke to a long history of women's lived experiences. If Hawthorne shied away from revealing the sundry details of Hepzibah Pyncheon's maidenly quarters, then Mary Wilkins Freeman and Rose Terry Cooke delighted in sumptuous paragraphs spent describing their characters' basket of sewing scraps and strategies for jarring the last of the season's tomatoes.[13] It is, moreover, a genre dismissed on the same grounds as feminist critics' declared their interest: its inherent femininity, domesticity, and quietness. Carolyn Gebhard, in her rousing 1991 dressing-down of literary criticism's devaluation of regional writing, makes the connection obvious: "What I am particularly concerned with tracing here, however, is how the feminine becomes equated in American literary history and critical discourse, first with local color, then with the sensitive, faithful, but above all, the feeble, and thus epitomized by the stereotype of the spinster."[14] Women's writing at the end of the nineteenth century had long been considered, in other words, to be a spinsterly dead end: a fruitless offshoot of

more virile realism and a hapless detour on the way to modernism. Gebhard's assessment of the academic establishment's then-common view of late nineteenth-century writing is worth quoting in full:

> [Such criticism] soon blurs the distinction between the fictional characters who lived 'unnatural' spinsterly lives with the women who represented them in fiction. […] Writing this kind of fiction, [masculinist critics suggest], amounts to no more than a dull and fastidious housekeeping. Spinsters who write fiction or fiction written about spinsters, it matters little—women who choose not to 'complicate' their lives by marriage are lacking as women, and the fiction they write or that is written about them can at best aspire to a quaint and charming, if anemic, genre painting.[15]

In one brief paragraph, Gebhard points to several of the key issues I seek to untangle in this dissertation: the characterization of the spinster as 'unnatural,' the notion of women's writing and criticism as carework ('housekeeping' in this instance), and the conceptual collapse of the literary spinster with her author.

The collapse of the woman writer and her characters is, of course, rooted in everyday misogyny—a stark refusal to see women as fully realized people with the ability to create art out of their lived experiences and to write beyond their own feelings rather than merely writing thinly-veiled diary entries. Implicit also is the collapse of the writer/character with her critic, similarly rooted in the misogynistic assumption that women's writing (and in particular women's writing *about* women) could only be the subject of scholarly assessment out of some stunted worldview or perverse narcissism. Such an assumption links back to the idea of the spinster as 'unnatural': women critics, who

are career-minded rather than family-oriented (as though such a binary choice has ever been available) and who are often unmarried or queer or otherwise representative of a threat to the masculinist power structure upon which academia is built, demonstrate the same off-putting oddness as the woman writer or the literary spinster. Such women, ultimately, care disproportionately and about all the wrong things; they misspend their time on unworthy texts, poring over the literary equivalent of piled laundry—the functional byproduct of more necessary labor, scarcely worth mentioning. Housework, as we will see, is an apt metaphor for the work of the literary spinster and the women's writing to which she belongs: irritatingly omnipresent, frustratingly unfinished (as the completion of one task leads always to the next), refused as anything other than rote and unskilled work. Criticism of regional writing, much like the act of regional writing itself, amounted to little more than self-interested tidying.

The collapse of the feminist critic with her subject is responsible too for a certain degree of backlash, particularly as white lesbian feminists found in the spinsterly writers of the late nineteenth century a kinship and ancestry otherwise absent in the canon. Writers like Mary Wilkins Freeman and Sarah Orne Jewett became essential figures in the queer recovery project, as critics found in their works a deep and storied "female world of love and ritual," to use Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's term. Critics and theorists like Lillian Faderman (*Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present*, 1985) and Sheila Jeffreys (*The Spinster and Her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality, 1880-1930*, 1985) then unpacked that world to highlight the undercurrents of queer desire running through the writing of Jewett et al. The strong sense of identification between feminist critics (lesbian and otherwise) and spinsterly regional

writers quickly became a double-edged sword: it moved the project of queer recovery along and allowed for very meaningful connections across time but also opened the door for sharp rebuke, as the same qualities that had attracted feminist critics to regional writing lent themselves also to the methodologies taking center stage in the 1990s. As explained in further detail in my second chapter, regional writing became a battleground on which scholars could articulate the necessity of anti-imperialist, anti-racist (or, to use then-common parlance, 'multicultural'), and queer critique.[16] Throughout the 1990s, there grew a sense that feminist critics over-identified with Jewett and her contemporaries to the extent that they willfully overlooked the racist and imperialist leanings of their texts. Even when that critique was implicit, it nonetheless did a level of damage from which regional writing never fully recovered. That these forms of scholarly inquiry are essential is not up for debate—the work of literary criticism has been immeasurably enhanced, transformed, and enriched by the tireless efforts of scholars who insisted that literary critique must reckon with the legacies of what bell hooks so precisely named the imperialist white supremacist capitalist heteropatriarchy. I would not, frankly, have arrived to the questions that inform this dissertation without that work.

The disciplinary effects of this important and energizing turn toward radical critique (a term that is is loose and imprecise) have largely been that feminist critique has been subsumed by queer critique. Such a move is neither surprising nor unwarranted, as calls for more expansive understandings of gender have coincided with the transformation of university Women's Studies departments into more inclusive Gender and Sexuality departments. That is, queer critique is presumed to be feminist in nature (or at least to align with feminism's broad goals), whereas feminist critique has taken on a vaguely

embarrassing tinge—a bit too second wave, far too limited in scope, bound up in a troublesome alliance with whiteness. The general effect of this overlap has been, of course, wildly productive for literary criticism; the contemporary refrain that 'if one's feminism is not antiracist and queer, it is not feminism at all' serves as a powerful antidote to decades of prominent feminists' tendency to focus on issues concerning moneyed white cis-gender women.[17] Despite these important interventions—which have happily pushed literary critics to recognize the wide and varied forms of gender and sexual expression that have always flourished both on and off the page—the general pendulum swing away from 'traditional feminist criticism' (and, rightfully, its tendency toward binaristic, gender essentialist thought) and toward queer theory's rejection of such rigidity has left wayward, spinsterly texts like those that are the subject of this dissertation in an odd sort of holding pattern. While writers like Sarah Orne Jewett and Mary Wilkins Freeman have been usefully taken up by queer critics and by symptomatic readers who find great use in their writing for ecocritical and materialist thought, they have not in recent years been given much attention outside of those theoretical circles. The message is clear: we, as a community of literary critics, have moved beyond the need for simple feminist accounts of these texts and must now account for more rigorous, generative understandings of what late-nineteenth-century texts can show us about the queer histories that have so long been suppressed.

This confluence of investments from both feminists and queer theorists has resulted in what we might call the sexualization of sentiment. The conversation in queer theory broadly has focused on sexuality in all shades and variants; even calls to complicate our notion of sexuality, such as Peter Coviello's expansive reading of affinity in *The Country of*

the Pointed Firs or larger theorizations of anti-sociality by scholars like Lee Edelman and Leo Bersani, have kept sex at their center. Anti-sociality and the push against heteronormative conceptions of reproductive futurity have largely been interested in the versions of non-reproductive futurity or non-reproductive presentism that queerness affords. This is not to say that such thought is misplaced or irrelevant—but we might consider the ways in which queer theory has proven true Foucault's warnings of the repressive hypothesis. Benjamin Kahan, in arguing to consider celibacy as a sexuality rather than a suppression of queerness, offers a similar reading of queer theory's focus on sex: "That is, in employing a paranoid hermeneutic that 'reads through' censorship to recover sexual expression—in order to make sure that one's sexual identities, desires, and pleasures never fall victim to suppression—inadvertently reduces possible connotations into a single denotative reality [that, as Kahan says elsewhere, 'not engaging in or focusing on sex is a capitulation to homophobic forces']."[18] The political stakes of centering sex in the wake of the feminist sex wars and the ongoing AIDS crisis were an understandable and perhaps necessary motivator, but I persist in asking what that focus might have cost? How, in concerning ourselves with sexual identity and discursive sexual acts, might we have let fall from our sight the wider world of social relations? How might we take sex off the table, as it were, and to traffic instead in the pleasure-focused (rather than desire-focused) 'ways of life' Foucault discusses later in his career might allow us to see the subtle, quiet, asexual relations that women writers at the end of the nineteenth century so valued.[19] These non-sexual, non-sensual, non-erotic (except, perhaps, in Audre Lorde's sense of the term) intimacies allow for a relationality that is defined by caretaking: by the desire to create and cultivate space for the continued existence of something else.

What, in other words, do we lose when feminist criticism—or at least the version of feminist criticism unapologetically invested in women's writing for its mundanity and conventionality—falls out of fashion? What do we lose when all that second-wave feminist critics had loved and valued in women's writing at the end of the nineteenth century becomes embarrassing, old-fashioned, and regressive? What subtleties might we miss? Gebhard's warning that the collapse of unmarried female writers, unmarried female characters, and unmarried female critics would "devalue the feminine [and] equate the choice not to marry with unnaturalness and sterility" to the detriment of literary studies feels significant in the wake of blowback against second-wave criticism.[20] Heather Love situated her call for a return to the spinster in 2009 as part of a longer history of lesbian feminist reclamation of unmarried women (and, specifically, spinsterly women writers of the late nineteenth century) as queer ancestors, yet she still felt the need to apologize for resurrecting the spinster from her lonely grave. Such hesitancy is certainly due in part to the general uncoolness of the spinster (she is, after all, by definition unwanted or otherwise leftover), but it is also, I suggest, due to the spinster's inextricability with second-wave feminist criticism itself, which has ironically or not come to represent a certain conservatism and sexlessness (which is easily conflated with prudishness, then sex-negativity, then queerphobia). A call to return to the spinster in 2022—particularly without explicitly proclaiming the queerness and radical potential of the figure—teeters dangerously on the edge of recklessness.

Regardless, this is the call I make in "An Unoccupied Woman" as I work to chart a way forward for feminist criticism, though I am conscious that such a call could easily be read as an alignment with so-called 'gender critical' feminists, known also as Trans-

Exclusive Radical Feminists (TERFs). One reason why "old-fashioned" feminist criticism is often considered embarrassing or even distasteful today is that many calls for feminism (as opposed to calls for queerness or progressive thought more broadly) are bound up in gender essentialism: we need look no further than backlash against the infamous pink pussy hat as symbol of protest or mainstream pro-choice activists' insistence on gendered language and imagery to see the ever-growing divide between those who cling to the mantle of feminism and those who believe the term is forever bound up in age-old alliance with whiteness and cis-ness. As with the cyclical return of feminists to the spinster figure, we find in transphobic calls for 'real-woman-first feminism' echoes of second-wave homophobia and first-wave racism that have always plagued mainstream feminist activism.[21] Though I hope it is by now obvious that I emphatically do not align myself with a sense of feminist purity that seeks to exclude those who do not pass an absurd litmus test of 'real womanhood,' I want to emphasize that my interest here is in a version of feminist criticism that allows for an investment in women's writing without falling into gender exclusivity or a myopic focus on sex and sexual identity. Feminist criticism can and should account for the wide variety of ways in which people of all genders and sexualities survive and flourish under patriarchal oppression; I very much value readings and critiques that illuminate queerness and gender nonconformity in nineteenth-century texts and would never argue that widening support for queer theory has not been essential and liberatory and fundamentally beneficial to literary criticism.

This expansive understanding of feminist criticism that I seek to articulate in "An Unoccupied Woman" is usefully understood through the figure of the literary spinster, who was central to women's writing at the end of the nineteenth century as well as to second-

wave feminist literary critics and radical lesbian feminist critics in the mid-to-late twentieth century. At various points, the spinster has been reclaimed by feminists as the model of independent womanhood and as the hidden-in-plain-sight lesbian through whom we can understand how the convention of a Boston marriage was a socially conventional way for lesbians to cohabitate; more recently, Natasha Hurley has argued for the spinster as representative of non-lesbian queerness.[22] As Kahan finds utility in the multiplicity of celibacy as a term ("[T]he celibate is uncommitted—he or she can take on any kind of sexual identity because celibacy *can be read* as accommodating multiple identities."[23]), I find utility in the pleasurable indeterminacy of the spinster. Rather than argue for a definitive understanding of the spinster and her desires, sexual or otherwise, I embrace her liminality, her messiness, and her open-endedness. It is precisely these qualities that mark her as a productive figure for understanding the messy, open-ended work of feminist criticism. The literary spinster, as I explore in more detail in my first chapter, is a frustrating mix of contradictions: she is simultaneously over- and under-sexed (is her singleness a sign of prudish frigidity or wanton sluttiness?), immaturity and senility (is she forever a maiden or a withered crone past her prime?), distraction and forgettability (is she a problem to be solved or an aberrance to avoid?). Moreover, she performs narratively the work that I argue feminist criticism does metacritically: she is a slantwise caretaker, quietly performing work that often goes unrecognized and unvalued. By definition, the spinster fails to progress: she cannot move forward in a marriage plot, nor can she furnish a new generation's growth. Instead, she merely exists as an omnipresent figure whose narrative purpose evades our grasp. What would it mean, then, to consider the spinster as a person for whom there is no narrative? Not as a person who failed to achieve the marriage plot and

instead works to undo it for everyone else (e.g. the sad hermit, the bitter hag, the childlike prude), nor as someone whose adherence to the marriage plot is simply harder to read (i.e. queer coupledom via Boston marriage), nor even as a person who grasps at the marriage plot through degraded means (the evil stepmother, the cougar). These impulses to fit the spinster into recognizably gendered categories proliferated at the turn of the twentieth century, but between these narratives, another concern began to emerge: what if none of these stories fit? Despite decades of feminist recovery of women's writing and queer theory's push to recognize the centrality of sexuality to humanist thought, the complexities of unmarried women's lives and labor have consistently been flattened in deference to trendier theoretical aims.

My first chapter, "I Could See No Other Way: Mary Wilkins Freeman's Frustrating Spinster," theorizes the literary spinster in all her frustrating illegibility, turning to the collaborative novel *The Whole Family* (1906), from which my project takes its name. The "unoccupied woman" in question is Lily Talbert (known to her family as 'Aunt Elizabeth'), the fiery spinster created in Mary E. Wilkins Freeman's chapter of the round-robin novel originally conceived by William Dean Howells and helmed by *Harper's Bazar* [sic] editor Elizabeth Jordan. Irked by Howells' description of 'the old maid aunt' in his inaugural chapter, Freeman derailed what was meant to be a straightforward account of a large family's reaction to the engagement of its second-eldest daughter by introducing the maiden aunt not as a cloistered fussbucket who dwells on the lost opportunity of failed courtships but as a sophisticated, fashionable woman whose romantic prospects are far from over—so much so that her niece's new fiancé falls in love with her. What was meant to unfold neatly as a realist portrayal of the modern American family quickly turned, as

Alfred Bendixen and June Howard have detailed, into an all-out family brawl, with each author attempting to seize control of the narrative. From the moment Freeman's young, winsome aunt enters the scene, The Whole Family works tirelessly to 'fix' her, attempting to correct the narrative and re-characterize the aunt as at turns disappointed, delusional, manipulative, and hysterical, with the characters' affective responses bleeding into the authors' behind-the-scenes correspondence. The novel is a perfect vehicle for exploring the mutual shaping of gender and public literary culture. Critics have been quick to read the novel allegorically as representing the literary sphere and have eagerly mined the collaborators' papers and letters for evidence, but much less attention has been paid to the actual contents of the novel. I read Freeman's chapter (and the other contributors' responses to it) closely, finding in it a shrewd commentary on what exactly the literary spinster is, was, or could be.

Freeman shows us that a spinster is a spectral thing, a figure we conjure whenever we deem her presence necessary. She is also something that disrupts and derails and is therefore dangerous—as Freeman's co-authors demonstrate, the spinster should be contained, but she will resist all the way and pull herself free of any attempt to pin her down conclusively. She is a danger moreover in both her self-sufficiency and in her uselessness: though another character disparages Lily as an 'unoccupied woman' who fails to bring useful things to pass, we see just how concerning her occupations are. Within the social world, the spinster fails to contribute to the comfort of men or the production of children who will grow to be men or 'useful' women; on a literary scale, the spinster disrupts the flow of narrative and represents a certain irreverence that is dangerous to an institution reliant on the order and approval of patriarchal gatekeeping. That Freeman

turns Howells' old maid on her head, we will see, is deeply concerning to those allied with the literary establishment.

My second chapter, "Spinsters and Shepherdesses: The Queer Caretaking of Sarah Orne Jewett" follows Freeman and her co-authors' frustration into a broader consideration of how and why one might take care of a text. Turning to Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896), I consider the subtle, nuanced care that Jewett depicts in her rural Maine community of lonely women in tandem with the earnest, politically-invested care with which feminist critics have long treated Jewett herself. Much of feminist criticism has been about not only ensuring a future for women's stories but also a past. Criticism pertaining to Jewett (and Firs more specifically) has followed similar contours, figuring the critic as caretaker; much of the critical conflict has been about how--and why, and whether--to tend its own legacy. In finding answers to these questions, I look to the most spectral of spinsters, Jewett's Joanna, the ghostly figure at the center of *Firs* whose retreat from society after a failed engagement sparks a decades-long investment in the care and keeping of her memory. The female discursive community's preoccupation in the text with Joanna's legacy and the careful transmission of its importance to a new generation finds a mirror in feminist critics' attention to *Firs* itself. Integral to that critical attention is Willa Cather, Jewett's literary protégé and posthumous editor; I read Cather's attempt to curate the definitive edition of Firs as a form of editorial caretaking which complicates the question of how to tend to a resistant subject. In tracing Firs ' often-contentious occupation of feminist critique over the past century alongside the characters' determination to care for resistant figures, I argue that spinster caretaking in- and outside the novel express one another metonymically. As such, the spinster--in all her spectrality, her haunting illegibility--is a

resonant figure for the potentiality of women's writing at the end of the nineteenth century; she pulls at the threads of sentimentality inherited from earlier generations and of narrative form more broadly (a project which modernism will continue).

The third chapter of my project considers María Amparo Ruiz de Burton's *Who Would Have Thought It?* (1892), a sprawling satirical novel of manners undergirded by complex considerations of race, gender, class, and nationalism. While most analyses of the novel focus on the heroine Lola's complicated racial positionality, her foster mother Jemima Norval's function as avatar of racist abolitionism and the cult of true womanhood, and Ruiz de Burton's own political and racial investments, I center my attention on Lavinia Sprig, Jemima's maiden sister. Lavinia is largely read as one of the novel's comic relief characters--an impassioned yet silly spinster impeded by her pitiful romantic entanglements, naive conception of politics, and frequent swooning spells. Lavinia is often overlooked by critics or quickly understood as Ruiz de Burton's attempt to engage with feminist concerns. In short, Lavinia is treated by scholars much in the same way as by other characters in the novel: ridiculed, used, and dismissed. My own reading of the novel instead interrogates the extent to which Lavinia's spinster status creates the conditions both for her dismissal and independence. As an unmarried woman, Lavinia is untethered enough to float freely between the public and private spheres, tending to her nieces and nephew and attempting to rescue her brother from a Confederate prison, but the ways in which her actions operate outside the maternal and marital models of care render her caretaking illegible. Being an old maid allows her to entertain past and future romances, though it also allows those romances to be comedic rather than serious; occupied though she may be, she may never be productive. Lavinia's illegibility seems to extend to Ruiz de Burton herself--

she seems unsure what to do with Lavinia, which frustrates any easy reading of the novel. Through Lavinia, I am able to explore the degree to which the spinster's illegibility renders her unproductive for the novel's narrative aims and how that unproductivity allows for a messier (and ultimately more realistic) depiction. In so doing, *Who Would Have Thought It?* then becomes a limit case for the literary spinster and the feminist critic as caretaker.

In short, "An Unoccupied Woman" enters several important conversations in American literary studies and seeks to redefine the grounds on which they are held. In its interrogation of the function of plot in the novel (or, more specifically, the ways in which the spinster radically destabilizes and breaks down traditional plot structure), its rethinking of the role female regional writers played in the transition to modernist literature, and its call for a new feminist critical practice, this project prompts essential reconsiderations of how and why to read American women's writing. Ultimately, my project envisions a new chapter in feminist literary criticism, one sensitive to second-wave concern with sentimentality and third-wave attention to sexuality in order to expand our understanding of the possibilities and frustrations of women's writing.

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[1] Traister, *All the Single Ladies,* 5.
[2] For one such example, peruse the December 2019 issue of British *Vogue*, in which actor and activist Emma Watson described herself as "self-partnered" and subsequently set social media ablaze.
[3] Love, "Gyn/Apology: Sarah Orne Jewett's Spinster Aesthetics," 306.
[4] Ibid., 307.
[5] Such embarrassment, ironic or not, is vastly preferable to the also-popular affect of novelty. Kate Bolick's *Spinster: Making a Life of One's Own* (2015) frequently marvels at its author's singular discovery of the potential parallels between single women at the turns of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. See Briallen Hopper's excoriating review "On Spinsters" in *Hard To Love: Essays and Confessions* (2019).
[6] Koppelman, *Old Maids,* 1.
[7] Ibid., 1.
[8] Toth, *Regionalism and the Female Imagination*, 9; Fetterly & Pryse, *Writing Out of Place: Regionalism, Women, and American Literary Culture,* 2-3.
[9] See Tompkins, *Sensational Designs*, x-xv.
[10] Ammons, *Conflicting Stories*, 3.
[11] Baym, *Woman's Fiction*, ix.
[12] Tompkins, *Sensational Designs,* xvi.

[13] See Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables*, pp.24 for the narrator's refusal to 'intrude upon Hepzibah's toilet.'
[14] Gebhard, "Spinster in the House of American Criticism," 82.
[15] Ibid., 85.
[16] Peter Coviello gives an exhaustive summary of the whiplash of critical debates surrounding Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs* in *Tomorrow's Parties*, pp.222-3.
[17] See Kyla Schuller, *The Trouble With White Women* (2020), Rafia Zakaria, *Against White Feminism* (2021), and Karen Sánchez-Eppler, *Touching Liberty: Abolition, Feminism, and the Politics of the Body* (1993) as useful touchstones for an understanding of the ways in which mainstream (read: white) feminism has continually abandoned and/or exploited women of color in its tendency to align with whiteness.
[18] Kahan, *Celibacies*, 5; 4.
[19] See Michel Foucault, "Friendship as a Way of Life"
[20] Gebhard, "Spinster in the House," 89.
[21] For a brilliant assessment of the struggle to form a true feminist coalition across race, class, and sexuality, see Kyla Schuller, *The Trouble With White Women: A Counterhistory of Feminism*, 2021.
[22] See Natasha Hurley, "Type Complication and Literary Old Maids" in *Circulating Queerness: Before the Gay and Lesbian Novel,* 2018, pp. 109-48.
[23] Kahan, *Celibacies,* 6.

CHAPTER ONE:
"I Could See No Other Way": Mary Wilkins Freeman's Frustrating Spinster

> "Heavens! What a catastrophe! Who would have thought that the maiden aunt would go mad in the second chapter? Poor lady. Red hair and a pink hat and boys in beau-knots all over the costume. What will Mr. Howells say?"[1]

So wrote Henry Van Dyke to Elizabeth Jordan, then editor of *Harper's Bazar*, upon reading Mary Eleanor Wilkins Freeman's incendiary installment of the 1908 collaborative novel *The Whole Family*.[2] The novel, conceptualized by William Dean Howells (who was by then firmly established as the American 'Dean of Letters') was meant to be written round-robin by a cast of twelve celebrated authors, each taking up the perspective of a different member of an extended family, the Talberts, upon the engagement of their second-eldest daughter. The narrative, under Jordan's guidance, was meant to follow naturally from that announcement, providing the authors an opportunity to consider family, marriage, love, and the curious question of co-education in the new century. The project, moreover, would allow for a metafictional unpacking of the literary community's interconnectedness in that it would feature the *Bazar*'s regular writers and the brightest literary voices of the day (the emphasis, of course, being the degree to which those categories overlapped).[3] Early in the novel, Howells' character Ned Temple, editor of the local newspaper, sputters in indignation at his wife's suggestion that he not publish the details of the Talberts' 'family affair': "Well, I consider the readers of the *Banner* a part of the family!"[4] What Howells seems to mean by this assertion is that the *Bazar*'s subscribers, readers, and contributors constitute a 'whole family,' subject to his benevolent authority as patriarch.[5] Mary Wilkins

Freeman's intrusion as the 'mad' maiden aunt upsets the entire production and signifies the frustrating, destabilizing power of an 'unoccupied,' unproductive spinster.[6]

Van Dyke's scandalized amusement comes in the wake of Freeman's unsettling revelation of Aunt Elizabeth 'Lily' Talbert, the unmarried sister of patriarch Cyrus Talbert, as not a maidenly prude who dwells on the lost opportunity of failed courtships but as a sophisticated, fashionable woman whose days of romantic viability are far from over—so much so that her niece's new fiancé Harry Goward is in love with her. Howells' vision of a glorious and orderly roundtable on the modern American family quickly devolved into a power struggle with increasingly melodramatic interventions as each author attempted to seize control of the narrative and right the ship Aunt Lily had set to sink.[7] Freeman's chapter—which Jordan later described as "the explosion of a bomb-shell on our literary hearthstone"[8]—quickly became an affective miasma, shaping every other author's reaction both on and off the page. After Freeman's charming spinster enters the narrative in the novel's second chapter, the rest of the Family works in vain to 'fix' her by disproving the terms Freeman had set and recharacterizing Aunt Lily as delusional, untrustworthy, and aberrant. This chapter reads Freeman's frustrated and frustrating old maid aunt alongside her co-authors' frustrated and frustrating responses as a way of theorizing the literary spinster.

The Whole Family is a useful vehicle for unpacking the deceptively complex figure of the literary spinster for several reasons, including the authors' detailed commentary on their frustrated attempts to contain and command the winsome old maid Freeman unleashes onto their shared page. I unfold the literary spinster slowly in these pages, first tracking her odd spectrality, as evidenced by the central conflict between Howells and

Freeman's understandings of what an old maid could be by the turn of the twentieth century. The spinster both does and does not exist—that is, our understanding of her (typically conceived as a woman somehow occupying youthful naivete and elderly world-weariness at the same time as fussy middle age, prone to drab clothing, prudishness, and bouts of hysteria) is always out of date, an impossible conception in the face of modern single women. Definitions of both 'modern single women' and 'old-fashioned spinsters' are endlessly elastic, as we have seen in the introduction's analysis of the cyclical disavowal and return to the spinster; the language Freeman uses in 1906 to defend her version of Lily Talbert would not be out of place in 1966, let alone 2022. I then move to an exploration of the literary spinster's narratological frustrations, as evidenced by *The Whole Family*'s increasingly exasperated attempts to wrangle Lily back into the recognizable plot Howells had envisioned. The openendedness of the literary spinster, I find, allows her to evade the grasp of conventional narrative and genre; we will see this formal slipperiness develop in Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs,* which makes an art of indeterminacy, and find its limit in Ruiz de Burton's *Who Would Have Thought It?*, which bounces against generic constraints like a pinball. The literary spinster's narrative 'unproductivity' in the eyes of the other characters and their authors (which, ironically, is almost single-handedly responsible for *The Whole Family*'s final plot) also becomes a way of understanding a larger concern with misplaced or disproportionate care, as we will see more clearly in Chapter Two. While the few literary critics who have written on *The Whole Family* have thoroughly analyzed it as a means of exploring the process of literary production at the turn of the century, far less attention has been paid to the text itself; in reading Freeman's old maid

aunt against her co-author's reactions to her, I draw a sharper understanding of just how productive an unoccupied woman can be.

An Innovation in the Shape of a Maiden Aunt: Defining the Spinster

Upon submitting her chapter to Jordan, Freeman included a note in which she admits, "to tell the truth such an innovation in the shape of a maiden aunt rather frightened me, but the old conception of her was so hackneyed…I did think some plot ought to be started—and I could see no other way."[9] Freeman plays the helpless authoress with a wink, as Howells' chapter certainly sets up a clear plot—albeit not one that Freeman found particularly interesting. Whereas nearly every participating author wished to write one of the novel's final chapters "and have the benefit of the literary spading done by his predecessors," the forceful personalities of Howells and Freeman elected to go first.[10] Howells clearly wished to set the tone for the entire project, sketching both the most basic elements of the plot and quick portraits of every character. Writing from the perspective of the Talberts' neighbor, Ned Temple, Howells even established the first-person format of the following chapters, though the other authors were in theory able to write in the form of their choosing. (However, when Edith Wyatt submitted her first draft of the Mother's chapter as a series of letters from other characters, she was promptly asked to rewrite her contribution. While Wyatt's original draft has been lost to history, Howells heartily approved of her second attempt.)[11] Through Ned temple, Howells offers his co-contributors a variety of themes to draw upon in addition to the basic engagement plot, from the organization and aesthetics of the New England domestic sphere to the status of marriage in the early twentieth century to concerns of co-education. Freeman's insistence that

Howells' old-fashioned description of the aunt absolutely forced her hand might, as June Howard has pointed out, be an instance of Freeman overplaying her hand.[12] Nowhere in Howells' chapter does Ned Temple describe Aunt Elizabeth as a woman in her mid-thirties nor even as Cyrus' younger sister; in fact, he mentions her only briefly as a woman who "had long been a lady of that age when ladies begin to be spoken of as maiden" and whose reputation in Eastridge is as a woman "not without the disappointment which endears maiden ladies to the imagination, but the disappointment was of a date so remote that it was only a matter of pathetic hearsay, now."[13] These passing descriptions conjure the image of an elderly sister rather than the youthful firecracker Freeman introduces as Lily Talbert. It is hard to read Freeman's chapter as anything other than an irritated response to Howells' offhand invocation of the spectral 'old maid' whom she had been revising for most of her literary career.

Freeman's faux-naïve admission of her chapter's potential volatility was indeed met with an uproar by the other authors. Howells, in a letter to Jordan "that almost scorched the paper it was written on," begged the editor to shelve Freeman's contribution: "Don't *don't* let her ruin our beautiful story!"[14] As Howells' pet project and an intended showpiece for the *Bazar*, the stakes were high. The novel was heavily publicized, particularly once Henry James, Mark Twain, and Elizabeth Steward Phelps signed onto the project—though in the ensuing drama, Twain rescinded his commitment (much to the satisfaction of James, who wished to be the brightest star on the roster). Against Howells' wishes, Jordan ultimately decided to keep Freeman's chapter and continue the novel as planned. She writes in her autobiography *Three Rousing Cheers* that Howells "took the decision like the scholar and gentleman he was; but he let [her] see that he thought the novel was wrecked and that he

himself lay buried among the ruins."[15] Howells furthermore requested that at the very least, Jordan refrain from sending Freeman's chapter to the other writers, fearing that "they might take their color from it and lose originality of composition."[16] Given that such bleed among chapters is an essential aspect of a collaborative novel, it is clear that Howells' suggestion was less a plea for artistic purity and more an effort at crisis management, seeking to quarantine Freeman's radical depiction of Lily Talbert.[17] Howells, unsurprisingly, was not the only writer seeking control of the whole enterprise. Jordan later registered her surprise that the other authors "would accept the proofs of the chapters preceding their own as tacit invitations to comment, praise, blame, suggest, and in general, to take part in the editorial work on the novel" and would go so far as to spread the word of Freeman's 'bomb-shell' and Howells' response to their friends and colleagues, spurring literary gossip across New York City much like the members of the Talbert family flurry through Eastridge in an attempt to control the narrative of Peggy's engagement gone awry.[18] Dale Bauer's reading of the novel positions what she calls "the politics of collaboration" as a struggle to wrest control of the plot, which "determines in large part the form and ideology of the text."[19] For Bauer, then, Freeman's chapter succeeds in "establishing the terms of the subsequent debate."[20] Considering the near sole focus on Lily Talbert in the authors' correspondence and a century's (admittedly sparse) criticism of the novel, I would agree and further argue that Freeman positions her chapter as an intervention in a much longer conversation on the mutual shaping of gender and the public literary sphere.

Freeman, in a letter characteristically spirited and stubborn, wrote to Jordan in defense of her authorial choices in "The Maiden Aunt." I quote her letter in full here, as it

provides a rich context not only for Freeman's thoughts but also the other authors' responses:

METUCHEN, NJ., August 1, 1906

Dear Miss Jordan,

You are most certainly right in your conception of the old maid aunt.[21] Mr. Howells evidently clings to the old conception of her. **You and I know that in these days of voluntary celibacy on the part of a woman an old maid only fifteen years older than a young girl is a sheer impossibility, if she is an educated woman with a fair amount of brains.** Moreover, a young man is really more apt to fall in love with her…Why the whole plot of the novel must be relegated back to Miss Austen and *Godey's Lady's Book*, and all that sort of thing, if the old conception holds.

At this minute I can think of a score of women who fifty years ago would have carried out Mr. Howells's idea of the old maid aunt. To-day they look as pretty and as up-to-date as their young nieces—and no pretence about it, either. They really *are*. **Their single state is a deliberate choice on their own part, and men are at their feet. Single women have caught up with, and passed, old bachelors in the last half of the century.**

I don't think Mr. Howells realizes this. He is thinking of the time when women of thirty put on caps, and renounced the world. That was because

they married at fifteen and sixteen, and at thirty had about a dozen children. Now they simply do not do it.

Peggy was twenty, and her aunt thirty-four. It is obvious nonsense to make it impossible that a man should fall in love with Elizabeth, and that she should still be beautiful…Suppose Peggy was even considerably older; the possibility, even probability, remains that the aunt would still have the advantage…

I do think the whole freshness and novelty of the book depends on my conception of that part, and I hope it will hold with the other authors. Otherwise it will just be a hackneyed *Way Down East* sort of novel, and the situations will be completely spoiled.[22] In fact, there will be no situation except one of opéra bouffe.

That young man was as much in love with Miss Talbert as Thackery makes Pendennis in love with the actress, and poor Peggy was confronted with a hard fact. …

I am glad you look at the character as I do. Otherwise I should think I had written very stupidly.

Very sincerely yours,

Mary E. Wilkins Freeman[23]

A cursory reading of this letter might find fifty-something Freeman to be defensive and insulted by the notion that a woman's romantic and sexual viability ends in her twenties; she had, after all, married for the first time only a few years earlier in 1902. Jordan herself

was happily single at the time of the novel's construction, writing in her autobiography that "I also agreed with [Freeman] that an up-to-date woman of thirty-four was still in the ring. (I myself was in my thirties and convinced that I was going strong.)"[24] Though Jordan was, in fact, 41 at the time of this correspondence, her point stands. In fact, Freeman and Jordan here take up a conversation about the modern spinster, who seems to exist in a perpetual state of rediscovery, as outlined in this project's introduction. Mitigating, perhaps, any personal offense at Howells' 'old maid,' Freeman most emphatically defends her authorial choices in Howells' own favored terms: those of plot and of realism. The old maid as he conceives of her, she argues, simply does not exist anymore. To include her, even as a side character, would be to hurl the novel decades into the past, to Harriet Beecher Stowe and old-fashioned sentimentality. If Howells wished his co-contributors to ponder the modern family and questions of marriage and co-education in the twentieth century, then he must expect to encounter New Women rather than old maids.

Although none of the contributors to *The Whole Family* use the term 'New Woman, their engagement with Lily Talbert (and, to an extent, Peggy Talbert herself as a young, educated woman whose romance blossoms out from under the watchful eye of her parents, her fiancé an unknown match unlike the family-chosen-and-approved suitors of her parents' Victorian youths) very much enters the decade-long cultural debate on women's shifting societal opportunities. As described by June Howard, the New Woman's primary distinction was of her wide and varied choices: "She might marry, or not; she might have a career, or not; she might support reform and suffrage, or not—but in each case, she was understood to make up her own mind."[25] Freeman's letter echoes this discourse, emphasizing that modern women's "single state is a deliberate choice on their own part,

and men are at their feet" and that such a portrayal is hardly revolutionary by 1906. This insistence belies Freeman's earlier note to Jordan, enclosed with the draft of her chapter, in which she described herself as "rather frightened" by "such an innovation in the shape of a maiden aunt"—if, after all, the old maid aunt is a nonentity by 1906, why should Freeman's depiction of an attractive, fashionable single woman in her thirties be so innovative? We could dismiss this contradiction as evidence of Freeman's nerves in submitting a draft that was sure to displease (perhaps even offend!) her friend and mentor William Dean Howells, but it is more compelling to consider the possibility that Freeman (knowingly or not) has voiced a key quality of the spinster: the ways in which her unfixed status mark her as frustratingly untimely, a sort of out-of-date novelty.

Writing a century after Freeman, queer theorist Heather Love ponders the "contemporary irrelevance" of the spinster and her apparent disappearance from feminist discourse, asking: "Have we moved beyond the spinster stereotype, or have we simply forgotten her?"[26] The problem might be, she says, that the very term 'spinster' "no longer means unwanted: women themselves are now quite often in the position to determine its meaning."[27] That Love's questions so neatly chorus Freeman's exclamations a full century earlier tells us less about the old maid herself and more about her utility as a catch-all term to be trotted out at the first sign of a perceived shift in unmarried women's social standing. In the contemporary moment, this assessment rings true, considering the trade paperbacks and endless thinkpieces that work to reclaim and redefine the title of 'old maid.' Rebecca Traister's *All the Single Ladies: Unmarried Women and the Rise of an Independent Nation* (2016) provides an indispensable account of single women's widening freedoms over the past century.[28] Most recently, bestselling memoirs Glynnis MacNicol's *No One Tells You This*

(2018) and Kate Bollick's *Spinster: Making a Life of One's Own* (2016) have taken up Love's question and attempted to reclaim the term 'spinster' while simultaneously arguing that singledom has always been a viable, desirable choice and that old-fashioned spinsters no longer exist. Bollick in particular describes her conception of happy spinsterdom as a breakthrough in feminist thought while also citing a battery of other writers making similar claims across the last century: Betsy Israel's *The Bachelor Girl* (2003), Nancy Peterson's *Our Lives for Ourselves* (1981), Margaret Adams' *Single Blessedness* (1976), Helen Gurley Brown's *Sex and the Single Girl* (1962), Marjorie Hillis' *Live Alone and Like It* (1936), and Myrtle Reed's *The Spinster Book* (1907), among others. The cultural amnesia surrounding the spinster, who seems to occupy an elusive temporal space between 'old fashioned' and 'of the future,' indicates a persistent unease with this unfixed figure.

This unease resonates in the reams of letters sent by *The Whole Family* contributors as they grappled with Freeman's chapter. Over and over, they worry: how can we understand the old maid (or at least this version of the old maid) and what do we *do* with her? A more fundamental question: what *is* an old maid, after all? There must, it stands to reason, be a moment in which an unmarried woman becomes a spinster—a snapping shut of sorts, when the promise of youth breaks against the foreclosure of matrimony, of reproduction, of utility. And yet, there is not: a spinster is only ever *revealed* to have been a spinster all along. At some indeterminate point in an unmarried woman's life, we are to understand that she has always been destined for the spinsterly life. (We might think here of Henry James' iconic description of spinster essentialism in *The Bostonians* twenty years earlier: "Olive Chancellor was unmarried by every implication of her being. She was a spinster as Shelley was a lyric poet, or as the month of August is sultry."[29]) She derails plot

in her open-endedness and lack of relationality; she denies the swift advancement of what is understood to be the normative progression of 'her story.' She is also a reactive figure, blinking into existence once the perceptions of others determine her presence, taking shape in conjunction with their emotional responses: their sighs, their clucking tongues, their heads shaken in sympathy and disapproval. Can you choose to be a spinster, or must spinsterhood be thrust upon you?

Let us consider the possibility of a 'spinster affect': the emotions, expressions, and physiological responses that produce and are produced by her—the panicked impulse to attach narrative to an evasive host, revealing in that panic a version of what Lauren Berlant calls genre flail. Put simply, 'spinster affect' is frustration borne of frustration. The old maid's tendency to throw plot—to halt progression, to spur a detour, to cause a moment of rupture—frustrates the narrative and is, in turn, frustrating. *The Whole Family,* then, is the funhouse mirror through which we can watch this frustration play out at every level. The 'bomb-shell' of Freeman's addition to the text is one that irreparably ruptures and, simultaneously, endlessly generates. Let us turn now to Freeman's chapter itself, which demonstrates the spinster's frustrating contradictions and possibilities.

The Literary Old Maid Invents Herself

Imagine, for a moment, yourself in the place of Mary Eleanor Wilkins Freeman in 1906, having just received the first pages of *The Whole Family*, written by a celebrated pillar of American realism whom you truly admire and who has publicly celebrated (albeit with a sharp edge of suspicion) your writing—in which you have worked to give depth and truth to literary depictions of unmarried and elderly and otherwise 'odd' women—for

decades.[30] What might you feel upon reading Howells' casual references to a pathetic, unloved maiden aunt, knowing that the author's steadfast loyalty to literary truth indicates his belief that loveless old maids are less a generic trope than a commonplace reality for women of a certain age? It is tempting to project a swell of feminist rage onto Freeman, who had by 1906 endured decades of scrutiny from the press over her appearance and romantic life (to the point that she was christened 'The Literary old Maid' by the *New York Telegraph*)[31], but her aforementioned letter to Elizabeth Jordan and her eventual chapter's irreverence indicate instead a certain boredom. *Oh, this again?* we can almost hear Freeman sigh. "The Old-Maid Aunt" becomes in this context Freeman's attempt to clarify once and for all what, exactly, a spinster might be.

What that spinster is, according to Freeman, is ancient history; in the wide new world of the twentieth century, the frail and prudish maiden called into focus by Howells' Ned Temple simply no longer exists and is, at best, a symbolic relic of days gone by. We all but hear the scare quotes around her chapter title, as the opening sentences of "The Old-Maid Aunt" effectively skewer not only Howells' description but the very concept of an old maid:

> I am relegated here in Eastridge to the position in which I suppose I properly belong, and I dare say it is for my best spiritual and temporal good. Here I am an old-maid aunt. Not a day, not an hour, not a minute, when I am with other people, passes that I do not see myself in their estimation playing that role as plainly as if I saw myself in a looking glass. It is a moral lesson I presume I need.[32]

Freeman's old maid aunt isn't, then, an old maid at all—in fact, she goes so far as to say that it is only in her family's small town and smaller minds that she is even 'Aunt Elizabeth' at all. Elsewhere, she is Lily Talbert, a vibrant and viable woman secure enough in her life to slip into the role of 'old maid' when necessary:

> The situation has seemed to me rather amusing, inasmuch as it has involved a secret willingness to be what everybody has considered me very unwilling to be. I have regarded it as a sort of joke upon other people. […] But I think I am honest—I really mean to be, and I think I am—when I say that outside Eastridge the role of an old-maid aunt is the very last one which I can take to my advantage. Here I am estimated according to what people think I am, rather than what I actually am.[33]

By her own account, Lily both is and is not a spinster. Everywhere, she is an unmarried woman of thirty-four, but only in Eastridge does that make her an old maid. Lily's spinster status arises out of the judgement, disapproval, and pity of her family. If elsewhere—the bustling drawing rooms of Boston society, the beachside manors of Cape Cod, the sunny villas in the south of France—she is Lily Talbert, a vibrant and fashionable woman with scores of dear friends and suitors, it is not out of some delusional sense of self. "I know it is the popular opinion that old maids are exceedingly prone to deceive themselves concerning the endurance of their youth and charms, and the views of other people with regard to them," Lily muses, "But I am willing, even anxious, to be quite frank with myself."[34] In what could believably be read as a jab toward Howells' ironclad call for truth and realism, Freeman here insists that it is *Lily's* version of the nonexistent spinster rather

than her family's who most mirrors the status of unmarried women in the early twentieth century.

Yet even here, Freeman frustrates Lily's interpolation by reflecting Eastridge's opinion of her back onto themselves. Lily pities her family, stuck in 'old narratives' and enthused by all the wrong things: "They do not know that today an old-maid aunt is as much of an anomaly as a spinning-wheel, that she has ceased to exist, that she is prehistoric, that even grandmothers have almost disappeared off the face of the earth."[35] And yet, of course, they haven't—grandmothers and old maid aunts abound in Eastridge, called into existence by the townspeople's insistence that they are there. As such, Freeman "creates a spinster whose life is enviable rather than pitiful and who mocks the dull stability of her brother's world."[36] If the rest of the Talbert family (and, indeed, the whole of Eastridge society) pities Lily for her lack of home and husband, then she refocuses that pity on their petty priorities. She casts a withering glance upon the mansard roof of which Cyrus is so proud and shudders at the thought of Ned Temple's neatly organized life, with a wife who spends her days arranging knickknacks and mending socks and preparing meals for precisely the right time. "Those exactions are to me pathetic," Lily sniffs, "These reflections are uncommonly like the popular conception as to how an old-maid aunt should reflect, had she not ceased to exist."[37] With this acerbic observation, Lily again upends the common thought of unmarried women as 'fixed' or otherwise stuck. If others see her as passive, merely waiting for a man to appear and choose her for a wife, she denies that passivity, ascribing her single status to a conscious choice on her part. Moreover, she argues that it is *married* folk who are passive, who have never even chosen what time they would like to eat, let alone actively considered the terms upon which they live their lives.[38]

This is not to say, however, that Lily Talbert is a paragon of feminist ideals by today's standards. As both June Howard and Leah Blatt Glasser note, Lily is not the straightforward feminist figure she might, for all her independence and sexual liberation, seem. The subject of her 'disappointment' (which we are to understand as a broken or perhaps endlessly forestalled engagement to Lyman Wilde, a character who enters the narrative scene by way of Mary Stewart Cutting's "The Daughter-In-Law"), at turns referred to as her 'tragedy,' recurs frequently in her thoughts. As Leah Blatt Glasser notes, Freeman "has her heroine internalize the view that she cannot have the most important pleasures of life without marriage."[39] Despite Freeman's boisterous declaration to Jordan that unmarried women are single by choice and Lily's pride in her full life and well-maintained beauty, Lily characterizes those qualities as "the minor sweets of life," noting sadly that she "could not have the really big worth-while ones."[40] She struggles with the "horrible nuisance" of femininity while also mocking the frumpy fashion and hopeless hairstyles of her brother's family. Such inconsistencies are frustrating hallmarks of Freeman's fiction.

Many critics, particularly second-wave feminists participating in the 'Freeman revival' effort of the 1980s and 90s, try to smooth out these moments in order to better prop Freeman and her heroines up as feminist icons, but these contradictions and ambivalences are precisely what make her character so interesting. Leah Blatt Glasser, in her 1996 monograph on Freeman's life and work, celebrates the contradictions and contrariness that mark Freeman's writing: "I was drawn to her subversive strategies in her fiction, her understanding of the role of work in women's lives, her courageous portraits of aging women, and her depictions of the unique relationships that women form."[41] As in the broader critical reception of regional writing outlined in this project's introduction,

Freeman's work was too often regarded as quaint and charming depictions of rural life rather than complex artistic undertakings. Doris Turkes offers a withering summary of twentieth-century male critics' view of Freeman: "Critical judgment declared that Freeman's place and her subject were no longer relevant, since she pictured a dead society, and her works should be read as snapshots of a dismal past, if read at all. […] [These critics argue] that she is a curiosity of the past, that her characters live in a dark, dismal world, and that therefore her work is without universality."[42] In her 2000 introduction to the Penguin Classics edition of *A New England Nun and Other Stories,* Sandra Zagarell aligns the blossoming of feminist literary criticism with the widening acknowledgment of Freeman's artistry, articulating that "Freeman's many-sided depictions of women … --of women single as well as married; old as well as young; often struggling for livelihood and determined to preserve their independence—spoke eloquently to late twentieth century readers and underwrote the [then-] current Freeman revival."[43] Glasser similarly says that she "felt an obligation, a deep connection to a woman whose work had been so misunderstood" in her study of Freeman's writing.[44] Here again we see the collapse of the literary spinster, her author, and her critic on full display.

As the conflicting elements of Freeman's writing were often glossed over in early feminist criticism, Freeman's life itself posed a challenge for feminist critics seeking to hold her up as an ideal of single womanhood. Her marriage to Dr. Charles Freeman is often characterized as unhappy, mentioned always with the dual caveats of its post-menopausal occurrence and Dr. Freeman's struggle with addiction that ultimately prompted their bitter separation. That Freeman married at all seems disappointing to critics who wish for a neater image of Freeman as radical defender of single women everywhere. Aside from

Brent Kendrick, few critics note that her relationship with Dr. Freeman spanned fifteen happy years before his health troubles. Few others admit that the lack of information (both public and private) concerning Freeman's feelings about her relationship with Dr. Freeman is due in large part to the overwhelming scrutiny she faced from the press. The prospect of Freeman, who by the late 1890s was not only a well-published author but a celebrity in her own right known for her beauty and fashionable dress, finally joining the respectable ranks of the married was literary tabloid fodder—so much so that the *New York Telegraph* began complaining about its own coverage of her courtship! "The public is really tired of the love affairs of the literary old maid, and the sooner she marries the doctor an takes him out of the public view the more highly will the action be appreciated," quotes Brent Kendrick.[45] The publicity was so relentless and invasive that Freeman ceased to mention private details of her relationship even in letters to her closest friends. After their wedding, Freeman continued to shield some personal details from the press (particularly as related to Dr. Freeman's worsening problems with alcohol), but she began again to detail their happiness in letters to friends. Those details, however, are hard to come by in critical accounts of Freeman's life and work, arguably due to critics' desire to deprioritize her 'capitulation' to heteronormativity.

In the 1970s and 80s, feminist critics and queer theorists instead emphasized Freeman's decades-long relationship with Mary Wales, positioning her marriage to Charles as a blip in an otherwise radical feminist life. (One typical description of Freeman's marriage: "The forty-nine-year-old woman […] finally married, moved in with her husband's mother and his unmarried sisters, and apparently attempted to become 'unstuck' in her own development."[46]) Freeman's years with Wales, described obliquely by

Zagarell as "an intimate domestic relationship" with unknown sexual aspects, spanned much of her thirties and forties.[47] Glasser characterizes these years as "the richest years of her literary career," arguing that Freeman "was in fact at her best when she wrote, often in highly sensual terms, about the bonds women form."[48] Freeman's life and her work, however, refuse to fit into such neat packaging: her characters are often happy to remain single, conflicted at the thought of marriage, and uncertain of the terms of their own femininity. Such ambivalence is not, importantly, the result of her marriage and its trials; Marjorie Pryse finds that "even in [Freeman's] early fiction, in which she often portrays the lives of unmarried women, Freeman implicitly questions whether a woman who remains unmarried may also develop as a person—and as a writer—or whether a woman must take on a 'family' role in order to achieve her developmental potential."[49] June Howard notes that "Freeman's life and work affirm that sustaining relationships come in many forms. Yet in each social world, some kinds of connections are recognized and valued, while others are ignored or forbidden."[50] True—though this sentiment applies equally to the social world of literary criticism.

If certain aspects of Freeman's life and writing failed to cohere with the critical politics de rigueur (be they the image of Freeman as the model of independent womanhood or the subtle intricacies of queer love in New England regional writing), they were often downplayed in critical accounts of her work. As Glasser notes, Freeman's life "was necessarily haunted by contradictions," and her writing is marked by polyvocality: "voices that both celebrate and deny the superior quality of life for those women characters who, despite the stigma of spinsterhood, choose to love and support each other in place of making a man the center of their lives."[51] Such contradictions are not without their

drawbacks, though. "In searching for intimacy and connection, Freeman's women are more often than not frustrated," writes Mary Reichardt, "In the end, they often fail to achieve relationship in a community where social proscriptions have labeled and isolated them, where communication has broken down."[52] Despite this frustration, a word that echoes throughout Freeman criticism, when Freeman's contradictions are placed in conversation with a wider family of writers, it is *they* rather than she who is thrown off kilter.

The responses to Freeman's chapter, both on and off the page, indicate a high degree of frustration and panic. "Every author on the list dropped all other interests to write me about it," Jordan recalls, "They wrote intimately and in a state of high excitement."[53] Freeman's old maid aunt brings everything and everyone to a standstill, prompting the other authors to try to 'fix' Aunt Elizabeth and 'save' the novel. One would, of course, be totally justified in thinking about the spinster's frustrating effects in terms of gender roles, sexuality, or materiality—and indeed, this has typically been the way that scholars have approached the novel. Lily "represents a danger to the patriarchal domestic ideology which the whole family is enlisted to preserve."[54] Dale Bauer reads the other authors' attempts to "tame" Lily as evidence of "their fear of her power and the need to assert what the authors consider to be 'natural' and domesticated sexuality."[55] But here, I try instead to think via narrative—affective attachments to the marriage plot as plot, the affective response to its rupture, etc. The family of authors work to make Lily legible, containing her by forcing her either into the 'old conception' or an otherwise understandable model, to varying effect. The problem is that none of their efforts hold, partially because Freeman so effectively foreshadows their responses in Lily's sharp analysis of Eastridge. Lily understands the

Talberts—their beliefs, their desires, their relations to one another—perfectly; the Talberts find Lily absolutely incomprehensible, and therein lies the problem.

An Unoccupied Woman: Spinsterly Production & Productivity

To work through this frustration a different way, I turn now to Mary Heaton Vorse's chapter on The Grandmother, the first to respond to Freeman's Old-Maid Aunt. Elizabeth Talbert, in Grandmother Evarts' estimation, is an "unoccupied woman," someone who "makes a convenience" of Ada Talbert's well-run home and has neither the desire to be useful nor the good sense to be shamed[56]:

> Elizabeth Talbert is one of those women who live on a false basis. She is a case of arrested development. She enjoys the same amusements that she did fifteen years ago. She is like a young fruit that has been put up in a preserving fluid and gives the illusion of youth; the preserving fluid in her case is the disappointment she suffered as a girl. I like useful women—women who, whether married or unmarried, bring things to pass in this world, and Elizabeth does not. Still, I can't help feeling sorry for her, poor thing; in the end our own shortcomings and vanities hurt us more than they hurt anyone else.[57]

This description is an affective minefield: disapproval, disgust, condescension, anger, pity, perhaps a bit of envy, and of course frustration. Importantly, Grandmother Evarts' views must be held in distinction from Mary Heaton Vorse's—identifying the characters with their authors is a delicate matter, one doubly complicated by the clear alignment of many of the authors' thoughts on the novel and their tendency to refer explicitly in letters to their characters as strange doubles whom they 'met' during the writing process. Whereas

Howells and Freeman, for instance, clearly 'believe' along the same lines as their characters (as is evident in both their personal writings and other fiction), Vorse was delighted by Freeman's intervention and was hardly the reactionary conservative she brings to life on the page.[58] Grandmother Evarts is particularly concerned with Lily's 'stuck-ness,' the same sort of arrested development that Lily herself views as the Talberts' main problem. That Evarts uses the domestic metaphor of a jar of unnatural preserves to describe Lily indicates her panic at anyone and anything failing to progress, explicitly in terms of material production and implicitly in terms of reproduction.

What is panic-inducing to Grandmother Evarts is the idea of consumption without replenishment—to move through the world without 'bringing anything to pass,' to 'make a convenience' of the domestic space without contributing to household labor or even the emotional labor of familial caretaking. Lily is representative of an entire generation of women who throw away scraps of fabric instead of patchworking a quilt and toss glass jars into the garbage rather than finding new use for them:

> Machinery has put a stop to many of our old occupations, and the result is a generation of nervous women who haven't a single thing in life to occupy themselves with but their own feelings, while girls like Peggy, who are active and useful, have nothing to do but to go to school and keep on going to school. […] Formerly in a family like ours there would have been so much to do that, whether she liked it or not, and whether she was married or not, Elizabeth would have had to be a useful women—and now, the less said the better.[59]

These concerns are typical of those surrounding the spinster: she is dangerous in her non-utility and in her opting out of the chronobiopolitical imperative of managed reproductive coupledom. She is dangerous also in her narrative rupture: Lily is someone who does not 'bring things to pass in the world.' She does not further the plot—quite literally, in that she delays and effectively ruins the marriage plot set out by Howells.

This derailment should not, perhaps, have been such a surprise, as Freeman was well-known by 1906 for "[upsetting] conventional expectations by soon displacing or otherwise skewing the outcome of [the marriage] plot. Though the majority of Freeman's women protagonists wish to marry and many eventually do [Lily excepted, of course], marriage is never considered a fulfilling 'reward' for or ending to a woman's trials."[60] Such ambivalence is not, importantly, necessarily the result of Freeman's marriage and its trials, as some critics might suggest; Marjorie Pryse finds that "even in [Freeman's] early fiction, in which she often portrays the lives of unmarried women, Freeman implicitly questions whether a woman who remains unmarried may also develop as a person—and as a writer—or whether a woman must take on a 'family' role in order to achieve her developmental potential."[61] Just what that 'family role' must be, however, is not so clear.

Lily, clearly, is not interested in taking on the role of wife (despite her many interrupted memories of her 'disappointment' with Lyman Wilde), nor does she express any desire for motherhood. Instead, Lily takes on the slantwise caretaking role of the old maid aunt; just because she does so self-consciously does not mean she does so without genuine affection. Though Vorse's Grandmother expounds at length on Lily's lack of productivity and occupation, in Freeman's chapter we see endless amounts of production—just not, of course, in ways that are easily recognized as respectable and good.

As such, Lily demonstrates the frustrating occupation we will see again in Jewett's Joanna, Ruiz de Burton's Lavinia, and generations of feminist literary critics: she cares and is occupied, yes, but in all the wrong proportions and about all the wrong things. She is preoccupied with her dress and with affecting the manners and habits of city folk; she spends too much time gossiping and visiting with friends rather than producing children or at least a handsome quilt; she turns up her nose at her sister-in-law Ada's housekeeping (nevermind that Ada's domestic work also does not pass Grandmother Evarts' muster) and gets in the way of Peggy's very productive engagement. And yet, in Freeman's chapter, we see Lily's genuine concern for her family and their well-being. She might criticize their habits and priorities, and she might resent their insistence on her as a pathetic old maid, but she does her level best to undo the mess she has created with Harry Goward.

As such, Freeman's frustrating, unoccupied old maid is perhaps the *most* productive contribution to the novel. Without her intervention, it appears as though the chapters would merely have followed neatly from Howells' original design, offering the subtleties of various characters' perspectives but lacking the drama of Freeman's exciting derailment. Freeman is not unaware of her plotty productivity: throughout Lily's chapter, she points cheekily to the spinster's ability to throw plot. While Lily worries about the rules and conventions of the role she is to inhabit in Eastridge, she notes with exasperation that Harry operates out of the wrong genre's rulebook. Harry moves firmly out of the world of realism and into that of melodrama, fabricating wild excuses and dramatic escapes and purloined letters. John Crowley, in his review of Alfred Bendixen's edition of *The Whole Family*, latches onto the mysterious letter (introduced in Freeman's chapter and bounced like a hot potato throughout the remaining chapters) as evidence of the novel's

protomodernist sensibilities.[62] That "not even James could find a way to open [the letter]" is, to him, a marvel.[63] I move, however, to give Freeman credit for the letter, which I argue is evidence both of Freeman's frustration with Howells and her good-faith attempt to move the plot along. If *the Whole Family* is meant to be a modern realist novel, then Howells' gesture toward the stereotypical old maid aunt drags the novel into an earlier time. Despite Howells distaste for sentimentality, Freeman suggests, a fussy old maid moves the novel into the literature of the 1850s rather than the 1900s; by making Lily charming and beautiful, she pulls the novel back to modernity, and with a wink, the central actor of the marriage plot moves it back into melodrama. Less a symbol of modernism than a trope of the gothic and the Romantic, the mysterious, unopened letter becomes a plot device that moves with the same ambiguity and elasticity as the spinster herself. Freeman, of course, is in on the joke; she ends the aunt's chapter with Lily's sly declaration: "I cannot tell how this will end."[64]

Then She Went Away: 'Fixing' the Spinster

Typical readings of *The Whole Family* have found Lily Talbert to be an amusing but ultimately sad diversion from which the novel never quite recovers. For Mary Reichardt, this is in keeping with Freeman's oeuvre, which she characterizes as populated by lone and lonely women "cut off either voluntarily or through circumstance from ties to other human beings" in a seemingly futile search for meaning and purpose.[65] Heather Love similarly mines the literary spinster's solitude and loneliness for its affective and queer resonances, as we will see further in Chapter Two. June Howard, in the only monograph-length analysis of *The Whole Family*, reads Lily (and Freeman, for that matter) as isolated and abortive:

> Freeman mentions Lily's friends but leaves them offstage, and she rejects the suggestion of friendship between the sisters-in-law—in refuting Howells's image of the old maid, she makes Lily critical of the Talberts and more or less estranged from all her kin. Thus even in Freeman's own chapter the framework of the collaboration, structured in terms of family relations, does not accommodate her vision of many sorts of sustaining connections.[66]

I am not particularly swayed by this reading of Lily Talbert or of Freeman, in that it undermines the work that Lily does on the page to help her family and paints Freeman as, at best, unable to collaborate productively and at worst needlessly vindictive, ruining the entire project for no reason. Despite her 'daring innovation,' Freeman is not a spoilsport bent on throwing up narrative road blocks at every turn. On the contrary, her dramatic interjection is certainly what keeps the plot moving overall, and Freeman offers tantalizing bits of backstory for not only Lily (in her 'disappointment' and the new character of Lyman Wilde) but also for Cyrus (through a reference to his lost first love). She breathes life into the youngest children, inviting them into the primary plot, and she opens up many (arguably too many) directions for Peggy and Harry's engagement.

The rest of the authors struggle to take the flaming batons Freeman has tossed. Rather than return focus to the marriage plot, the remaining authors dedicate most of the narrative to correcting and revising Lily herself. Mary Heaton Vorse and Mary Stewart Cutting, the first to write after Freeman, characterize Lily as insatiably selfish and unproductive, a "howling swell" that takes and takes[67]; John Kendrick Bangs and Elizabeth Jordan soften that selfishness to mere self-absorption, the easy narcissism of a thoughtless, vapid flirt; Henry James sees her as a 'poseur' whose existence is less interesting in and of

itself than it is as a challenge for the rest of the family[68]; Alice Brown and Henry Van Dyke skitter away from Lily altogether, working valiantly to "lure her off" and finish the narrative on their own terms. Doing so is not easy, as the literary spinster is both spectral and evasive. In her open-endedness, she stalls the narrative; in her slipperiness, she resists any attempt to reroute, to re-characterize, or to remand.

Nonetheless, the authors technically succeed in ridding themselves of Lily in the eleventh hour. Alice Brown sought to save the novel from "the insatiable maw of Aunt Elizabeth," as she wrote in a letter to Jordan.[69] Unable to properly contain Lily in matrimonial binds, Brown instead endows her with heretofore undiscovered psychic gifts and sends her off, dressed "in a close-fitting black gown and a plain white collar and a little close black hat […] like some sister of charity," to work with a "magnetic healer and mediumistic divulger."[70] When asked if she plans on telling her brother where she's gone, Lily says: "You can simply tell Cyrus that I have gone to Mrs. Chataway's. You can also tell him I shall be too occupied to return."[71] Brown 'fixes' Lily as thoroughly as she possibly can—in one fell swoop, she properly chastens the old maid and dresses her appropriately, finding her an avocation that will keep her occupied, thereby fitting her into a form of legible futurity and turning her from relentless consumer to producer. Though supposedly final (Brown ends the chapter with a declarative, "Then she went away"), Brown and her co-authors ultimately fail to banish Lily entirely, as the thought of her takes up quite a bit of space in the novel's final chapter, and the family has obviously abandoned Howells' intended plot entirely in order to 'fix' Freeman's mess.

James' Charles Edward thinks derisively of Mrs. Chataway's apartment: "there was exactly the smell in the hall, *the* boarding-house smell, that pervaded my old greasy haunt

of the League days: that boiled atmosphere that seems to belong at once, confusedly, to a domestic 'wash' and to inferior food—as if the former were perhaps being prepared in the saucepan and the latter in the tubs."[72] This description of the malodorous domestic space of single women recalls Lily Bart's horror at the thought of her cousin Gerty Farish's apartment "where all the food tastes like soap" in Edith Wharton's massively popular *House of Mirth* (1905). Wharton's novel is not referenced in the text of *The Whole Family* nor in any of the contributors' correspondence, but the connections between Lily Talbert and Lily Bart are hard to dismiss. Both are women whose bloom is wearing thin in the eyes of their conservative society, who are preoccupied with beauty and fashion and the entertaining charms of attractive men, and whose social standing is at the mercy of their wealthy, disapproving families. While boarding with a mystic is not nearly so devastating as possibly-accidental overdose of sleeping medicine, Lily's end is nonetheless a sharp removal from the station described in Freeman's chapter. The constant refrain of *The Whole Family* and *House of Mirth* and, even, of James' *The Bostonians* is that "solitary women are vulnerable."[73]

Solitary women are, perhaps, vulnerable in the literary realm just as in the real world, but *The Whole Family*'s increasingly frantic attempts to rid Eastridge of Aunt Elizabeth speaks less to the vulnerability of single women and more to the dangerous spectrality of the literary spinster. Lily Talbert, as we have seen, is concerning to the whole family on a variety of levels: she is unproductive and unoccupied, but at the same time, she cares too much about the wrong things and brings endless trouble to pass. She both does and does not exist, or at least she is difficult to pin down—who, after all, is the 'real' Lily Talbert? Is she who she says she is, or who the family believes her to be? At the interpretive

level, is Lily representative of the New Woman or of Mary Wilkins Freeman's frustrations? Does ridding Eastridge of her save the story, or were her interventions what held the narrative together in the first place? As in the rest of her oeuvre, Freeman resists easy answers and instead revels in contradiction. Her invocation of the literary spinster, for all her complications and frustrations, is ultimately what moves *The Whole Family* along and creates the grounds upon which a lively, if somewhat incoherent, novel is born. Freeman's frustrating spinster and her co-authors' panicked attempts to slot her back into her 'correct' narrative become, then, a useful example on which we can map the literary spinster herself. As we will see in Jewett and Ruiz de Burton, the spinster's frustrating mass of contradictions and her inability to stay neatly within the well-worn grooves of plot make her an irresistible figure for both women writers in the late nineteenth century and feminist critics in the twentieth century. By embracing her elusiveness, we are able to chart the ways in which the spinster—who does and does not exist—demonstrates a messy world of social relations that cannot fit neatly into one narrative.

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[1] Henry Van Dyke, undated letter to Elizabeth Jordan; published in Jordan, *Three Rousing Cheers* (1938), 266-7.

[2] Until 1929, *Harper's Bazar* took its spelling from the German, citing *Der Bazar* as its inspiration as a weekly women's magazine (though the magazine became a monthly under Jordan's leadership). During Arthur H. Samuels' editorship, the magazine updated its spelling to the now-familiar *Bazaar.* For an extended account of Harper's history, see June Howard, "The Hearthstone at Harper's" in *Publishing the Family* (2001), 58-105.

[3] In Jordan's words: "My ambition was to bring together what P.T. Barnum would have called the greatest, grandest, most gorgeous group of authors ever collaborating on a literary production." *Three Rousing Cheers*, 258.

[4] Howells et al., *The Whole Family,* 29.

[5] In her autobiography, Jordan writes that despite Howells' lack of official role at the magazine, he "continued to have a fatherly feeling for the *Bazar*" at the conception of *The Whole Family* (258). Jordan's phrasing here is telling, as her account of the behind-the-scenes drama among the twelve authors paints a picture of Howells as a well-meaning leader shocked to discover that he is, in fact, in charge of neither *The Whole Family* nor the *Bazar*.

[6] Although Freeman was married during the publication of *The Whole Family* (having wed Dr. Charles Manning Freeman in 1902, months shy of her 50th birthday), she had made her name as a single authoress writing stories about unmarried or otherwise unconventional women.
[7] For a succinct account of the dramatic behind-the-scenes correspondence, see Bendixen's introduction to *The Whole Family* (xi-xxxvii).
[8] Jordan, *Three Rousing Cheers*, 264.
[9] Freeman, letter to Jordan, 21 July 1906, published in Jordan, *Three Rousing Cheers,* 265.
[10] Ibid., 261.
[11] Henry James, meanwhile, could scarcely contain his displeasure at the Mother's chapter, calling it in an undated letter to Jordan "a positive small convulsion of debility—without irony, without fancy, without anything! Will your public want that so completely lack-lustre domestic sentimentality?" Published in Jordan, *Three Rousing Cheers*, 272.
[12] See June Howard, *Publishing the Whole Family,* pp. 132-3, for a brief reading of Freeman's reluctance to own her authorial choices as knowingly in conflict with Howells' desires.
[13] Howells et al., *The Whole Family*, 19.
[14] While the original letter has not been preserved, Jordan quotes from it in *Three Rousing Cheers*, 264. She says: "I must not quote [the letter] here, for he wouldn't like that. But after more than thirty years, and with all the authors but three now in their grave, it can do no harm to give the gist of his letter in a sentence or two. He told me what he thought of Miss Wilkins' chapter, and he implored me not to publish it. he ended with a prayer, 'Don't *don't* let her ruin our beautiful story!" (264).
[15] Ibid., 267.
[16] Ibid., 267.
[17] Indeed, Jordan characterizes his suggestion as "one more desperate effort tot send Elizabeth back to her corner" in *Three Rousing Cheers,* 267.
[18] Ibid., 268.
[19] Bauer, "The Politics of Collaboration," 120.
[20] Ibid., 120.
[21] Unfortunately, I have been unable to find record of Jordan's "conception of the old maid aunt," presumably detailed in a letter to Freeman dated between 24 July and 1 August 1906. The letter is not, to my knowledge, included in either Jordan's papers (housed at the New York Public Library) nor Freeman's papers (housed at several archives and available online). According to Alfred Bendixen's introduction to *The Whole Family*, Jordan took many liberties with her version of the story, so finding an intact, unedited copy of Jordan and Freeman's correspondence would be invaluable; despite much correspondence with relevant archives and a visit to the NYPL, I have not yet been able to do so.
[22] Freeman here references Charlotte Blair Parker's wildly popular 1887 sentimental melodrama, *Way Down East,* which follows a standard seduction plot to its happy redemptive end in matrimony. Freeman's fears of a return to such narratives prove prescient: D.W. Griffiths adapted the novel to a very successful film in 1920.
[23] Published in Jordan, *Three Rousing Cheers,* 265-6, bolded emphasis mine.
[24] Ibid., 267.
[25] Howard, *Publishing the Family*, 158.
[26] Love, "Gyn/apology" 307.
[27] Ibid., 307.
[28] Traister's account of 'single ladies' is largely restricted to a particular group of heterosexual, highly educated, financially stable women to whom such freedoms are available. Although she does gesture the structural barriers poor and queer women face and is quite conversant on the intersection of race and gender, her study—like most studies of single women and concepts like the 'New Woman'—primarily refers to the most privileged of women, for whom singleness is a viable financial and social option.
[29] James, *The Bostonians*, 16.
[30] For a lively account of Howells and Freeman's complicated relationship, see Donna M. Campbell's "Howells' Untrustworthy Realist; Mary Wilkins Freeman" in *American Realism,* 38.2, pp. 115-31. Though Howells frequently celebrated Freeman's pitch-perfect local color writing, he pitted her often against Sarah Orne Jewett (whom he considered to be a more natural and more elevated artist) and noted with alarm signs that "Miss Wilkins would like to write entirely romantic stories about these honest people of hers; but her own love of truth and her perfect knowledge of such life as theirs forbids her to actually do this." (Qtd. in Campbell 118).

[31] Pryse, "Freeman, Mary E. Wilkins," 147.
[32] Howells et al., *The Whole Family,* 30.
[33] Ibid., 31.
[34] Ibid., 31.
[35] Ibid., 33.
[36] Glasser, *In a Closet Hidden*, 89.
[37] Howells et al., *The Whole Family,* 35.
[38] Heteronormative passivity is not an uncommon theme in Freeman's oeuvre. For a reading of marital drift and heterosexual inertia, see Valerie Rohy's "Freeman's Object Lessons" in *Legacy: A Journal of American Women Writers,* 37.1, pp. 42-59.
[39] Glasser, *In a Closet Hidden*, 90.
[40] Howells et al., *The Whole Family,* 33.
[41] Glasser, *In a Closet Hidden,* xiv.
[42] Turkes, "Must Age Equal Failure?", 197. Turkes here calls out Freeman's critics by name: Fred Lewis Pattee, Van Wyck Brooks, Edward Foster, and Percy Westbrook, all of whom contributed to 'a legacy difficult to shake off" but that feminist critics succeeded in rewriting in the last decades of the twentieth century.
[43] Zagarell, "Introduction," x.
[44] Glasser, *In a Closet Hidden,* xiv
[45] Qtd. in Zagarell, "Introduction," xiv.
[46] Pryse, "Freeman, Mary E. Wilkins," 141.
[47] Ibid., ix.
[48] Glasser, *In a Closet Hidden,* xix.
[49] Pryse, "Freeman, Mary E. Wilkins," 141.
[50] Howard, *Publishing,* 175.
[51] Glasser, *In a Closet Hidden,* xvi, xix.
[52] Reichardt, *A Web of Relationship*, xv.
[53] Jordan, *Three Rousing Cheers,* 264.
[54] Bauer, "The Politics of Collaboration," 116.
[55] Ibid., 116.
[56] Howells et al., *The Whole Family,* 74.
[57] Ibid., 68.
[58] The youngest contributor to *The Whole Family*, Vorse in 1906 was at the beginning of a long and fascinating career, one marked by radical political stances.
[59] Howells et al., *The Whole Family,* 62-3.
[60] Reichardt, *A Web of Relationship*, 29-30.
[61] Pryse, "Freeman, Mary E. Wilkins," 141.
[62] Crowley, "The Whole Famdamnily," 113.
[63] Ibid., 113.
[64] Howells et al., *The Whole Family,* 59.
[65] Reichardt, *A Web of Relationship*, 128.
[66] Howard, *Publishing,* 177.
[67] Howells et al., *The Whole Family,* 92.
[68] Elizabeth Stuart Phelps Ward, though, disapproved of James' characterization, writing to Jordan that "The flirtatious aunt should not be a vulgar person, except so far as flirtatiousness is always more or less vulgar. And Mr. James's insinuation that she posed as moving in better society than she did seems to me unworthy of *The Whole Family*" (qtd in Jordan, 277).
[69] Brown, qtd. in Jordan *Three Rousing Cheers,* 276.
[70] Howells et al., *The Whole Family,* 291.
[71] Ibid., 291.
[72] Ibid., 181.
[73] Howard, *Publishing,* 178.

CHAPTER TWO:
Spinsters and Shepherdesses:
The Queer Caretaking of Sarah Orne Jewett

Midway through Sarah Orne Jewett's 1896 masterpiece *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, the unnamed narrator finds herself singularly enraptured by the local legend of 'Poor Joanna.' Though the narrator has been treated to visits with and tales of Dunnet Landing's various residents throughout her season-long stay in the coastal Maine village, she cannot keep herself from wanting to know everything she can about this poor woman who willingly shuttered herself away on a nearby island. Joanna Todd, referred to almost exclusively as 'Poor Joanna' in the text, is a perplexing figure, at once the exemplar and the antithesis of the world Jewett creates in *The Country of the Pointed Firs*. In a community of reserved, insular oddballs who nonetheless form a tightly-knit family with traditions and gatherings, she stands alone in her ability to stand at a distance. Characterized as a nun of sorts, Joanna is a study in resilience: simultaneously the paragon of anti-sociality in her complete rejection of the village's determined attempts to envelop and shelter her and the very heart of her community, coming to represent the tender devotion of Dunnet Landing to even its most reclusive members. Despite being long gone from village and from the island by the time the narrator arrives, Joanna remains at the very center of the text—she never physically enters the narrative, but her presence is central both to the text's construction and to the narrator's acceptance into the community. Part of my interest in Joanna lies in the inability of other characters—and of critics—to leave her alone; their refusal to understand and accept her decision to remove herself from the social world speaks to the messy problems of care surrounding Jewett and her writing. In the trio of

chapters concerning Joanna Todd ("Poor Joanna," "On Shell-heap Island," and "The Hermitage"), Jewett performs literarily a question that I pose metacritically: how do you care for something (or someone) that resists and frustrates your every attempt?

I deploy the term "care" purposefully—my argument is sensitive to the many meanings and resonances of the term as an action, an affect, and a habit. To care for something means both to tend to its needs and to harbor affection or other emotional investment in its continued existence. Care posits the inextricability of feeling and doing, as does the sentimental culture to which it is central. Sentimentality, that sweeping strain of American letters which has long been associated with women writers, preoccupied twentieth-century feminist literary critics as they worked to reveal the artistic complexity and political shrewdness of works previously dismissed as overly dramatic, domestic, and diminutive. In so doing, these critics often performed the same emotional involvement on a critical level that they analyzed on the page. Jane Tompkins' foundational *Sentimental Designs* demonstrates the affective power of sentimental writing through narrative description of her research process. She describes in detail the embodied experience of recovering nineteenth-century manuscripts from drafty archives, the shock of joy upon connecting the rooms she inhabited with the women writers who once called them home, and the indignation of being asked over and over by colleagues "But are they any good?" whenever she discussed her objects of study.[1] Tompkins' anger at the repeated assumption that women's writing, no matter how popular or celebrated it was at the time of its publication, could only be of contemporary critical interest as a historical curiosity rather than as art fueled her analysis and, in turn, inspired an entire generation of second-wave feminist literary critics.

Care, then, is investment which both plays out in time and works to ensure temporal longevity. Recovery work, the dominant mode of feminist literary critical practice in the 1980s and 90s, is perhaps best thought of as care work: a devoted attention to the rehabilitation and future legacy of a more complete American women's literary tradition. In this way, care is generative—it seeks to ensure that its subject persists into the future. To think of feminist critical practice as carework is to fuse the recovery of sentimental culture with the *inheritance* of sentimental culture. That is, in concerning themselves with the preservation of American women's writing, which was suffused with sentiment and attempts to stir emotions and memories that would live long in the hearts of readers, these critics participated in the same sentimental culture, with all of its attendant emotional investment and sense of political importance. The consideration of critic as careworker is further complicated by third-wave feminist criticism's by-and-large rejection of sentimentality, both in recovery and in practice. If the previous generation had been willing to turn a blind eye to many of its subjects' abhorrent racial politics in favor of championing their complex gender politics, then this generation of critics would, in turn, disavow the conservatism of their literary foremothers altogether. This chapter aligns with neither second- nor third-wave criticism, choosing instead to care about the complexities and ambiguities with which nineteenth-century women's literature resists both critical models; to do so, it turns to the spinster, a figure who has often been discovered and re-discovered as an essential critical subject but who, I argue, demonstrates precisely the bind in which feminist critics have found themselves time and again.

Caring For Poor Joanna

The Country of the Pointed Firs is a set of short sketches following an unnamed female narrator's experience summering in Dunnet Landing, a rural outpost in coastal Maine. The narrator, a writer hoping to find a productive workspace away from the bustle of the city, finds lodging with Mrs. Almira Todd, a widowed herbalist whose deep connections to the small community soon allow the narrator to discover its complexities. The narrator, through her increasingly close relationship with Mrs. Todd, tells the story of Dunnet Landing by sketching her interactions with various townsfolk, from Mrs. Todd's elderly mother Mrs. Blackett to the widower fisherman Elijah Tillney. She explores the region, participates in its traditions, and records its legends with the hesitant attentiveness of someone who almost, or could, or will belong. *Firs'* narrative (or narratives) moves without impetus; the narrator drifts from episode to episode, resulting overall in an emphasis less on the goings-on of Dunnet Landing than on the relationships among its inhabitants and the forms of care they show for one another. This is a text devoted to the minutia of a lunchtime visit and a table spread with fresh bread and fruit, the heaviness of an apron laden with herbs that might provide relief for an ailing neighbor, and the quiet kindness of indulging a friend's desire to recount his favorite story one more time.

Even in a narrative full of odd, lonely characters and reclusive seaside dwellers, Joanna Todd is a reclusive figure, shrouded in mystery and only 'discovered' by the narrator midway through her summer stay in Dunnet Landing. With some prompting from our curious narrator, Mrs. Fosdick (a visiting friend of Mrs. Todd whose arrival in the village causes a flurry of excitement) relays the pitiful tale of 'Poor Joanna' in the wistful, hushed tones of a ghost story. Joanna was a cousin of Mrs. Todd's late husband whose

fiancé "got bewitched with a girl 'way up the bay, and married her, and went off to Massachusetts," leaving Joanna bereft.[2] Mrs. Fosdick notes that Joanna "was crossed in love,--that was all the matter to begin with; but as I look back, I can see that Joanna was one doomed from the first to fall into a melancholy."[3] Joanna's spinsterhood and retreat from society are at first considered choices made after a romantic disappointment, choices perhaps made hastily and out of proportion to the seriousness of the offence ("that was all the matter to begin with," tsks Mrs. Fosdick), but choices nonetheless. Within the same sentence, Mrs. Fosdick rewrites the narrative, determining that in fact Joanna's fate had been decided from the start; she was "doomed from the first," and as such was always meant to be a melancholic recluse. This formulation is not uncommon in reference to spinsters, as we have seen in *The Whole Family*: 'spinster' often represents an elusive, ambiguous category that only becomes clear at the point at which no other category fits. Like spinsterhood itself, Joanna's antisociality is retroactively realized as an eventuality, an unchangeable and essential truth to her person.

Even though Joanna, upon her departure for Shell-heap Island, "left word she didn't want no company," the men of Dunnet Landing are unable to leave her alone.[4] Mrs. Fosdick explains:

> Why, the waters round Shell-heap Island were white with sails all that fall. 'T was never called no great of a fishin'-ground before. Many of 'em made excuse to go ashore to get water at the spring; but at last she spoke to a bo't-load, very dignified and calm, and said that she'd like it better if they'd make a practice of getting water to Black Island or somewhere else and leave her alone, except in case of accident or trouble. But there was one man who had

> always set everything by her from a boy. He'd have married her if the other hadn't come about an spoilt his chance, and he used to get close to the island, before light, on his way out o' the house. His sister told me she happened to see, what a pretty choice he made o' useful things that a woman would feel lost without. He stood off fishin', and could see them in the grass all day, though sometimes she'd come out and walk right by them. There was other bo'ts near, out after mackerel. But early next morning his present was gone. He didn't presume too much, but once he took her a nice firkin o' things he got up to Portland, and when spring come he landed her a hen and chickens in a nice little coop. There was a good many friends had Joanna on their minds.[5]

Mrs. Fosdick's description of the village men's 'helpfulness' makes clear that their efforts were unasked for and unwanted by Joanna, perhaps even burdensome. In retreating to Shell-heap Island, Joanna sought to remove herself from the social world of Dunnet Landing, to reject her place on the marriage market and to avoid permanently the pitying stares and well-meaning encouragement of the neighbors who had witnessed her disappointment firsthand. For Joanna, this retreat is a perfectly viable option: she announces her intentions to her friends and family before setting sail, and she accepts the first few rounds of curious trespassing fishermen before politely asking them to refrain from visiting her shores without serious cause. For the villagers of Dunnet Landing, this retreat is unacceptable. Mrs. Fosdick's depiction of the villagers' reaction indicates a sense of entitlement: well-intended and lacking in malice, to be sure, but a distinct entitlement to Joanna's participation in the community. The particular man who "had always set

everything by her" is dogged in his efforts to woo Joanna, despite her clear disinterest. This man believes that he knows better than Joanna what she truly needs and wants; in his (and Mrs. Fosdick's, and presumably the entire village's) estimation, the only reason that they were not married is because "the other" had "spoilt [the first man's] chance." Joanna's interests do not seem to factor into the equation. Even after Joanna has gone to the island and made clear that she needs nothing more from the village, this man, certain that he knows better what sort of "useful things" Joanna "would feel lost without," leaves gifts as though they were offerings at the steps of a temple. Neither Mrs. Fosdick nor Mrs. Todd (nor, really, the narrator) views these interventions as anything but courteous and friendly, even charming in their obvious transparency; rather, it is Joanna's resistance that is figured as strange and incomprehensible.

Regardless of the fishermen's assistance, by all accounts, Joanna was more than capable of providing for herself: the island offered plenty of driftwood and old trees for firewood, ample land for gardening and berry-picking, wild herbs for medicinal purposes, and opportunity to catch fish or net lobsters and clams. Joanna's capability and self-sufficiency—traits typically celebrated in Dunnet Landing, as when Mrs. Todd's elderly mother admits with pride that she is still able to turn heavy quilts herself—is quickly set aside as Mrs. Todd and Mrs. Fosdick marvel at how Joanna managed to live without new clothing, "or risin' for her bread, or the piece-bag that no woman can live long without," or friendly company.[6] Much like the "nice firkin' o things" Joanna's persistent suitor bought her in Portland, these trappings of normative feminine domesticity are figured as essential

The tale of 'Poor Joanna' takes on the contours of a ghost story--indeed, we first learn of Joanna in the context of a stray reference to Shell-heap Island, regarded by locals as

mysterious and possibly haunted by the specter of a long-dead native captive. "'T was 'counted a great place in old Indian times," Mrs. Fosdick says of the island, "You can pick up their stone tools 'most any time if you hunt about."[7] Mrs. Todd attempts to reject the tales: "Anyway, there was Indians,--you can see their shell-heap that named the island; and I've heard myself that 't was one o' their cannibal places, but I never could believe it. There never was no cannibals on the coast o' Maine. All the Indians o' these regions are tame-looking folks."[8] Despite Mrs. Todd's use of the present tense, native people do not make an appearance in the world of Dunnet Landing except as legends and ghosts. As such, Jewett troublingly indulges in what Lora Romero calls the 'cult of the Vanishing American,' a form of "historical sleight-of-hand" in which "the disappearance of the native [is seen as] not just as natural but as having already happened."[9] In the same breath, the women gloss over the fact of the island's history of indigenous people, marveling instead at Joanna's abundant gardens and rows of crops. Even this level of cultivation was not unique to Joanna, Mrs. Fosdick notes, deciding that the island's abundance of wormwood, "which is always a planted herb," indicated that "there must have been folks there before the Todds' day," despite her assertion mere moments ago that Shell-heap Island "was 'counted a great place in old Indian times."[10] Jewett's tendency to align interests with the white aristocracy (and second-wave feminist critics' tendency to overlook that alliance in favor of a 'utopian' reading of her contributions to women's literature) has been the subject of much critical debate. [11] Rather than retread that ground, I point to Jewett's odd, fleeting reference to Shell-heap Island's indigenous heritage and ghostly inhabitants in order to emphasize the ways in which the Island's reputation as haunted naturally lends itself to its association with Joanna. By the point at which she makes land at Shell-heap Island, Joanna is already

half in the spectral realm—spinsters are, after all, an elusive, not-quite-there bunch, primed to be the stuff of legend and mystery, hovering at the edges of society, irresistible in their spectral presence.

The curious fishermen and 'helpful' islanders of Joanna's hermitage are not alone in being unable to resist intervening in Joanna's chosen solitude. Mrs. Todd and Mrs. Fosdick, some twenty-odd years after the woman's death, cannot help but tend to her memory with the same compulsion of the men making up excuses to visit Shell-heap Island time and again. Whereas Mrs. Fosdick "[fidgets] with an eagerness to speak" of Joanna's story, Mrs. Todd is more reluctant, taking her role as confidante seriously. As the story continues, though, even hesitant Mrs. Todd "[loses] her sad reserve in the growing sympathy of these reminisces."[12] With every sentence, Joanna's story becomes more dreadful and more romantic and more *legible*. Joanna's behavior makes sense to them only now, after having had the chance to work through the story many times over. The narrator, who has not had the chance to participate as editrix of Joanna's story over the course of many years, thinks of her behavior as "something mediaeval" in its self-punitiveness.[13] The narrator senses the familiarity of Mrs. Todd and Mrs. Fosdick's conversation, finding "new openness and freedom" in Mrs. Todd's tone, "as if she and her friend had disagreed about Joanna once, and were now in happy harmony."[14] Joanna's reclusion, her desire to refuse the comfort and care of Dunnet Landing, is met with fervid determination by the community to refuse her refusal. If Joanna the woman could not be returned to the fold, then Joanna the story—'Poor Joanna,' the legend—will be so thoroughly attended as to return to the very people she tried in vain to leave.

The fishermen and villagers' refusal to leave Joanna alone, much like Mrs. Todd and Mrs. Fosdick's insistence on their role as caretakers (and revisionists) of Joanna's memory indicate something crucial about the power of Joanna's refusal to adhere to societal expectations, as even Dunnet Landing's wide-ranging tolerance for eccentricity proves too much for her. The villagers' curiosity is easily understood as discomfort in the face of one's rejection of social norms and an attempt to restore order by re-assimilating Joanna under the pretense of generosity and kindness. The fishermen's interest is even more readily legible as romantic desire or, more critically, as paternalistic instinct to rescue Joanna from her decision to live outside the rule of men. Mrs. Todd and Mrs. Fosdick's concern, however, is far more interesting in both its longevity (having long outlived the fishermen's watchful eyes and proffered objects of affection and even Joanna's own life) and its narrative investment. In telling the narrator about Joanna, the women continually double-back, revising and reframing Joanna's choices: they fill in gaps, make assumptions about what Joanna felt or experienced on the island, offer commentary on other villagers' reactions, and insist that now, decades later, they understand the story better than they ever could have as young women. "I called [Joanna] a great fool," declares Mrs. Fosdick early on, "but I pitied her then, and I pity her far more now."[15] The women obviously cherish Joanna's memory and have spent decades turning it over in their minds, finding a way to shape her story into the sort of narrative they might teach the narrator to hold with proper reverence. Joanna is figured both as a mythic past and an essential feminine presence; over the course of Mrs. Todd and Mrs. Fosdick's recounting, Joanna transforms into a symbol of both the particularity of Dunnet Landing history ("[T]here was certain a good many curiosities of human natur' in this neighborhood years ago") and a particular

sort of feminine melancholy ("Some is meant to be the Joannas in this world, an' 't was her poor lot").[16] As in the previous chapter, "Where the Pennyroyal Grew," in which Mrs. Todd draws the narrator into her closest circle by sharing her most painful memories, the women's decision to share Joanna's story with the narrator is an act of trust, one that knits the narrator into a longer chain of intimacy and care and, importantly, into a distinctly female discursive community.

The seriousness with which Mrs. Todd, Mrs. Fosdick, and the narrator treat Joanna's story is recognizable to anyone with a passing familiarity of feminist literary criticism. The women's desire to hold fast to Joanna's memory, to find in it a recognition that only grows stronger as time passes, to see in its strangeness and slanted proximity the sort of kinship only found in the lives of people who walk the same worn path, to feel the ardent sense that maintaining and transmitting it is an essential duty—all these are sentiments shared by feminist critics, particularly those writing in the last decades of the twentieth century. In Jane Tompkins' definitive call for a shift in critical practice in *Sentimental Designs,* she works to see beyond the "certain set of defects that exclude [popular women's writing] from the ranks of great masterpieces" and to fight against the false tides of canonical merit that have relegated so many writers to obscurity, particularly those women and men of color who did not, as in her iconic assessment of Hawthorne, have well-connected and well-moneyed friends standing graveside, plotting how to ensure their literary legacy.[17] Much of feminist criticism has been about not only ensuring a future for women's stories but also a past. Criticism pertaining to Sarah Orne Jewett, and to *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, has followed similar contours, figuring the critic as caretaker; much of the critical conflict over the text's place in the American literary canon has been about how—and why, and

whether—to tend its own legacy. This anxiety is, in itself, an artifact of sentimental culture, a culture preoccupied with preservation and remembrance and safekeeping. The same care and concern we see in Mrs. Todd's keeping of Joanna's memory—her unwillingness to speak ill of someone she regards as a key member of her community, her fervent desire to see that the narrator recognizes Joanna's importance, her delicate reworking of the story to make sense of Joanna's otherwise incomprehensible choices—is reflected in twentieth-century feminist literary critics' ambivalent dedication to a tradition of women's writing that often failed to cohere with modern sensibilities and political desires.

The Care and Keeping of Sarah Orne Jewett

As with many American women writers of the nineteenth century, Sarah Orne Jewett has had a long and complicated place in the literary canon, having never quite regained the celebrity she enjoyed during her life, despite twentieth-century critics' best efforts. Gwen L. Nagel uses the introduction of her 1984 collection *Critical Essays on Sarah Orne Jewett* to trace painstakingly the critical response to Jewett's work since its first publication in 1868. With remarkable comprehensiveness, she sheds light on three major stages of Jewett's critical reputation: early reviews of her writing that cemented, particularly through the published benediction of William Dean Howells and Horace Scudder, her status as a major writer of minor literature; the first wave of scholarly criticism in the early 20th century, made up largely of male critics debating Jewett's place in either realism or regionalism with the constant caveat of her writing's obvious limitations (narrow focus on a feminine experience of New England, lack of plot, etc.); and feminist criticism's reconsideration of Jewett's complicated treatment of female worlds and

relationships. Nagel's collection, which marked the first publication of several landmark pieces of Jewett criticism by Judith Roman, Barbara A. Johns, and Josephine Donovan, announces a new and improved era of Jewett criticism, one that prioritized questions of gender and sexuality which had, to varying degrees, previously been deemphasized in favor of formal and canonical inquiry.

A decade later, June Howard's critical collection *New Essays on* *The Country of the Pointed Firs* offered a less triumphant vision of Jewett criticism, seeking to "deliberately [revisit its] familiar landscapes" through sharper (and more historicist) engagement with questions of race, nation, and empire in her works.[18] "What [Jewett's] place in American literature will be at the end of the twentieth century remains to be seen," writes Howard ominously.[19] The overall effect of Howard's introduction is curious – it invokes a mode of critical distance that seems at odds with the intense identification (and even protectiveness) typically associated with second wave feminist criticism. It's a move in line, perhaps, with a larger critical shift away from feminist reclamation and toward critique of (white) feminism's collusion with white nationalist heteropatriarchy. While a vocal section of Jewett criticism focused on race (rightfully prompting the conversation about regionalism to reckon with its New England myopia), many other critics moved to bring Jewett into queer theory's recovery project.

Discussion of Jewett as a queer author was not exactly new at the turn of the twentieth century—many critics had explored the long-term relationship between Jewett and Annie Fields, and *Deephaven* had been thoroughly canonized as a lesbian novel.[20] Work by Sharon Marcus and Lillian Faderman among many others helped to find in Jewett a lesbian literary legacy, just as in the new millennium, a new generation of queer theorists

explored the richness of the queer affinities for which Jewett's writing allows. It is unsurprising, in the context of third wave feminism's sex wars in the 1990s and of queer theory's orientation toward early Foucault, that most writing about Jewett and her contemporaries has placed sexual identity and practice as primary concerns. After all, Jewett herself has often been at the center of critical debates over the extent to which a history of lesbian sexuality can be found in the gaps and silences of women's regional writing and in the social construct of a Boston marriage. The term 'Boston marriage' itself is often said to have originated in *Atlantic Monthly* editor Mark DeWolfe Howe's description of Jewett's long-term domestic partnership with Annie Fields. As described by Howe's daughter in her biography of her father, such a partnership "[consisted] of two ladies, living sweetly and devotedly together" in "a union—there is no truer word for it."[21] Queer critics and theorists (particularly Lillian Faderman and Terry Castle) argued fiercely over whether or not a Boston marriage is sexual as in a modern understanding of lesbian coupledom. But as Benjamin Kahan notes, a definitive answer to the sexual practices of these women is unknowable to us now—but to those participating in Boston marriages and their contemporaries who recognized the significance of such a union, the relationship was most importantly characterized by a domestic caretaking and collaborative literary production.[22]

Just as the literary spinster tends to collapse with her author and her critic, so do Jewett and Fields become conflated with their shared home on Charles Street and the lively literary conversations spilling out of its doors. Willa Cather wrote extensively and fondly of her few visits to Charles Street, with the sense that being invited to Jewett and Fields' salon was as good as any formal entre into the world of professional literature.[23] Henry James, in his *Atlantic* memoir "Mr. and Mrs. Fields" written after the 1915 death of Annie Fields,

described the widowed Fields as "the literary and social executor of the ghostly past" and Jewett "both a sharer and a sustainer" in the rich literary social world that had been established under Fields' first marriage.[24] As with Mary Wilkins Freeman's twenty-year relationship with Mary Wales, critics are often quick to characterize Jewett's decades-long cohabitation with Fields as the most productive and artistically bountiful of her life. Jewett and Fields, both literary minded women who maintained a serious dedication to both their craft and their cultivation of a vibrant social circle, created a flexible and deeply caring partnership in which "each became the other's ideal self, her ideal critic who fostered fullest creativity, her most devoted friend."[25] Rather than focus on decoding the sexual and romantic components of Jewett's writing and relationships, I wish to focus on what Annie Fields compliments as Jewett's "handling of 'the little language'" (which Fryer glosses as "the private and native language of love and friendship").[26]

This chapter, then, takes seriously questions of why and how one might take care. In his reading of *The Country of the Pointed Firs,* Peter Coviello asks us to think about history and sociality, to ponder how we might reckon with the affinity between Jewett's lovers and the loneliness inherent to the spinsters and recluses who populate the island. His answer seems to lie in Jewett's resistance to the marriage plot, a narrative in which problems "emerge in the drive to resolve the question of anyone's relation to her world."[27] In his reading, Jewett shows us a different way of being—one he characterizes as 'mixed and mysterious.' My own questions are similar, having to do with the critical impulse to define, to locate, and to contextualize. Is such an impulse a form of care? We almost certainly find a dimension of care in the work of ensuring a literary legacy through the editing, publishing, and reprinting of texts alongside the maintenance of a literary estate. Is what literary critics

in the intervening century after Jewett's death attempted with her oeuvre a form of care, also? If Coviello asks us what it might mean to be a 'lover of Dunnet Landing," then this chapter asks what it might mean to be a 'lover of *The Country of the Pointed Firs*.' What does it mean to take care of a text? And why does taking care of a text turn out to so closely resemble taking care of Joanna, in its circular patterns of interpretation and rewriting? In finding answers to these questions, I turn to the figure of the spinster, central not only to *Firs* and to Jewett's larger oeuvre but also to Jewett herself, to her literary protégé and posthumous editor Willa Cather (whose further relevance as a central figure in both feminist and queer critique is a subject of later discussion), to the field of regionalism in which Jewett's writing looms large, to the entirety of feminist critique (both in subject matter and identity—the caricature of the 'old maid academic' discussed in the introduction to this dissertation is not irrelevant here), and to the world of relational possibilities that exist outside of the boundaries of sexuality.[28] This chapter asks what a new feminist criticism—not one that returns necessarily to its pre-queer iteration nor one that continues its complete conceptual overlap—that is capacious in its care might look like.

Spinsterly Sketches

The world of Dunnet Landing is deeply familiar yet somehow strange; it is filled with recognizable pains and joys, heartbreak and affection, but the narrator's portrait of Dunnet Landing retains an oddness that marks it as a different sort of world. It is, as scholars have argued, a minor world, a woman's world, a queer world—to me, a spinsterly world. 'Spinster' is perhaps precisely the term here needed. If we understand the spinster

not exclusively as an unmarried woman of a certain age but rather as a figure characterized by untimeliness and illegibility and non-reproductive care—a figure for whom there is no narrative but who is instead the point at which narrative refracts and reveals the proliferation of social relations that exist outside of, beneath, and beside the marriage plot—then we might see 'spinsterliness' as exactly the textual quality that makes *The Country of the Pointed Firs* so tantalizing and so frustrating. Narratively, a spinster might be something that blocks—something that halts, that delays progress, that is often conceived of as *itself* halted, delayed, and otherwise 'backward.' A spinster might also be something that generates—that is able, in its radical freedom, to move in and out of plots and scenes and networks, to liberate sociability from the strictures of hegemony. It is, then, the spinsterly qualities of the text which have encouraged a century of critics to define that which resists definition and to produce both '*Firs*' and 'Jewett' as literary objects onto which they can project their own anxieties and canonical concerns. It is these spinsterly qualities which keep Jewett simultaneously at the center and periphery of American literature and which prompt us to perform a version of literary caretaking that the text somehow resists.

The Country of the Pointed Firs has long been considered a masterpiece of New England regionalism, at least since Charles Miner Thompson's celebratory 1904 review, though for decades this was a dubious distinction. Critics tend to place Henry James' "Mr. and Mrs. James T. Fields," in which he names *Firs* a "beautiful little quantum of achievement" as the moment at which Jewett became an author of 'minor literature' rather than a 'major' figure in American letters.[29] Jewett's spinsterly qualities, as Carolyn Gebhard notes in her account of the denigration of local color writing, are precisely what barred her

work from the realm of major writers. Gebhard cites a 1919 article in *The Nation* that announced the end of local color and welcomed a newer, more modern, more masculine version of American writing that spoke to a more metropolitan post-war country. Writing in 1991, Gebhard is dismayed that "volumes have been devoted to the rise of realism and the development of naturalism in nineteenth-century America, while critics have largely dismissed that vast, uneven, and sprawling body of fiction known as local color … simply because of its association with women."[30] Most concerning for these critics is the frequency with which the unmarried woman populates the pages of regionalism. "The specter of the spinster, the female warped by some form of sexual starvation or repression, informs much of the criticism on nineteenth-century women's fiction," Gebhard argues, citing the conflation of women authors' marital status with their writing's qualities.[31] For male critics in the early twentieth century, to write literature designated as 'regional' or 'local color' "amounts to no more than a dull and fastidious housekeeping": "Spinsters who write fiction or fiction written about spinsters, it matter little--women who choose not to 'complicate' their lives by marriage are lacking as women, and the fiction they write or that is written about them can at best aspire to a quaint and charming, if anemic, genre painting."[32] Valerie Rohy summarizes the masculinist criticism simply: for these critics, "regionalism was a morbid genre, repressed and neurotic, isolated and featureless, a sterile 'dead end' of literary tradition."[33]

In the 1980s and 1990s, however, feminist critics worked to reconsider these 'dead ends,' finding instead an untimeliness that spoke to the fraught, fragile, deeply feminine worlds that Jewett (and her contemporaries) had worked to create. June Howard, Marjorie Pryse, Judith Fetterly, and others prolifically reassessed Jewett's work, building a canon of

women regionalists and finding value in their 'minor' moves, particularly in how writers like Jewett so painstakingly rendered female friendship and desire. What Carroll Smith-Rosenberg terms the 'female world of love and ritual' gave rise to queer theory's debates about the possibilities of romantic friendship, sublimated same-sex desire, and the utility of queer temporality as a theoretical framework.[34] The spinster remains central to these conversations; Barbara Johns, for instance, schematizes Jewett's 'mateless and appealing' spinsters as models of feminine independence, while Heather Love theorizes the loneliness and longing inherent to the female experience, charting the bittersweet beauty of Jewett's 'spinster aesthetics.' Sarah Ensor writes: "Neither turning their backs on the future nor embracing it wholeheartedly, Jewett's spinsters exemplify an alternative mode of temporal movement and inhabitation: they head toward a future unconcerned with fruition and accessible only by moving through the spectral presence of all the futures that will never come to pass."[35] Spinsters, then, merit closer study because they "structurally sit between—and demonstrate the limits of—" two critical approaches: the desire to find "the longing and loneliness of this historical queer subject" and the wish to locate "a fully satisfying, enlivening, model of female maturity."[36] Love and Johns might be said to exemplify those opposing positions. Ensor argues that "for Jewett's spinsters, the future is never as distinct from the present or the past as either the triumphalist or backward narrative would make it seem."[37] Joanna, for instance, "is oriented toward a future that exists in or as an objectless continuity with the present."[38] Such an 'objectless continuity' chimes with Joseph Allen Boone's and Elizabeth Ammons' readings of Firs' narrative structure. Boone's reading of Jewett's 'counter-traditional narrative' (that is, a narrative structure that resists the pull of the marriage plot) finds "the socially enforced immobility

of the single heroine" to be a "central metaphor and structural principle in novels attempting to counterplot paths of possibility for women who have foregone the usual fictional denouement of marriage."[39] Essential to this counterplot is "an extensive web of female bonds that render the romantic expectations of conventional love fiction unimportant," described elsewhere as an "extended community of individualistic women who have survived, along with the weather, the vicissitudes of marriage and the deprivations of spinsterhood."[40]

Willa Cather & The Problem of Literary Caretaking

If a central problem of feminist criticism has been questioning how to care for the right things in the right way and in the right amount, then we would be hard pressed to find a more central figure than Willa Cather, whose literary estate and archival concerns merit a chapter of their own.[41] In her 1925 preface to *The Best Stories of Sarah Orne Jewett* (known as the 'Mayflower Edition'), Cather lauds *Firs* as one of only three American books that she considers to "have the possibility of a long life."[42] *Firs,* alongside *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, will in Cather's estimation be held reverently by young scholars "in distant years to come" and proclaimed "a masterpiece"—"a message to the future" from a version of America (or, a version of a small region of land in America; or, a distinctly white, moneyed, female version of a small region of land in America) that no longer exists.[43] This potential young scholar of the future will find in Jewett's work "the characteristic flavor, the spirit, the cadence of an American writer of the first order and of a New England which will then be a thing of the past."[44] *Firs,* then, is an untimely and curious piece of literature: it possesses the unique and uncanny ability to "confront time and

change so serenely" as to seem at home in any era yet retain the particularities of its time and place, to be simultaneously a thing of the past and of the future.[45] I linger on Cather's now-famous proclamation (referenced in almost every scholarly assessment of *Firs*) not to emphasize its accuracy, nor to shore up the significance of the text, nor even to emphasize the absurdity of Cather's bold declaration, but rather to draw attention to the self-consciousness with which Cather fashions a future for Jewett's work: her rapt attention to the enduring qualities and long-lasting potential of *Firs* is remarkable both in its signaling of *Firs'* curious qualities and its emphasis on Cather as its steward.

For Cather, the 'Pointed Fir' sketches are not text but rather "living things, caught in the open, with light and freedom and air-spaces about them. They melt into the land and the life of the land until they are not stories at all, but life itself."[46] Although Cather's edition speaks of the 'Pointed Fir stories," Jewett herself was less tied to the generic/formal notion of the 'story,' as Cather notes elsewhere[47]:

> [Jewett] spoke of "the Pointed Fir papers" or "the Pointed Fir sketches"; I never heard her call them stories. She had, as Henry James said of her, "a sort of elegance of humility, or fine flame of modesty." She was content to be slight, if she could be true.[48]

With this description, Cather seeks to naturalize Jewett's writing, to bind it with the landscape of the region it so famously chronicles. In so doing, Cather recalls Charles Miner Thompson's oft-quoted review "The Art of Miss Jewett" (published in the *Atlantic* in 1904 and used as an epigraph for the collection in question): "…the fragrant, retiring, exquisite flower, which I think [Jewett] would say is the symbol of New England virtue, is the symbol also of her own modest and delightful art."[49] Riffing on Pater, Cather continues to abstract

Jewett's work by noting that the best art ceases to be text at all and becomes instead "an intangible residuum of pleasure" in the reader's mind long after she sets down the volume, "as one can experience in a memory a melody, or the summer perfume of a garden."[50] Jewett's art, then, is autochthonous: it springs from the New England soil and is transmitted through Jewett's pen to the page, finally resting indelibly in the memories of readers. It is beautiful and natural, fraught and fragile as a flower; it requires cultivation.

I am tempted to take Cather at her word and to envision the 'Pointed Fir' sketches as living creatures of which she is caretaker. Certainly she saw herself as such, stressing at various points in the preface how carefully she stitched together the best of Jewett's work into two volumes that could stand the test of time and be held, a hundred years hence, by a scholar "as proudly as if he himself had made it."[51] Cather's introduction, as Ann Romines observes, "is also a confirmation of the *critic's* and the *editor's* magisterial power."[52] It is *Cather* who tends to Jewett's legacy, whose keen eye is able to discern the 'best' of her works and whose sharp hand can annotate and edit the sketches so as to ensure their continued celebration and importance.[53] Cather's introduction can be persuasively read as an attempt to write into existence a context for her own work: to conjure a literary foremother who might cement Cather's own permanent place in American letters, as Marilee Lindemann argues. "In selling Jewett, she sells herself," Lindemann writes, "In assuring a bright future for *Pointed Firs*, she assures a continued demand for books cut from the same cloth"—a thought we might take literally, as Cather demanded the Mayflower Edition's cover be designed in the style of her own *My Antonia*.[54] In other words, Cather presents a past for her own work's future by announcing the timelessness of her literary predecessor.

While the potential intent behind Cather's introduction offers insight into the Jewett-Cather mentorship (both before and after Jewett's death), it is Cather's bold editorial decisions that have been most controversial.[55] In this celebrated 'final' version of *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, Cather chose to include three sketches ("A Dunnet Shepherdess," "The Queen's Twin," and "William's Wedding") that were neither serialized alongside the original sketches nor included in the 1896 bound edition. The addition of these sketches was not necessarily a revolutionary move by Cather in and of itself, as Cynthia Goheen demonstrates in her editorial history of the text (fig. 1). All three sketches had, in some form or another, been included in all posthumous editions of *Firs*, thanks largely to Mary Jewett, who had assumed control of her late sister's estate as literary executrix, and Ferris Greenslet, who had long been Jewett's editor at Houghton Mifflin. Despite her position as literary executrix, however, Mary Jewett's hand was perhaps less authoritative than it might seem; Cynthia Goheen cites letters to Houghton Mifflin in which Mary "express[es] surprise" at the inclusion of "The Queen's Twin" in the 1919 edition.[56] Melissa Homestead has called into question the prevailing narrative of Cather's iron hand, characterizing her editorial power as "negligible" and revealing instead the "extraordinary pressure" under which she wrote her celebrated preface.[57] Specifically, Homestead unearths a scandalous entry by Edward F. Edgett in the *Boston Evening Transcript*'s 'Writers and Books' column, in which Edgett rebukes Cather for speaking condescendingly both of Jewett's literary voice and of her estate's handling of previous collections of her writing: "What, may we ask, is Willa Cather the voice of when she writes 'One of Ours' and 'A Lost Lady?' [sic] Not, we may be sure, the voice of one who is competent to view her predecessors in American fiction, even though she has met the approval of certain 'judges'

who have awarded her a prize for her work."[58] Cather's comments were made at a luncheon with Burton Rascoe, literary editor of the *New York Tribune*; Cather later insisted that Rascoe (and in turn Edgett) had taken a good deal of liberty with her phrasing. Regardless of the gossip's accuracy, argues Homestead, Cather's editorship of *The Best Stories of Sarah Orne Jewett* was irrevocably colored by both the anger and hurt feelings of Mary Jewett *and* the indignity of Edgett questioning her literary bona fides, including her recently-won Pulitzer Prize. Whereas Goheen (among others) characterizes Cather as domineering and overly dismissive of Mary Jewett's literary taste and authority, Homestead reads the introduction as "an act of overcompensation" in the interest of maintaining Cather's connection to the Jewett family.[59] Homestead thus complicates Deborah Carlin's analysis of Cather's representation of Jewett over the course of her career from unreserved praise to a "different, distant, increasingly shrunken and memorialized figure who comes to embody nineteenth-century artistic constraints from which Cather distinguishes herself in the 1930s" (qtd in Homestead 84) by arguing that this is "less a genuine shift than Cather's public declaration of a judgment she had already conceived more than a decade earlier."[60]

Table 1: *Pointed Firs'* Publication History

Atlantic Monthly Serial 1896 *no titles throughout	**Book—October 1896**	Book—1910
January: chapters 1–7	1. The Return 2. Mrs. Todd 3. The Schoolhouse 4. At the Schoolhouse Window 5. Captain Littlepage 6. The Waiting Place 7. The Outer Island	
March: chapters 8–11.	8. Green Island 9. William 10. Where Pennyroyal Grew 11. The Old Singers	
July: chapters 12–15	12. A Strange Sail 13. Poor Joanna 14. The Hermitage 15. On Shell-heap Island	
September: chapters 16–20 **was two chapters: 18–19** **was final chapter 20**	16. The Great Expedition 17. A Country Road 18. The Bowden Reunion 19. The Feast's End 20. Along Shore 21. The Backward View	22. A Dunnet Shepherdess 23. William's Wedding

Book—1919	Book—1924	Book—1925 (Willa Cather Edition)
21. The Backward View	21. A Dunnet Shepherdess	21. A Dunnet Shepherdess
22. A Dunnet Shepherdess	22. William's Wedding	22. The Queen's Twin
23. William's Wedding	23. The Queen's Twin	23. William's Wedding
24. The Queen's Twin	24. The Backward View	24. The Backward View

Original Publication Dates for Added Stories:

"A Dunnet Shepherdess"	*Atlantic,* December 1899
"The Queen's Twin"	*Atlantic,* February 1899
"William's Wedding"	*Atlantic,* July 1910

Figure 1: Table excerpted from Cynthia J. Goheen, "Editorial Misinterpretation and the Unmaking of a Perfectly Good Story: The Publication History of the Country of the Pointed Firs," American Literary Realism 30.2, 1998.

Regardless, the inclusion of the three sketches in the Mayflower Edition *does* pose an interesting problem for critics; "A Dunnet Shepherdess" and "William's Wedding" (both of which were unfinished at the time of Jewett's death in 1909) shift the entire text's narrative structure, bending *Firs* toward the marriage plot and potentially hemming a radical work into traditional genre expectations. The sketches' inclusion, argues Goheen, introduces "an organizing principle, a narrative strategy that was not present in the original text," in the form of "the motive quality of time."[61] Cather's editing is for Lindemann "a 'de-queering' of a story whose primary interest had been in the world of love, particularly between women, outside of marriage."[62] Other critics are more pointed: Elizabeth Ammons claims that Cather "ruined" and "mangled" the text with her edits.[63] Such responses are perhaps warranted, particularly in the context of Jewett's critical reconsideration in the 1990s as an important queer feminist literary figure, but they do draw a firm boundary between the forms of love and kinship sanctioned by Jewett's original text and the forms sanctioned by heteropatriarchy, a distinction that seems ill at ease in a text so celebrated for its fluid disregard for literary and political bounds. Rather than castigate Cather's editorial choices or argue for the supremacy of the 1896 edition, as has been the purview of much *Firs* criticism over the past forty years, I want instead to consider the opportunities that Cather's version—considered the primary version of *The Country of the Pointed Firs* for nearly a century—allows us.[64]

William's Wedding

A central critical objection to Cather's inclusion of "A Dunnet Shepherdess" and "William's Wedding" is its disruption of the original narrative structure. In the 1896 version of *Firs,* the narrator moves through the season, chronicling the characters she meets and ambling toward her eventual departure from the island. Her final parting from Mrs. Todd is certainly poignant, though the text resists any move toward a definitive ending: Dunnet Landing, having been established as an out-of-time place, seems as though it will always be available for the narrator's return. The three additional sketches of the Mayflower Edition alter this recursive narrative by introducing a marriage plot, against whose linearity the narrator's wandering is thrown in sharp relief. While "The Queen's Twin" serves as a character sketch similar to many other in the original cycle, "A Dunnet Shepherdess" introduces Esther, an elderly spinster who is revealed to be the sweetheart of William Blackett (Mrs. Todd's bachelor brother). "William's Wedding" features William and Esther, freed from the burdens of familial care that have kept them apart, marry, thereby adjusting the narrative force of the text from the narrator's enmeshment within the wide network of Dunnet Landing to the logical terminus of a 'happy ending.' The inclusion of these sketches, then, is sacrilege to Jewett's feminist formal innovation: "[a violation of] the integrity of the maternal text"[65] and a "pseudo-plot" that "recast Pointed Firs in the form of a (somewhat pallid) romance that ends happily in requited love."[66] For these scholars and others, the marriage plot has no place here—yet we must reckon with Cather's decision to include the wedding stories (and, indeed, their existence at all), particularly as *The Country of the Pointed Firs* is so widely read in the context of these sketches.

According to the headnote accompanying the publication of "William's Wedding" in Atlantic Monthly's July 1910 issue, "After the publication of 'A Dunnet Shepherdess' in the

Atlantic for December, 1899, and its subsequent appearance in a volume of collected stories, Miss Jewett received many appeals to bring William Blackett's lifelong love of Esther Hight, 'the shepherdess,' who had given the better part of her days to the care of her stricken mother, to a happy termination."[67] "William's Wedding," published in its draft form (as Jewett died before finalizing the sketch), was a story in high demand, as it successfully 'finished' the plot begun with the sweethearts' chaste stolen afternoon in "A Dunnet Shepherdess." At play in this note are two important notions: that Esther had 'given' too many of her 'useful' days in the caretaking of her mother and that a wedding is the suitable 'termination' to her story—that it alone is a fitting end point.

The public's desire to see William and Esther rewarded with their happily-ever-after is tied to a desire to 'fix' the spinster, whose failure to adhere to the normative progression of reproductive coupledom both frustrates and threatens. The marriage plot (or even the attempt at engaging with a legible romance narrative) course-corrects by smoothing over the errancies that spinsterhood allows. Certainly those who argue that the inclusion of William and Esther's narrative undoes the rich possibilities of Jewett's world of intimacies outside of heterosexual marriage would agree. Yet: must the boundary between normative and non-normative be quite so firm? In my formulation, everyone on Dunnet Landing can be understood as a spinster: unmarried women, widows, bachelors, ghosts, spinsters all. Cather's inclusion of "A Dunnet Shepherdess" and "William's Wedding," then, in my reading does not hinder or defang The Country of the Pointed Firs; rather, it allows for a more expansive understanding of love, of kinship, and of care in the text

In "A Dunnet Shepherdess," the narrator accompanies William Blackett on what seems to be a simple fishing trip and quick, neighborly visit to the Hight home. There, the

narrator makes pleasant conversation with the ailing, elderly Mrs. Hight while William goes to find Esther, whom the narrator recognizes as the tall, lovely shepherdess the pair had seen earlier in their journey. As the afternoon stretches on with no sign of William and Esther's return, the narrator slowly realizes the true purpose of their visit: courtship at a snail's pace. The narrator remarks: "I am not sure that they acknowledged even to themselves that they had always been lovers; they could not consent to anything so definite or pronounced, but they were happy in being together in the world."[68] The narrator's realization is striking in its complicated temporality. Throughout these chapters, Esther and William are described as seeming youthful despite their age: William, the narrator tells us, "looked almost bold, and oddly like a happy young man rather than an ancient boy," while Esther "might have been Jeanne d'Arc returned to her sheep, touched with age and gray with ashes of a great remembrance."[69] Elsewhere, the narrator comments on her "worn face and her young blue eyes" and the "girlish color brightening her [weathered] cheeks."[70] This youthful appearance might be read as conventional, the restorative power of love's bloom, but such a reading is troubled by the narrator's assertion that William's typical appearance is that of an 'ancient boy.' William's childishness, like Esther's girlishness, is spinsterly: without the chrononormative markers of marriage and childbirth, they are both illegible and illogical, wrinkled-over adolescents. So too is their relationship illegible—even to themselves, according to the narrator. Ancient sweethearts stealing an afternoon's chaste conversation once a year isn't a recognizable romance narrative. The *time* of their intimacy confounds: they have no past, no star-crossed youth or out-of-sync romance, and no clear future. Instead, as our narrator assesses, they are simply "happy in

being together in the world," wanting neither more nor less than what they currently enjoy.[71]

Jewett complicates this happiness in a subtle moment between the narrator and Esther toward the end of their visit: "Then she smiled at me, a smile of noble patience, of uncomprehended sacrifice, which I can never forget. There was all the remembrance of disappointed hopes, the hardships of winter, the loneliness of single-handedness in her look, but I understood."[72] Esther communicates a spinsterly lifetime in the course of one look, recalling Heather Love's reading of Jewett's 'spinster aesthetics.' For Love, Jewett captures the "feelings of loss, disappointment, and longing that are *internal* to female worlds of love and ritual."[73] Esther's 'disappointment,' however, is difficult to understand as such, tied as it is to her happiness in the present moment and, importantly, her sudden legibility to both William and the narrator. "This silent farmer-fisherman," remarks the narrator of William, "who knew, and he alone, the noble and patient heart that beat within [Esther's] breast."[74] Esther gives the narrator the look of "uncomprehended sacrifice" but still "[she] understood."[75] That Esther is equally understood by the narrator, with whom she interacts for a few short hours, and by William, whom she courts over long years and whom she eventually marries, signifies something odd in the affections and intimacies and communions of Dunnet Landing.

Later, at William and Esther's wedding, the narrator reflects on her time in the village, saying, "Sometimes I believed that I had never found love in its simplicity as I had found it at Dunnet Landing in the various hearts of Mrs. Blackett and Mrs. Todd and William."[76] 'Love' here, runs in and around and between the characters, resting in the hearts and habitations of the islanders and in the kinship found and forged among them.

Peter Coviello elegantly parses the narrator's declaration early in *Firs* that she is a 'lover of Dunnet Landing,' "in all senses: an enthusiast, a woman living out her passions there, a person whose *role* there is that of a lover."[77] To love and be loved in Dunnet Landing is, for Coviello, "to live in the errancies and extravagancies of attachment that the unjoining of affect from its overcoding by the marriage plot makes possible."[78] But, in my understanding of "A Dunnet Shepherdess" and "William's Wedding," these possibilities might yet exist *within* the marriage plot—at least as Jewett fashions it. William and Esther's marriage is 'traditional' in that it is the joining of two individuals by a minister with all the properly vested powers, but it doesn't seem to be cemented in a legal or economic logic; it isn't a precursor to legitimate reproduction, and it isn't even a narratological telos. It is, I venture, a marriage of spinsters. William's wedding is a marriage of spinsters in that it lays bare the importance (perhaps even the supremacy) of the affective relationships all around – the actual wedding takes place offscreen and is relayed in a parenthetical amidst a stream of Mrs. Todd's gossip. Far more attention is paid to the demonstrations of love between Esther and Mrs. Todd, who welcomes the bride less as a sister than a daughter, or between the narrator and Esther, who share yet another tender look, or between the narrator and Mrs. Todd, who walk home together in pleasant silence, holding hands all the way.

Perhaps another detail will help to illustrate the possibilities of these odd sketches: throughout her wedding, Esther the shepherdess carries with her a small lamb. As the newlyweds climb aboard the boat that will take them home, the narrator recalls:

> I watched [William] make a nest for the lamb out of an old sea-cloak at Esther's feet, and then he wrapped her own shawl round her shoulders, and finding a pin in the lapel of his Sunday coat, he pinned it for her. She looked

> up at him fondly while he did this, and then glanced up at us, a pretty, girlish color brightening her cheeks.[79]

We might read the lamb's presence here as a pseudo-child, the ovine completion of the hetero-family structure. It might be more persuasive, however, to consider the lamb as signifying a return to—or perhaps the continuance of—Esther's life as a shepherdess, a form of what Sarah Ensor might call 'avuncular stewardship.' Ensor's brilliant reading of *The Country of the Pointed Firs* considers the spinster's odd relationship to time, her 'non-reproductive futurity.' "For there are many names for the spinster's relationship to the future," writes Ensor, "none of them conventional or readily recognized as contributing to traditional sociality. Perhaps one would be avuncular: often an aunt, the spinster stands in a kind of slanted or oblique relationship to the linear, vertical paradigms of transmission that govern familiar notions of futurity."[80] (416). This caretaking for Ensor is important in its ecofeminist possibilities, while I am more interested in its temporal possibilities. 'Spinster' indicates a figure—or a relation—dislodged in time. Technically, Esther ceases to be a spinster at the moment she marries William—and here we can see the finicky temporality of the term: when one is a spinster, she has always been and will always be one; should she marry, then the term never applied in the first place—her spinster past is erased in an instant), but in my theorizing she (and he) always is.[81] Esther continues to care for her sheep even after her flock has been sold; the boat she and William board takes them not toward their future but their past—they return to the ailing mother whose caretaking needs had kept them apart for so long. Yet none of this negates or otherwise invalidates the spinsterly intimacy they share, nor is it inconsistent with the rest of *Firs*, whose pages are

replete with islanders who bend time, space, and memory to forge intimacy with and take care of one another.

Joanna, Again

To conclude this chapter, I return to Poor Joanna, whose place as the text's central lacuna helps to find the boundaries of spinsterly care. If, that is, a spinster is one who provides care within an odd or otherwise slanted relationality yet who resists the care of other through her illegibility (or other uncooperativeness), then Joanna is paradignmatic. Joanna seeks to remove herself from Dunnet Landing society, to exit from the marriage market (and all other markets) and to arrange a form of self-sufficiency that frustrates even her own notion of her life, surprising herself by never rekindling a desire to return to the landing even in death.

Joanna's retreat to Shell-heap Island is marked as explicitly antisocial: "All she wanted was to get away from folks; she thought she wasn't fit to live with anybody, and wanted to be free."[82] What it is that Joanna sought to escape is not immediately clear: the marriage market, with its disappointments and treacheries? The burden of societal expectations, which demand a normative coupling that she no longer felt able to pursue? The closeness of Dunnet Landing, an ever-present affective binding that required active participation in its traditions and relationships? Finding one overwhelming reason for Joanna's departure is both impossible and beside the point. In tying Joanna's inability to "live with anybody" to her need to excise herself from the entire community, we see the ways in which the community is figured as an extended family, a domestic network that requires both caregiving and receipt of care.

Tellingly, the true sorrow of Joanna's story is less in her refusal to attempt another marriage than in her decision to isolate herself from the network of care that defines the Landing:

> 'Mother used to say she didn't see how Joanna lived without having nobody to do for, getting gher own meals and tending her own poor self day in an' day out,' said Mrs. Todd sorrowfully. 'There was the hens,' repeated Mrs. Fosdick kindly. 'I expect she soon came to makin' folks o' them. She was full o' feeling, and her troubles hurt her more than she could bear. I see it all now as I couldn't when I was young.'[83]

Mrs. Todd and Mrs. Blackett's sorrow at the thought of Joanna living "without nobody to do for" cuts against the models of female independence that critics so often point to in the web of complex relationships at work on Dunnet Landing. The tragedy, for Mrs. Todd and Mrs. Fosdick, is not necessarily Joanna's decision to remain unmarried—after all, this is a village of the uncoupled, the elderly, the widowed, and the odd—but rather in her refusal to participate in a larger network that relies on an economy of domestic labor and care. Joanna's solitude, which is noticeably different form the self-sufficiency and industriousness that are characteristic of other villagers, is marked as unspeakably sad. To "[get one's] own meals and [tend one's] own poor self" is to refuse for herself the pleasure of providing for another and to refuse everyone else the pleasure of providing for her. Mrs. Fosdick's addition to the story further emphasizes the degree to which Joanna's chosen solitude is unthinkable; she not only declares that Joanna must have developed human-like connections with her chickens but also admits that she sees Joanna's circumstances more clearly now than she could have as a young woman. What is it that Mrs. Fosdick can now

see? The implication is that Mrs. Fosdick, now after a lifetime of experience and heartbreak and grief (she has just, we are told, buried the last of her nine siblings), can understand what it is like to be so overwhelmed with feeling that the only logical response is to teeter toward madness.

Much like Cather's notion that Jewett's sketches blend into the landscape until they are "life itself," 'Poor Joanna' becomes, in Mrs. Todd and Mrs. Fosdick's telling, increasingly naturalized until she is essentially part of the island itself. That Joanna was 'doomed from the start' blurs with her stewardship of Shell-heap Island to produce the inevitability of her choice. Joanna's dramatic response to heartbreak is inherited from her mother, who "had the grim streak and never knew what 't was to be happy," whereas her natural affinity for the island is inherited from her father, with whom she had explored the island many times (437). Her island garden—which surprises Mrs. Todd in its tidiness—is at once cultivated and wild, the result of Joanna's haphazard planting on girlhood trips and her more careful tending as the island's eventual mistress. "Some is meant to be the Joannas in this world, an' 't was her poor lot," Mrs. Todd tells us (437). Mrs. Fosdick says of Joanna: "All her hopes were built on marryin', an' havin' a real home and somebody to look to; she acted just like a bird when its nest is spoilt" (430). Joanna is further identified with songbirds as Mrs. Todd recounts the story of her funeral, wherein a wild sparrow's song overpowered the incongruous reverend's eulogy.

The naturalization of Joanna, much like the perceived inevitability of her spinsterhood and hermitage, then affords the narrator the sense, upon visiting Shell-heap island, that she is able to commune with Joanna herself. Her journey, aided by Captain Bowden, is one of the most poignant and overtly sentimental passages in the novel:

> I found the path; it was touching to discover that this lonely spot was not without its pilgrims. Later generations will know less and less of Joanna herself, but there are paths trodden to the shrines of solitude the world over,--the world cannot forget them, try as it may; the feet of the young find them out because of curiosity and dim foreboding, while the old bring hearts full of remembrance. This plain anchorite had been one of those whom sorrow made too lonely to brave the sight of men, too timid to front the simple world she knew, yet valiant enough to live alone with her poor insistent human nature and the calms and passions of the sea and sky. […] There was the world, and here was she with eternity well begun. In the life of each of us, I said to myself, there is a place remote and islanded, and given to endless regret or secret happiness; we are each the uncompanioned hermit and recluse of an hour or a day we understand our fellows of the cell to whatever age of history they may belong.[84]

The narrator's sense of communion is powerful, her ability to find kinship and connection with the spirit of a long-dead spinster undeniably touching and yet, in the context of Joanna's desire to remove herself completely, somewhat unsettling. No matter her intentions, Joanna is unable to find solitude in life nor death; her hideaway is privy always to helpful fishermen and well-meaning pilgrims. The narrator finds that while Joanna's house had rotted away, her flower garden still bloomed—a testament either to Joanna's strong bond to the island or to the world's inability to allow her escape. As Coviello notes, this is a recuperative gesture on Jewett's part, one that brings Joanna back into Dunent

Landing society and that betrays an inability on the text's part to fully allow for the valor of Joanna's "poor, insistent human nature" and her desire to slip away.[85]

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[1] Tompkins, *Sentimental Designs*, xviii.
[2] Jewett, *Country of the Pointed Firs*, 430.
[3] Ibid., 429.
[4] Ibid., 429.
[5] Ibid., 431
[6] Ibid., 432.
[7] Ibid., 428.
[8] Ibid., 428.
[9] Romero, *Home Fronts*, 35.
[10] Jewett, *Country*, 432
[11] For sharp critiques of Jewett's portrayal of race and her complicity in American imperialism and racism, see Amy Kaplan, "Nation, Region, and Empire," in *Columbia Literary History of the United* States, ed. Emory Elliott (Columbia University Press, 1991, pp. 240-66), Richard Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America* (University of Chicago Press, 1993), and Elizabeth Ammons, "Material Culture, Empire, and Jewett's *Country of the Pointed Firs"* in *New Essays on The Country of the Pointed Firs,* ed. June Howard (Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 81-100). See also Karen L. Kilcup and Thomas S. Edwards' introduction to *Jewett and Her Contemporaries: Reshaping the Canon* (University of Florida Press, 1999, pp. 1-27) for a robust account of the critical conflict surrounding Jewett's portrayal of race.
[12]Jewett, *Country*, 431.
[13] Ibid., 433.
[14] Ibid., 433.
[15] Ibid., 433.
[16] Ibid., 449; 441.
[17] Tompkins, *Sentimental Designs,* xii.
[18] Howard, *New Essays on* <u>*The Country of the Pointed Firs*</u>, 4.
[19] Ibid., 4.
[20] See Judith Fetterley, "Reading *Deephaven* as a Lesbian Text," in *Sexual Practice/Textual Theory: Lesbian Cultural Criticism,* ed. Susan J. Wolfe and Julia Penelope (1993), 164-83; Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse, *Writing Out of Place: Regionalism, Women, and American Literary Culture* (2003); Kate McCullough, *Regions of Identity: The Construction of America in Women's Fiction* (1999).
[21] Howe, qtd. in Kahan, *Celibacies*, 40.
[22] Ibid., 40-1.
[23] Cather, "148 Charles Street" in *Not Under Forty*.
[24] James qtd. in Fryer, "What Goes on in the Ladies Room," 614.
[25] Rita K. Gollin, "Profile: Annie Adams Fields" qtd. in Fryer, "What Goes on in the Ladies Room," 617.
[26] Fields, introduction to Jewett's *Letters*, qtd. in Fryer, "What Goes on in the Ladies Room," 620.
[27] Coviello, *Tomorrow's Parties*, x.
[28] See Benjamin Kahan's *Celibacies: American Modernism and Sexual Life* (2013) for a reading of 'celibate' as a sexual identity in and of itself – different, perhaps, from asexual or spinster but relevant nonetheless.
[29] James, "Mr. and Mrs. James T. Fields," 7.
[30] Gebhard, "The Spinster in the House," 82.
[31] Ibid., 82.
[32] Ibid., 85.
[33] Rohy, *Anachronism and its Others*, 53.
[34] Smith Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct*
[35] Ensor, "Spinster Ecology," 420.

[36] Ibid., 420.
[37] Ibid., 422.
[38] Ibid., 422.
[39] Boone, *Tradition Counter Tradition,* 280.
[40] Ibid., 306.
[41] See Marilee Lindemann's *Willa Cather, Queering America* (1999).
[42] Cather, "Preface," xix.
[43] Ibid., xix.
[44] Ibid., xiii.
[45] Ibid., xix.
[46] Ibid., x.
[47] Scholars have similarly debated whether *The Country of the Pointed Firs* is a novel, a novella, or a collection of short stories. I have opted to refer to it simply as 'the text' in this chapter. For discussion of Jewett's genre(s), see J. Samaine Lockwood's *Archives of Desire*, Marjorie Pryse's "Sex, Class, and 'Category Crisis': Reading Jewett's Transivity," and Stephanie Foote's *Regional Fictions*.
[48] Cather, *Not Under Forty*, x.
[49] Thompson, "The Art of Miss Jewett," 407.
[50] Cather, "Preface," xi.
[51] Ibid., xix.
[52] Lindemann, *Willa Cather, Queering America*, 154, emphasis in original.
[53] Romines goes on to compare Cather's editorial work on *The Best Stories of Sarah Orne Jewett* with that of Godfrey St. Peter In *The Professor's House*, written roughly contemporaneously. Faced with the mountain of Tom Outland's writing after his death, St. Peter insists that he "must 'edit and annotate' and 'write an introduction' if the published book is 'to mean anything' … His editing will ensure the preservation of a patriarchal inheritance" (159). See Ann Romines' "The Professor and the Pointed Firs" (1999).
[54] Lindemann, *Willa Cather,* 94-5.
[55] For rich discussion of the Jewett/Cather relationship, see Heather Love's *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (2007), Richard Cary's "The Spinster and the Sculptor: Jewett's 'Influence' on Cather" (1973), and Marilee Lindemann's *Willa Cather: Queering America* (1999).
[56] Goheen, "Editorial Misinterpretation," 38.
[57] Homestead, "Willa Cather Editing Sarah Orne Jewett," 65.
[58] Qtd. in Homestead, "Willa Cather Editing Sarah Orne Jewett," 72.
[59] Ibid., 76.
[60] Qtd. in Homestead, "Willa Cather Editing Sarah Orne Jewett," 84.
[61] Goheen, "Editorial Misinterpretation," 39.
[62] Lindemann, *Willa Cather*, 96.
[63] Ammons, "Going in Circles: The Female Geography of Jewett's Country of the Pointed Firs," 86, 89.
[64] Of particular note are Marco A. Portales' "History of a Text: Jewett's The Country of the Pointed Firs" (1982) and Cynthia J. Goheen's "Editorial Misinterpretation and the Unmaking of a Perfectly Good Text: The Editorial History of 'The Country of the Pointed Firs'" (1998). Since the 1994 publication of the Library of America collected edition of Jewett's works, scholars have largely used Jewett's original 21-sketch cycle.
[65] Lindemann, *Willa Cather*, 96.
[66] Goheen, "Editorial Misinterpretation," 39.
[67] Qtd. in Lindemann, *Willa Cather,* 65.
[68] Jewett, *Country*, 237.
[69] Ibid., 237.
[70] Ibid., 240, 299.
[71] Ibid., 238.
[72] Ibid., 240.
[73] Love, "Gyn/Apology: Sarah Orne Jewett's Spinster Aesthetics," 313.
[74] Jewett, *Firs,* 237.
[75] Ibid., 240.
[76] Ibid., 286.
[77] Coviello, *Tomorrow's Parties*, 84.
[78] Ibid., 93.

[79] Jewett, *Firs,* 298-9.
[80] Ensor, "Spinster Ecology: Rachel Carson, Sarah Orne Jewett, and Nonreproductive Futurity," 416.
[81] Sarah Ensor puts it this way: "For the spinster, we might say, is legible as a kind of social outsider precisely insofar as she has been abstracted from time. She becomes a spinster only once it has been determined that she likely has no marriageable future; when that happens, however, she also comes to have no past—or at least no past in which a future, or the desire for one, ever existed. (We need think here only of the oddly virginal resonances of the phrase old maid, which erases the spinster's lived past in favor of a kind of ahistorical, perpetual innocence.)" (414)
[82] Jewett, *Firs,* 429.
[83] Ibid., 433.
[84] Ibid., 444.
[85] Ibid., 444; Coviello, *Tomorrow's Parties,* 97.

CHAPTER THREE:
"Womanhood denies my tongue to tell":
María Amparo Ruiz de Burton's Spinsterly Flail

So far, the literary spinsters and critics I have focused on in this dissertation have largely been white women. Such a pattern is unsurprising, considering the degree to which spinsterhood has always been imbricated with white femininity. The spinsterly ideal—the image of spinsterhood one's mind conjures upon hearing the term—is typically an elderly white woman residing in a charming New England village or perhaps a city home shared with another aging maiden; the financial and social means necessary to navigate life on one's own have not historically been widely accessible to marginalized groups. This is not to say, of course, that Black and brown women did not remain unmarried throughout the nineteenth century; in fact, many Black female activists and writers (Ida B. Wells, Pauline Hopkins, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper) were unmarried, widowed, or single for most of their lives. But 'spinster' as an identity category was not largely available to nonwhite women, and vanishingly few Black and brown spinsters emerge in the literature of the time.[1] I have argued elsewhere that the spinster is a figure for whom there is no narrative; here, I extend that argument to find that there is *especially* no narrative for the Black or brown spinster, so much so that she ceases to exist at all.

In this chapter, I turn not exactly to a spinster of color but rather to a literary spinster who fits the character type perfectly and who was written by a criminally underappreciated Latina, María Amparo Ruiz de Burton. As with Freeman and Jewett, Ruiz de Burton has had a complicated critical history in which she and her works have been held up as paradigmatic of a particular literary movement (Latinx literature in Ruiz de Burton's

case) and been subject to shifting political investments of literary criticism. Consequently, the vast majority of critical attention on Ruiz de Burton's work has been on the areas of her writing which most clearly overlap with those political investments: the politics of empire-building and railroad construction (particularly as they overlapped with Ruiz de Burton's own landholding battles), her complicated meditations on race and citizenship, and her satirical critique of feminist abolition and the Cult of True Womanhood. Comparatively less attention has been paid to Ruiz de Burton's formal complexity and the degree to which her writing is in conversation with other regional writing. Here, I pay close attention to what Ruiz de Burton achieves in her sprawling satirical novel *Who Would Have Thought It?* (1872) through Lavinia Sprig, an old maid aunt largely disregarded as comic relief both within and without the novel.

Early in the novel, readers are made to understand that Lavinia, the sister of repugnant matriarch Jemima Norval, had in her youth been courted, bedded, and abandoned by both the roguish Reverend Hackwell and his friend Reverend Hammerhard, leaving her, as Amelia María de la Luz Montes describes in her 2009 introduction to the novel, "bitter yet still in love."[2] Such a description conforms to the larger critical view of Lavinia, which sees her as a bitter, slightly mad spinster who fuels an absurd political plot and bears the brunt of the novel's feminist concerns. A closer look at Lavinia, who takes center stage only a few times throughout the novel, reveals the degree to which she becomes a limit case for the literary spinster. In a novel as wide and varied as Ruiz de Burton's, where melodramatic kidnapping plots butt up against political theorizations of citizenship and sentimental seduction plots, the spinster figure becomes an endlessly flexible avatar through which Ruiz de Burton can explore all manner of concerns. In fact, it

is Lavinia's spinster status—her illegibility and freedom, her unoccupied production and misplaced caretaking, her contradictory blend of libidinous frigidity—that allows her to move through the novel's many disparate plots and genres with a generative sort of unproductivity. To ignore or dismiss Lavinia is to miss out on some of the novel's more subtle machinations, moves only made possible by the literary spinster herself.

The Recovery of Ruiz de Burton

Perhaps it is unsurprising that in a novel so wide-ranging and with such high stakes for its critical reception that a character as odd and often ridiculous as Lavinia Sprig has been relatively ignored. *Who Would Have Thought It?* is Californio writer Ruiz de Burton's first novel, published under the pseudonym C. Loyal and set before and during the American Civil War.[3] It follows the story of Mexican orphan Lola Medina after she is rescued by the kind and sympathetic Dr. Norval, who brings her to his New England home to be raised as his ward, much to the displeasure of his wife, Jemima. Mrs. Norval, who professes a belief in abolition while being devoutly racist, initially rejects the idea of keeping Lola in their home but changes her mind after her husband's apparent death, when she realizes she and her beloved Reverend Hackwell could devise a scheme to steal the young girl's fortune, which Dr. Norval had kept hidden away. Amid these dramatics, the Civil War rages, with the Norval's eldest son fighting for the Union and spinster aunt Lavinia Sprig taking it upon herself to stage a rescue mission for her brother, a prisoner of war held behind Confederate lines. Unlike the firmly-rooted New England regionalist texts *The Whole Family* and *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, *Who Would Have Thought It?* moves with picaresque agility across America and introduces an enormous cast of characters in

order to provide a satirical critique of American politics, consumerism, and misguided self-image.

Despite the novel's complexities, it has only been in recent years that the text itself has garnered much critical attention. Though the trajectory of Ruiz de Burton's inclusion into the literary canon has not followed the exact same path as Jewett and Freeman's, her work has been subject to a similar level of investment and backlash. Ruiz de Burton's writing, which had fallen well off the mainstream academic radar through most of the twentieth century in no small part due to white masculinist academics' successful efforts to codify the narrative of American literature explored in this project's introduction, was given attention through the scholarly recovery project known as the Recovering the United States Hispanic Literary Heritage Project in the 1990s. Originally directed by Nicolás Kanellos and housed at the University of Houston, the Project sought to locate, recover, preserve, and publish literature by writers of Hispanic descent from the colonial period through the mid-twentieth century.[4] The Recovery Project's efforts to bring to light an entire century's worth of literature and in so doing emphasize the longevity and legitimacy of Latinx studies departments heightened the stakes of each new discovery and critical assessment.[5] To recover the work of Ruiz de Burton, a Latina writing in English in the late nineteenth century and engaging with precisely the political questions with which the modern academy was abuzz, was a coup.[6]

With that level of pressure—similar to what I have traced as second-wave feminist critics' care and investment in the recovery of New England regional women writers—came a tendency to collapse recovered writers, their characters, and their critics. José Aranda Jr., in his influential 1998 article "Contradictory Impulses: María Amparo Ruiz de

Burton, Resistance Theory, and the Politics of Chicano/a Studies," noted the predictability and danger of such a collapse: "[B]ecause of the difficulties inherent in archival research on minorities and women in the United States, biographical and textual analyses inevitably feed off one another until all possible resources have been exhausted."[7] Unspoken in Aranda's assessment are the ways in which critics' own investments and desires bleed into those analyses—understandably so, when the pressure to articulate the political relevance and canonical importance of one's subjects is tied so clearly to the possibility of earning the state- and university-funded research grants and departmental legitimacy that ensure the continued study of Latinx literature. The study of marginalized literature has never had the luxury of supposed objectivity afforded to the canon-forming study of white male authors—the degree to which twentieth-century critics did or did not identify with Hawthorne or Melville had little bearing on those authors' hallowed status. But feminist criticism, which is always inextricably linked to feminist activism and queer liberation, and Latinx criticism, which finds its roots in Chicano/a and Puerto Rican diaspora activism, can rarely escape the notion that not only must the critic prove that the literature is worthy of attention for its artistic merit rather than simply its historical interest, but she must also find in the text and its author a thread of radical or transgressive politics, through which she can argue for the further importance of their study. When those disciplines intersect, as in Ruiz de Burton, the pressure builds exponentially.

As a result, the study of Ruiz de Burton's writing has become increasingly fraught over the past thirty years. Whereas early recovery writing by scholars like Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita found in Ruiz de Burton a resistance narrative that figured her as, in Aranda's words, "a prototypical Chicana feminist, resistance fighter, in-your-face Abraham

Lincoln basher, and go-to-hell Supreme Court critic."[8] Unfortunately, Aranda goes on to say, she was in fact none of these. Instead, Ruiz de Burton was born to an aristocratic family in Baja California, married Captain Henry Burton (who had been sent to Baja California with the U.S. Army to head off an uprising during the Mexican American War), and saw herself as a member of an educated, white elite that traced itself to European colonizers rather than the colonized Indigenous populations. Her writing is indeed critical of American empire and politics, but her sharp criticism is on the grounds of the corruption, corporate monopoly, and deceit that led to the dispossession and bankruptcy of wealthy Californios rather than the racist and violent colonization of Mexico. Beginning with Aranda's critical reassessment of Ruiz de Burton's legacy in 1998, literary critics shifted focus from highlighting the political satire and stinging critique of U.S. empire evident in her writing to more tempered exploration of whiteness and contradictory politics in her personal and professional writing. As such, the academy's critical eye has by and large turned away from *Who Would Have Thought It?* and more toward Ruiz de Burton's second novel, *The Squatter and the Don*; to a certain degree, the burden of representation that has haunted Ruiz de Burton's writing since the 1990s has perhaps led to critics moving away from in-depth readings of her prose, preferring instead to gesture toward her as a major figure in the Latinx nineteenth century, more useful as an object lesson in understanding important disciplinary debates than as an artist adept at mixing and manipulating literary genres for her own purposes.[9]

While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to determine what should be done with regard to Ruiz de Burton's place in literary studies, if such a determination is even possible, I must pause to consider what we miss when the burden of care for a text and a

writer is so troubled. It is worth noting, as countless others have done, that the politics of marginalized writers are always unfairly under more severe scrutiny than those of the dominant group. I have yet to read apologia from (white, male) scholars for their interest in Henry David Thoreau or William Dean Howells. I am not, to be clear, participating in the conservative reaction to 'cancel culture'; as scholars we can and should engage with the messy complexities of our subjects' lives and choices, including censuring them as necessary. But I have come to balk at the academic compunction to excuse one's scholarly interest in (or affective investment in) a writer through the identification of a transgressive or radical strain of politics found hiding in their work or life. Contrary to this project's second epigraph, I argue that 'liking' a text is not a facile or uncritical mode for engagement; to analyze literature exclusively through symptomatic means or to disregard that which fails to align with disciplinary politics is to miss a wide array of subtlety and nuance that coexist with and expand our understanding of a text and its world. This is not to suggest that a return to New Criticism or a willful disregard for the author's biography and cultural context is an advantageous move for literary criticism—rather, I suggest that we as literary critics really grapple with what it means to care for and about a text that is not always easy to love: a text that resists our attempts at definition, that evades any easy reading of its politics, that troubles are very instinct to care for it at all.

As I have suggested throughout this dissertation, the literary spinster is an apt figure to help us work through these complicated and contradictory desires. As a figure which resists definition as well as narrative structure, the spinster opens a gap through which we can explore the possibilities of women's writing. I turn now to *Who Would Have Thought It?*'s Lavinia Sprig, an odd mess of a character whose narrative purpose evades us

upon first read and whose confusing blend of archetype and genre has kept her at the sidelines of Ruiz de Burton criticism. It is precisely those qualities that make Lavinia (and *Who Would Have Thought It?* broadly) so difficult to care for that render her so useful as a limit case for the literary spinster and all she can achieve. In a novel that bounces through genres as a means of satire, Lavinia the literary spinster becomes a dumping ground for all that cannot be reliably attached to other character types—a move made possible by the elasticity, undesirability, and unproductivity of the spinster herself. Careful attention to her work in the novel, then, reveals a complex commentary on the overlap of gender, sexuality, and citizenship that Ruiz de Burton cannot say elsewhere.

Lavinia as Hysterical Old Maid

"What would the good and proper people of this world do if there were no rogues in it," muses the wicked Reverend Hackwell in the novel's opening line.[10] Hackwell, a "cunning opportunist" and cartoonish schemer, becomes the novel's most obvious villain as he plots with the invidious Jemima Norval to steal the riches (and, secretly on Hackwell's part, the heart) of orphaned Lola Medina.[11] Yet Hackwell is positioned as a villain long before he sets his sights on our heroine Lola: early in the novel, the reader learns that he had seduced Jemima's sister Lavinia with the false promise of marriage, only to abandon her and cement her status in the community as a bitter, hysterical spinster. Lavinia goes on to inhabit a complicated role in the novel, first being established as the precise archetypal old maid Mary Wilkins Freeman would argue no longer exists by 1908, then as a nursemaid and protofeminist political activist. Scholar Kirstie Soares argues that Lavinia "undergoes a transformation from a satirical to a serious character over the course of the novel,"

"push[ing] the boundaries of the traditional female role" through both her apparent sexual liberation and her entrance into the political realm.[12] "When other female characters are pining over their lost lovers," Soares quips, "Lavinia is breaking out of the private sphere."[13] To draw so sharp a divide, however, between Lavinia's 'promiscuous' past and political present is misleading and fails to recognize the fulness of her role in the novel, a role further complicated by the expansive nature of the literary spinster. Close inspection of Lavinia's three key scenes, each of which are marked by an hysterical outburst, sexual impropriety, and a frustrated sense of duty, exposes a larger sense of frustration that courses through the novel: Lavinia, as literary spinster, becomes the avenue through which Ruiz de Burton demonstrates the contradictory struggles of women's place in nineteenth-century America and the (bodily) sacrifices they so often made.

Lavinia Sprig is, from her first introduction, figured as an unstable spinster obsessed with her past beaus: a stock character of the nineteenth-century novel. Yet rather than being jilted at the altar or suffering the death of her beloved, Lavinia is presented as a woman who, on two different occasions, slept with a man to whom she believed herself engaged, only to have him leave her for a younger, wealthier woman. Importantly, Lavinia is not lovelorn for her lost reverends (though, admittedly, she remains infatuated with Reverend Hackwell, who holds a mysterious charm over both her and her sister) so much as she is bitterly regretful of "the laurels that *might have been her own*."[14] That is, Lavinia mourns her lost opportunity to be a wife and mother ("her two victorious rivals were happy mothers,--whilst poor Lavinia was not even a wife! And that thought kept her awake.") more than her lost virginity.[15] Ruiz de Burton is merciless in her description of Lavinia's admittedly cartoonish actions as she stands alone in front of the fireplace, staring

into the ashes as her nieces—young, beautiful, wealthy girls who scarcely consider themselves the same species as their pathetic aunt—stare from a hidden spot. "Was she drawing mental comparisons between that grate and her own virginal bosom?" the narrator suggests.[16] Lavinia, it seems, regrets less the loss of sexual contact than the unfulfilled promise of marriage. "How very wrong girls are in permitting any liberties to men to whom they are engaged!" she says to herself angrily while viciously stabbing the dying fire with a poker.[17] The repeated plunges of Lavinia's poker here echo the fruitless penetrations of the reverends, and the outlandish image of the aging maiden raving in the dark while attacking the family hearth pointedly undercuts any sympathy the reader might feel for Lavinia.

We might also understand Lavinia's "continued thrusts" also as evidence that celibate though she may be at this moment, she is not without sexual desire. Soares argues that "it is presumed while Lavinia was sexually promiscuous in the past, she no longer is at the time the story takes place," as "for Lavinia, sexual indiscretion does not coexist with her political and social interests."[18] The force of my own argument denies this clear demarcation, finding instead that Lavinia's political experiences are always muddied with sexual impropriety (though not always of her own volition). It is also important to note that Lavinia's anger at the reverends stems not from the fact that they presumably took her virginity and 'sullied' her for the marriage market but from their hypocrisy. "The scoundrel, preaching scoundrel!" she cries, reflecting on the bitter unfairness of Hackwell "preaching morality every Sunday" and convincing everyone—even her own sister—that their word reigns supreme over hers.[19] Her spinster status characterizes her as paradoxically frigid

and libidinous, while her inability to let go of her anger and resentment marks her as possibly insane—the combination removes all credibility.

Sexually and emotionally frustrated, unable to fulfill the societal roles of wife and mother she so desires, Lavinia is frequently presented as yet another stock character type of the nineteenth century: the hysterical woman. Throughout the novel, Lavinia has emotional outbursts, dissolves into tears, and faints without much concern from others (even her own family members), who see these dramatics as "a common occurrence with old maids."[20] Hysteria is itself linked to the wanton celibacy of the spinster, thought throughout the nineteenth century to be caused by either a lack or an overabundance of sexual stimulation. It is also tied conceptually to a period in feminist theory occurring simultaneously to the recovery of Ruiz de Burton's writing. In *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America,* Carroll Smith-Rosenberg argues that nineteenth-century hysteria must be seen "as a disease peculiar to the Victorian bourgeois family and as a disease related, as well, to the role changes and conflicts bourgeois matrons experienced between the 1840s and 1890s."[21] Smith-Rosenberg crystallizes these societal changes in an exploration of the "painful discontinuities" and incongruities of the bourgeois woman's expected roles of 'True Woman' and 'Ideal Mother.' The True Woman is "emotional, dependent, and gentle—a born follower," while the Ideal Mother is "strong, self-reliant, protective, an efficient caretaker in relation to children and home."[22] Lavinia, just as she both is and is not hysterical and is and is not sexual, is positioned as both the True Woman and the Ideal Mother while simultaneously being rejected from both social categories.

Inhabiting this unstable space of overlap ultimately allows for Lavinia to be dismissed, ridiculed, and ignored by those around her. Hysteria, thought to be

"characteristically female—the hysterical woman the embodiment of a perverse or hyper-femininity," was considered evidence of moral and mental weakness that could not be seen as reliable and instead could be freely ignored; as witnessed in Lavinia's interactions (or lack thereof) with other characters, a woman's crying jag or fainting spell is thoroughly unremarkable, akin to a fussy baby or adolescent tantrum.[23] That is, the spectre of hysteria provides a scientific, medical reason to ignore women's desires and demands. Lavinia, for instance, is routinely ignored and ridiculed by others; her sister Jemima "doesn't believe that [Hackwell] engaged himself to [Lavinia]," and her nieces titter over her late-night misery with cruel jokes.[24] Hysteria itself takes on a similar cultural trajectory as the spinster: the 1980s and 90s saw attempted feminist reclamation of the term (see: Hélène Cixous and those following psychoanalytic feminist thought), countered by other feminists' attempts to decouple hysteria and femininity (see: Elaine Showalter's wide-ranging work on hysteria throughout the period).[25]

Following that second wave impulse, we could very well track the ways in which Lavinia exemplifies the extremes of nineteenth-century femininity, as other critics have done. Lavinia embraces the ideals of republican motherhood even though she is a childless spinster: she cheerfully tends to her family, effectively taking over as matriarch once Jemima succumbs first to her love for Reverend Hackwell and second to brain fever. She simultaneously inhabits the frailties of true womanhood, falling prey to hysterical collapse and using her brief entrance into the public sphere primarily as a way of restoring patriarchal order to her family. Such readings would not be unprecedented: Kirstie Soares' reading of the novel attempts to balance the ways in which Lavinia's "feminine qualities redeem her as the perfect woman that every woman should admire, but on the other hand,

her misfortunes make her an example of the type of woman that no woman wants to become."[26] Other critics relocate Ruiz de Burton's exploration of gender to Jemima Norval, the more obvious avatar of domesticity and the cult of true womanhood who is figured in opposition to Lola Medina's purity and inherent feminine goodness.[27] In this chapter, however, I am more interested in thinking through the ways in which Lavinia's status as a spinster, as I have theorized up to this point, both allows for and encourages her dismissal by other characters (and, to a large extent, the novel itself) and is marked by a frustrating unproductivity.

Lavinia's Misplaced Care

Lavinia, then, with neither husband nor children to care for but with a heart brimming with maternal instinct and the desire to fulfill her feminine duty, must turn elsewhere. The reader is introduced to Lavinia indirectly, through another character's recognition of her poodle Jack Sprig. Mrs. Cackle, a neighbor of the Norvals and rival matriarch to Jemima, looks with revulsion at the dog: "There is that miserable poodle, with his wool all washed up white, adorned with a new ribbon! […] That old maid Lavvy Sprig, I suppose, has decked her thousand cats and her million canary-birds all with ribbons, like her odious poodle."[28] Jack is living evidence of Lavinia's inappropriate unproductivity – she spends far too much time and effort on the wrong things. Rather than participating in a more useful form of caretaking, such as motherhood, Lavinia wastes time preening and primping her pets, going so far as to bestow upon them her own last name as though they were her natural born heirs. After "the gloomy days in which the Rev. Hackwell and the Rev. Hammerhard proved so faithless," Lavinia refocuses her affections on her brood of

canaries, whom she lavishes with love and attention, dutifully trains, and adorns with blue ribbons.[29] The most cursory gloss of these creatures reads them as largely symbolic: caged birds to represent Lavinia's trapped existence, ensnared both by her controlling sister and by nineteenth-century bourgeois social standards. But the novel makes clear that the birds are "useful as well as ornamental," as they are "the recipients of Miss Lavinia's pent-up caresses" and had undoubtedly "saved Miss Lavvy from a fit of hysterics," though of course Lavinia is nonetheless regarded as slightly insane by the rest of her social circle.[30]

The carework Lavinia performs throughout the novel is consistently ignored and undervalued, operating as it does outside of the auspices of 'legitimate' (that is, maternal) care. The narrator, in an unusual display of empathy for Lavinia, notes that "When the [Norval] family was happy, no one missed the kind Lavvy; but as soon as misfortune came, Lavvy was indispensable."[31] As the Civil War rages, Lavinia's caring instinct is rerouted to patriotic duty uncoupled from maternity; alongside the community's other unwed women (for, of course, married women have their own families to attend to), Lavinia "canned beef-tea and made jellies and jams in the daytime, and lint and bandages and havelocks at night," knitting stockings and sewing night-shirts to be boxed up and sent to Washington for the Union soldiers.[32] She is not, however, rewarded for her efforts—on the contrary, her family finds her do-gooding irritating, and even the narrator belittles her patriotism, noting that the clothes Lavinia sews are wildly out of proportion, having "seemed to take measure by [her] enthusiasm," apparently "[imagining] that the heroes for whom the shirts were made must all be as large in size as in deeds."[33] What's more, in her fervor for patriotic domestic tasks, Lavinia is devastated to realize that she has been neglecting her beloved canaries: "She saw that she had to decide between her country and her birds, and her heart seemed

to collapse in pain. But Lavvy's soul was Spartan. It soon leaped higher, and a sublime resolve invaded her spirit."[34] She kills her cherished flock of canaries by etherizing them one by one, painfully and at what she sees as great personal cost choosing her country and its soldiers over her own surrogate children. The image of Lavinia weeping and dipping a brood of canaries into a flask of chloroform is easily read as a satirical depiction of the bourgeois white woman's wartime 'sacrifice,' made all the more ridiculous by Ruiz de Burton's forceful prose, which declares that "what [Lavinia] was about to do, only an Electra, an Antigone, or some such classic heroine, could have done outside of New England."[35] In "Lavinia outdoes the Spartan Women," she makes as grand a political statement as she can imagine. She decides to eschew the domestic sphere and all that it entails (that is, romance, sex, motherhood, and social legitimacy) in favor of the public sphere, where she will devote herself to a fuller sense of citizenship.

Even this desire for duty is frustrated, her attempt at agency marred by another instance of sexual impropriety. Lavinia, so overcome with emotion at the gravity of killing her canaries, is distracted and outsmarted by the avian patriarch, who escapes her grasp and flies away. Shrieking, Lavinia rushes after the bird, only to run into Reverend Hackwell and, overcome, faint. Hackwell "put[s] his hand to feel Lavvy's heart's pulsations," by which the reader is meant to understand that he takes the opportunity to fondle Lavinia's chest, as his next thought is a reflection on Lavinia's "very handsome bust."[36] At this point, "his thoughts, which had never been what should be in the head of a parson, [get] altogether very far from the church," and he "[thinks] he [will] experiment on Lavvy."[37] Lest Hackwell's intentions be misconstrued as good, the narrator notes that he "look[s] all around" and only continues because he "[sees] no one near."[38] Hackwell kisses Lavinia,

reasoning that "If she is unconscious […] she will never know it; and if she is pretending, she expects it"; when he gets no reaction from her unconscious form, he "change[s] his position slightly, kneeling on one knee to approach Lavinia closer" but is prevented from taking further advantage when he notices Lola standing nearby.[39] Shocked, he abruptly drops Lavinia, who, "without the tender support of his arm around her waist, [rolls] down the carpet very ungracefully."[40] The scene ends quickly, and it is unclear if Lavinia was aware of these further 'liberties' taken by Hackwell; at any rate, she never speaks of the incident again, instead continuing her move toward the public sphere.

The Sacrifice of Lavinia

Lavinia's dedication to her political duty culminates in her third key scene, in which she fully leaves the domestic space to visit Washington D.C.. After a year and a half of waiting for their brother Isaac's return from Confederate captivity (taken prisoner, as he was, during the Battle of Bull Run), Jemima and Lavinia devise a plan to go to Washington and seek help on his behalf. Lavinia, it is decided, must go alone, for Jemima believes her own influence to be tainted by her husband's political writings and is more urgently needed to care for the very ill Mrs. Hackwell. Lavinia eagerly takes up the task of campaigning for Isaac's return, "[wanting] nothing better than plenty of employment for her exuberant moral energies and redundant force of will."[41] This redirection of energy—as witnessed by the rechanneling of her affectionate urges toward her canaries—is typical of Lavinia, who seems always to be reconciling two discrete modes of being. Here, Lavinia attempts to merge her patriotism with feminine duty by expanding the role of caretaker to that of wartime nurse; whereas typical matrons like Jemima Norval and Mrs. Cackle do

their part by caring for their sons in the home, Lavinia "goes from being a domestic caregiver to caring for wounded soldiers, therefore stepping outside of the traditional domestic realm of giving."[42] Lavinia is the consummate nurse: she spends every day tending to the sick and wounded soldiers, serving as a source of joy and light in the grim Union infirmaries. To Lavinia, the soldiers are "the impersonation of *duty*" and as such, she is "bound to love them."[43] Isaac, then, becomes the exemplar of both patriotic and familial duty, and as such, his rescue becomes the guiding purpose of Lavinia's existence. Yet as with her previous scenes, Lavinia's attempt at action is frustrated by sexual impropriety and a hysterical outburst.

Lavinia's visit to Washington is grimly begun—with the thought of her brother's imprisonment hanging overhead and Dr. Norval's supposedly treasonous reputation looming, Lavinia is nevertheless determined to secure Isaac's rescue. Though "the prospect of a tussle with a cabinet member or two […] did not terrify the strong soul of Lavvy," the reader is led to understand that Lavinia's hopes are idealistic at best.[44] When Lavinia goes to the War Department, she is soundly ignored by a young officer whose favor with the Secretary precludes any obligations of politeness. The longer Lavinia waits to be recognized, the more she begins to wilt and become discouraged. She reflects "that no matter how much a woman, in her unostentatious sphere, may do, and help to do, and no matter how her heart may feel for her beloved, *worshiped* country, after all she is but an insignificant creature, whom a very young man may snub, simply because he wears very shiny brass buttons and his uncle is in Congress."[45] Lavinia considers the unfairness of her situation: "What a miserable, powerless thing woman is, even in this our country of glorious equality!"[46] Soares qualifies this dismay as 'protofeminist thought' because Lavinia

"lacks the conscious awareness of oppression that characterized feminist movements."[47] The work that she has done "in her unostentatious sphere" to care for the nation's ills embodied in the wounded and dying soldiers holds no sway in Washington, and she bristles with indignation at the thought. Whereas in the hospital, she cheerfully saw to the soldiers and relished in her sense of duty, Lavinia now thinks more honestly of her work: "sitting up at night, toiling, and tending disgusting sickness, and dressing loathsome wounds."[48] The passage here draws comparisons between the material realities of Lavinia's duties and the 'work' of the politicians. While Lavina spends her days dealing with the sickening physicality of war, these men seem to do little more than talk.

This divide is further brought into focus when Lavinia's "gloomy reflections [are] interrupted by laughter of several gentlemen who came out of the Secretary's room."[49] When she is finally admitted to the Secretary's office, Lavinia enters "more dead than alive" "into the presence of the dreaded power."[50] The 'dreaded power' here is presumably the Secretary's political influence, though the term takes on a more sinister tone in the context of the pair's behind-closed-doors meeting, which is shrouded in secret: "What passed between the Secretary and Lavvy no one shall ever know, for neither of them ever told it."[51] The novel refuses to allow the reader access to the scene, acknowledging only that Lavinia emerges from the office "crying convulsively" and "talking to herself."[52] By this point in the novel, Lavinia's tears are not unusual: she weeps more frequently than any other character in the novel (save, perhaps, Lola in her girlhood), to the point that her tears routinely fail to rouse concern from others. Indeed, Lavinia's driver is apparently unconcerned, noting that her tears are "a common occurrence with the [female] sex" and her mumblings are "a common occurrence with old maids."[53] From the driver's perspective, Lavinia is yet

another hysterical woman—brimming with emotion and highly unstable. Yet Lavinia, as she is presented in the moments before entering the Secretary's office, is lucid, determined, and highly focused. She despairs in her newfound understanding of women's devalued place in society, but she is far from hysterical; as when she killed her beloved canaries, Lavinia believes herself to be consciously performing a political act.

Throughout the rest of her visit to Washington, Lavinia expresses alarm at the mention of the Secretary. It is only through gentle conversation with the kind Mr. White—aptly named, as he functions as Lavinia's 'white night'—that Lavinia's "courage gradually returned."[54] But when he decides they should go to the Senate for help, Lavinia refuses, saying "I don't want to go to any department. I am afraid of Secretaries."[55] Mr. White mistakes her terror for intimidation and tries to assure her that "[Secretaries] are no better than anyone else," but Lavinia firmly insists that "still [she] would rather not go."[56] Later, Mr. White suggests that they go see the Secretary of War, and Lavinia again interrupts him midsentence with a hurried "No, no, no!" before bursting into tears.[57] For her to leave the office in such shambles and to have such violent reactions to any mention of the office, it stands to reason that "what passed between the Secretary and Lavvy" was truly terrible indeed.

Though, as the narrator says, Lavinia never speaks of what happened with the Secretary of War, it is not unreasonable to suspect that she was sexually assaulted. Soares does not go so far as to suggest, as I do, that Lavinia is assaulted. "[Ruiz de Burton's] phrasing certainly insinuates that something illicit occurred," she admits, and "if this was the case, it seems that Lavinia had yet another negative experience behind closed doors with men."[58] She goes on to say that "Again we see that for Lavinia, sexuality is not a viable

tool for rebellion, although this possible use of her sexuality on behalf of her brother's cause represents yet another personal sacrifice."[59] Soares' phrasing here is troubling—she recognizes that "something illicit" almost certainly happened in the Secretary's office but assumes that Lavinia attempted a seduction (or even prostituted herself) in order to save Isaac. Such a reading places the entirety of the blame on Lavinia's shoulders (and renders unclear her convulsive tears as she exists the office—tears of guilt? Of shame?). Moreoever, it ignores the repeated instances of sexual impropriety (or, more often, assault) and their implications that I track in this chapter.

Lavinia does, after all, share a name with the victim of one of literature's most brutal rapes. In *Titus Andronicus*, the titular character's daughter Lavinia is violently assaulted by her fiance's murderers, the Queen Tamora's sons Demetrius and Chiron. So that she cannot name them as her attackers, the brothers then cut out her tongue and chop off her hands. Ruiz de Burton's Lavinia is similarly (though less forcefully, to be sure) silenced after her visit with the Secretary of War, as she refuses to speak of what happened. Although one could assume that Lavinia's tears are the result of the Secretary's refusal to help rescue her brother, the fact that she does not mention his response to anyone else in Washington and does not argue with him (as she does everyone else), suggests that Lavinia encountered a 'tussle' of an altogether different sort. Shakespeare's Lavinia asks to be killed rather than suffer her tormenters' assault, which she cannot bring herself to name: "'Tis present death I beg: and one thing more / that womanhood denies my tongue to tell."[60] As Emily Detmer-Goebel points out, "Lavinia's chaste refusal to say the word 'rape' reminds the audience that even to speak of rape brings a woman shame."[61] With this in mind, Lavinia's entrance into the Secretary's office being described as nearing "the presence of the dreaded power"

takes on a much more ominous tone; the 'dreaded power' here seems less a reference to the Secretary's political influence than to his penis, figured always as a potential threat. Though Ruiz de Burton's Lavinia also refuses to name her experience with the Secretary, the novel suggests the crime by subtly knitting allusions to her Shakespearean counterpart into its prose. As Lavinia enters the capital, she feels "more sick at heart than any of the patients at her hospital, and the wounds in her spirit [are] deeper and *[bleed] more profusely* than any of those she had bandaged so tenderly. But *there was no hand* to assuage her suffering."[62] Ruiz de Burton's phrasing here is significant—in the context of a character named Lavinia's off-screen, apparently traumatic encounter with a political official, the imagery cannot help but to invoke the Shakespearean Lavinia's mutilated mouth streaming a "crimson river of warm blood, / like to a bubbling fountain stirr'd with wind" and bloodied, maimed wrists.[63] In this culminating scene, we see most clearly the overlap between public and private of which Berlant writes; Lavinia's entrance into the public sphere comes at a cost—her body becomes a sacrificial space, and her voice is silenced so that she may continue trying to save her brother.

This notion of sacrifice, seen again and again in Lavinia's narrative, comes even more into focus when she finally speaks to a Senator on Isaac's behalf. Mr. Blower, a rather officious and patronizing blowhard, explains to Lavinia that she should cease campaigning for Isaac's exchange and should instead "leave that matter entirely in the hands of the government," for refusing to exchange prisoners of war will eventually lead the Confederates to deplete fully their resources and cause the collapse of their army.[64] Put simply, she is asked to sacrifice her brother for the good of the nation: "So you see how, *like a patriotic girl as you are,* you should resign yourself to the misfortune that made your

brother one of the noble victims selected by Providence to be the means of subjugating the wicked traitors."[65] Lavinia is thus asked again to bow to the will of powerful men in the name of duty. Indeed, Lavinia is consistently figured as the model of dutiful service: she "was a girl who had been brought up to look rigidly at her duty, and rigidly to execute it, no matter if it went on like the Juggernaut car, crushing all her feelings."[66] But sacrificing her brother, after all that she has suffered, is a bridge too far for Lavinia. "I had the strength to kill my—my—my—dar—dar—darling can—can—canary birds, but I can't let my own brother starve," weeps Lavinia.[67] Her 'failure' here is worth parsing as yet another classical reference – she fails the test of faith in her beloved duty to sacrifice Isaac. Of course, the astute reader knows that Isaac will always be saved and that it is *Lavinia* who will be sacrificed time and again.

Lauren Berlant, in an essay that serves as the foundation for her 1997 *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City*, explores exactly this tangle of "the unsettled and unsettling relations of sexuality and American citizenship—two complexly related sites of subjectivity, sensation, affect, law, and agency."[68] Berlant triangulates Harriet Jacobs' 1861 *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's 1892 *Iola Leroy*, and Anita Hill's 1991 testimony against Justice Clarence Thomas in order to explore "the conditions and fantasies of power motivating [the] affective domination" of women "from the hybrid body of patriarchal official and sexual privilege."[69] Berlant is particularly invested in the ways these women's public accounts of private actions (which took place "within the politically charged spaces of everyday life") creates an 'intimate public' and 'so represent[s] the negative space of political existence for American women."[70] Lavinia Sprig inhabits this negative space but does so quietly, frustratingly—she does not (or perhaps

cannot) testify to the sexual impropriety she experiences, and her reputation as a hysterical woman prevents any such declarations from being taken seriously. She is abused and cannot bear witness; she attempts political acts and is denied. Lavinia becomes a locus of the messy overlap of sexuality and citizenship, representative of a dawning feminist consciousness that is suddenly, painfully aware of its own inequality and of the power (both political and sexual) that men freely wield.

The Spinster's Messy, Flailing End

Lavinia Sprig, in my reading of this capacious novel, is a contradictory mess of archetypes and an ever-moving target who evades narrative grasp time and again. As such, the novel can scarcely decide how to treat her: is she a buffoon, the pitifully lovestruck spinster who fails to recognize that her caring efforts are in vain? Is she a sympathetic creature, representative of the many ways in which patriarchal society dismisses, mocks, and outright abuses women for embodying the feminine qualities it demands of them? Is she a prototypical feminist, wielding what little agency she possesses to call out political hypocrisy and corruption while advocating for the downtrodden and forgotten? Yes, it seems, Lavinia is all that and more—ridiculous yet sympathetic, righteous yet delusional, she occupies more affective and narrative roles than any other character in the novel. Even Ruiz de Burton, at times, seems unsure what to make of her. The narrator's tone when describing Lavinia is often comedic (and at times downright cruel), opting to show in detail her most cartoonish moments (her late-night breakdown by the fireplace, her slapstick fainting spells) and narrativizing or otherwise suppressing her vulnerable moments (the bulk of her caretaking for the wounded soldiers and for her ailing nephew, her behind-

closed-doors assault by the Secretary). Unlike other characters, Lavinia is often referred to by the narrator as 'Lavvy,' an infantilizing nickname that emphasizes the spinster's curious mix of child and crone.[71]

As such, Lavinia's presence in the novel is marked by what Lauren Berlant would call genre flail. *Who Would Have Thought It?* is an ambitious blend of genres, to be sure—the novel is structured as a romance but pulls from the picaresque, satire, and realist modes. But Lavinia in particular seemingly cannot conform to one generic mold. Instead, she bounces from affect to affect and genre to genre, and the reader is increasingly unclear if her presence should be met with laughter or tears. For Berlant, such messy indeterminacy often happens on the critical level, when a writer is faced with a crisis in which her critical object or object world "becomes disturbed in a way that intrudes on one's confidence about how to move in it."[72] We have witnessed genre flail in every chapter of this dissertation, as the literary spinster's frustrating refusal to adhere to narrative or genre rules invites an equally frustrated response from her interlocutors on both the narrative and critical levels. Lavinia Squire and her author are no exception.

The critical inability to reckon with the literary spinster on her terms rather than the terms guiding contemporaneous feminist critical thought has transformed the literary spinster into a malleable blank slate, useful as a prop to be trotted out every generation or so, as she can be made to embody any manner of feminist ideals, from hysteria to queer loneliness to social abjection to sexual empowerment and independence. Rarely, though, is she recognized in all her complexity and contradiction; instead, critics flail in the face of her, focusing on what is most useful in her and disavowing the rest. The same could be said for feminist criticism itself: in the preceding chapters, we have seen the ways in which

feminist criticism falls in and out of fashion and the self-consciousness and embarrassment with which scholars often defend their desire to devote more critical time and energy on writers and texts whose utility has already been expended. In so doing, we hem in our critical objects and hamper our care for them: to search exclusively for search Mary Wilkins Freeman's writing exclusively for feminist independence, or to interpret Sarah Orne Jewett and her lonely islanders as emblematic of silenced queerness and anti-sociality, or to consider María Amparo Ruiz de Burton's complicated writing only for its (admittedly rich) explorations of whiteness and American empire is to ignore the messier, more complicated, contradictory conversations these writers and their texts enter. To confine the literary spinster is to limit our understandings of the complex work she accomplishes. In these pages, I have worked to envision a path forward for feminist criticism, one unapologetic in its care for messy, frustrating texts and their authors, one attentive to but not restricted by third-wave/queer explorations of sexuality, and one open to the unproductive productivity of writing previously considered self-indulgent, frail, and fruitless. As we move forward into a new era of feminist literary criticism, let us remember the spinster, for all her contradictions and frustrations—long may she reign.

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[1] As of this writing, I have not yet found a single instance of a nineteenth-century literary spinster who is explicitly described as non-white. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's "The Two Offers," a short story written before her own marriage at age 35, features two sisters whose relationship with the concept of marriage is complicated: Laura Lagrange impulsively accepts the wrong marriage proposal and suffers miserably for it, while her sister Janette Alston becomes a spinster devoted to her writing career. While the characters' race is never described in the story, Harper's purposeful use of ambiguity prompts the reader to consider the possibility of spinsterdom as an 'offer' extended to all women—one that should be carefully considered.
[2] Montes, "Introduction," xiii.
[3] According to Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita, the phrase 'Loyal Citizen' (*Ciudadano Leal*) was "a common letter-closing practice used in official government correspondence in Mexico during the nineteenth century." Both of Ruiz de Burton's novels were published and copyrighted under this moniker, often read by critics as devastatingly ironic, given the novels' sharp critiques of the American political sphere. See Sánchez and Pita, "Introduction" to *The Squatter and the Don*, 13.
[4] Here I use the term 'Hispanic' when referring to writing in the context of the Recovery Project; elsewhere, I prefer the use of 'Latino/a' or the more gender inclusive 'Latinx' to refer to the writing and writers of

latinidad origin and identification, itself a contentious term**.** For an expansive consideration of the term Latino/a (and the fragile imprecision and fraught politics of such a term), see Rodrigo Lazo, "Introduction," *The Latino Nineteenth Century* (2016), pp.1-19.

[5] The disciplinary history of Latinx studies is complicated and multilayered, ranging from the Chicano/a Studies programs developed from student activist groups in the 1960s and 70s to interdisciplinary/social science-inflected Hispanic, Latin American, and hemispheric studies throughout the 1980s and 90s, to the still-developing formation of Latinx studies in the twenty-first century. While there are few monograph-length accounts of this disciplinary history, see Michael Soldatenko's *Chicano Studies: The Genesis of a Discipline* (2011) and John Alba Cutler's *The Ends of Assimilation: The Formation of Chicano Literature* (2015). We can also look forward to Christopher Joseph Varela's forthcoming work on the institutionalization of Latinx writing and criticism for a much-needed intervention in the field.

[6] Whereas typically I choose to use people's self-identified terms for race and sexual identities, I describe Ruiz de Burton (who would likely have referred to herself as a Californio writer) as Latina in order to highlight the discipline with which she is most frequently associated.

[7] Aranda, "Contradictory Impulses," 552.

[8] Ibid., 555.

[9] For some scholars, even this gesture is a bridge too far. Alice Contreras, writing in *American Literary Realism* (Winter 2021), openly questions the ethics of continuing to include Ruiz de Burton on nineteenth-century literature syllabi: "For almost thirty years, scholarship openly and obliquely addressed *Squatter*'s [and Ruiz de Burton's in general] dubious outlook [on race], settling on a general (though sometimes reluctant) acceptance of it. The novel was deemed necessary in the end because it filled a gap in the chronology of American literature and the late-nineteenth-century canon. But today—in light of the Black Lives Matter movement—*Squatter*'s questionable aspects take on a new meaning. The issues that scholars learned to gloss over in their writing (in the occasional romanticizing of the novel) cannot be ignored in the college classroom." (113).

[10] Ruiz de Burton, *Who Would Have Thought It?,* 1.

[11] Montes, Introduction, xiii.

[12] Soares, "From Canary Birds," 212.

[13] Ibid., 212.

[14] Ruiz de Burton, *Who Would*, 31.

[15] Ibid., 31.

[16] Ibid., 31.

[17] Ibid., 31.

[18] Soares, "From Canary Birds," 221.

[19] Ruiz de Burton, *Who Would,* 32.

[20] Ibid., 102.

[21] Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct,* 198.

[22] Ibid., 199.

[23] Ibid., 201.

[24] Ruiz de Burton, *Who Would,* 32.

[25] For a thorough overview of hysteria's role in feminist thought throughout the late twentieth century, see Cecily Devereux, "Hysteria, Feminism, and Gender Revisited: The Case of the Second Wave" (2014).

[26] Soares, "From Canary Birds," 219.

[27] See: Beth Fisher, "The Captive Mexicana and the Desiring Bourgeois Woman: Domesticity and Expansionism in Ruiz de Burton's Who Would Have Thought It?" (1999). See also Jennifer S. Tuttle, "The Symptoms of Conquest: Race, Class, and the Nervous Body in *The Squatter and the Don*" in *Maria Amparo Ruiz de Burton* (ed. Amelia Maria de la Luz Montes and Anne Elizabeth Goldman), 2004.

[28] Ruiz de Burton, *Who Would,* 4.

[29] Ibid., 71.

[30] Ibid., 79.

[31] Ibid., 271.

[32] Ibid., 71.

[33] Ibid., 71.

[34] Ibid., 79.

[35] Ibid., 79.

[36] Ibid., 81.
[37] Ibid., 81.
[38] Ibid., 81.
[39] Ibid., 81.
[40] Ibid., 82.
[41] Ibid., 97.
[42] Soares, "From Canary Birds," 218.
[43] Ruiz de Burton, *Who Would,* 98.
[44] Ibid., 97-8.
[45] Ibid., 100.
[46] Ibid., 100.
[47] Soares, "From Canary Birds," 216.
[48] Ruiz de Burton, *Who Would,* 100.
[49] Ibid., 100.
[50] Ibid.,101.
[51] Ibid.,, 101.
[52] Ibid.,102.
[53] Ibid.,102.
[54] Ibid.,107.
[55] Ibid., 107.
[56] Ibid.,107.
[57] Ibid., 112.
[58] Soares, "From Canary Birds," 222.
[59] Ibid., 222.
[60] Shakespeare, II.iii.912-3.
[61] Detmer-Goebel, "The Need for Lavinia's Voice," 75.
[62] Ruiz de Burton, *Who Would* 102 – emphasis mine.
[63] Shakespeare, II.iv.1086-7.
[64] Ruiz de Burton, *Who Would,* 109.
[65] Ibid.,, 109 – emphasis mine.
[66] Ibid.,97.
[67] Ibid., 112.
[68] Berlant, "The Queen of America," 549.
[69] Ibid.,554, 552.
[70] Ibid., 550, 554.
[71] Other characters, including Jemima Norval and Julian Norval, are only given nicknames in dialogue spoken by other characters ('Jenny' and 'Jule,' respectively.) Even Reverend Hackwell's associate scoundrels, Aeschylus Wagg and Sophocles Head, are called by their ridiculous nicknames (Scaly-wagg and Sophy-head) only within dialogue. Ruiz de Burton names her characters with a wicked satirical bent, to be sure—the self-important political opportunists of the middle-class receive ironically sophisticated classical names (Julius Caesar Cackle and his brother Marcus Tullius Cicero Cackle, for instance), while wealthy New England aristocrats are given ridiculous monikers (such as Miss Squeezephat and Miss Pinchingham). My point here is not that Lavinia is unique in the novel's frequent disdain for her but that she *is* unique in the novel's apparent inability to decide if she is as contemptable as the rest of the Yankees or quietly heroic and worthy of some level of respect, like Lola or Julian.
[72] Berlant, "Genre Flail," 157.

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