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REVELATIONS OF THE FEMALE INDIVIDUALIST IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY
AMERICAN LITERATURE

by

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ABSTRACT

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In nineteenth-century American literature, the trope of the "female individualist" is one who cultivates an individualistic ethical code based on her own desires, which emboldens her to overcome the dominance of a repressive, patriarchal culture. The primary texts examined are Rebecca Harding Davis' *Life in the Iron Mills*, Louisa May Alcott's *Old Fashioned Girl*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper," Henry James' *Madame de Mauves* and William Dean Howells' *A Hazard of New Fortunes*. In chapters two and three, a comparison of the works by these women with those of the men reveal the different intentions for—and portrayals of—the female individualist. In chapters four and five, the functions of female oppression in the texts are analyzed to reveal the strategies for liberation each female individualist employs. In essence, this study reveals the emergence in nineteenth-century American texts of a strong, female nonconformist and her social perception.

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INTRODUCTION

Literature that develops from the observation or experience of oppression portrays not only the horrific toll it takes on a person, but the strength of defiance that such forces incite. In working with nineteenth-century American literature, I have discovered a recurring depiction of nonconformity through what I identify as a trope of the “female individualist.” These female characters, I will argue, are alike in their rejection of society’s dominant ethics through their development of individualistic morals. The women cultivate an ethical code based on their own desires and resolve for independence, which emboldens them to overcome the dominance of a repressive, patriarchal system.

I first discovered The female individualist trope in Rebecca Harding Davis’ 1861 novella *Life in the Iron Mills*. Through the cultivation of self-awareness and resistance to submission, the main character Deb fights her way out of the restrictions forced on her by a capitalistic world. These attributes of Davis’ female protagonist share a commonality with women’s works that followed. Eight years later Louisa May Alcott featured her own female individualist, as she depicted a young woman overcoming patriarchal oppression that enacted itself on middle-class, white womanhood. Her heroine Polly rejects the materialistic, superficial values upheld by her peers and, instead, seeks honest work in a world where women were typically shunned for doing so. Two decades later, Charlotte Perkins Gilman painted a far less optimistic and much more intimate portrayal of a female individualist suffering under domestic imprisonment. The narrator in Gilman’s story ultimately refuses to remain subordinate to her husband, withdrawing inside herself and restructuring her confinement into a place of liberation.

Non-fiction accounts, written by these same women writers, reveal how their literary depictions reflect their experiences as women seeking independence and social responsibility. Other voices of radical women are echoed in their fiction and further portray the need for women's education and exploration of self. The voices within their fictional stories disseminate messages of female communalism that provide support for individual growth and self-expression.

Surprisingly, it was not just in works by women that I found depictions of the female individualist. Male authors Henry James and William Dean Howells also used the trope in their interpretation of the nineteenth-century New Woman. James and Howells' criticisms of each other's work, as well as their documented insight on the women's texts, make it clear that they were intrigued by the emergence of individualistic female characters. The emergence of these characters was taken by James and Howells to be a personal challenge to their writing capabilities. Thus, they endeavored to create their own versions of the female individualist, seeing it as a chance to prove their adeptness in depicting reality in any fictional character—man or woman.

Analyzing the intended readership is a major factor in differentiating between the men's and women's portrayal of this trope. James explicitly wrote for a male readership, while Howells boasted his aim to create characters for an emerging female readership. Although Howells claimed to write for an all-woman audience, his female individualist falls short of exuding the same dynamics of those females depicted in the women's writing. Instead, Howells' depiction very much mirrors James's portrait. An analysis of the audience is significant in exploring the reasons behind why each writer code to sketch

a female individualist, revealing that the women, being faced with basic binary choices, are crafted toward a male audience feeling challenged by concepts of the New Woman. They submit to an oppressive marriage or have no life partner at all. They must adhere strictly to the ideals of their female peers, or be left without womanly companionship. In both James' and Howells' stories, the defiant women do outwit their male counterparts and achieve what they set out to do; but, in the end, both women are still exiled for their individualism and suffer for their self-sacrifice.

My initial argument comes through the contrasting of the men and women's texts, as they each contributed different attributes to the trope of the female individualist. The men's depictions are exploratory and experimental, revealing that their portraits as a hindrance to this developmental literary trope. Although their women characters are surprisingly clever and complex, their stories reject the possibility of female communalism and create bleak outcomes for these characters. Meanwhile, the women's depictions of the female individualist are much more true to the realities of what defiant women were seeking in the real world. Their stories clearly the echo the progressive woman's voice and end with the heroines in full triumph over their oppressors.

Most significantly, I am arguing for the emergence of the female individualist trope—despite the shortcomings of the male authors' depictions at these moments in American literature. It marks a change in the way author's depicted women in society and a deep interest in understanding masculine oppression and techniques for women to overcome it. In every text, through their wit and awareness of both themselves and the world in which they live, the female characters use the very functions of oppression that

are used to control them to their ultimate advantage. By observing the functions of oppressive powers yet refusing to internalize them, these women adapt their ideologies and methods of communication in ways that allow them their various forms of liberation.

DAVIS, ALCOTT AND GILMAN: VOICES FOR THE FEMALE INDIVIDUALIST

In this section, I will explain how the works of Davis, Alcott and Gilman all succeed in crafting realistic portraits of the female individualist. The works of Davis, Alcott and Gilman all succeed in crafting realistic portraits of the female individualist. Davis' and Alcotts' characters demonstrate social skills that allow them to thrive in both private and social roles, while Gilman's character effectively depicts the psychological consequences of female oppression. Women such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Margaret Fuller, and Sarah Grimké voiced the dangers of not providing avenues for education or self-expression for young women. Their social influence paved the way for the cultivation of a literary statement that sought deliverance from conformity for young women from conformity. Davis, Alcott and Gilman took their social message of encouragement to the female individual and created avenues for their voices in their works of literary fiction.

Gilman described the popular literature of her time as focused on untrue, misogynistic pursuits of women: "The 'love' of our stories is man's love of woman. If any dare dispute this, and say it treats equally of woman's love for man, I answer, 'Then why do the stories stop at marriage?'" (*Man-Made* 97). To Gilman, fiction only relayed love stories through the eyes of the male, providing amorous benefits only to him. In her short story "The Yellow Wallpaper," Gilman depicts, through the eyes of an oppressed housewife, the dangers of a husband's requirement for spousal subservience.

Gilman criticized the content of contemporary fiction and aspired to see American society consuming literature that truly captured the individual spirit:

Is that kind of fiction any sort of picture of a woman's life? Fiction, under our androcentric culture, has not given any true picture of woman's life, very little of human life, and a disproportioned section of man's life. As we daily grow more human, both of us, this noble art is changing for the better so fast that a short lifetime can mark the growth. New fields are opening and new laborers are working in them. But it is no swift and easy matter to disabuse the race mind from attitudes and habits inculcated for a thousand years. What we have been fed upon so long we are well used to, what we are used to we like, what we like we think is good and proper. (*Man-Made* 102-103)

Gilman argued for a deviation from male-centered stories and became instrumental in cultivating a type of New Woman in fiction. She chose to do so in “The Yellow Wallpaper” by revealing the detriment a male-focused ideology was to women. Her narrator becomes a weak, degenerated version of herself by the end of the novel as a result of her husband’s self-centeredness. Louisa May Alcott, saw the same flaw in literature, but chose to take a more idealistic approach by writing sentimental fiction. Alcott’s story *Old Fashioned Girl* traces Polly’s maturation as an independent, young woman who, although marries by the story’s end, is apart from her future husband for much of the novel and remains steadfast without him.

Davis’ story ventures well beyond the bounds of courtship and marriage, dealing with lower class characters who have no time to consider romantic prospects. Her female lead Deb identifies the limitations of her love Hugh and only hopes to improve his life prospects. When his materialistic desires lead him to a dismal fate, Deb achieves her escape from the confines of an industrial worker and lives out the remainder of her life in a Quaker community.

Gilman, Alcott and Davis’ disgust for dominant male desire was influenced by the women’s rights activists that came before them. At the first women’s rights convention in

1848, Elizabeth Cady Stanton declared that man “has created a false public sentiment by giving to the world a different code of morals for men and women, by which moral delinquencies which exclude women from society, are not only tolerated, but deemed of little account in man” (Declaration 59-60). Stanton not only referred to the “public sentiment” disseminated through male-centered literature, but also men’s real-life separation of the domestic life from that of public activism. Just as Gilman observed that stories in popular literature ended in marriage, Stanton assured her listeners that, in real life, a woman’s public presence ended with matrimony. Stanton called this condition “the establishment of an absolute tyranny,” (58): men forced women to stay in the home, refusing them any roles in the public sector.

Tara Fitzpatrick explains how, in literary form, the submissive, nurturing wife appealed to emerging, middle-class men at such a time in American history:

The sentimental image of the domestic haven and the true woman worked to mediate the corrosive effects of capitalist individualism by offering men the solace of the family home—both as a respite from competition and as a goad to further competitive endeavor. Domestic rhetoric provided an ideological repository for social values such as loving cooperation and self-denial that the capitalist ethic otherwise undermined. In turn, the domestic ideal promised to secure at least one site of equal success for men whose unequal rewards in the marketplace might otherwise have served to reveal the disparate burdens under which different classes of workers and competitors labored. (29)

Women were viewed as a comfort that must remain pure in the home, essentially becoming a tool with which the working man may cleanse himself of the capitalistic corruption. According to Stanton, this alienation of women from any public occupation had the potential to morally deteriorate women, degenerating them to a childlike obeisance with no real responsibilities of their own: “He has made her, morally, an

irresponsible being, as she can commit many crimes with impunity, provided they be done in the presence of her husband. In the covenant of marriage, she is compelled to promise obedience to her husband, he becoming, to all intents and purposes, her master—the law giving him power to deprive her of her liberty, and to administer chastisement” (59). This degeneration to the child-like state, as well as the husband as an arbiter of punishment, is a topic that Gilman deeply explores both in her social observations, as well as in her fiction. Likewise, Alcott depicts such dangers specifically through her portrayal of the Shaw’s mother, who spends more time fussing over her dresses and fingernails than attending to her children.

Unlike Gilman, Alcott and Davis, whose texts assert women’s complete autonomy, Stanton questioned women’s potential for independence: “To manage a household, have a desirable influence in society, keep her friends and the affections of her husband, train her children and servants well, she must have . . . knowledge” (“The Solitude of Self” 125). Stanton placed the strongest emphasis on education for young women so that they could gather and improve their domestic skills as a way to better society. In 1843 Margaret Fuller, following Stanton’s belief, assured the success of the separate spheres if women were properly educated, so they could be “the tutelary genius of home, while Man manages the outdoor business of life, both may be done with a wisdom, a mutual understanding and respect, unknown at present. Men will be no less gainers by this than women, finding in pure and more religious marriages the joys of friendship and love combined” (Kindle Locations 2262-22660). Like Stanton, Fuller pushed for female education but could not envision women’s full autonomy.

It is difficult to argue that Fuller and Stanton only fought for women's domestic education because they could not even fathom female autonomy when, in 1837, Sarah Grimké highlighted the dangers of isolating women's education to domestic duties. She saw forcing domestic skills on young women as detrimental to their individual growth. She wrote on the dangers of cultivating in young girls the sole intentions of becoming expert housewives: "To be married is too often held up to the view of girls as the sine qua non of human happiness and human existence. For this purpose more than for any other, I verily believe the majority of girls are trained" (48-49). She saw society's training of young girls for marriage as detrimental to their intellects: "[Young women] seldom think that men will be allured by intellectual acquirements, because they find, that where any mental superiority exists, a woman is generally shunned and regarded as stepping out of her 'appropriate sphere'" (48). Grimké's observation that young women play on their naivety—essentially dumbing themselves down to please prospective husbands—reflects society's emphasis that all women must be housewives and it this superficiality that Gilman, Alcott and Davis depict in their stories.

Gilman saw no benefit in harnessing young women's domestic skills. To her, society treated the home not as a place to raise children but as one that prioritizes the man, making it a terrible environment for a woman to establish individual growth: "What man has done to the family, speaking broadly, is to change it from an institution for the best service of the child to one modified to his own service, the vehicle of his comfort, power and pride" (*Man-Made* 27). She saw men as having completely corrupted the sanctity of the women and the home: "It is humiliating to any far-seeing woman to have

to recognize this glaring proof of the dependent, degraded position of her sex; and it ought to be humiliating to men to see the results of their mastery. These crazily decorated little creatures do not represent womanhood” (*Man-Made* 176). According to Gilman, women served no other purpose than to be adornments for their husbands and to be, at all times, at their disposal. Because men drew attention away from their children, Gilman saw no reason for young women to waste their education on fulfilling homely duties.

Alcott’s *Old Fashioned Girl* depicts plenty of these “crazily decorated little creatures” and proves that they “do not represent womanhood” through their contrast with her ideal woman Polly. Polly’s cousin Fanny introduces Polly to several middle-class girls who are ripe for the marriage market and primp themselves in the most extravagant ways. Polly is disgusted by their behavior and eventually encourages her cousin Fanny to relinquish the materialistic and narcissistic tendencies that courtship drew from her.

Davis also finds a way to depict the humiliation caused for women who succumb to what their male counterparts desire from them. As the beginning of *Life in the Iron Mills*, Deb encounters a group of drunken women who are on their way to a social gathering. Their dress is risqué and their speech and behavior suggest that they are in search of male companions. Deb has no desire to join them and refuses their invitation. This is one of many examples through which Davis attempts to de-myth depictions of the American female, as well as portray the negative effects that the lack of education and social responsibility had on women.

Davis viewed the restriction of women to the domestic sphere as a severe detriment to society, as well as individual female growth: “Davis [had] a lifelong concern for women deprived of love, of significant work, and of opportunities to express their intelligence . . . outside the ‘cult of domesticity . . . This deprivation was one of the most significant tragedies of nineteenth-century America” (Harris 434). Davis sought to provide women with alternative perspectives on a female lifestyle. In her 1891 essay “Women in Literature,” Davis articulated her desire for all women to send the message of feminine ethics to future generations: “I have a hope that this body of women who have the habit of broad and accurate thought . . . will be stirred by the ambition to leave something more permanent behind them than reports of Sanitary or Archeological clubs, and will paint as they only can do, for the next generation, the inner life and history of their time with a power which shall make that time alive for future ages” (Davis qtd. by Mock 612). Davis hoped that the messages she delivered in her literary texts would resonate with her female readership and empower them to pursue an active role in the professional world. Furthermore, she encouraged women to do what they could to educate and influence younger generations on gender equality so that they may prevent those youths from experiencing the same restrictions that were currently placed on women.

Davis’ *Life in the Iron Mills* is widely viewed as the precursor to naturalism, a sub-genre of realism that emerged in the late nineteenth century. It merges the fantastical elements of romanticism with the descriptive techniques of realism to relate the individual’s plight to the universal powers that surround her. Harris accurately describes

Davis' influence on realist and naturalist writers: "Davis devoted her life to debunking mythologies, of the past and the present, recognizing then as the process of glossing over harsh realities in favor of a romanticized vision" (14). Davis' depiction of her protagonist Deb as an ugly, crippled woman with a heightened sense of social awareness was a drastic deviation from typical literary depictions of women.

Along with the emergence of realism and naturalism came the sentimental novel, developed mid-century with Alcott as its key innovator. Glenn Hendler summarizes the origination of the genre and the ways in which it identified the contradictions American society projected onto the literary female role:

Sentimental fiction is both a domestic genre and the first major mass-cultural genre in America. The novels' virtually exclusive address to women foregrounds the conflict between the "public" task of appealing to a mass readership and the ideological status of this particular readership as the guardians of the private sphere. They work through for the first time a set of problems which persist in subsequent mass cultural forms: the tensions between the new public sphere instantiated by these cultural forms and the similarly new private sphere which they are meant to uphold; the contradictions inherent in the complex association of women with mass culture and the sphere of consumption; the related connection between the forms of individual and collective subjectivity instituted by mass culture and traditional concepts of normative femininity; and the relation of these changing representations of femininity to liberal individualism. (686)

Thus, the sentimental novel explored the emerging forms of identity women assumed and ways in which those identities adhered to or rejected social norms. In many of Alcott's novels, for instance, her characters reject the emerging materialism and courtship-centered femininity of mainstream, middle-class female youth and, instead, seek earnest work and authentic love for personal fulfillment. Sentimental fiction provided young women who secretly desired an escape from "normative femininity" with an alternative

lifestyle after which they could model themselves.

Through different portrayals—Davis' early Naturalism, Alcott's use of the sentimental novel and Gilman's employment of Gothic style—these women used burgeoning literary tools to depict the female individualist character. They aimed to destroy the dangerous myths crafted in the minds of young American women by depicting suffering under societal pressure and the harmful effects they have on those who cannot overcome.

THE GOOD WITH THE BAD: HOWELLS AND JAMES' FEMALE INDIVIDUALISTS

For the purpose of this section, I will define both the strengths and shortcomings of the female individualists portrayed in the stories by Howells and James. By looking at their criticisms of each other's works, as well as their comments on that of their female contemporaries, their fascination with the role of the New Woman becomes clear, while their illustration of her is not entirely positive. Significantly, James' refused to integrate such women into the society he crafted. His choice not to do so had an influence on Owen Wister who crafted the first Western novel. Howells was not so clear cut in his alienation of the female individualist. However, the fate his rebellious women ultimately face calls into question whether or not he truly believed in the success of women's liberation. The endings of these male authors' works featuring their model of the New Woman contradicts the endings crafted by their female contemporaries in which the fate of their women are much more diverse.

Robert Hough highlights the vital influence Howells, as a prominent literary figure, had on social issues of his time: "The most significant fact about Howells' social writings is that they reflected, and more importantly, promoted many liberal ideas of the age. These ideas were not those of the majority at the time that Howells wrote, but the number of Howells-supported causes that eventually succeeded or exerted strong influence on public opinion is surprisingly large" (111). Hough lists a number of movements on which he believes Howells had a major influence, one being the acceptance of women's suffrage in 1920. Howells also supported the development of the

female character in American fiction and did his best, albeit apprehensively, to promote Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper."

Gilman's short story first put her in the literary spotlight, and it was through this tale that she depicted the dangers of female imprisonment concealed by the overemphasis on domesticity. She developed a long-term epistolary exchange with William Dean Howells and sent him her story in the hopes that his high connections would land her a publishing deal. Howells loved the story and "put it in the hands of Horace Scudder, editor of *Atlantic Monthly* [who], in declining to publish it, wrote, 'I could not forgive myself if I made others as miserable as I have made myself!'" (Horowitz 188). Scudder's reaction represents the typical man-of-the-time's reaction to Gilman's story. Howells did not give up, however, and "later claimed credit for placing the story" in *New England Magazine* (Horowitz 188), describing Gilman as "the prophetess of the new era" (Hill 254).

Howells did, however, have his apprehensions about the boldness Gilman took with her female narrator. In his response to the "Yellow Wallpaper," he admitted his anxieties about the blatant honesty of her work and his fear of its reception: "I rejoice in your gift fearfully and wonder much more you will do with it. I can see how far and deep you have thought about the things at hand; and I have my bourgeois moments when I could have wished you for success's sake to have been less frank. But of course you know that you stand in your own way!" (Hill 254). Howells' statement is very telling of the domination of misogynistic principles in the literary sphere at that time, as well as the lack of strong feminist leaders. He sees her grotesque description of a female suffering

under patriarchy as a telling representation of society's inherent flaw. In doing this, though, Howells notes that her success as a writer is compromised, as she is surely to ruffle the feathers of bourgeois artists who take pride in the status quo. Howells also infers that he believes that taken such liberty to express female oppression would deter her success, revealing that he surely had similar fears for himself. This may have contributed to his much more safe depiction of the female individualist trope in his own work *A Hazard of New Fortunes*.

Although Howells did not take it upon himself to support the women's movement for individual freedom and feared for those who did, like Gilman, he did encourage depictions of real life in fiction:

For Howells, the campaign to promote realist fiction was simultaneously a moral and ethical campaign. Implicit in his aesthetic argument is the belief that there is an objective reality to capture and reproduce in art, a reality that includes a stable, universal moral code . . . Realist fiction, by means of rigorous verisimilitude, should portray only that which is "true to the motives, the impulses, the principles that shape the life of actual men and women." (Davidson 106)

Rob Davidson's reference to Howells' "aesthetic argument" is representative of Howells' reputation for finely detailing his characters and their stories. Howells saw much importance in noting even the most minute elements of daily life to reveal truth, employing "rigorous verisimilitude" to paint distinct, individualized portraits of the ordinary woman.

Henry James and Howells were foundational writers of the realist movement. In an 1886 issue of *Harper's Weekly*, Henry James clarified Howells' distinction from the romanticists: "Neither in theory nor in practice is Mr. Howells a romancer; but the

romancers can spare him; there will always be plenty of people to do their work. He has definite and downright convictions on the subject of the work that calls out to be done in opposition to theirs, and this fact is a source of much of the interest that he excites” (Eschholz 19). Howells’ writing clearly stuck out to James as monumental in portraying the true human experience, something James was also compelled to do.

Howells’ desire to depict the conflicting ideologies women faced during the great social shifts of his time—evident through his variety of complex female characters—was as the same time lauded and criticized by James: “[Mr. Howells’] women, in particular, are of the best—except, indeed in the sense of being the best to live with. Purity of life, fineness of conscience, benevolence of motive, decency of speech, good-nature, kindness, charity and tolerance (though, indeed, there is little but each other’s manners for the people to tolerate), govern all the scene” (21). Here James reveals his disgust for the realistic aspects of the women in Howells’ work. His sarcastic description of Howells’ female characters as not the “best to live with” reveals that he saw Howells’ depiction of the American woman as boring and idealistic. He also notes an interesting distinction between the audiences for which the two writers wrote. Howells was genuinely interesting in drawing a strong female readership with his works, and thus he depicted women characters to which he believed his female readers to connect. James, on the other hand, although intrigued by the rise in female independence, only desired to write for his male readers.

Michael Anesko draws the connection between the two authors, defining their influence in encouraging female presence in literature: “By dramatizing the inner life of

[female] characters, making heroic the otherwise passive operations of consciousness, Howells and James enhanced the illusion of psychological realism at the same time that they tried to vindicate a particular mode of literary production as a distinctively masculine pursuit” (42). The “psychological realism” Anesko describes is the innovative tool both authors used to portray women’s struggles. It was completely new in American literature to delve into the deep consciousness of the female character and analyze her thoughts, intentions and actions in detail. What Anesko misses is the main distinction between the two writers. James’ inspiration to paint a psychologically realist female character was drawn from his curiosity about the female rebellion against social normativity, while Howells expressed support for women’s rights.

Exemplified by his praise of Gilman, Howells held a deep appreciation for women and believed that their advancement was crucial to the betterment of American society: “Women in fiction [are] becom[ing] more and more interesting, and are of greater consequence than the men in fiction, and the skill with which they are portrayed is more and more a test of mastery . . . Women, above all others, should love the fiction which is faithful to life, for no other fiction has paid the homage and done the justice due to women, or recognized their paramount interest” (Howells qtd. by Davidson 239). Howells sought to create a genre of literature that would finally cater to the female reader, a venture he believed would enlighten the growing female readership.

James, on the other hand, presented obscure female individuals who are only viewed through a narrow perspective, challenging the reader to draw their own conclusions from the women’s rebellious behavior. In an 1875 review of *Madame de*

Mauves in *Atlantic Monthly*, Howells discusses female readership's criticism of James' works and argues that James' Madame de Mauves is his first female character to exhibit the traits of a real-life heroine. However, Howells does note that James paints her as more ideal than real: "Madame de Mauves is the strength of the story, and if Mr. James has not always painted the kind of woman that women like to meet in fiction, he has richly atoned in her lovely nature for all default. She is the finally successful expression of an ideal of woman which has always been an homage, perhaps not to all kinds of women, but certainly to the sex" (Anesko 111). Just as James criticized Howells' female characters for being too grotesque in their truthful depiction, Howells chastises James for only portraying a romanticized "homage" to women, rather than truly attempting to depict an individual female. Here, Howells' comment succinctly reiterates the difference between his and James' female characters. Howells believed that he was painting real women like those he encountered in his life—a woman to whom the average female reader could relate, while James only painted the womanly ideal, while arguing that James did little to capture the actual female experience.

What Howells did not see however is the psychologically complex James give to his female protagonist in *Madame de Mauves*. In analyzing James' personal writings, Davidson observes that "James notes with some pleasure the possibility that 'the revolution taking place in the position and outlook of women' might be the locus of change; women, 'for whom the sacrifices have hitherto been supposed to be made,' might break the bubble of propriety in fiction" (176). James wanted to be the author to burst the bubble and present female characters who rejected masculine norms. However, other

accounts of his writing prove that he was mostly intrigued by how these changing women would affect young men.

According to John Carlos Rowe, “James claims for himself a certain authority regarding the representation of women” (87). He writes that James often borrowed plots from contemporary female writers and drew from them the societal pressure women were enduring. Rowe viewed James’ time of writing as when the novel “focused on the education and self-consciousness of its central characters principally to reconcile the contradictions of individual and society” (xii). Rowe observes that “James knew well enough that what one borrows leaves its traces on the borrower” (87), which led James to become a literary figure for feminists who have, according to Rowe, “found in his works the exposure of woman’s imprisonment in a patriarchal culture” (88). Rowe makes a solid connection between James’ own psychological attachment to the women he depicts in his work, providing adequate evidence for James’ intimate understanding of the female psyche. Rowe even goes so far as to him a “pioneer among the nineteenth-century writers in the representation of the psychological effects of woman’s subordination” (88). Rowe’s insight into James’ psychological depiction of women characters is correct in that James’ *Madame de Mauves* is deeply complicated. However, Rowe assumes that James’ depiction of the complex female represents his desire to further the feminist cause. I disagree: James’ influence on writers such as Owen Wister proves that his emphasis on viewing these female characters through the male perspective did nothing but depict them through their relations to men.

Owen Wister's 1901 *The Virginian*, considered by many as the first Western novel, is a prime example of a work influenced by James. According to Rowe, "sacrificial gains are common to James' female characters, whose very identities in a patriarchal society compel them to interpret sacrifice as reward and fetishize surrender or self-denial as their own property" (138). As I argue below, Madame de Mauves clearly gains a disturbing empowerment through her own self-sacrifice and the emotional torture of others.

Wister's *The Virginian* presents Molly Wood as a self-declared spinster, although she is only in her early twenties. She travels West to achieve a sense of independence but soon falls in love with the novel's protagonist, the Virginian. Throughout most of the story, Molly denies her love and boasts about her sacrifice of romance in order to attain independence. During his writing of the novel, Wister looked to James as a mentor and wrote to him often for insight. Wister's portrayal of Molly only in relation to the male protagonist is very similar to James' depiction of Euphemia. Just as Madame de Mauves is only related to the reader through the eyes of the male narrator Longmore, it is clear from the start of the novel that Molly exists for and through the protagonist.

Davidson notes that, "James had an acute sense of the extent to which his own professional arena was shaped by the presence of women writers and readers" (Davidson 182). Wister and James alike understood that female identities were evolving and it was necessary to adapt to their needs. Still, Wister and his predecessor refused to depict women as autonomous, a viewpoint evident in James' writing:

The extraordinary, the unique relation in which [the businessman] for the most part stands to the life of his lawful, his immitigable womankind, the wives and daughters who float, who splash on the surface and ride the waves . . . This relation, even taken alone, contains elements that strike me as only yearning for their interpreter—elements, moreover, that would present the further merit of melting into the huge neighboring province of the special situation of women in an order of things where to be a woman at all—certainly to be a young one—constitutes in itself a social position. (James qtd. in Davidson 258)

James and his mentee Wister strove to be the “interpreter” James described. They cared more for relating the effect changing womanhood had on the industrial-age male than depicting the true experience of an independent woman. “The special situation of women” constituting a “social position” was, to James, a major change for bourgeois men. He called on young businessmen to write about the effect female social positions have on them, something Wister clearly did.

Davis’ novella provides a stark contrast to James’ and Wister’s unreliable depiction of their female characters in a negative and hypocritical light. Sharon Harris observes that, “Davis does often incorporate her own values and intentions into the narrator’s assertions; but at significant junctures in the text, she separates herself from the narrator. At the story’s conclusion, Davis radically deviates from this alliance to reveal the narrator as unreliable, the same technique that Henry James would later use in his fiction” (28). James and his follower Wister used the same technique as Davis. However, because the male authors only sought to show how the New Woman affected emerging middle-class men, they do not achieve a positive, innovative portrayal of the female individualist like Davis does.

However, like Davis's complex Deb and unlike Wister's surface-value Molly Wood, James paints a deeply psychological portrait of his heroine in *Madame de Mauves*. Although he wrote primarily for his male audience, James still succeeded in truthfully depicting the effects of gender oppression on the female psyche. In fact, his portrayal is so accurate that feminist theories developed decades later effectively serve as a lens to analyze Euphemia's inner turmoil. Rowe asserts that James developed an internal connection with the female struggle, making a feminist reading of James' work pertinent. Rowe illustrates the way in which James attains "a certain authority" in his transcendence into the female psyche. Rowe assumes that "the entanglement of feminism in James' psychology is not a weaving we wish to pick apart, not a thread we would separate from the tapestry" (91), because as a man James is unable to fully adopt a female mentality. To Rowe, James' literature must be viewed as a generic construction of the female plight and not one that embodies the pains of a single individual.

Rowe does not see the dangers in James' failure to depict a realistic woman, a danger revealed through the way in which his female operates in society and the fate she faces by the end of the novella. Euphemia becomes a selfish egoist hellbent on alienating herself from the rest of society, proving that, to James, assimilation of an independent woman into society was impossible. James scholar Elizabeth Allen accurately captures the significance of James' societal alienation of his female individualist: "Having a lover or a husband is the only justification for female existence, identifying with and representing a man is the only assurance of a place in society" (Allen 124). James sees no place within society for a woman who rejects a masculine ideology.

A comparison with his contemporary Alcott further shows how James portrayed a much darker depiction of the female individualist than did Alcott. In analyzing James' *The Bostonians*, which centers on male reactions to the women's rights movement and emerging female roles in society, Hendler asserts that James and Alcott's views on literature were completely contrary: "Although in 1882—when organized feminism was a far more powerful political force—James still sees such a possibility as patently absurd [while] Alcott successfully represents female particularity and collectivity as commensurable" (703).

Although James rejected Alcott's emphasis on the realistic possibilities of female public service, he admired his female contemporary and "generously claimed that there were only two or three novelists more promising than Alcott in the United States" (Habegger 246). In his analysis of the early works of James and Alcott, Alfred Habegger asserts that Alcott's work became the treasure trove from which James gathered his assumptions about the female psyche: "Through Alcott's fiction James had full access to the secret fantasy-life that helped generate [his own narratives], and that his own fiction records the contours of his distaste for what he found there" (233-234). James was disgusted by Alcott's intended female readership, as well as her advocacy of female independence and only sought to enlighten his male audience on the "issue" of the New Woman.

Although James' Euphemia obsesses over matrimony throughout the story, she never hints towards the desire to be a mother, nor does she ever show authentic sympathy for another character throughout the story. Alcott's protagonist is the complete opposite.

She has no ideals for future marriage and puts little effort into its pursuit. She embodies the motherly, only caring to make those around her happy, and prioritizes her moral purity even when it requires rejecting societal norms. According to Hendler, “James unambiguously asserts the impossibility of reconciling sentimental femininity with liberal individualism, evincing a certainty that Alcott does not share” (701). Hendler captures the difference between the authors’ female characters, as James’ independent woman becomes an embittered hermit who is exiled from her community, while Alcott’s young lady transforms her community’s perception of womanhood and influences others to follow her righteous path.

As Hendler suggests, James is overt in his refusal to integrate his female individualist characters into society. At the conclusion of *Madame de Mauves*, Euphemia’s courtship with the narrator ends and it is inferred that she lives the rest of her life in isolation. Likewise, in Howells’ *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, the careers of his rebellious female characters end after their rejection of the same man they have been courted by throughout the novel. Neither one finds what she desires, as one loses the man she loves and becomes an Episcopalian nun while the other is forced to work a dead-end job catering to her male superiors.

Thus, the most notable distinction among the works of these male and female authors of the female individualist trope is that the women create more believable portraits of the oppression these women undergo, as well as their way of in to navigating through such forces. Howells and James, on the other hand, explore these characters in their works but do little to provide a positive, realistic outcome for them. Such portrayals

encouraged Wister to force his individualistic heroine to adhere to her cowboy's traditional moral codes or face the consequences.

FUNCTIONS OF FEMALE OPPRESSION

The individualism expressed by the female characters in these stories develop as a reaction to cultural forces of oppression. In this section, I work to define the powerful forces that repress the women and challenge them to reshape their idealistic perceptions of society.

A Male Counterpart for the Female Individualist. The individualism expressed by the female characters in these stories develops as a reaction to cultural forces of oppression. These powerful forces come in a number of forms, but they are primarily enforced through the male characters with which these women interact. An analysis of the male characters depicted in these stories reveals ways which oppression is exacted upon the individualist female characters. Pure, unadulterated misogyny is the most apparent in James' novella; while a more obscure, aesthetic male ideology is revealed in Davis' and Howells' stories. Gilman and Alcott's male characters are more paternal in their nature. While Gilman's paternal John exacts extreme control over his wife, Alcott's Tom Shaw takes on a more brotherly role, as his malleable spirit is inspired—rather than intimidated—by his love's individualist aspirations. Such depictions are insightful through the ways in which the authors chose for their male characters to accept or reject the individualism exuded by the female characters.

Henry James' 1874 novella *Madame de Mauves* presents male characters struggling to uphold a sincere ethical code, while the female protagonist Euphemia cultivates a strong ideology. The story begins when the narrator Longmore meets Euphemia de Mauves whose husband, he has learned, is unfaithful to her. Longmore

spends much of the story romancing Euphemia only to be rejected by her at the conclusion. Both Longmore and Euphemia's husband Richard assert their understanding of women early in the narrative, but Euphemia's staunch idealism baffles both of them—banishing one and driving the other to suicide.

In James' tale, the reader is introduced to Richard just before he proposes. An omniscient narrator defines his character, artfully painting his opinion of women: "The form prescribed to him by the society into which his birth and his tastes had introduced him was marked by some peculiar features. That which mainly informs us is its classification of the fairer half of humanity as objects not essentially different—say from those very lavender gloves that are soiled in an evening and thrown away" (James 235). It is clear that Richard makes no effort to discern any individuality in the women he encounters. He simply uses them for his own satisfaction and discards them as easily as he would a piece of clothing. As he becomes acquainted with the young Euphemia, he absently recalls that young women's innocence "is on the whole [the] most potent source of attraction" (235). He subscribes to the perception that the youthful female is a blank canvas onto which he can sketch his own desires of servitude.

Richard's materialistic perception of women as instruments to further his vanity appeals to Longmore. As an American visiting France—the story takes place outside of Paris, Longmore is depicted as struggling with a Puritanical morality that plagues his conscience throughout the story. However, his guilty conscience never succeeds in restraining him from pursuing his barbaric desires. Richard's narrow perspective on women intrigues Longmore, and the characteristics that attract Richard to Euphemia, or

to all women for that matter, serve as the same temptations for Longmore. Richard, being some fifteen years Longmore's senior, educates the young man on his romantic philosophy. He explains to Longmore his regard for women as a single, predictable entity: "I've not met one of the rarest of women without recognising her, without making my reflexion that, charm for charm . . . Wit for wit, I think mine carries me further" (256). Richard finds himself intellectually superior to the opposite sex, assuming they all share a common intelligence that is simply "hers." Although Longmore feigns a personal disgust for Richard's neglect of Euphemia, he is not offended by Richard's misogynistic views. He admires him for being the stereotype of an honorable, aristocratic Frenchman: "He was by race and instinct a *grand seigneur*. Longmore had often heard of that historical type, and was properly grateful for an opportunity to examine it closely" (256). Longmore's curiosity about Richard proves that it is only his lack of confidence, rather than a true moral conscience, that keeps him from behaving the same way.

Longmore anticipates his initial encounter with Richard as one of complete disgust, but he finds himself charmed by the Frenchman's brute self-confidence: "[Richard's] critic vaguely envied, something in his address, splendidly positive, a manner rounded and polished by the habit of conversation and friction of full experience" (254). Richard's brazen countenance both intimidates and intrigues Longmore, stimulating a desire in him to embody a similar Western ideal of masculinity: "The Count had plainly no sense for morals, and poor Longmore, who had the finest, would have been glad to borrow his recipes" (254). The irony in this statement reveals that Longmore

secretly desires to be like the Count: he is not concerned with actually being moral but simply with upholding the image of an American Puritan.

Longmore becomes so taken by Richard that he wonders if Euphemia's condition—he has been informed that she portrays herself to society as a depressed hermit—is simply a result of her own personal faults: “There were times when Longmore was almost persuaded against his finer judgment that [Richard] was really the most considerate of humans and that it was not a man's fault if his wife's love of life had pitched itself once for all in the minor key” (252). Longmore is so fascinated by Richard's masculine persuasion over the opposite sex that he rationalizes Euphemia's situation by viewing her simply as a defective woman—Euphemia must be at fault for Richard's philandering since she refuses to express appreciation for her status as Richard's wife.

Richard does not oppose Longmore's courtship of Euphemia, he actually encourages it. Being a scandalous cheater himself, he believes that if Euphemia engages in an affair she will achieve happiness and end the widespread gossip about her depression, improving his public perception. Like Richard, Longmore is completely ignorant of a woman's autonomy. Every perception he has of women is through their affiliation with men. Before Longmore has his first conversation with Euphemia, he gathers from a gossiping friend that her emotional troubles completely revolve around her husband: “Longmore well remembered that Mrs. Draper has spoken of uneasy things in her life, and he found it natural to guess that this same husband was the source of them” (James 220).

Finding it “natural” that her husband is to blame for her woes signifies the connection Longmore makes between a woman’s condition and man as her possessor.

Before pursuing an intimate relationship with Euphemia, Longmore’s internal monologue reveals his ultimate dismissal of her well-being in an effort to assert his own masculinity:

He asked himself whether an appearance of attentions from any gallant gentleman mightn’t give another twist to her tangle . . . however . . . It was too inspiring not to act upon the idea of kindling a truer light in his fair countrywoman’s slow smile, and at least he hoped to persuade her that even a raw representation of the social order she had not done justice to was not necessarily a mere fortuitous collocation of atoms. (James 223)

Although it means giving her “another twist to her tangle,” Longmore resolves to prove true romance to his “fair countrywoman” through his American purity.

Furthermore, he plans to educate her on patriarchy not simply being an arbitrary development. To Longmore, there is a reason why men—ideally the morally righteous (and American) ones—are in charge of the marriage market. Euphemia remains emotionally distant from him throughout the novel until she rejects him at the end.

However, her resistance to his charms does nothing but drive him to pursue her more intensely. A disturbing fetishization develops within Longmore and grows stronger the more Euphemia pushes him away: “It was gross to keep on tugging at the cover of a book so intentionally closed. Then inclination answered that some day her self-support would fail, and he had a vision of this exquisite creature calling vainly for help” (252). Every time she rejects his forwardness, Longmore becomes more enraptured by the thought of finally breaking through her abstinent exterior. The last thing Longmore is concerned

with is her wellbeing, evidenced by his envisioning that she would be most in need of him only after he has left her. A “vision” of an “exquisite creature” also implies his sexualization of her emotionally decrepit state and the increasing power he longs to assert over her as her depression worsens.

Longmore is at his most delusional just before her ultimate rejection of him. Euphemia is in her garden sobbing following an argument with her husband when Longmore arrives: “[Longmore] seemed now to touch her secret . . . [as] her half-dozen smothered sobs showed him the bottom of her heart and convinced him she was weak enough to be grateful” (275-6). He assumes her tears are for him and is delighted by her depressed state. The reader learns from their subsequent meeting that his assumption could not be further from the truth. Even when she finally asks him to leave her alone, he mistakes her request as her attempt to mask her physical desire for him: “The intention of her words was all remonstrance, refusal, dismissal, but her presence and effect there, so close, so urgent, so personal, a distracting contradiction of it” (312). He imagines her longing for him and believes that it is only for his sake that she refuses to succumb to an affair which would tarnish his moral purity: “What she asked he seemed to feel her ask not for her own sake—she feared nothing, she needed nothing—but for that of his own happiness and his own character” (318). Her refusal of him does nothing but take his fetishization of her to new heights. Instead of understanding that she is not interested in carrying on an affair with him, he fathoms a grand scheme in which she needs nothing but to see him happy and morally pure. He envisions her surrendering all of her own earthly happiness for the betterment of him and leaves satisfied with his delusion.

Howells' 1890 novel *A Hazard of New Fortunes* features a character very much like Longmore. He is taken by seemingly every woman he encounters and chooses to pursue the most ideologically rigorous lady he meets, although he does court two other young women to boost his ego. Beaton displays elements of Longmore's selfish fetishization of female weakness as well as demonstrating an extremely aesthetic perception of the women he encounters.

Like Longmore, Beaton has fantasies about attaining a rebellious woman—in this case it is Alma. After meeting her at a social event and failing to call on her for months after, he hears of her arrival in New York and decides to pursue her. She pretends to barely remember him when he visits. Her actions infer that his negligence was insulting. After his visit, Alma informs her mother that if she had any feelings for him when they met, she lost them after he never visited her. Unlike James' story, which is told through Longmore's perspective, the omniscient narrator directly describes to the reader Alma's indifference to him. Beaton, however, still believes Alma is interested: "She astonished him by taking his most solemn histrionics with flippant incredulity, and even burlesquing them. But he could see, all the same, that he had caught her fancy" (Howells 157). It is unfathomable to the arrogant Beaton that she is not taken by him.. He envisions a grand scene in which Alma is filled with remorse for her rudeness and the two are wed: "All this involved now the unavailing regret of Alma Leighton, and now his reconciliation with her they were married in Grace Church, because Beaton had once seen a marriage there" (85). Because Beaton feels so little control over the "flippant" Alma, he leaves her home envisioning his acquisition of her as a wife to repair his damaged ego.

While Beaton courts Alma, he flatters his ego by passing his time with two other women. Christine Dryfoos appeals to Beaton for no other reason than her dowry. Upon a visit to her, “he fancied that she wore the lustrous black silk, with the breadths of white Venetian lace about the neck which he had praised, because he praised it” (324).

Although she is actually in black to mourn the recent death of her brother, Beaton is oblivious to her own struggles and assumes her objective in dressing was simply to please him. His other female interest, Margaret Vance, is only visited by him because of her physical looks: “An obscure but well-recognized law of the masculine being disposed him to be rather fond of Miss Vance. She was a slender girl, whose semi-aesthetic dress flowed about her with an accentuation of her long forms” (113). The narrator relates Beaton’s interest in Margaret to the universal belief in Western culture that men are obsessed with female beauty. The “well-recognized law” is “obscure” because men’s perceptions of what is beautiful vary among cultures and time periods. Consequently, Beaton’s attraction to the three women represents the typical impetuses for men to marry: love, money or physical attraction.

Beaton ultimately chooses Alma, not because he values love over money or physicality, but because she is the only woman to refuse him. After his first proposal to Alma is denied, Beaton is flabbergasted: “It was because Beaton would not believe that Alma Leighton, being a woman, could put him out of her heart after suffering him to steal into it, that he now hoped anything from her” (313). Beaton, like James’ Richard, cannot fathom a woman deviating from his typical perception of the female form. In this case, Alma’s emotional strength helps her to overcome her attachment to Beaton. The social

constructions Beaton has been exposed to lead him to the misconception that, because women are expected to be emotionally passive in their expressions of love, Alma must simply be playing hard to get: “[Beaton] found that it strengthened [his desires] indefinitely to have Alma ignore them so completely. If she had been sentimental, or softly reproachful, that would have been the end; he could not have stood it; he would have had to drop her. But when she met him on his own ground, and obliged him to be sentimental, the game was in her hands” (157). Howells again depicts Beaton as essentially male in his desire for conquest. Beaton must satisfy his masculine ego by mastering Alma’s independent nature. He sees her earnest refusal of him as simply her attempt to overpower him. Much like Richard’s “game of wit” scenario in which he feels his intelligence always trumps that of women, Beaton sees Alma’s expression of her true sentiment about his proposal as a game of power she is trying to win.

Beaton appeases his wounded ego by rationalizing her artistic talents and autonomy as very masculine traits: “If she were a man there could be no question of her future” (157). He satisfies himself by thinking that her only avenue to success is in marrying him so that he may allow her to work along with him: “He began to construct a future for her; it included provision for himself, too; it was a common future, in which their lives and work were united” (157). Beaton views himself as holding the key to Alma’s success in the professional world, leading him to believe that he holds power over her.

After she refuses him for the second time, reality sets in and he engages in the pursuit of Christine to ensure his future financial comfort. Being denied his preferred

woman, he puts little stock into which woman accepts him: “One woman would be like another as far as the love was concerned, and probably he should not be more tired if the woman were Christine Dryfoos than if she were Margaret Vance” (263). As he bitterly ponders his prospects, he remembers a friend’s suggestion that he instruct a sketching class for young women. The thought fills him with a “loathing for the whole race of women—dabblers in art” (263). Beaton adheres to a stereotypical perception, as described in Gilman’s social observation of nineteenth-century art: “Women, in [art] as in so many other lines, consume rather than produce. They carry the major part of personal decoration today; but the decorator is the man” (*Man-Made* 72). Beaton views Alma—and all womankind—as nothing but “dabblers” in a sphere crafted solely for the man. He is outraged at Alma’s desire to create art, rather than be his own personal muse.

Unlike the other texts, Howells’ novel does not focus the story on any of the young women: Alma gets the most attention, but her subplot is still overshadowed by the many male characters’ situations. Like James, Howells presents his female character only in relation to his male character. However, Howell’s depiction of the despicable male is more digestible than James’. Howell’s novel concludes with Beaton’s realization of his own insignificance in the eyes of the young women, as well as in the artistic community. Beaton starts as a clueless narcissist and ends as a self-loathing coward, whereas Longmore leaves Euphemia at the novella’s conclusion still believing in his masculine dominance and priding himself for his moral purity.

Delusion presents itself in a very different form in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s 1892 short story “The Yellow Wallpaper.” The story portrays a female narrator whose

fierce devotion to reading and writing is stifled by her husband's locking her away in a vacation rental. The narrator is slowly driven mad by isolation and develops bizarre hallucinations. Unlike the fantastical conclusion of James' novella in which his heroine drives away the misguided Longmore and provokes her husband to suicide, Gilman's narrator has no power over her male oppressor. The visions she experiences are unnaturally grotesque but demonstrate the feeling of powerlessness a nineteenth-century woman could experience as she longs for autonomy and self-expression.

Just as Longmore believes his moral purity serves as validation for his pursuit of Euphemia, the narrator's husband John uses his medical practice as a tool to justify his wife's imprisonment. Karen Ford points out that, upon the narrator's introduction of her husband, "John is identified in relation to the patriarchy first and in relation to his wife only afterwards: he is 'a physician of high standing and one's own husband'" (Ford 310). After which, the narrator is quick to indicate and justify—he is highly intellectual due to his profession—his patronization of her: "John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that" ("Yellow" 129). She describes him as implementing his medical perspective into his worldview and expectations of her: "John is practical in the extreme. He has no patience with faith, an intense horror of superstition, and he scoffs openly at any talk of things not to be felt and seen and put down in figures" (129). He assumes that his wife's symptoms of hysteria and depression are a result of her attempts at intellectualism.

The narrator aspires to read and write but her husband has declared that she be "absolutely forbidden to work" (129). The narrator distressingly confides in the reader that he "hardly lets me stir without special direction" (130) and keeps her locked away in

an old nursery, which insinuates that John believes her return to a child-like state is the cure.

John's dialogue most clearly reveals his assumption that the narrator's role is to be a possession of his. When the narrator mentions that her mental anguish is not improving—expressing concern about her own wellbeing—he responds with a “stern, reproachful look” and proclaims: “I beg of you, for my sake and for our child's sake, as well as for your own, that you will never for an instant let that idea enter your mind! There is nothing so dangerous, so fascinating to a temperament like yours. It is a false and foolish fancy” (137). Before he mentions her wellbeing or even their child's, he states that for his “sake” she must not exhibit any depression or anxiety. His reaction to her honest concern reveals the contradiction Gilman described in her writings about the typical nineteenth-century marriage: because men wanted the home to revolve around their every need, they deemed their wives inherently selfish and diseased if they drew attention to their own complications.

Alcott's counterpart for her protagonist Polly is the most positive male figure in the texts I have chosen and represents an alternative to the male as a constant oppressor. The first half of the novel depicts the friendship that develops between Tom and Polly during their childhood, while the second half chronicles their entrance into adulthood, ending with their marriage. Tom begins with a similar air to that of Richard or Beaton in that he feels intellectually superior to Polly. After she returns to Tom's household after several years of absence, Tom, now a university student, observes Polly as “the deluded girl with a smile of lofty pity, from the heights of his vast and varied experience” (Alcott

88). The narrator employs a sarcastic tone in describing Tom's view of Polly. In actuality, Tom is much more immature than Polly throughout the novel but because his male status allows him the opportunity to attend college, he believes himself to be smarter than Polly.

Eventually, Tom's view of Polly changes as she demonstrates her powerful wit. By the novel's conclusion, he respects her as his equal. This change is marked when, after Tom learns his prankster behavior has gotten him kicked out of his university, he asks Polly to break the news to his father and she refuses: "I know he 'd rather have his son go to him and tell the truth, like a man, instead of sending a girl to do what he is afraid to do himself.' If Polly had suddenly boxed his ears, Tom couldn't have looked more taken aback" (168). Her challenge proves to Tom that he needs her support and encouragement, and he becomes more emotionally dependent on her than she ever is on him: "Whenever I was in a quandary, I used to go and consult grandma, and she always had something sensible or comfortable to say to me. She 's gone now, but somehow, Polly, you seem to take her place" (192). Tom learns to respect and appreciate Polly's insight and relies on her wit as much as he does his own.

Like Alcott, Davis describes a sympathetic male counterpart for her female protagonist; however, she does not end her tale in a joyous celebration of marriage. Instead, she displays the weakness that destroys her male character and tells the story of her heroine's living peacefully to her old age. The major oppressor in this tale is embodied by Hugh and driven by class distinction and American industrialism.

Hugh is an industrial laborer living in a boardinghouse with his cousin, the female protagonist Deb. The narrator introduces them while Hugh is working at an iron mill

shoveling coal and Deb is trudging through the rain to bring him his supper. Hugh provides a heap of hay for her to sleep on until his shift ends so that he may return home with her. In Howells' story, artistic expression is only allotted to those deemed worthy by society, exemplified through Beaton's belief that women were not to be artists but solely the inspiration for male-created art. In Davis' tale, class distinction dictates who has the right to pursue artistic endeavors.

As Deb sleeps, Hugh encounters three wealthy men who are observing the mill's operations. One of the men, Mitchell, notices a sculpture of a woman Hugh crafted with the mill's discarded korn: "Mitchell started back, half-frightened, as, suddenly turning a corner, the white figure of a woman faced him in the darkness,—a woman, white, of giant proportions, crouching on the ground, her arms flung out in some wild gesture of warning" (Davis 11). Andrew Sheiber captures the significance of the encounter between Hugh and the capitalist men as it occurs through the mutual admiration of a man's artistic interpretation of womanhood: "[Hugh's] art is actually a kind of imaginative cannibalism; by using a woman's figure to express his own 'foreign thoughts and longings,' Wolfe has in essence colonized the female form, making it the vehicle of his own expressive need, and in the process denying the real women whose form he has appropriated a presence or a voice of their own" (108). Hugh, although not in the same role of power as the men in the other stories, uses the female form as a "vehicle" to self-fulfillment. However, he is ultimately denied the power to express his feelings through his art because his social class alienates him from the three men.

Harris points out that it is “Mitchell’s physicality and upper-class demeanor that fascinates Hugh” (37). After the men depart, Hugh reflects upon Mitchell’s appearance: “the pure face, the delicate, sinewy limbs, in harmony with all he knew of beauty or truth” (18). Thus, Mitchell represents to Hugh an upper-class unity of truth and beauty. He assumes that Mitchell’s insight reveals the truth because his beautiful exterior is representative of his success in life. According to Harris, Davis “attributes the destruction of the true artistic spirit to Hugh’s acceptance of the capitalists’ vision of Beauty when they visit the mill” (36).

However, Harris unknowingly points out that, before Hugh even encounters Mitchell, the reader is informed of Hugh’s fascination with little Janey, another inhabitant at the boardinghouse. Deb knows that she is the object of Hugh’s affections, which reveals that Hugh’s value of beauty is already ingrained in him long before he encounters the three men: “His own vision of beauty is little Janey . . . that is, the most traditional of all images of woman: demure, helpless, completely dependent” (Harris 36). Harris fails to realize that “the destruction of [Hugh’s] true artistic spirit” occurred early on in his life, as society instilled in him the perpetual emphasis on aestheticism and feminine weakness. It does not take Hugh encountering the three men to suddenly become infatuated with beauty. It is a mindset he has been socialized into since birth.

Industrialism. Hugh has a weakness for more than just the popular masculine obsession with feminine innocence and beauty. He belongs to the countless number of oppressed, immigrant workers during the Industrial Era and subscribes to the mainstream thought of an oppressive upper class. Karl Marx wrote that, “alienated labour alienates

nature from man and alienates man from himself, from his own active function, his life activity” (Marx 76). Hugh is alienated from his artistic work, as well as his individual identity, but he still succumbs to the beliefs of the three capitalist men.

Deb and Hugh’s story is recounted by the narrator who, years later, lives in the same boarding house. The narrator observes laborers milling past the window and describes a caged canary in the room that symbolizes the immigrant workers’ acceptance of the true nature of capitalism: “Its dream of green fields and sunshine is a very old dream,—almost worn out, I think” (Davis 2). Just as Marx describes the worker as alienated from his own human desires, workers who traveled to America with dreams of lofty lives internalize the droning nature of industrial work, losing the hope that led them to America in the first place.

Just like the oppressed droning along past the narrator’s window, Hugh internalizes the capitalistic propaganda forced upon poor laborers. When he encounters the capitalist men at the mill, he freely associates with them. He is ignorant of their role as the conductors of alienation against himself and his peers and, instead, sees them as common men who were lucky enough to attain a higher status in life. Kirby the overseer symbolizes an individualistic ideology driven by the ego—the true nature of all three men, although Hugh is unable to see it. He feels no sympathy for Hugh and believes he is a victim of his own weakness, claiming no responsibility for Hugh and Deb’s plight. Kirby personifies the mass of capitalists that dominate the American manufacturing industry. When May, the Doctor, implores a bit of sympathy from Kirby for Hugh, Kirby responds:

I have no fancy for nursing infant geniuses. I suppose there are some stray gleams of mind and soul among these wretches. The Lord will take care of his own; or else they can work out their own salvation. I have heard you call our American system a ladder which any man can scale. Do you doubt it? Or perhaps you want to banish all social ladders, and put us all on a flat table-land? (Davis 14)

Kirby's response to May shows his valuation of attaining the American dream. He argues that if only Hugh worked hard enough, he would be able to rise above his lowly rank in the social order to attain success. Kirby finishes his response with a summation of May's philosophy. By stating that May hopes to place "all on a flat table-land," Kirby suggests that May supports a socialist agenda. Although May seemingly embodies Marxian ideals as he encourages Hugh to follow his dream, he refuses to provide Hugh with anything more than a few kind words: "Something of a vague idea possessed the Doctor's brain that much good was to be done here by a friendly word or two: a latent genius to be warmed into life by a waited-for sunbeam. Here it was: he had brought it" (15). May appeases his guilt by bestowing upon Hugh words of wisdom. When Hugh's response is a plea for help, May turns to his companions, saying, "I have not the means. You know, if I had, it is in my heart to take this boy and educate him" (15). It is evident that May is only interested in displaying an insignificant act of kindness but holds no true intention of helping Hugh.

Mitchell refers to Kirby as a "deist" and the "pocket of the world" (15), while he calls May a "philanthropist" and the "heart" (15). Mitchell, then, assumes the role of the "head" (16), as he is referred to by Doctor May. He quotes scripture, philosophizes in French and claims to be "raised on the milk of the word" (15). More insightful than the others, Mitchell acts as translator between Hugh and the other two men. He is the one

who identifies Hugh as the sculptor of the korl woman and notes that her expression of anguish stems from hunger for spirituality and understanding, unlike May who interprets her as suffering from physical hunger or Kirby's jest at her craving for alcohol. Hugh invests the greatest hope in Mitchell since he is the only one to understand his artwork. Hugh suddenly envisions him as a "man all-knowing, all-seeing, crowned by Nature, reigning,—the keen glance of his eye falling like a sceptre on other men" (18). Sadly, Mitchell is not "crowned by Nature" as idealistic Hugh imagines and, instead, reflects the selfish nature of his class. He does not take Hugh's fate seriously, seeing the mill as an "amphitheatre of smothered fires" where "one could fancy these red smouldering lights to be the half-shut eyes of wild beasts, and the spectral figures their victims in the den" (11). He ignores the gravity of what he is seeing and, instead, perceives it as fantastical. The narrator explains his belief of "accepting all, despising nothing, in heaven, earth, or hell, but one-idead men." Mitchell accepts the laboring class as necessary and thinks that those in it are not as intelligent as the men above them. Men like Mitchell, the narrator asserts, are "not rare in the States."

Initially, Mitchell is intrigued by the korl sculpture and looks at Hugh "as he had looked at a rare mosaic in the morning; only the man was the more amusing study of the two" (15). Hugh seems just as foreign and inhuman to Mitchell as the korl woman, yet Mitchell leaves Hugh with the impression that they are equals: "Mitchell had simply touched his hat, as to an equal, with a quiet look of thorough recognition" (17). Hugh is left with the impression that Mitchell views him as his counterpart, although Mitchell's attitude is completely the opposite. Besides Kirby's tossing some money to Deb before

riding off, the two are given no opportunities of escape from their menial lives. Hugh comes to this realization and cultivates an extreme self-hatred upon his revelation: “He looked at himself with sudden loathing, sick, wrung his hands with a cry” (18). He blames his situation on himself, asking Deb, “What am I worth?” and “Is it my fault that I am no better?” (18). He does see society for what it is—an oppressive hierarchy built to keep the working man immobile. Hugh’s belief that his predicament is completely his fault represents his internalization of capitalist propaganda. Doctor May telling him that it is his “right to rise” encourages Hugh’s assumption that it is his inherent flaws that hold him back.

In order to truly understand the distinction between Hugh and Deb, the reader must discern the reasons for the connection between Hugh and the three men.. Although Hugh belongs to a different social class than the three men, he still shares the same gender. This, above all, distinguishes him from Deb in the other men’s eyes. Simone de Beauvoir pointedly defines the distinction men make of women: “Humanity is male, and man defines woman, not in herself, but in relation to himself; she is not considered an autonomous being” (Beauvoir 5). Men must join forces to show the distinction between themselves and the opposite sex. Although Hugh is below the three rich men, he still upholds the traits of the dominant sex, which allows for him to at least be acknowledged by the men. The striking appearance and presence of the kohl woman is representative of the alienation impressed upon women, the male attempt to anthropomorphize the female form, and the male emphasis on the aesthetic quality of women.

Scheiber articulates the rejection of the natural female state and the power a woman should be granted through male solidarity: “Deb's body provides the same [as the kohl woman] for artistic production. The solidarity of class which excludes the exploited Wolfe from the circle of affluent men is merely a reflection of the solidarity of sex by which all the men, Wolfe included, exclude Deb herself” (110). The industrialization of the labor force enabled hegemonic masculinity to dominate women’s roles in the workforce. According to Sarah Grimké, “The general opinion, that women are inferior to men, is manifested [and] bears with tremendous effect on the laboring class, and indeed on almost all who are obliged to earn a subsistence, whether it be by mental or physical exertion, I allude to the disproportionate value set on the time and labor of men and of women” (49). As industrialism carried with it the means for quicker dissemination of popular thought, it quickly established a system in which women were forced to the lowest rung of the laboring machine.

The kohl woman is representative of the male desire to understand woman through a man’s depiction of her. Although Deb is the true form of hunger for something more, all three men ignore her deformed figure on the ash pile to admire the intriguing sculpture of the kohl woman. They, in essence, appreciate a man’s interpretation of female struggle more than an actual woman deteriorating in front of their eyes. Andrew Scheiber asserts that it is through male anthropomorphism of the kohl woman that Hugh experiences a sense of unity among the other men: “The ‘man-made’ version of the female form . . . the kohl woman becomes a focus around which men, across class boundaries, recognize momentarily their essential solidarity as men, and recuperate the essential

‘hom(m)osexual’ nature of patriarchal culture” (108). The feeling of community Hugh momentarily experiences while among the three men represents a false sense of acceptance through their mutual alienation of women.

Hugh is blind to any differences between himself and the other men and conforms to the ideology that capitalist oppressors force upon the working class. According to Marx, “the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas” (Marx 89). The oppressed are ill-equipped to develop their own ideas due to the strain of physical labor, allowing their superiors to easily perpetuate their oppression. Harris defines Hugh’s perceptions as the perpetual reverence working men hold for the elite, seeing them as the key to a better life: “Hugh has no real power; he is drifting in a dreamworld based upon myths perpetuated by the capitalists who, during their brief visit to the mill, held out to him the great American dream” (38). Deb, on the other hand, is not offered the American dream. She is barely even acknowledged during the discourse between Hugh and the three wealthy men. Hugh futilely begs for acceptance while Deb is aware of her invisibility and pickpockets Mitchell, which reveals the gender-based distinction among the story’s two oppressed protagonists under the weight of Industrial capitalism.

Alcott inherited Davis’ desire to reveal the evils of capitalism and emphasize gender equality in the labor force. Lydia Schultz notes that Alcott’s disgust for accumulated wealth is evident through the improvement of Tom’s family following his father’s financial ruin: “Alcott’s scathing view of how her society defines ‘success’ in work becomes clearest in the later parts of [*Old Fashioned Girl*]. Not only does she have Mr. Shaw face and survive bankruptcy, but she also shows that he becomes a better father

and person as a result of it” (32). Through the protagonist Polly, Alcott emphasizes an individual’s ability to transform the community’s perception of industrialism. Polly comes to the aid of the Shaws after their bankruptcy and transforms their familial relations to a state they never before imagined. Community members soon hear of the transformation and rejoice in the family’s success; many even try to follow their example.

Class distinction plays a role in Alcott’s story, as well. Once Polly begins to take up work in her community, her bourgeois friends refuse to socialize with her. Because she wants to live independently, she is viewed as a second-class citizen and shunned by those who used to enjoy her company. Alcott utilized the sentimental novel with a middle-class female readership to express her emphasis on work ethic: “She wants her book to provide readers with a coherent vision of what role work should play in the lives of all Americans, regardless of their gender, class, or age. Alcott’s characters, both male and female, illustrate by example specifically how and why work is so important” (Schultz 41). Alcott believed that a strong work ethic was necessary for individual happiness and viewed women as vehicles for such a message. In *Old Fashioned Girl*, she writes: “Another thorn that wounded our Polly in her first attempt to make her way through the thicket that always bars a woman’s progress, was the discovery that working for a living shuts a good many doors in one’s face even in democratic America” (94). Social alienation and male domination of the workforce go hand-in-hand in forcing the door shut on Polly as she begins her pursuit of a career. To Alcott, “the thicket that always bars a woman’s progress” is her inability to develop a strong work ethic due to society’s pressuring women to stay at home.

Gilman also believed that young women were not given any opportunities to express themselves in the workforce. She saw this constriction on individuality as a conflict between a woman's natural inclination for self-expression and the social expectations for female conformity. She argued that at the genetic level, women were naturally productivity and identified the hard work ethic as essentially feminine: "Industry, at its base, is a feminine function. The surplus energy of the mother does not manifest itself in noise, or combat, or display, but in productive industry. Because of her mother-power she became the first inventor and laborer; being in truth the mother of all industry as well as all people" (*Man-Made* 36). Gilman saw it as a contradiction for men to alienate women from labor or demean those who participate in it. Like Alcott, Gilman related the innate nurturing characteristics of the female to industriousness and argued for women's rights to work.

Scientific Evolution. Evolutionary theory that developed during the nineteenth-century sought, among many other things, to answer the question of why the human sexes were so inherently different. As a young woman, Charlotte Perkins Gilman posed the same query to herself and endeavored to answer it. The young Charlotte noted in her journal before marrying Walter that to wed would mean "subduing my deep rooted desires and crushing out this Doppelganger of mine whenever it appears" (Gilman qtd. in Horowitz 61). Charlotte experienced an inner conflict of desires. She hopes for assimilation in a culture in which she had to commit to matrimony and domestic responsibilities. On the other hand, she longed for escape from a society that restricted

her autonomy and artistic freedom. Her conflicting nature felt so inherent to her that she turned to evolutionary theory for an answer.

Charlotte referred to the part of herself that desired artistic and individual freedom “Doppelganger.” As a young woman in 1883, Charlotte wrote a poem about what she described as the “wild unrest.” She describes “two strong natures” causing her great inner turmoil in determining which nature to follow.

Can I who suffer from the wild unrest
Of two strong natures claiming each its due,
And can not tell the greater of the two;
Who have two spirits ruling in my breast
Alternately, and know which is guest
And which the owner true (Gilman qtd. in Horowitz 1)

Helen Horowitz explains that Gilman’s poem related to a “deep distress, she believed, sprang from the inner war between her ‘two strong natures.’ One nature, her female, desired a man’s love and its full expression in marriage and children. The other, the self that in her mind had no sex, felt the need to be independent to act in the world—to write, convince others of her ideas, and become famous” (1). Gilman understood that in expressing the part of her that “had no sex” meant alienation from the conservative Eastern society she grew up in, as well as her exclusion from love and marriage. She ultimately chose the “female side” and married Walter. This choice caused her great distress throughout most of her young life. She only attained happiness once she gained the courage to leave her marriage and create a new life for her “other,” truer self.

Attempting to understand the duality that plagued her, young Charlotte intensely studied the writings of Herbert Spencer and Charles Darwin. She sought the truth of a

women's role in the world and grew frustrated with Spencer and Darwin's assumption that women were simply inferior to men. She eventually rejected their versions of evolution: "Opposing Spencerian notions, Charlotte imagined herself as composed of two sides . . . 'The mother side,' as that part of herself that existed 'merely as a woman' and disparaged it as 'that useful animal a wife and a mother' . . . Against this side was her individual self, the 'personal aspect of power of character,' what she called 'myself as a self'" (Horowitz 28). Charlotte followed Stanton's assertion that burgeoning evolutionary ideas were just another tool to enforce misogynistic principles: "In the usual discussion in regard to woman's sphere, such men as Herbert Spencer, Frederic Harrison and Grant Allen, uniformly subordinate her rights and duties as an individual, as a citizen, as a woman, to the necessities of these incidental relations, neither of which a large class of women may ever assume" ("Solitude" 124). The "large class of women" Stanton refers to are women of all races in the labor force suffering from poverty who cannot simply depend on the "superior" male to ensure their survival.

Years after her initial consumption of evolutionary theory, Charlotte developed her own interpretation of evolution: "An avid reader of theories of civilization and degeneration, Gilman, in her work, refunctions the Darwinian concept of 'natural selection'" (Seitler 77). Darwin identified a commonality among most male mammals that compete for mating privileges with a female, noting that it is also present in the human species. He argued that man's enhanced intellect evolved from sexual selection through his need for more efficient techniques of triumph over other men: "The chief distinction in the intellectual powers of the two sexes is shown by man's attaining to a

higher eminence, in whatever he takes up, than can woman—whether requiring deep thought, reason, or imagination, or merely the use of the senses and hands” (*Descent* Kindle Locations 9972-9976). Darwin asserted that this male distinction, referred to as a “secondary sexual character,” differed in every human but was mostly confined to men, a truth, he said, that is “to a certain extent, intelligible” (*Descent* Kindle Locations 4211-4215). Gilman, however, disagreed with Darwin’s assertion that this “secondary sexual character” distinction was inherent in the humans of their civilized culture: “We have to-day reached a degree of human development where both men and women are capable of seeing over and across the distinctions of sex, and mutually working for the advancement of the world” (*Man-Made* 132). Gilman believed that modern intellect had reached the point when both genders were capable of contributing to society through some form of public service.

According to Gilman, the “masculine tradition” cultivated by Western principles deprived women of their right to civil contribution: “Our progress is, however, seriously impeded by what we may call the masculine tradition, the unconscious dominance of a race habit based on this long androcentric period” (*Man-Made* 132-133). The Western principles she refers to are those that led American culture to its emphasis on materialism and aestheticism. She may also be addressing Darwin’s ultimate rejection of what he acknowledged as the “law of the equal transmission of characters to both sexes” (*Descent* Kindle Locations 9995-9997): women, if raised in the appropriate environment, may attain the same intellectualism as their male counterparts. Darwin claimed that because “man has ultimately become superior to woman,” equal transmission of secondary

characters was no longer possible: “it is probable that man would have become as superior in mental endowment to woman, as the peacock is in ornamental plumage to the peahen” (*Descent* Kindle Locations 9995-9997). Although Darwin saw evidence in the past for intellectual equality among men and women, he concluded that men had been more intelligent than women for so long that it was impossible for women to develop the intellectualism of the male.

Gilman cleverly reversed Darwin’s peacock metaphor to define a disturbing, societal trend she observed. Instead of man sporting his mental superiority like a peacock does his plumage, Gilman argued that man projects his superiority onto women to please their material and aesthetic expectations: “Alone among all female [creatures] do women decorate and preen themselves and exhibit their borrowed plumage (literally!) to attract the favor of the male” (*Man-Made* 59). Ironically, Darwin’s metaphor is shown truthful in the reverse but, as Gilman understood, it is not human evolution that has led men to project their superiority onto women, but societal ethics. Gilman defined the most disturbing reason behind women’s courtship practices: “This ignominy is forced upon them by their position of economic dependence; and their general helplessness. As all broader life is made to depend, for them, on whom they marry, indeed as even the necessities of life so often depend on their marrying someone, they have been driven into this form of competition, so alien to the true female attitude” (*Man-Made* 60). Women did not attain the same pleasure in decorating themselves as men did in observing them. They were using it as a survival technique so that they might obtain a husband and ensure a prosperous life.

Gilman viewed the pressure men placed on young women, from an evolutionary standpoint, as very dangerous for humankind. She saw “much of what man calls beauty in woman [as] not human beauty at all, but gross overdevelopment of certain points which appeal to him as a male” (*Man-Made* 53). Female weakness and childish innocence, for example, appealed to the nineteenth-century man because it assured him that, even if he failed in the public sphere, there was always a weak creature at home who was ignorant of his flaws. Gilman noted that men showed no concern for the effect of their treatment of women on human evolution: “As a male he is appealed to by the ultra-feminine, and has given small thought to effects on the race” (*Man-Made* 55). Like Darwin, who stated that it is traditionally the female who selects her partner, Gilman argued that it is unnatural for men to do the choosing: “He was not designed to do the selecting. Under his fostering care we have bred a race of women who are physically weak enough to be handed about like invalids; or mentally weak enough to pretend they are—and to like it” (*Man-Made* 55). Instead of women growing stronger as humans evolved, the nineteenth-century principles of domesticity and aestheticism threatened to degenerate them into weak, subservient, and unintelligent creatures.

The “Yellow Wallpaper” narrator represents an image elucidated by Gilman through her criticisms of evolutionary theory and the marriage market. Instead of reaching a childlike satisfaction under the possession of her husband, the narrator literally reverses evolution and degenerates into an animalistic form. The more her husband projects his desires for her submission onto her, the more she deteriorates into her subhuman form. The superior intellectualism that the narrator supposedly admires in her

husband—a male trait expressed by Darwin as superior to that of women—leads to her ultimate loss of sanity and of her human self.

Domestic Imprisonment. In “The Yellow Wallpaper” the absolute power a husband can assert over his wife is painfully articulated. The narrator’s sense of imprisonment is evident from the start, as she describes the summer house her husband has rented as being as picturesque as the “English places that you read about” (“Yellow” 130), except for the hideous yellow wallpapered nursery where her husband John locks her away. The narrator becomes so isolated in the room that she hallucinates women being trapped within the wall. She understands that it is her exile that drives her delusions, saying: “there are things in the wallpaper that nobody knows about, or ever will. Behind the outside pattern the dim shape gets clearer every day. It is always the same shape, only very numerous. And it is like a woman stooping down and creeping about behind that pattern” (136). By stating that “nobody know . . . or ever will,” the narrator suggests to the reader her understanding that the trapped women are manifestations of her own inner turmoil. She is so helpless in her imprisonment that she envisions other women stuck in her same situation: “The faint figure behind seemed to shake the pattern, just as if she wanted to get out” (137). She begins to imagine the woman sneaking out of the wallpaper during the day and “creeping” (141). She is shocked by the woman’s audacity to go out in daylight seemingly unafraid of the consequences. The narrator degenerates further and begins to liken herself to a cleverer copy of the woman in the wallpaper: “I always lock the door when I creep by

daylight” (141). She develops a bravery she did not have previously, a courage that allows her to stand up to her husband at the story’s conclusion.

Dana Seitler argues that the creeping narrator is a symbol for the narrator’s degeneration into a childish, animal-like state: “Her physician husband recommends she become a child. Upon his order she sleeps in the ‘atrocious nursery.’ This has the effect of infantilizing and animalizing her because she is trapped “in the yellow wall-papered nursery, with its barred, cage-like windows and nailed-down bed, where the ‘bedstead is fairly gnawed’” (Seitler 70). Domestic imprisonment and solitary confinement leave the narrator completely idle. She is without the work ethic that Alcott sees as necessary for a woman’s happiness and public activism. The narrator becomes so destroyed by her captivity that she becomes something less than woman: a subhuman, childlike creature.

The narrator’s husband John has so much control over her situation that he can imprison her in any way he likes. Early in the story, the narrator confides that John has been threatening to send her away if her mental health does not improve: “John says if I don’t pick it up faster he shall send me to Weir Mitchell in the fall. But I don’t want to go there at all. I had a friend who was in his hands once, and she says he is just like John and my brother, only more so!” (134). Here Gilman inserts her own experiences in the story. Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell was a prominent neurological physician whose fame developed from his writings on and practice of the “rest cure.” Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” is based on her experiences while being treated by Mitchell, which she specifically clarifies. John is only present for a short time in the story and it seems that even through his

generic name he represents the scientific and medicinal logic that men used to control women.

In her real life, Charlotte's husband Walter suggested that she attend Mitchell's institution when her depression and anxiety worsened after their marriage. She spent a summer under his care and was treated horrendously by Dr. Mitchell. Gilman cleverly crafted her narrator in the form of an animal or child-like creature to infer the way in which Mitchell—and most men—viewed and treated women.

Karen Ford identifies the most important message of Gilman's story as revealing the dangers of Mitchell's beliefs and practices:

The narrator's lack of a name, argue against her individuality, and similarly, the primer-like names of the husband and sister-in-law, John and Mary, suggest they are merely representatives for Husbands and In-laws. In fact, the most individual name in the story—Weir Mitchell—points away from the narrator and toward the effects of his very specific treatment on people like her. (Ford 309)

Walter wrote in his journal just after Charlotte was admitted for Mitchell's treatment that "Dr. Mitchell said that Charlotte was doubtless really insane at times, and that he never had had but one other such case, and that of a lady with the same blood in her veins" (Horowitz 122). By insinuating that her blood is different than other humans', Walter sounds as if he infers from Mitchell that Charlotte is an altogether different creature. Horowitz explains how Mitchell's "rest cure" was a grotesque method of forcing a child-like state on his female patients:

[Mitchell's treatment was] a reversion to infancy, a milk diet synonymous with the comfort of the breast, but it was neither loving nor mild. It involved extreme bed rest (a nurse moved a patient who wanted to turn over in bed), total seclusion (nurses and masseuses were not to talk to patients), rubbing serious enough to raise the body temperature, feedings every two hours, consisting of malt extract,

raw beef, butter, and wine. In addition, cod liver oil was inserted up the rectum, and iron was concealed in the food fed to the patient” (127).

It is no wonder Gilman used her craft to reveal the disturbing liberty Mitchell took with his patients, as well as his secretive forms of treatment.

Although his techniques were grotesque, his practice was widely accepted. Not only did he treat Gilman, but other well-known women such as William Dean Howells’ daughter and Virginia Woolf. Mitchell published the popular article “Wear and Tear” in 1871, describing the theory behind his treatment of female patients. The “wear” was defined as typical strain brought on by physical labor and could be taken care of with a full night’s rest. However, women were much more susceptible to the “tear,” defined as “indoor, brain work . . . not experienced as tiring in the same way” (124). Mitchell blamed the causes of “tear” on the over-education of young girls: “Mitchell believed that the teenage girl should labor at her books only three or four hours each day. He argued that ‘she is physiologically other than the man’ [and] believed that many of the problems he saw in his female patients came from their failure to appreciate that difference” (128). Mitchell’s “rest cure” was, thus, to open the eyes of his female patients to the true inferiority of their sex. They, like children, exist only to continue a man’s lineage and ensure his worldly success.

Modern Medicine. The narrator’s husband in “The Yellow Wallpaper” uses his medical expertise to suppress his wife’s attempts at self-expression. The narrator explains that her husband correlates her desires for autonomy with a mental illness driven by the narrator’s selfishness. She then references Dr. Mitchell to inform the reader that he is a

real-life practitioner of the husband's practices in the story. Mitchell's treatment of male patients suffering from hysteria was quite different from the treatment Charlotte endured. One of his male patients was Owen Wister: "For men pained by 'tear,' Mitchell devised the 'camp cure,' a vigorous outdoor vacation" (124). For Wister, "the goal of Mitchell's treatment of male neurasthenia [was] to eliminate 'nervousness' through a positive reevaluation of its terms, to substitute the struggle that tears the body . . . with willful or strenuous struggle" (Will 300). With such a mindset, Wister travelled West and acquired the experience to write *The Virginian*. The narrative fits into society's larger view of the Western genre as Wister merged the "theme of adventurous individualism portrayed in the enormously popular 'dime novel' Westerns of the 1870s and 1880s . . . [with the largely middle class] vision of masculine potency and conquest in the face of perceived cultural 'effeminacy'" (Will 294). Wister's combination of preconceived notions of the frontier with a newly cultivated perception of redefined masculinity arguably began, or at least forever altered, the Western genre.

One's relation to the natural world--and to woman--is arguably the most important motif in the Western genre. One cannot argue, however, from where the myth originated. Richard Slotkin summarizes the development of American's relationship with the natural world: "The first colonists saw in America an opportunity to regenerate their fortunes, their spirits, and the power of their church and nation; but the means to that regeneration ultimately became the means of violence, and the myth of regeneration through violence became the structuring metaphor of the American experience" (5). *The Virginian* is a prime example of this myth. The plot revolves around the Eastern tenderfoot narrator—

much like Wister—who is visiting the West and whose guide, the Virginian, embodies the ideal Western hero. The reader is introduced to the narrative's bad guy Trampas, who is singled out as a threat to the cowboy protagonist by the second chapter. The narrator, the Virginian and Trampas are headed to a Wyoming ranch to work as cowboys and, for the Virginian and Trampas, to capitalize on the cattle ranching business. The drive behind the animosity between the Virginian and Trampas, which heightens throughout the novel, is the contrasting views the two men have of manipulating land for capital gain.

The Virginian embodies Slotkin's "regeneration through violence" myth, whose reason for heading west matched that of all his fellow cowboys: "The romance of American adventure had drawn them all alike to this great playground of young men" (Wister 51). The Virginian, whose heart is tender enough to sympathize with the animals he harms, still sees the necessity of cattle herding through his patriotic ambitions of the American Dream: "This hieh is a mighty cruel country . . . to animals, that is . . . Think of what we do to hundreds an' thousands of little calves! . . . But I say this. If a man can go jammin' hot irons on to little calves and slicin' pieces off of 'em with his knife, and live along, keepin' a kindness for animals in his heart, he has got some good in him" (177). What alienates Trampas from the "good" cowboys is not his mistreatment of animals, but his method for capitalizing on them. Instead of taking care of an already rich man's cattle and working his way up, Trampas chooses to steal his cattle, following a get-rich-quick scheme. The Virginian perceives Trampas' actions as unacceptable for the American cowboy and even hangs his own best friend Steve for having "fallen from the grace of that particular honesty which respects another man's cattle" (65). The Virginian

is thus the ideal cowboy, not because he respects the natural world, but because he respects the white American male's property and his capitalist agenda.

What the men intentionally leave in the East is the female partner. According to Slotkin, the frontiersman's "way of life and his moral values make even white women unsuitable as mates; their natures are either too high for his manner of life or too low for his respect" (505). However, the Virginian is able to settle down with Molly Wood because, by the end of the novel, he tames her strong will, making her work within his cowboy ideal. Molly initially refuses to marry the Virginian if he engages in a final shootout with Trampas. However, after Trampas is shot dead, she returns to the Virginian and consents to marriage. By taming Molly, symbolized by her acceptance of the Virginian's murdering of Trampas, the Virginian essentially tames the wild Western landscape—as suddenly the couple is situated in a natural oasis in the middle of the frontier for their honeymoon. The vast plains of Wyoming suddenly become nurturing and provide the Virginian with a fecund, edenic setting for his honeymoon at the close of the novel.

Thomas Dean explains how Wister's conclusion influenced the generic ending to the Western:

The middle-class western novel worked toward a horizon, or narrative closure, or domesticity within the western landscape. As the western man forsakes much of his savage character for some eastern refinement, the eastern woman with whom he mates forsakes many over refined eastern mannerisms for a hardier and more sincere character. In the process, the western frontier is also civilized by the control and balance of marriage. (49)

Dean's portrait of closure in the generic Western perfectly describes the ending of Wister's novel. The Virginian has a final shootout with his enemy Trampas, even after Molly forbids him. She marries him anyway and the two ride off into the sunset, ending up on an island full of vegetation and friendly animals. The so-called "sincere character" that Dean claims the eastern woman becomes is defined by Jane Tompkins and Faith Jaycox as a tamed woman. According to Tompkins, "The Western owes its popularity to the dominance of a women's culture in the nineteenth century and to the women's invasion of the public sphere between 1880 and 1920" (44). Jaycox concurs with Tompkin's assertion and sees the "true subject of the Western narrative [as] male fear of losing patriarchal dominance" (5). The Virginian's sweetheart Molly Wood walks a fine line between a cowboy's ideal wife and the fearful "New Woman."

Women in the Frontier. Privileged Eastern men like Wister viewed the West as a place to affirm their masculinity and envisioned as a place free from the persuasions and temptations of the effeminate. This male apprehension toward the concept of female presence out West is embodied in Wister's novel. Chapter six departs completely from the plot to tell the story of Em'ly, a farm hen that the Virginian and the narrator encounter on their employer's ranch, that the Virginian refers to as "one o' them parables" (Wister 62). It is clear before Em'ly's chapter begins that she is to be viewed as a human figure, specifically, a "personage" whose faults provide the narrator with the Virginian's friendship, something he had yet to secure before their encounter with the hen. Chapter five ends with a reflection from the narrator:

But I think that [mine and the Virginian's familiarity] would not have gone farther, save for a certain personage—I must call her a personage. And as I am indebted to her for gaining me a friend whose prejudice against me might never have been otherwise overcome, I shall tell you her little story, and how her misadventures and her fate came to bring the Virginian and me to an appreciation of one another. Without her, it is likely I should also not have heard so much of the story of the schoolmarm, and how that lady at last came to Bear Creek. (50)

This important passage informs the reader that Em'ly's story is provided as evidence of the close friendship that develops between the narrator and the Virginian. It also infers that their friendship is secured through the taming of effeminate nature—Em'ly being both female and part of their natural environment. Lastly, this passage makes a direct connection between Em'ly and the “schoolmarm” Molly who will serve as Em'ly's counterpart.

Em'ly is an erratic hen that is constantly attempting to mother other animals' offspring, even incubating inanimate objects like rocks and peaches. She is described as “broody”—a term often used for hens. It refers to Em'ly's instinctively trying to incubate eggs even though she has hatched none. Despite that fact that it is very natural for hens to act so, Em'ly's actions are an anomaly to the narrator, who tells the Virginian: “There's a hen over there now that has no judgment” (55). He recounts his observation of Em'ly roosting on a pile of potatoes and the Virginian replies: “That runaway rooster, he hated her. And she hated him same as she hates 'em all.” Although Em'ly exhibits her natural inclination to brood, the Virginian sees her inability to differentiate between eggs and potatoes as her having no sense. The Virginian concurs with her having “no judgment,” verifying such a claim by stating that she hates all male chickens. Em'ly is becoming more and more reminiscent of the attributes Victorian men feared in the “New Woman.”

She shows symptoms of hysteria in her attempt to foster other people's—or creatures'—offspring, while actively resenting the power her male counterparts hold.

The tenderfoot provides further evidence for Em'ly's representation of the "New Woman" when he explains her name to the Virginian: "'I named her myself,' said I, 'after I came to notice her particularly. There's an old maid at home who's charitable, and belongs to the Cruelty to Animals, and she never knows whether she had better cross in front of a street car or wait. I named the hen after her'" (55). Em'ly thus represents the spinsters who are set on influencing public policy (active involvement in "Cruelty to Animals," for example), but who—according to popular opinion—will only grow hysterical over attempting to do more than the simple domestic housework of which they are capable (as the "old maid" exemplifies, they are not even capable of maneuvering around city streets). The narrator also alludes to the union of womanhood and nature, just as he does with Em'ly, when referring to the "old maid [who] belongs to Cruelty to Animals" (55). By choosing that particular philanthropy, he relates females' weakness to their desire to protect the natural world and its creatures. Men, on the other hand, are strong enough to tame it through whatever force necessary, which is just what the narrator and the Virginian are doing as they herd cattle for capital gain.

The narrator and the Virginian also suggest that Em'ly, like the "New Woman," is abnormally embodying masculine traits. The narrator asks the Virginian, "Does she ever lay eggs?" He responds: "Well, I don't believe she knows how. I think she came near being a rooster . . . She's sure manly-lookin'" (55). The narrator describes her as "an egregious fowl . . . huge and gaunt, with a great yellow beak" (55). He observes that she

is “straight and alert in the manner of responsible people” (55). He then illustrates a creature composed of contradictory human traits: although a female, Em’ly has a single feather that is “twice as long as the rest” (55) and, according to the narrator, “feathers on her breast there were none” (55). The description of one phallus-like feather that protrudes further than the rest and nothing to emphasize her chest depicts a very masculine form. However, her feathers being “worn entirely off by her habit of sitting upon potatoes and other rough abnormal objects . . . lent to her appearance an air of being décolleté” (56). The conflicting depictions of her as both hyper-masculine and ultra-feminine, erring on the side of risqué, represent the two ways in which feminist women were viewed in the nineteenth century. They were either overpowering, grotesque male impersonators or deviant, hyper-sexual provocateurs.

Wister also uses Em’ly to note the offensiveness of the “New Woman” in evolutionary terms:

I have often wondered what the other fowls thought of all this. Some impression it certainly did make upon them. The notion may seem out of reason to those who have never closely attended to other animals than man; but I am convinced that any community which shares some of our instincts will share some of the resulting feelings, and that birds and beasts have conventions, the breach of which startles them. If there be anything in evolution, this would seem inevitable (Wister 58).

Wister argues that individualistic women like Em’ly, who are actively rebellious, will stir animosity within their community. Because he believes the other birds share similar instinctual drives with humans, they will react the same way men do to rebellious women—with animosity.

The narrator's final description of Em'ly leaves the reader with undeniable evidence that she is Wister's symbol for new-age women: "It was as if she went about the world perpetually scandalized over the doings that fell beneath her notice. Her legs were blue, long, and remarkably stout" (58). By the end of Em'ly's description, she becomes nothing short of a woman reaching for more than she is allowed. She is a "bluestocking"—a term used for women who sought intelligence and power in the public sphere. Em'ly's being "perpetually scandalized" refers to the behavior of such progressive women being interpreted improper and offensive to men.

Gilman's 1893 poem "Wedded Bliss" tells a very different story of a hen. She pairs animals of various species exhibiting a range of strengths and weaknesses to represent the contrasting lifestyles of husband and wife: "In each case, the weak and passive animal ironically takes pleasure in the achievement of the strong, active one" (Horowitz 165). In one particular verse, she pairs a grounded hen with a soaring eagle:

'O come and by mate!' said the Eagle to the Hen;
I love to soar, but then
I want my mate to rest
Forever in the nest!
Said the hen 'I cannot fly,
I have no wish to try,
But I joy to see my mate careering through the sky!'
They wed, and cried, 'Ah, this is Love, my own!'

And the Hen sat and the Eagle soared, alone. (Gilman qtd in Horowitz 165-166)

In this poem, written a year after the publication of "The Yellow Wallpaper," Gilman reiterates the oppression internalized by women in the throes of domesticity. The hen in

the poem internalizes the powerlessness it feels, therefore expressing no desire to attain the same power as her male counterpart. The hen's declaration of achieving her singular pleasure in watching her mate soar refers to Gilman's belief that women were forced to show support for their husband's independence, while suppressing their own. Just as the narrator in "The Yellow Wallpaper" becomes a degenerated human in her attempts to please her husband, the hen is a flightless bird paired with the extraordinary eagle. The hen represents the wife through the man's eyes, while the eagle stands for the advancement men saw themselves as having over their female partners. Gilman's hen symbolizes the degenerative state a female succumbs to when locked away in domesticity, and she infers that women should be free to explore the vast unknown, just as the hen should be flying alongside her aerial mate. Conversely, Wister uses his hen to argue the dangers of rejecting traditional womanhood and warn women against stepping outside their traditional bounds.

LEARNING THE FUNCTIONS AND OVERCOMING OPPRESSION

In the following section, I will illustrate how the individualist characters in every story demonstrate similar talents and wit that allow them to overcome—to greater or lesser degrees—the oppression under which they are suffering. They cultivate individualistic ethics that center around their own needs, while suppressing their true feelings until they are in a moment of power to act on their inner desires. In the texts written by women, a desire for a female community is apparent, while the texts by the men seem to alienate and exile the women who assert their independence. Exploring each of these techniques for overcoming oppression and the outcomes these female individualists experience proves insight into the varying depictions written by the male and female authors.

Double Consciousness. Davis' Deb struggles in industrial life because she longs for an escape from oppression and desires an expression of self in the natural world. Deb's turmoil mirrors Alcott's Polly, who distresses over balancing her communal position with her sought-after work and influence on other ambitious young women. Likewise, Gilman's narrator, James' Euphemia and Howell's Alma develop methods of self-sacrifice and manipulation as ways to cope with the oppressive men that try to control them. Young Gilman's own reflections, describing hers as a "dual self," help explain this idea. In all of these situations, these women employ a "double consciousness."

The term "double consciousness" was coined by W. E. B. DuBois in his 1903 collection of essays, *The Souls of Black Folk*. He describes the internal conflict a persecuted soul experiences:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, — An American, a negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (DuBois 11)

DuBois' uses this term as a way to depict the struggle African Americans experienced as they attempted to integrate into white society. Although they were unashamed of their Black American heritage, they must mask such pride in order to placate their white oppressor. This forced them to alienate themselves from their own identities, as well as neglect their professional and personal desires.

I will use “double consciousness” to describe a woman under patriarchal oppression. She longs for freedom while her oppressor openly exercises his liberty and forces her to present herself in the form he expects. Gilman fought against forceful domestic servitude by arguing that, because industriousness is an inherently feminine characteristic, women would improve the American workforce. Likewise, DuBois emphasized African Americans' resistance to internalizing racial oppression. He believed that integrating African heritage into American culture would be a positive thing: “He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to . . . be both a Negro and an American . . . without having the doors of Opportunity closed in his face (11).”

DuBois described the Black American's desire to embrace his heritage while assimilating into American society. Similarly, Gilman and Alcott described a similar prejudice that requires women to embrace only the masculine in an effort to succeed in the workplace.

Just as DuBois viewed African heritage as a positive cultural influence, Davis, Alcott and Gilman saw feminine and domestic traits as skills that would improve American industry. Therefore, their individualist female characters develop a “double consciousness,” but never relinquish their hidden hopes by internalizing their oppression. They keep their inner desires hidden but find avenues of liberation through their suppression.

Sheila Hassell Hughes, in what she defines as a “liberationist” reading of *Life in the Iron Mills*, sees evidence of what Du Bois would call “double consciousness” in Deb. Unlike Hugh, Deb understands that the men care nothing for understanding her person or empathizing with her suffering: “Like W. E. B. DuBois's concept of the ‘double-consciousness’ of the African American, it entails both seeing oneself and seeing the dominant other mis-seeing oneself. The figure in the socially dominant position is generally unable to acknowledge the full subjectivity, and thus encompassing vision, of the oppressed, and so has a narrower view, or simpler consciousness” (Hughes 125). Deb is aware of the men’s “mis-seeing” her. She understands their simplistic view of her, and so she picks Mitchell’s pocket. She understands her negligibility and weakness in their eyes, something not even worth them acknowledging. Davis paints a character whose “double consciousness” is acquired through her alienation from a culture of masculine and industrial oppression. However, her simultaneous refusal to internalize her male oppression and understanding that survival relies on the superficial acceptance of it gives her the strength to surreptitiously steal Mitchell’s money, an action that drives the plot and leads Deb to a better life.

James' depiction of double consciousness is much more singular: it does not link his individual to a community of oppressed Industrial workers. Euphemia alone seems to disapprove of the foundations of the typical French marriage. James proves his understanding that a repressed woman has the capacity to embed her sincere consciousness deep within herself. This notion of duality within an individual's consciousness is the root of Euphemia's complex character. Elizabeth Allen identifies female conflict with the double consciousness throughout James' work: "In certain of his female characters, James focuses on the conflict between female consciousness of self and existence as signs [within society]" (43). Euphemia struggles with the conflict between what she desires from her marriage and the role society expects of her as a wife. Although Richard is an overt philanderer, she is expected to exude gaiety in the presence of others and support her husband.

Euphemia is oppressed by masculine ideas not just through her husband but also through the women around her. Allen asserts that Richard's grandmother symbolizes society's power over the innocent: "The figure of the powerful, older woman—using her control of worldly representation to maintain the status quo and ensure her own status [is] fixed culturally—assumes power culturally to restrict others, representing a world of rigid meaning and convention" (Allen 117). Old Madame de Mauves does just this as she manipulates Euphemia into marrying her grandson, ensuring that the young girl's inheritance secures their aristocratic name.

Euphemia has two contradictory conversations with Old Madame de Mauves—one before she meets Richard and the other once they are engaged—representing the

discrepancy in patriarchal monogamy. Old Madame de Mauves provides Euphemia with the choice of either developing a “double consciousness” for successful integration into society or representing herself honestly “in spite of bad precepts and bad examples” (James 240). In their initial conversation, the grandmother lets Euphemia in on the female family secret, providing her with a feeling of acceptance: “If you wish to live at ease in the *doux pays de France* don’t trouble too much about the key of your conscience . . . You’ll fancy it saying things it won’t help your case to hear. They’ll make you sad, and when you’re sad you’ll grow plain, and when you’re plain you’ll grow bitter” (229). The grandmother instructs Euphemia to abandon a “double consciousness” and accept her oppression. However, Euphemia never relinquishes her own beliefs and Old Madame de Mauves predicts exactly what becomes of Euphemia.

As Longmore and Euphemia’s friendship develops, Longmore becomes aware of Euphemia’s split in consciousness, seeing a divide between her intentions and her statements: “He began to regard his hostess as a figure haunted by a shadow which was somehow her intenser and more authentic self. This lurking duality in her put on for him an extraordinary charm” (246). Longmore is unable to understand the cause of the “lurking duality” and blindly assumes she is putting on a demure mysteriousness for his pleasure. At other times, he feels pity for her obvious inability to express her true self and sees her as a “spirit condemned to play a part” (260). The 1896 poem “We Wear the Mask” by Paul Laurence Dunbar addresses the false, happy exterior African Americans must assume to hide their true feelings about white oppression: “We wear the mask that grins and lies . . . With torn and bleeding hearts we smile . . . Why should the world be

over-wise / In counting all our tears and sighs / Nay, let them only see us, while / We wear the mask” (Dunbar). Dunbar’s poem suggests Caucasian Americans’ active refusal to acknowledge the repeated atrocities their ancestors forced on African Americans. Instead, they continue to depict and interpret them as lesser humans simply content with any privilege they are given by white society. In a similar way, Longmore, as a male oppressor, cannot interpret Euphemia’s inner turmoil because he assumes she is delighted to have his company. Eventually, though, he senses that she is not being genuine and confronts her, saying: “I’ve admired your reserve, your courage, your studied gaiety. But I’ve felt the existence of something beneath them that was more *you*” (James 259). Her “studied gaiety” is a puzzle to him. He cannot understand that the “more *you*” part of her is that which she knows to be unacceptable to him and fellow adherers of misogynistic principles.

The Mothertongue. Although nineteenth-century theoretical musings such as those by Stanton, Fuller and Grimké are helpful in understanding literary depictions of gender oppression, modern psychological feminist theory is also crucial. It provides a lens to evaluate specific ways in which female characters created by women authors search within themselves, as well as relying on other individualistic women, to overcome their oppression. In contrast, as with James’ and Howells’ work, modern feminist theory also helps to identify the women character’s weaknesses that link solely to the shortcomings of other women who do not provide them with tools for self-cultivation.

James’ *Madame de Mauves* tells the tale of a woman who is an exiled, sad character at the end, despite eventually overcoming her oppressor. Without a strong

mother figure, a sense of community or a desire for an active role in society, Euphemia is left without any positivity in her life. Her lack of maternal influence has a huge effect on her, as Euphemia's being deceived into marrying Richard stems from the lack of a mother figure in her childhood. Her motherly void causes Euphemia to misconstrue perceptions of society and plants the seed for her inability to accept the role society later expects from her. According to Gail Scott: "We women have two ways of speaking. The first begins in our mother's womb as we listen to the rhythms of her body. As girls, we continue to develop this largely oral tongue in our ongoing relationship and identification with her" (D. Smith 3). Euphemia misses the continuation of the "mothertongue" and, therefore, must develop her own perception of a woman's role in society through extremely idealized works of fiction.

She immerses herself in the stories of "Prince Charmings and young Paladins" (James 225), and learns of the importance of hierarchical status, leading her to speculate about a vital requirement in her future matrimony: "One condition alone she was to make—that he should have 'race' in a state as documented as it was possible to have it. On this she would stake her happiness" (226). Euphemia wishes to belong to a long-standing family that takes pride in her representation of them. Her mother's rejection of her creates within her a strong desire to be needed: "[Euphemia's] romantic belief that the enjoyment of inherited and transmitted consideration . . . would be the direct guarantee of an ideal delicacy of feeling" (224). Sadly, Euphemia's future only brings her emotional deterioration and further exclusion, rather than her desired happiness and acceptance, which is foreshadowed by the omniscient narrator: "Several

accidents conspired to give convincing colour to this artless philosophy” (226). Old Madame de Mauves, understanding Euphemia lacks a mother figure, says to her: “You seem to me to have been wound up by some key that isn’t kept by your governess or your confessor or even your mother, but that you wear by a fine black ribbon round your neck” (James 229). She senses Euphemia’s unique cultivation of self that resists the influence of French society or familial connections.

Desire for aristocratic security and an assertion of power is inculcated within Euphemia at a young age as she faithfully crafts a romantic perspective of the world. Although she is constantly referred to as an American, the reader is informed that Euphemia was left in a Parisian convent at the tender age of three by a “widowed mother who was fonder of Homburg and Nice than of letting out tucks in the frock of a vigorously growing daughter” (James 224). Euphemia could hardly have been socialized as an American. French nuns rear her because her mother is so deeply integrated into French society that she is constantly absent. Therefore, Euphemia turns inward to develop a sense of belonging and experience: “She acquired a certain turn of the imagination which might have passed for a sign of precocious worldliness” (224). This “precocious worldliness” develops only through her divulgence in the “Ultramontane works of fiction” (224), which were all that was available to her in the convent’s limited library. Euphemia crafts a worldly perspective, especially of love, that really only exists in fiction. She is unable to ground herself in any familial roots and finds herself creating romantic ideals of marriage in which she establishes herself within the aristocracy.

Marie is a key player in the events that unfold in the story as she is constantly scheming to please her brother at Euphemia's expense: "She was to become later in life so accomplished a schemer that her sense of having further heights to scale might well have waked up early" (227). Marie sees Euphemia's inherited fortune as an opportunity to advance her family's aristocratic name and plays on Euphemia's longing for acceptance: "[Euphemia's] intimacy with this chosen schoolmate was founded on the perception--- all her own--- that their differences were just the right ones. Mademoiselle was very positive, very shrewd, very ironical, very French--- everything Euphemia felt herself unpardonable for not being" (226). Euphemia is aware of her alienation from a particular country, culture and lineage. She sees in Marie everything she desires within herself. Marie and her family become a physical manifestation of the illusions Euphemia has developed as a result of her alienation from familial roots. It is this fallacy of the De Mauves that blinds Euphemia from interpreting their true intentions. The qualities of being "shrewd" and "ironic," those that Marie accumulated as a result of her "mothertongue"—as the reader observes through her similarities with her grandmother—are characteristics used to manipulate and deceive Euphemia, who lacks such skills.

In Euphemia's eyes, the ultimate distinction between herself and Marie is the latter's "stately grandmother" and "supreme merit of being a rigorous example of the virtue of exalted birth, having, as she did, ancestors honourably mentioned by Joinville and Commines," which seemed to make her friend "more at home in the world than if she had been the daughter of even the most prosperous grocer" (227). Euphemia observes the behavior of Marie and her grandmother through the lenses of her romantic texts and

fantasizes about becoming another female member of the family. Her enthusiastic romanticism is inevitably sensed by the shrewd Marie and her grandmother, who use Euphemia's yearning for familial acceptance to their benefit: "Mademoiselle de Mauves indeed, at this time seventeen years of age and capable of views as wide as her wants, was a proper figure as could possibly have been found for the foreground of a scene so artfully designed" (227).

Marie sets the stage for the story's development when she invites Euphemia to her family's *castel*. Euphemia's role in the Mauves' devious plot is foreshadowed by the narrator's description of the *castel* as being composed of "battered towers," an "empty moat" and a "rusty drawbridge" (228), illustrating the decline of the family's fortune. Still, "Euphemia was not frightened out of her dream" (228) and, instead, only correlates it with the depth of their familial heritage, viewing it as "full of wonders as a box of old heirlooms." Euphemia's imaginative mind paints Old Madame de Mauves as a "historical character . . . belonging to a great order of things" (228), and she finds within her a sense of maternal language that she did not gain from her own mother. M de M shows Euphemia motherly affection by "pushing back Euphemia's shining locks . . . and [patronizing] the young stranger who was ready to sit all day at her feet and listen to anecdotes of the *bon temps* and quotations from the family chronicles" (229). Such seemingly innocent behavior is paired with a dialogue that reveals the old woman's selfish intentions.

Old Madame de Mauves is successful in manipulating Euphemia because she lacks the "fathertongue." In my earlier reference to Gail Scott's assertion that "women

have two ways of speaking” (D. Smith 3) I did not address the second form of communication. Along with developing a “mothertongue,” women learn to speak the “fathertongue,” which represents the socially accepted way in which women must communicate within patriarchal institutions. Upon their introduction, Euphemia sees Richard—sixteen years older than her—as “the hero of [her] romance made real and so completely accordant with her imagination that she felt afraid of him almost as she would have been of a figure in a framed picture who should have stepped down from the wall” (James 232). Euphemia cannot distinguish between the image of the prince charming she has fashioned in her mind and the man in front of her. Although there is now a physical form in her presence, he is no more real than the images in her books. Being the first “gentleman” she has ever encountered, Richard embodies her masculine fantasy. She is so unfamiliar with men and the language which they speak that her interpretation of him is entirely aesthetic: “Euphemia studied with noiseless diligence what she supposed to be ‘the character’ of M. de Mauves and the more she looked the more fine lights and shades she seemed to behold in his masterpiece of nature” (233). Euphemia’s inability to speak the “fathertongue” and her romanticized view of men inhibit her from seeing Richard’s true self.

Stephanie Smith explains, "for a nineteenth century American heroine engaged in a search for self, the mother is the primary emblem of that selfhood" (150). Without that emblem, Euphemia is never able to craft a strong ethic before entering adulthood and is left ill-equipped to deal with the world’s painful truths. Howells depicts similar strained relationships between Alma Leighton and her mother. However, here we find a strong

relationship between mother and daughter, but with a mother who only desires conformity in her daughter. After Alma has rejected Beaton's marriage proposal for the second time, her mother asks her: "Don't you expect to get married? Do you intend to be an old maid?" (Howells 316). The narrator interjects, noting that her mother's demand is "in the bonds of the superstition women have so long been under to the effect that every woman must wish to get married, if for no other purpose than to avoid being an old maid" (316). The narrator's aside is commenting on women's dependence on marriage for security during the nineteenth century. Alma's response to her mother demonstrates that her worldview is different from the traditional perceptions of her mother: "If I meet the right person, all well and good; if not, not. But I shall pick and choose, as a man does; I won't merely be picked and chosen" (316). Like James, Howells depicts a strained mother-daughter relationship that does nothing but hinder the development of the female's individual ethics.

Our other failed heroine—the narrator in "The Yellow Wallpaper"—is left in isolation. Because she is without the support of other strong women, she is forced to adhere only to her husband's discourse, or the "fathertongue": "The narrator becomes less verbal as she moves further into the world of the wallpaper. Tearing down the paper, then, is not the construction of women's discourse; rather, it signals a retreat from discourse precisely because language is male-controlled. The idea of contradiction captures this relationship between male and female discourse" (Ford 311-312). Unlike James and Howells, Gilman consciously creates a situation that reveals the dangers of restricting women from enabling growth in their children. Howells and James depict girls who are

diminished by their mothers. The narrator of “TYW,” in contrast, is kept away from her child and cannot retain her sanity. Gilman’s story argues for the importance of the mother-child relationship to women’s development, unlike those of Howells and James, who dismiss these relationships as nothing more than a hindrance to female individualism.

Gilman’s emphasis on the absence of the mother-child relationship is reinforced by her argument for representing parental relationships in literature: “What has fiction, to offer concerning mother-love, or even concerning father-love, as compared to this vast volume of excitement about lover-love? . . . The clear reason [is] that on a starkly masculine basis this is his one period of overwhelming interest and excitement” (*Man-Made* 98). Gilman used her short story to depict the dangers of neglecting familial relationships in literature and in societal thought. Alcott also addressed the issue through her depiction of strong parent-child relationships in her sentimental fiction. She made sure to portray both negative and positive parent-child relationships so that her readership could differentiate between home environments that are productive and those that are detrimental to children.

Tom and his sisters in *An Old Fashioned Girl* have a strained and distant relationship with their parents as a result of their materialistic lifestyles. The Shaw mother stays in bed all day and refuses to hug her youngest child Maud for fear that she will dirty her nice dresses. Consequently, Maud is constantly desperate for attention. Her treatment of her doll mirrors this lack of motherly love: “Maud, [gave] a jerk to the Paris doll which she held upside down by one leg in the most unmaternal manner” (Alcott 30).

Maud and her older sister Fanny lack many feminine and maternal skills at the beginning of the novel. However, after spending much time under Polly's influence, both girls develop strong work ethics and live prosperously.

In *An Old Fashioned Girl*, Polly's relationship with her parents is representative of an ideal support system for a young woman. At first Polly is intimidated by the materialistic demands of the Shaws' society. She writes to her mother requesting money for a locket so she may assimilate among the fashionistas of her age group. Her mother's encouraging response provides Polly with an important message about the frivolity of those around her: "You want a locket, deary; so I send one that my mother gave me years ago. You will find father's face on one side, mine on the other; and when things trouble you, just look at your talisman, and I think the sunshine will come back again" (Alcott 27). Her mother provides her with a "talisman" to protect her from the temptations of materialism and conformity.

Later in the story, when Polly is feeling down for attempting to defy these social requirements, she recalls advice from her mother and is instantly comforted: "Polly tried to conquer the bad feeling; but it worried her, till she remembered something her mother once said to her, 'When you feel out of sorts, try to make some one else happy, and you will soon be so yourself'" (Alcott 78). Every time Polly is tempted to adhere to the societal pressures around her, she remembers her mother's words and resists.

Because Polly relies so heavily on her own parental support, she is frightfully disturbed by the distance between Fanny and her parents: "I used to envy Fanny; but I don't now, for her father and mother don't take care of her as mine do of me. She is afraid

of her father, and makes her mother do as she likes. I'm glad I came though, for I see money don't give people everything” (Alcott 48). The Shaw mother is one of the few characters who is never charmed by Polly’s individualistic ethic and never attempts to change her materialistic ways. Her husband, however, is enlightened by Polly’s purity and improves with her help: “Even though she is a child, Polly identifies the source of Mr. Shaw's problem and takes the initial steps in rebuilding the familial relationships between father and children by encouraging them all to show affection toward each other and by having Fanny take over the walks with Mr. Shaw” (Schultz 32). Because Polly has such a strong relationship with her own father, she can educate both Mr. Shaw and his children on how they may improve theirs.

Through Polly, Alcott emphasizes the importance of educating others on developing strong familial relationships, as well as highlighting the importance of strong parenting to prepare an individual for future community service. When Polly sees that her influence on the Shaws has improved their relationships and overall happiness, she is overcome with joy: “She felt so proud and happy at this proof of the truth of her mother's words, when she said that ‘even a little girl could exert an influence, and do some good in this big, busy world’” (Alcott 80). Polly embodies Alcott’s new, independent woman who refutes the frivolity of the burgeoning capitalistic consumer society. Instead, she chooses to compassionately encourage those around her to work hard in improving others’ happiness.

Gilman viewed this strength exemplified by Polly and the development of motherly relationships as instruments not just for improving the community, but also the

future of humanity: “The female ‘as the race type,’ held the most immediate opportunity ‘through the immeasurable power of social motherhood’ to develop a race far more intelligent, efficient, and well-organized, living naturally at a much higher level of social progress” (Seitler 78). Gilman’s emphasis on the “power of social motherhood” transcended the relationships between mother and child, encouraging women to develop their own ethical system that challenge normative masculine ethics. Alcott’s message embodied by Polly promotes this same ideal. The young woman challenges the status quo, altering and improving the quality of life for the women around her.

Feminine Ethics. In each of the texts, the female individualists abandon the mainstreams ethics followed by their peers in order to cultivate their own individualized ideologies. In every instance, their developing perspectives clash with their environment, driving them to drastic acts of defiance that allow them to achieve autonomy.

In order to understand how these female characters cultivate their own ethics, it is important to understand the mainstream values of the societies in which they lived. Tara Fitzpatrick defines the ethical code that defined nineteenth-century American society:

In eighteenth-century republican political theory, virtue had referred primarily to the political actions of male citizens who, by participating in public life, put the common good ahead of their private interests . . . Women were denied access to the political realm because, deficient in reason and tied to the private world of necessity and the passions, they would corrupt the manly world of virtue. (Fitzpatrick 28)

Her description highlights the pride middle-class men took in proving the virtue of their public positions. Furthermore, they were sure to prevent women from penetrating the professional sphere because they viewed them as incompetent and

immoral?. Because men dominated the mainstream dissemination of ethical thought, they emphasized morals that supported the highly competitive and selfish principles that were necessary to succeed in a capitalistic society.

Gilman identified such mainstream ethics of her time as “colored by masculine instincts, always dominated by sex” (*Man-Made* 134). Gilman understood the danger of these widely accepted misogynistic principles as they permeated American society: “Ethical laws are laws—not idle notions . . . Under the limitations of a too masculine ethics, we have developed on this one line social conditions which would be absurdly funny if they were not so horrible” (314). According to Gilman, the nation’s culture was based on the principles of masculine ethics. Because she believed that women had much to contribute to the professional world, she saw the restriction placed on them as both “absurdly funny” and “horrible.”

Gilman believed that a strong feminine ethic was what American society needed to trump the patriarchal norms that were reinforced by burgeoning capitalism:

The mother instinct, throughout nature, is one of unmixed devotion, of love and service, care and defence, with no self-interest. The animal father, in such cases as he is of service to the young, assists the mother in her work in similar fashion. But the human father in the family with the male head soon made that family an instrument of desire, and combat, and self-expression, following the essentially masculine impulses. The children were his, and if males, valuable to serve and glorify him. In his dominance over servile women and helpless children, free rein was given to the growth of pride and the exercise of irresponsible tyranny. To these feelings, developed without check for thousands of years, and to the mental habits resultant, it is easy to trace much of the bias of our early ethical concepts. (*Man-Made* 131-132)

Gilman traced the development of Western thought and its basis in patriarchy to prove the longevity of the masculine dominance over women and children. At some

point, the “animal father,” who was of service to his family and shared responsibility with his female partner, evolved into the “human father,” whose priority was to glorify himself through the domination of his family. Moreover, Gilman attests that ever since this change in the human male’s evolution, his “exercise of irresponsible tyranny” has gone unchallenged. Thus, she calls on her female readership to finally step up to their male masters and challenge the oppression that centuries of Western thought had instilled.

Over eight decades later, Eve Browning and Susan Coultrap-McQuin’s theories reflect similar concerns to that of Gilman’s: “Traditional moral philosophy has been a largely male-directed enterprise and has reflected interests derived predominantly from men’s experience. In other words, because men’s experience has often involved market transactions, their moral theories concentrate on promise-keeping, property rights, contracts, and fairness” (2). Browning and Coultrap-McQuin use Carol Gilligan’s and Nel Noddings’ “ethic of care” as an alternative to traditional masculine ethics. Ethical decisions made by those following the “ethic of care” would be based on “contextual and narrative rather than formal and abstract” criteria and “put caring, responsibility, and relationship at the center” (3).

The strong feminine ethic cultivated through Davis’ protagonist Deb demonstrates the principles outlined in Browning and Coultrap-McQuin’s text. Distinctions between the ways Hugh and Deb react to their rare encounter with individuals of wealth and power illustrate Deb’s representation of the “ethic of care.” Hugh’s idealistic approach of begging for sponsorship as an artist gets him nowhere. He meagerly asks the doctor, “Will you help me?” Doctor May claims he hasn’t the money to sponsor him but makes

sure to reiterate the American dream, telling him: “It is your right to rise” (17). Hugh only serves as entertainment for the men who happen to be in his presence as they wait for the rain to pass. Deb faces the truth. She knows she amounts to nothing in the men’s eyes and takes advantage of an uncommonly close encounter with rich men by pickpocketing Mitchell. On the surface, it would seem that, if it were a competition of moral behavior, Hugh would win—as he honestly expresses a desire to grow as an artist and earnestly pleads for the gentlemen’s sponsorship.

Deb seems clearly corrupt for her pickpocketing Mitchell. However, according to the “ethic of care” theory, the basis for Deb’s thievery is driven by her desire to care for and protect her loved ones, making it difficult to deem it an immoral deed. Deb is only even around the gentleman Mitchell because she walked through the cold, dreary night air to bring Hugh his supper. She is sleeping on an ash pile so she may walk home with Hugh at the end of his night shift when the three happen upon them. Hughes perfectly articulates the source of Deb’s decision to steal and describes her selfless nature:

Deb subjectively embodies compassion . . . She tends to her drunken uncle . . . she welcomes and feeds the pretty young girl who steals her loved one's glances; and she sacrifices what little physical comfort she might enjoy to tread to the mills with Hugh's dinner. Her love for and hope in him, though unrequited, are the stimulant that keeps her going. They are also her motive for picking Mitchell's pocket. Because of this, as much as her dreadful lot, perhaps, our inclination is to reserve judgment. We read the act as her self-sacrificing identification---maybe over-identification---with Hugh. More the representative laboring subject than Hugh, she identifies with all those struggling around her, as her confusing use of the pronoun ‘hur’---for I, you, he, or she---implies. (Hughes 127)

Hughes’ suggests that the reader is compelled to “reserve judgment” of Deb because of her strong compassion for others. By tracing the motives that Deb has for

stealing the money, Hughes establishes the redeeming aspects Deb displays and provides evidence for why her act is justified. Just as the narrator in the “Yellow Wallpaper” is never referred to by name, inferring that her struggle is representative of that of countless others, Deb refers to Hugh confusingly. She uses a vague pronoun that could be interpreted as referring to a number of people. Deb hopes to liberate not only Hugh from his oppression but all those who suffer around her.

The traditional code that defines Deb’s deed as wrong is what Gilligan and Noddings would define as masculine ethics which “have implicitly excluded and silenced women and their moral perspectives” (Browning and Coultrap-McQuin 2). They assert that women must replace them with “an ethic that represents and validates both” (2). Deb does just this by rejecting traditional virtue to save her loved ones. She is a prime practitioner of feminine ethics, as defined by Browning and Coultrap-McQuin: “thinkers [who] emphasize that the particular context, not abstract principles of right and wrong, must shape and inform morally appropriate choices . . . [putting] caring, responsibility, and relationship at the center of her descriptions of an ethic of care” (2-3). Deb’s decision to steal defies traditional ethics but is part and parcel of her individual and ideological development, as she rejects what is impressed upon her according to her own beliefs.

The distinction between Hugh and Deb is that Hugh, who longs ascension in the social hierarchy, struggles and ultimately fails to discover what he needs to attain happiness. Mitchell leads him to believe that happiness comes in the form of money, but once in his possession, it quickly leads to his death. Harris views Hugh taking the money from Deb as an “acceptance of capitalistic valuation [that] leads him only into a prison

cell--the naturalistic 'trap'--and to his death" (38). Hugh is one of the countless men the narrator describes as internalizing oppression so that they live and die with their questions unanswered. After the men's departure, Hugh realizes that his ambition for a better life had been for nothing. He rejects his previous desire for a release of himself and his fellow workers to the natural world. Instead, he assumes a much more ego-driven agenda: "Able to speak, to know what was best, to raise these men and women working at his side up with him; sometimes he forgot this defined hope in the frantic anguish to escape, only to escape . . . only for a moment of free air on a hillside . . . But tonight he panted for life. The savage strength of his nature was aroused" (18). Hugh dismisses his nurturing inclination to improve the lives of the working class and becomes driven by his own selfish desire to prove himself.

Deb, however, in her seemingly simple nature, sees that a deeper connection with nature will bring freedom and peace to her and her loved ones. She creates her own ideological system in which a life in the natural world is the key, and she does not allow the men's philosophical comments to alter her life perception. Harris makes an interesting claim about Deb's having no last name, while Hugh's is that of an animal: "She, unlike Hugh Wolfe, has not yet devolved into that last, animalistic stage . . . Deb retains both compassion and a humane sense of others" (29). Deb maintains an authentic love for Hugh, while he ultimately rejects those around him and follows a thirst for professional advancement. Deb assumes a feminist ethical code in which her love for others will always be her motivator, while Hugh can readily reject those he loves for social ascension: "Davis distinguishes between Deb's genuine compassion for others and

Hugh's eclectic kindness that carries no personal commitment" (Harris 36). Harris's distinction between the types of benevolence the characters show exemplifies their differing ideologies and ethics.

During the brief interaction that seals Hugh's fate, he plays audience to a battle of ideologies between three wealthy men that represent the dominating ethics of the time. Each man is driven by a different philosophy that results in conflicting reactions to Hugh's sculpture. The capitalist overseer, the intellectually-driven amateur gymnast, and the sympathetic doctor provide contrasting lens for the men's observations of Hugh in that moment. These ideologies are no comfort to Hugh, who meets an untimely end at the hands of one of the very men he admires—Mitchell mysteriously meets with Hugh once he is in prison for Deb's theft, after which Hugh quickly dies. Neither do the men's philosophies provide support for Deb, who finds her own salvation through the generous woman who brings her to a Quaker community at the end of the story. The three men represent the dominant ideologies of the bourgeoisie that do nothing to change the circumstances of the poor working class: in this instance, Hugh and Deb.

Deb is never tempted by egocentrism, and it is through her constant love of Hugh that she achieves inner peace. Deb hopes that Mitchell's money will, as she explains to Hugh, give them a way out of the industrial slums. Deb does not understand that Hugh has already rejected an ethic of liberation for an egocentric philosophy. Hugh sees her as naive and alien from the understanding he shares with the other men and thinks the "woman mad" (Davis 19). Although Hugh never accepts Deb's compassionate outlook, Deb stays true to her beliefs, even as she watches her love slowly die. She ultimately

holds onto her dream for Hugh so tightly that it becomes her own liberation. Deb's desire for Hugh's escape to the natural world draws the attention of the Quaker woman. Even after Hugh has died, Deb shows more concern for him than herself. Deb begs the Quaker woman to bury Hugh "where t' air is frick and strong" (30) and the Quaker woman, perceiving Deb's honest hope for freedom, "speaks from a strong heart deeply moved with remorse or pity" (30). She provides the means for Deb to live a thriving life--a life the three men refused to Hugh.

Through the narrator, Davis informs her middle-class readership about the injuries a consumerist society inflicts upon the oppressed: "Davis' task is to pierce the privileged blindness of her audience with the intense and painful vision of her subjects . . . The oppressed bring a second significant vision as well. Suffering potentially enables both godly vision of the material" (30). Hughes refers to Deb's ability of identifying the dangers of materialism and aestheticism through her "godly vision of the material." Hugh follows blindly like most others, but Deb—through her individualist ethics—perceives the dangers of materialistic consumerism. She tells Hugh that the cure to his suffering is "to go out,—OUT, I say,—out, lad, where t' sun shines, and t' heath grows" (Davis 19). Unlike Hugh, Deb has developed her own belief in salvation.

During the three men's conversation at the mill, Mitchell argues that industrial workers will find salvation only after developing their own ideological solidarity. Mitchell sees the gap between himself and Hugh as so wide that Hugh cannot inherit any of the men's philosophies and must instead establish his own: "What will this lowest deep . . . do with the light filtered through ponderous Church creeds, Baconian theories,

Goethe schemes? Some day, out of their bitter need will be thrown up their own light-bringer,—their Jean Paul, their Cromwell, their Messiah” (Davis 17). Mitchell cannot imagine that the “light-bringer” he describes lay invisible on a heap of ash. In contrast, Hugh, whose “face, with its heavy weight of brain, its weak, uncertain mouth, its desperate eyes, out of which the soul of his class” (15), represents the countless workers who will never receive such spiritual illumination. Harris explains what the class of workers like Hugh—one who cannot retain a “double consciousness” and internalizes his oppression—represents: “Not only did [Davis] report the realities of everyday life in the language of the working class or the enslaved, but she also understood the implications of a deterministic philosophy in terms of human psychology and motivation. Thus she depicted the drifting masses as representative of human dislocation in an increasingly industrialized society” (14). Hugh does not represent a messiah. Rather, he symbolizes the masses of men who adopt the fatalistic logic of the upper class.

Unlike the men Mitchell envisions—Jean Paul and Cromwell—the messiah comes in the form of an unsightly female; one so alien to society’s ideal human. The narrator—in her room filled with objects like “Aphrodite,” and “homely fragments, in which lie the secrets of all eternal truth and beauty” (Davis 31)—struggles with the challenge of breaking the reader, and society, of its attachments to the beauty ideology of masculine ethics. It is the “dumb, woful face” (31) of the korl woman and “its groping arm [that] points through the broken cloud to the far East, where in the flickering, nebulous crimson, God has set the promise of the Dawn” (31). Davis contrasts the figure of Aphrodite and domestic items with the sculpture of the korl woman to illustrate the

distinction of the beauty ideal from the true working woman. Harris explains that, “Davis devoted her life to debunking mythologies, of the past and the present, recognizing them as the process of glossing over the harsh realities of life in favor of a romanticized vision” (14). Unlike the Aphrodite figure, which represents the perpetuation of the beauty ideal throughout the centuries and the unrealistic nature of society’s expectations, the sculpture of the korl woman embodies the true vision of the laboring woman and the greater working class. Deb serves as the “light-bringer” Mitchell describes, but only after the working class is able to rid itself of the false ideologies that penetrate the classes and keep the oppressed in a state of alienation, will their eyes be opened to Deb’s message. Davis crafts a story in which class and gender are vehicles for alienation and portrays the oppressors’ avenues for which to exact their oppression. By identifying oppressive channels, Davis devalues the importance society places upon them. Consequently, she uproots the patriarchal and capitalist ethics that robbed individuals of their natural rights to physical and spiritual liberation.

Like Deb, Alcott’s Polly develops a moral code different from mainstream values. However, Polly does not have to escape her society to follow her individualist ethics. Instead, she persuades those around her to accept her worldview, even influencing Tom’s perceptions. Polly’s emphasis on familial values and hard work both inside and outside the home improve the relationships within the Shaw family, as well as encouraging Tom to respect Polly as his equal. *Old Fashioned Girl* depicts a young woman who merges her domestic desires with her thirst for liberty to become a socially acceptable embodiment of the “ethic of care.”

James and Howells' "Survival of the Fittest." As explained in section three, the theories of evolution established by communities of male intellectuals worked as a way to further oppress women. In James' and Howells' stories, however, the female individualists use a "survival of the fittest" tactic to their own advantage. Evaluating the ways in which Euphemia and Alma mentally manipulate the men around them provides insight into how the male writers viewed the female individualist. In J's and H's stories, women rebel against the men around them, as opposed to attempting to influence them by opening up about their ethical code and encouraging mutual respect—like Polly does in Alcott's story.

In James' *Madame de Mauves*, we can see a "survival of the fittest" battle fought through the ideologies of each character. Euphemia, understanding how to manipulate Longmore and Richard through their narrow view of women, employs one man as a weapon to injure the other. Life becomes a battle of the wits for the injured and embittered woman who, using her individualist ethics, adapts herself to her situation and triumphs. Past scholarly analyses of the novella have fallen short in their analysis of Euphemia's ideology. Dorothy Berkson is among the many critics who fell for Euphemia's puritanical damsel-in-distress act. Berkson sees Longmore and Euphemia as synonymous in their romantic notions: "Euphemia can no longer construct a romantic vision of marriage... [and] sees herself and Longmore as victims of circumstance, lovers parted by fate" (81). Berkson assumes that Longmore and Euphemia are equally pure in their Christian beliefs and, once the lovers hear of Madame Clairin's proposition of a physical affair, they are both "affirmed in their suspicion that passion is an ugly monster

that cannot be equated with their ideal of love and virtue” (82). According to Berkson, Euphemia’s strong American morals compel her to send Longmore away.

Although Charles Samuels also fails to decipher Euphemia’s true intent, he does observe that the story cannot be understood through Longmore’s “callow terms”: “Early critics only interpreted the story through Longmore’s perspective” (154). Samuels goes beyond Longmore’s perception and evaluates the characters’ dialogue, yet still, like Longmore, he falls victim to Euphemia’s cunning guile: “Reading the story as a celebration of American virtue in unholy alliance with French lubriciousness is not permissible, even on artistic terms, since it ignores the irony of the prose” (155). Just as Longmore suspects that Euphemia desires revenge upon her husband, so does Samuels; but he still asserts that Euphemia returns Longmore’s affections. He says that “seeing her first fancy shattered, Euphemia retreats into a second” (156). Samuels also assumes that Longmore believes his desire to “plunge into passion” (157) will cause him to lose the woman he loves and willingly accepts his return to America as a “moral substitution” (158) for passion. Like Berkson, Samuels misses the key moments in the text that reveal Longmore’s selfish, misogynistic ideals—as I explained earlier—and Euphemia’s bitter desire for revenge.

The dialogic nature of the story reveals the characters’ true motivations and beliefs. James presents the story through Longmore’s narrow and biased perspective to challenge his readers with a narrative that must be deciphered to deduce the characters’ true motivations. Characters are frequently in conflict with their morals and desires, revealing their manipulation of each other and their struggle to ignore their virtues in

pursuit of their passions. Darwin's "survival of the fittest" theory provides a lens to examine Euphemia's behavior, revealing her techniques of survival. Euphemia deals with her situation in French society by hiding her true self. She is forced into what the grandmother tells her is the "game of life" (James 230) and eventually succeeds in a survival-of-the-fittest scenario. According to Bert Bender, James met Darwin five years before the novella was published and discussed his past work, probably including his current project *The Descent of Man* (Bender 107): "From Henry James' point of view *The Descent of Man* was the key text, for it offered a profoundly important new 'story' of human relationships, serving him not only as a chart to the social reality as it was being newly interpreted, but often as a weapon in his own literary wars" (109). As noted earlier, James admired his female contemporaries but wanted to be known as the ultimate illustrator of the independent female character. Thus, he used Darwinian theory to paint a picture of female intellect overpowering patriarchal tyranny.

Euphemia becomes a hybrid of the contrasting ideals the old woman presented to her. She is adamant in her matrimonial fidelity as society expects of her, and she waits to exact her revenge upon her husband, which is her true intention. She retains her "double consciousness" as an outsider who refuses to relinquish her own beliefs. After Euphemia meets Longmore, Richard challenges her in the "game of life," telling her: "Take your revenge [with the] handsome young man sighing himself into a consumption for you" (293). Euphemia's scheming sister-in-law Marie hears of their conversation and takes Richard's words straight to the "handsome young man," ensuring Euphemia's plan of driving her husband insane with guilt.

Richard never fathoms that Euphemia could create such a clever scheme. In the “game of life,” Richard considers himself better than the female sex. In his opinion, his iconoclasm? and rejection of romanticism puts him a step above foolish women: “[Richard] had in the course of time encountered in the feminine character such plentiful evidence of its pliant softness and fine adjustability that idealism naturally seemed to him a losing game” (235). Richard observes in young women a romantic view of the world, epitomized by the young Euphemia. However, unbeknownst to Richard, Euphemia not only learns to shed her idealistic perspective, but she also acquires a mindset that accepts Richard’s atheism by the end of the novella.

Longmore’s notion of femininity is also idealistic. Like Richard, Longmore upholds a simplified, uniform view of woman. His idealistic notions are often contradicted, but he simply turns a blind eye to such signs. When he realizes Marie desires his courtship, he runs off to the forest and lies in the grass, attempting to “forget that there were any women in nature who didn’t please like the swaying tree tops” (251). Longmore’s perception of women as instruments of his own pleasure prevents him from seeing Euphemia as an individual. The novella opens as Longmore is “simply amused” by the “helpless wonderment” (216) of Mrs. Draper’s daughter, exemplifying Richard’s view of all women as innocent. Longmore continues to find bewilderment in other women throughout the course of the novella. While dining at a cafe, “[b]old outlines,” an “even braver complexion,” and a “very handsome neck” (272) charm Longmore, leading to his infuriating revelation that the lovely lady he is admiring is Richard’s mistress. Longmore is well aware of Richard’s promiscuity, suggesting that his flood of anger

results from his desire for a similar passion. This assumption is reinforced later in the story when Longmore's curiosity is aroused by his encounter with young Claudine at the innkeeper's. Just as Longmore's question for Mrs. Draper upon his first sight of Euphemia is "who is she?" (218) and his initial thought when seeing the Count's lover is "who she was?" (272), Longmore asks himself "who might Claudine be?" (301). His initial inquiry is followed by: "Was she as pretty as her voice?" (301). The only distinction among these encounters with intriguing women is that, when Longmore encounters Euphemia, Mrs. Draper introduces him to her. Longmore sees the other women's attention diverted by other men, while Euphemia is left alone. Therefore, she elicits more of his desire because she has an element of attainability that others do not.

After Claudine intrigues him, he learns from the landlady that she is simply one of an artist's many mistresses, but "the landlady's gossip cast no shadow on its brightness" (305). Longmore idealizes Claudine's admiration and longing for her beloved artist. He envisions himself in the role of the artist, a "graver equivalent of the young lover," and Claudine as a "lighter sketch of Madame de Mauves" (306). The vision of the artist and his mistress inspires Longmore to reject all moral apprehension: "The episode of the happy young painter and the charming woman who had given up a great many things for him rose vividly in his mind and seemed to mock his moral unrest like some unobtrusive vision of unattainable bliss" (305). Longmore's longing to have a woman submit to his will—thus rejecting her own—is so strong in him that it overcomes his guilt.

Euphemia senses this need in Longmore, just as she is edified by Richard's singular perception of women. She speaks little when spending time with Longmore and proves herself an astute observer. In the opening scene of her childhood, "Euphemia listened and said nothing" (225), leading her to a sense of observation that gives her an advantage in the "game of life." Euphemia develops, as Claudia Card explains, "necessary survival skills under oppression" (qtd. from D. Smith 158). Euphemia learns that if she is to seek revenge on the Mauves family she must bide her time and slowly manipulate those around her. According to Card, manipulation is the "essence" (159) of female agency in a patriarchal society. Because Euphemia's idealist soul has been crushed under the weight of misogyny, she restructures her ideology to depend solely upon herself for support. When she is introduced to Longmore, she deciphers his interest in her and views him as the perfect tool with which to exact her vengeance. Through her observation of Longmore's timidity and insecurity (a personality in sharp contrast to her husband's), Euphemia manipulates the two men in different ways that give her power over both.

Longmore lacks the masculine confidence so obvious in her husband, so Euphemia caters to Longmore's ego. She senses his desire to be needed and keeps him enticed. Card explains that "women have developed the 'giving' expected of them into survival skills, strategies for gaining some control in situations where their energy and attention are focused on others" (158). Euphemia remains mostly silent in Longmore's presence and seems fully focused on him: "If she had wished to irritate his curiosity and lead him to take her confidence by storm nothing could have served her purpose better

than this studied discretion” (James 245). The omniscient narrator informs the reader of Longmore’s reaction to Euphemia’s behavior: “Longmore was able to add the satisfaction of suspecting that he was a ‘resource’ for Madame de Mauves” (244). James putting “resource” in quotation marks signifies its double meaning: while Longmore idealizes himself as her only confidante, she sees him as a tool in her scheme of vengeance. Because Longmore only sees women as creatures of pleasure and simplicity, he never ascribes deviant motivations to her. Instead, he becomes increasingly captivated by her reserved mystery.

While Euphemia was “not obviously a beauty” (217) when Longmore first saw her, once Euphemia’s manipulation begins to take effect, she becomes a “delicate beauty [like] the serious cast of certain blank-browed Greek statues” (246). His perception of her expression as “blank-browed” exemplifies his failure to see any complexity in her character and proves his interpretation of her quiet deception as simple modesty. He does, however, understand that she has an ulterior motive: “He tried more than once . . . to make out the game that she was playing” (257). Fortunately for Euphemia, Longmore assumes her shield is up simply because of her moral upholding of marital fidelity.

Euphemia’s moment of weakness is revealed when Longmore departs for Belgium and she realizes that she may have misinterpreted his intentions. Fearing she has manipulated an innocent, Euphemia experiences a flood of guilt: “She felt she had grossly failed and she was proportionately disappointed. An emotional friendship she had not desired; her scheme had been to pass with her visitor as a placid creature with a good deal of leisure which she was disposed to devote to profitable conversation of an

impersonal sort” (261). Euphemia develops a fondness for Longmore and is pained by guilt. However, her confidence is renewed when Longmore quickly returns and affirms her suspicions. Longmore notices upon his visit that “in his absence the whole character of her face had changed. It showed him something momentous had happened . . . as if his return had surrounded her with complications too great to be disguised by a colourless welcome” (275). Little does Longmore know that he has given Euphemia reason to pursue her scheme, giving her evidence for his perverted desire. She assumed his departure marked her misinterpretation of his intentions but, upon his hurried return, she is secure in her notion that he is driven by selfish lust. Thus, she continues to employ him for her own devices.

Marie’s scheming sets the scene for a second round of manipulation. This time, however, the tables have turned and Euphemia is the manipulator. Marie advises Longmore to engage in a romantic affair with Euphemia after hearing her brother encourage his wife to do so. She sees the irritation her sister-in-law’s stoicism causes her brother and is frustrated with Euphemia’s refusal to behave like the women in her family:

There has never been a *galant homme* among us, I fear, who has not given his wife, even when she was very charming, the right to be jealous. We know our history for ages back, and the fact’s established . . . You can see their portraits at our poor charming old house—every one of them an ‘injured beauty,’ but not one of them hanging her head (289).

Marie establishes the distinction between her familial notion of feminine behavior and Euphemia’s offensive contradiction of it: “It doesn’t seem to me fair that a little American bourgeoisie should come in and pretend to alter them—all to hang her modern photograph and her obstinate little *air penché* in the gallery of our shrewd great grandmothers” (289).

Marie's rant reveals Euphemia's true interpretation of the words of Old Madame de Mauves—to defy the Mauves women's tradition and remain her obstinate self. Marie tells Longmore he must convince Euphemia to “keep up the tone” (293), and, once again, Longmore receives encouragement to pursue her.

Longmore contemplates never returning to the Mauves estate, but it is useless, for he has no defense against his desires and finds himself back there that very evening. To his immense disappointment, he discovers that his passionate illusions will never come to fruition. Upon seeing Euphemia, he observes that “he couldn't clasp her to his arms now, any more than some antique worshipper could have clasped the marble statue in his temple” (310). He argues that she should be fair to “the thing one *feels*” (311), still believing that she simply desires his passion. She tells him that if he “wishes to please [her] forever there's a way.” Much to Longmore's dismay, she requests that he not destroy her “high opinion” of him by trying to engage in an affair with her. Longmore has long destroyed her “high opinion”, as evidenced by her reaction upon his speedy return from Belgium, but Euphemia boosts his ego by giving him a sense of power over the situation: “The intention of her words was all remonstrance, refusal, dismissal, but her presence and effect there, so close, so urgent, so personal, a distracting contradiction of it” (312). Longmore interprets Euphemia's order of his departure as representing her forfeiture of her own desires for his well being, and he suddenly notices that “she had never been so lovely” (312). Longmore leaves satisfied, believing that a woman gave up her happiness to ensure his. Oblivious to Euphemia's genuine perception of him, he

returns to American with a renewed confidence in his masculinity and affirmed pride in his upholding of moral virtue.

In a letter to his friend Mrs. Draper, Longmore unknowingly reveals evidence that Euphemia's manipulation of Richard is working: "It disagrees with him somewhere that a little American bourgeoisie should have fancied him a finer fellow than he is or than he at all wants to be . . . The Count at any rate would have enjoyed the comfort of believing his wife as bad a case as himself" (269). After Longmore's departure, Euphemia's mastery over Richard in the "game of life" is confirmed. Instead of reacting to Richard's challenge to her idealism, which he believes is "always a losing game," Euphemia refuses to engage in his suggested form of retaliation: adultery. When Richard learns that Euphemia has rejected her young courtier Longmore, he cannot interpret her refusal to counter his licentious acts. She becomes foreign to his singular view of women and sparks his curiosity more than ever. She elevates herself in his eyes, leading him to feel inept at meeting her expectation of him. Richard is baffled by Euphemia's self-control and chastises himself for his inability to do the same.

After discovering that Euphemia has banished Longmore, Richard refuses to see his mistress and is so confounded that "he hardly tasted [his dinner]" (327). He asks Marie about Longmore's departure, saying: "What the devil does it mean?" (328). For a man who establishes himself through his intellectual superiority, especially pertaining to women, Richard loses his sense of self when Euphemia refuses to engage with him. At the story's conclusion, Mrs. Draper hears of Richard's suicide. Her informant tells her that the Count "gave up society, ceased to care for anything" (331). Richard's inability to

accept that women are autonomous creatures unravels his entire understanding of the world after Euphemia asserts her independence. She completely negates all that Richard had believed was an absolute distinction among the sexes. He assumed all humans gave into their desires, but he is suddenly faced with a creature who rejects all such temptations and forces him into a feeling of ultimate inadequacy.

The Mrs. Draper character is used in both the beginning and end of the story to inform the reader of Euphemia's societal persona. At the start of the novella, Mrs. Draper explains to Longmore that Euphemia's puritanical resistance to French socialisms alienated her. By the end, Mrs. Draper is informed by her mutual friend of Marie's that Euphemia is "the terrible little woman that killed her husband" (331). The narrator provides the news of Richard's death through a confidante of Marie's to emphasize the impact Euphemia's manipulation has had on Marie and the Mauves family. The hint of gossip also clarifies the public understanding that Euphemia was responsible for her husband's death.

After her own subjection to deception, Euphemia attains her vengeance by destroying all that the Mauves hoped she would protect. Richard's suicide casts a shadow over their aristocratic name, while also ending the perpetuation of their lineage. Euphemia's mastery over Longmore and Richard results from their inability to alter their bigoted notion of women to truly understand her. They only observe her as she relates to themselves. Because they take on two ends of the ideological spectrum, they interpret her mystery in different ways, but neither acknowledges her individuality. Darwin believes that the key to survival is constant awareness: "It may be said that natural selection is

daily and hourly scrutinising, throughout the world, every variation, even the slightest; rejecting that which is bad, preserving and adding up all that is good” (Kindle Locations 1084-1085). Euphemia studied both men, listening to their beliefs and understanding their limitations. She learned their weaknesses and destroyed their ideological foundations. Neither man gets what he wants from Euphemia because neither can esteem her in the way that she so clearly values herself. Richard is unable to live up to Euphemia’s standards: “It was a singular fate for a man who believed in nothing to be so tenderly believed in” (234). Once Richard is aware of Euphemia’s expectations of him and her refusal to submit to his behavior, he is unable to adapt his ideology in a way that accommodates her belief.

Longmore assumes he is a better match for her because they share the same moral values, telling Euphemia: “[I could have been your] husband of your own faith and race and spiritual substance, who would have loved you well” (280). Although Euphemia is quick to tell him that she doesn’t feel she is of his “faith and race,” he cannot accept that she is any different from him. He continues to project his beliefs onto her, telling her that her statement “proves we’re made for each other.” Even as Euphemia tells Longmore her only philosophy is her “dogged obstinate clinging conscience” (281), Longmore sees her as his Christian equivalent, and he interprets his passion for her as the purest form of love. Longmore and Richard neglect to see Euphemia as anything but a way to satisfy their own insecurities and, as a result, one leaves heartbroken while the other takes his own life.

Although Euphemia establishes agency over her own life by ridding herself of the scandalous Richard and selfish Longmore, her actions force her into isolation. The French society to which she belongs refuses to accept a woman who resists the traditional wifely role. In responding to Longmore's plea that American society will make her happier, Euphemia says: "When I was younger—[my imagination] helped me to think that I should find happiness here. And after all, for a woman, what does that signify? . . . France is out there beyond the garden . . . but here . . . in my mind, it's a nameless, and doubtless not all remarkable, little country of my own. It's not her country . . . that makes a woman happy or unhappy" (James 248). Euphemia articulates the transition of her ideology from idealistic to an individualistic realism. She began her life believing she could find happiness among French society, but she later learned that for a woman to attain happiness, she must only rely on herself. She views society as the enforcer of patriarchy and understand that a woman's country is not what brings her happiness. Thus, Euphemia infers that women must revert to a life of solitude to achieve a sense of freedom.

Like Euphemia, Howells' female individualist Alma first sees her romantic interest idealistically and is smitten. She later realizes that Beaton, like Euphemia's Richard, is a self-indulgent fraud who only cares for how she can contribute to his own happiness. After Beaton exhibits feelings for Alma at a social gathering in St. Barnaby, he neglects her for months. She learns in his absence that he has deceived her. Although he eventually shows up to court her, she develops an individualistic perception of love. Alma discovers that Beaton does not see her as anything other than a female plaything with

which to complement himself, as he does with the other two women to whom he shows affection. Alma makes this observation to her mother: "I suppose he's very much in earnest with Miss Vance at times, and with Miss Dryfoos at others. Sometimes he's a painter, and sometimes he's an architect, and sometimes he's a sculptor. He has too many gifts—too many tastes." (Howells 254). She sees that each woman satisfies the different urges he has for each of them. The painter is inspired by Vance's beauty; the architect is desirous of Dryfoos' money; and the sculptor is challenged by Alma's artistic talents and intellect.

Alma knows he is never genuine with any of them. She is repulsed by the false persona he presents to her and his ruthlessness in his pursuit of her: "More and more she saw him selfish and mean, weak-willed, narrow-minded, and hard-hearted; and aimless . . . She was perfectly serene and happy in her final rejection of Beaton; he had worn out not only her fancy, but her sympathy, too" (Howells 316). Although her disdain becomes more and more apparent, Beaton cannot fathom that Alma's affection for him could be altered and pleads with her: "Alma, what keeps you from caring for me now as you did then? I haven't changed" (Howells 252). Her response proves her rejection of the unrealistic expectations women have in the marriage market:

But I have. I shall never care for you again, Mr. Beaton . . . I know very well that I'm not a perfect character, and that I've no claim on perfection in anybody else. I think women who want that are fools; they won't get it, and they don't deserve it. But I've learned a good deal more about myself than I knew in St. Barnaby, and a life of work, of art, and of art alone that's what I've made up my mind to. (252)

Just as Euphemia claims to Longmore that she has rejected romanticism, Alma replaces her passion for romance with a devotion to art. Beaton's reaction represents his

disgust for an autonomous woman, relating her rejection of love to having no moral goodness, responding: "A woman that's made up her mind to that has no heart to hinder her!" (252). Alma sees his statement as a contradiction of gender roles, asking him: "Would a man have that had done so?" (252).

During her conversation with Beaton, Alma invests all of her energy into her work. She questions men's absurd notion that women should be their support system, asking Beaton: "Why do men think life can be only the one thing to women? And if you come to the selfish view, who are the happy women?" (253). Alma cannot fathom a woman attaining true happiness in a role that is only the extension of another person. She calls such a view "selfish" and believes that the only joy in life she will attain is through her artistic labor: "I'm sure that if work doesn't fail me, health won't, and happiness won't" (253). Beaton refutes her assumption that in marriage she must revert to being his wifely support. Alma has none of it, saying that will she only ever be his "second fiddle" and challenges his request: "Do you suppose I shouldn't be woman enough to wish my work always less and lower than yours? At least I've heart enough for that!" (253). In opposition to Beaton's understanding, Euphemia sees herself as having an artistic integrity that he would never grant her in marriage; therefore, she refuses this contract that would compromise her professional endeavors.

Alma's art allows her to see beyond traditionally ascribed gender roles. Like Alcott's Polly, her strong work ethic allows her to see beyond what is enforced upon her as a woman, seeing society's perceptions of gender as unnatural and unhealthy:

Either I see all the hidden weakness that's in men's natures, and bring it to the surface in their figures, or else I put my own weakness into them. Either way, it's a drawback to their presenting a truly manly appearance. As long as I have one of the miserable objects before me, I can draw him; but as soon as his back's turned I get to putting ladies into men's clothes. (Alma qtd. in Howells 65)

Alma understands that gender is no black and white issue. Just as women have traits that are traditionally masculine, men display feminine characteristics that make the “truly manly appearance” impossible for Alma to illustrate. For Alma, there is no “truly manly,” just as there is no true happiness for young women who accept masculine dominance.

Alma also expresses her disgust for men’s inclination to be overtly masculine. She prefers drawing young women in gentlemen’s getup to prove that females are just as capable of fulfilling the professional roles that men dominate.

Alma does ultimately dominate over Beaton. She proves to him that her ideological stronghold is much more authentic and sound than his. Like James’ Richard, Beaton realizes that he does hold an intellectual superiority over his female counterpart. He is left disgusted with himself and again like Richard, contemplates suicide. However, Beaton is too cowardly to go through with shooting himself and instead is left with self-hatred at the novel’s conclusion. The last line in the novel attests that, “[i]n his heart he knew that he was a fraud” (322). Just like Euphemia brings Richard to a terrifying self-awareness, Alma does the same to Beaton.

It seems that Howells’ depiction of his female individualist is much more optimistic than that of James. Euphemia only develops an ego-driven ethic to exact revenge on those who oppress her, while Alma tries to change the outlook for working female artists. However, like James, Howells does not paint a bright future for his female

protagonist. The novel closes with the narrator informing the reader that “the future of the Leightons promises no immediate change” (328). Alma is being pursued by yet another selfish businessman who she shows no interest in her intellect. Also, her drawings are still being negatively reviewed by her male superior who believes she should not be given the liberty to draw in color: “He says her real hope is in black and white, and it is a pity for her to lose sight of her original aim of drawing for illustration” (328). Alma’s story ends with no escape from male oppression in sight. Although she rejects marriage to achieve her artistic dreams, she is again relentlessly pursued by another man and is still forced to play “second fiddle” to the men who market her art.

What James’ and Howells’ both suggest through their portrayals of this “survival of the fittest” ideology is that an independent woman cannot share a home with a male partner. Both authors create scenarios in which they are in clear competition with one another. James even calls such conflict the “game of life.” Unlike in Alcott’s and Davis’ stories, in which the female protagonists are finally enveloped in a community where they are treated equally by the men around them, James and Howells affirm that if a woman is to gain independence, it can only be done by self-sacrifice and alienation from men.

Communalism. In each of the texts, the female individualists’ connection to other women is significant to the ways in which they cultivate their world views. For Euphemia and the narrator in the “The Yellow Wallpaper,” estrangement from their sisters-in-law derives from the fact that their sisters care more about satisfying their male extensions—their brothers in these cases—than they do about supporting their sisters in

need. Like Euphemia, Howells' Alma remains critical of all women—those her age and even her own mother. In the men's stories the female individualists exhibit no desire for belonging to a strong female group. Conversely, for Gilman's narrator, her longing for a female community drives the story's plot and her exclusion from one leads to her ultimate break in sanity. Davis' Deb and Alcott's Polly introduce us to positive female communalism. Although they are initially contentious of the female groups who expect their companionship, the two eventually fall into ideal communities of women who encourage and support one another.

Howells' and James' female individualists care little for female comfort. Euphemia rejects her mother's marriage advice and finds comfort only in her "dogged obstinate clinging conscience" (James 281). Likewise, Alma makes fun of young woman who take art classes only as a hobby and devote their productivity to domestic responsibilities. She also rejects her mother's advice and refuses to marry or to integrate into society.

The narrator in "The Yellow Wallpaper," however, cannot rely wholly on herself and mourns her lack of female camaraderie. The narrator confides in the reader: "It is so discouraging not to have any advice and companionship about my work" (133). And, as she begins to hallucinate visions of women trapped behind the wallpaper, the reader understands that she seeks to find women who are repressed as she is so that with them she may attain liberation: "Sometimes I think there are a great many women behind, and sometimes only one, she crawls around fast, and her crawling shakes it all over" (140). The woman with trepidation symbolizes the narrator's hunger to share her experience

with others and join them in overcoming it. As she hallucinates, she tries to save the trapped and quaking woman: “As soon as it was midnight and that poor thing began to crawl and shake the patterns, I got up and ran to help her. I pulled and she shook. I shook and she pulled” (142). The narrator wants to liberate women imprisoned by the patriarchal oppression under which she suffers.

The narrator’s understanding of her own situation leads her to realize that there are countless women experiencing her plight. Such a discovery mortifies her: “I don’t like to look out of the windows even---there are so many of those creeping women, and they creep so fast” (143). She is so overwhelmed by this that she tries to return herself to her previous oblivion by symbolically re-trapping one of the creeping women. She imagines tying down a woman from behind the wall that she had previously envisioned herself freeing. Her sudden apprehension after such an awakening causes her to distrust her new perspective on the situation.

The narrator’s sister-in-law is quick to aid her brother in suppressing the narrator’s expression of self. Therefore, the narrator is weary at the thought of trusting other women. She assumes that, like her sister-in-law, the women behind the wall will betray her. Eventually, though, she envisions a separation between her sister-in-law and the women behind the wall that she ultimately joins. She begins to appreciate the space she shares with her fellow imprisoned women and develops a newfound love for the yellow-wallpapered room: “It is so pleasant to be out in this great room and creep around as I please! I don't want to go outside. I won't, even if Jennie asks me to. For outside you have to creep on the ground, and everything is green instead of yellow” (143). She begins

to associate her sister-in-law Jennie with the masculine ethics of the outside world and decides to remain within her room, a safe space where she has created the delusion of support within a female community.

In the texts by Davis and Alcott we are introduced to communities that cultivate the individualism and spirit of the female protagonists. The use of art and aestheticism in Davis' story and Alcott's novel provide insight into the importance of a beneficial female community for young women. Both stories depict contrasting communities of young women--one that is negative and subscribes to a masculine ideology, while the other is formed to support and enhance the protagonists' knowledge of female freedom.

In *Life in the Iron Mills*, Deb's story begins when she is returning home from work and is greeted by a group of drunken and unsteady "half-clothed women" (Davis 4). One of the ladies who greets her "needed the post to steady her. So did more than one of them" (4). The ladies invite Deb to a party, saying "Deb, if hur'll come, hur'll hef fun" (4). Deb declines the offer and one woman grows agitated by her refusal and, "inclining for a moment to show fight, and drag the woman Wolfe off with them" (4), she is subdued by her companions and they depart. It is clear the women desire a community of females and are disappointed that Deb does not join them. The women being "half-clothed" suggests that they find relief from the monotony of working life through male attention and sexual promiscuity. Deb's deformed figure and ugly appearance denies her the sexual attractiveness the other women maintain, which further alienates her from the rest of the women. In rejecting self-sexualization as way of overcoming the pain caused by hard labor, Deb also rejects the patriarchal norms placed upon working women.

Deb's unattractiveness makes it easier for her to understand the unhealthy nature of such behavior; she sees it as forced on the women, much like menial labor. Marilyn Friedman addresses the need for women to form their own sense of community that "fundamentally acknowledges the role of social relationships and human community in constituting both self-identity and the nature and meaning of the particulars of individual lives" (Friedman 276). These women attempt to form a female group but lack Deb's awareness of subscribing to masculine ethics.

Friedman addresses the issue of the community itself, placing much significance on the ideals practiced by such groups. If communalism is practiced based on traditional misogynistic principles, then it would fail to achieve whatever liberation its members desire. The communalism of the "half-dressed" women is centered on their desire for male companionship, thirst for alcohol and need to escape from their depressing labor. The women confine themselves to the roles inscribed on them by men and are thus no better off, even if they gain a false sense of security from their female companionship. The violent action one of the women attempts towards Deb symbolizes her acceptance of traditional masculine ethics. According to Friedman, male moralization causes issues when individuals become "incapable of human attachments based on mutuality and trust, unresponsive to human needs . . . and creating social institutions which tolerate, even legitimize, violence and aggression" (280). The drunken woman's desire to physically force Deb into joining them reflects her internalization of misogynistic oppression.

The description of the Quaker woman who Deb encounters after she is imprisoned for stealing Mitchell's money provides a clear contrast to the drunken women's emphasis

on physical attractiveness. Scheiber describes the Quaker woman who is the key to Deb's escape: her "figure represents a self-conscious retreat from aesthetic engagement; with her 'homely body, coarsely dressed in grey and white,' she is severely neutral rather than picturesque . . . Her spiritual strength is signified by her unaesthetic quality" (122). In her rejection of society's emphasis on beauty, the Quaker woman expresses her rejection of masculine principles.

Through her quaint image, peaceful demeanor and genuine compassion, the Quaker woman serves as a foil for Mitchell, who Hugh saw as beautiful because of his physique and expensive clothing. According to Harris, "Davis recognized that the power to be a spiritual being demands the ability not only to recognize oppression but also to transform the relations that encourage it" (47). By devaluing aestheticism and capitalism and glorifying naturalism and compassion through the Quaker woman's powerful presence and atypical exterior, Davis paints the ideal of beauty as an oppressive ethic upheld by society, as well as exposing the onerous nature of capitalism, while providing Deb's "ethic of care" as a liberating alternative to traditional masculine ethics.

Deb goes on to live "long years of sunshine, and fresh air" (Davis 31). She develops a strong ideology that leads her to a community where she is loved and respected by "silent, restful people" (31). Her new community is cultivated through equality and a return to the natural world, an embodiment of what Deb desired for herself and fellow industrial workers. Deb finds a community that, unlike the communal nature of the group of "half-clothed" women, does not rely on the ethics of a patriarchal and oppressive society. Deb finds what Friedman describes as the ideal community: "The

sorts of communities which will provide non-oppressive and enriched lives for women [in which relationships are] grounded in and sustained by similar interests and values, mutual affection, and possibilities for generating mutual respect and esteem” (286). Aestheticism and other traditionally masculine ideals are rejected in this community, where the Quaker woman and Deb are respected and esteemed by its members, both male and female.

Like Deb, Polly is at first faced with a group of women following a superficial and materialistic agenda. Polly leaves her initial female society after they criticize her public labor—she become a piano instructor—and refuse to engage in any humanitarian endeavors. Polly becomes disgusted with them for many reasons. One of her main concerns is that the young girls have little regard for their domestic staff of women workers and refuse to pay them a wage Polly thinks fair. After Polly calls on them to treat their housekeepers better, the young women turn their backs on her.

Eventually, Polly finds a true group of friends living in the boarding house she occupies once she is in the workforce: “As her butterfly acquaintances deserted her, she found her way into a hive of friendly bees, who welcomed her . . . Here Polly found her place at once, for in this little world love and liberty prevailed; talent, energy, and character took the first rank; money, fashion, and position were literally nowhere” (Alcott 127). Polly connects with this group of female artists and writers whose values are described as being the complete reverse of her initial girl companions.

As the narrator describes the group of young women Polly falls in with, references to the young female talents of Alcott’s culture appear: “Young teachers . . .

young writers . . . and some who tried to conquer independence. . . . All these helped Polly as unconsciously as she helped them, for purpose and principle are the best teachers we can have, and the want of them makes half the women of America what they are, restless, aimless, frivolous, and sick” (127). Like Gilman, Alcott was disgusted by young women who adhered to the masculine ethics that called on them to be simply domestic and materialistic. Through Polly’s experience, Alcott asserts that “purpose” and “principle” are what guide young woman to be successful. Also, as Polly explains to her cousin Fanny, doing service for one another is the essence of a female community: “Help one another, is part of the religion of our sisterhood, Fan” (152).

Charlotte’s West. Long before Gilman put such ideas to paper, young Charlotte struggled with her desire to be independent. These experiences are reflected in “The Yellow Wallpaper.” She sought independence but fell in love with Walter Stetson, a man who expected her adherence to the norm: “Walter’s understanding of womanhood and marriage was held by many American men and women in the late-nineteenth century. He believed that a woman was first a woman and was created to serve a man and bear his children. Any desire on her part for independence was mere selfishness” (Horowitz 79). Like her narrator at the beginning of the “Yellow Wallpaper,” Gilman initially adhered to such a code and scorned herself for desiring an assertion of artistic and personal independence: “[Charlotte] associated her variable life—one part of which sought independence—with illness, not health. It was hideous. It was to be prayed against” (72). Her yearning for independence and rejection of it sparked an inner conflict within the young writer that tormented her for decades and expressed in “The Yellow Wallpaper.”

Her misery was evident to Walter at times, but he saw himself as her only cure: “From Walter’s perspective, all negative messages coming from Charlotte—all her alternative blankness, anguish, emotionalism, fear, and doubts—could be resolved by sexual consummation” (57). Walter believe that by taking her to bed, thus consummating a marriage and putting her in her role as wife, she would be cured of all her ills: “He believed that he was taking her from a false life of intellect and independence to a true one of love. She was the wild colt to be saddled and brought to a course of usefulness for a man. He could not see Charlotte for what she was, a deeply conflicted being whose desires for independence and achievement outside marriage could not be long suppressed” (57). John does just the same in “The Yellow Wallpaper.” He believes that taking an assertive role over his wife, in this case forcing her into a childlike lifestyle, is what is best for her, never taking into account how she feels about her imprisonment.

It was not long before the pressures of marital submission began to weigh on Gilman, and she started exhibiting signs of melancholia. Contrary to Walter’s belief, Charlotte was not calmed or tamed after the consummation of their marriage and, instead, plunged into a deep depression while also feigning a mental illness. The insanity that develops in “The Yellow Wallpaper” narrator is inspired by the experiences Gilman underwent during her marriage.

Her reference to Dr. Mitchell in the short story reflects her true experience under his care, which did nothing but drive her closer to madness. After she was released, she attempted to continue practicing Mitchell’s therapy and plunged into the worst psychosis of her life. She wrote a letter to Howells describing her horrible experience: “[Mitchell]

sent me home with this prescription: 'Live as domestic a life as possible. Have your child with you at all times. Lie die an hour after every meal. Have but two hours of intellectual life a day. Never touch a pen, brush or pencil again as long as you live.' I did it, that summer, and came to the edge of insanity" (Horowitz 140).

After that summer, she realized that her only chance for an influential life would be to leave her husband and pursue a life of professional and individual enlightenment. In a letter to a friend, she exclaimed: "I am doing so much better! First, there was the great lift of my western plan! . . . Then I decided to cast off Dr. Mitchell bodily, and do exactly what I pleased!" (Horowitz 143). She moved with her friend Grace to Pasadena, California and, once settled, informed Walter that she could no longer carry on with their marriage. She wrote: "You are very dear to me my love; but there is no disguising the fact that my health and work lie not with you but away from you" (Horowitz 149). Upon his first visit with Charlotte in California, Walter was shocked at the positive influence she had on the community of female artists in Pasadena: "There is almost always someone here. Everybody seems to like to come, and Charlotte has a very long list of disciples among the young women. They simply adore her. Not only the young women but the older ones also" (Horowitz 156). Walter realized that Charlotte was not afflicted by a mental disorder but by the domestic isolation that Eastern American aristocracy inflicted upon her.

It was not a "rest cure" that Charlotte needed. Her happiness depended on her capability for self-expression, as well as the ability to develop her own complex view of the world: "What Charlotte found in Pasadena was less a place for 'rest' than a

welcoming one that appreciated her verve, talent and ambition” (Horowitz 156).

Charlotte established herself among the culturally elite in Pasadena: “In the next two and a half decades, she found success as a public intellectual, building an extraordinary career. Her lectures took her to cities all across the country, great and small” (Horowitz 192). She viewed her move out West as her salvation and used her literary works to emphasize her belief.

Dana Seitler describes how Gilman used “The Yellow Wallpaper” to demonstrate the fate of women who ignore masculine oppression and adhere to masculine ethics. She refers to Gilman’s teachings as “eugenic feminism,” in which she encouraged women to enlighten future generations on the dangers of misogynistic principles and the possibilities of liberation: “Gilman's work represents . . . and mitigates typical anxieties of the period, in which the body takes on the meanings and burdens of modernity, at times signifying its health but more often its degeneracy. We saw this in ‘The Yellow Wall-Paper’ and its creeping, crawling narrator” (Seitler 82). Seitler, referring to “The Yellow Wallpaper” as one of Gilman’s “degeneration novels,” describes some of her other works, including *The Crux*, as “regeneration novels” in which venturing West frees and revives her oppressed female protagonists: “As with the western . . . female characters ‘go west’ to find themselves and regain their health, sanity, and bodies in open outdoor space, places where they engage in rigorous activity as opposed to ‘rest.’ The transformation of these masculine genres seems to be a way for Gilman to expand the limits of her own and other women's domesticated social situations” (Seitler 81). Through her work, Gilman encouraged young women to escape the oppression of the established

patriarchy and enlightened them on the benefits of pursuing their own path in life through individualism and hard work.

On the contrary, In Wister's text, women are not capable of an independent life. The Virginian does not believe Em'ly the hen is cut out for the Western life: "I reckon maybe this hyeh lonesome country ain't been healthy for Em'ly to live in. It ain't for some humans" (Wister 56). Em'ly represents the "humans" who are not fit for living out West. The narrator agrees with the Virginian and views Em'ly as "demented" because of her desire to protect others.

Wister depicts the hen's motherly instinct to care for not just her own but others as the cause of her downfall: "She crossed the ditch with one jump of her stout blue legs . . . and was at once among the turkeys, where, with an instinct of maternity as indiscriminating as it was reckless, she attempted to huddle some of them away . . . and in a few moments Em'ly was entirely routed in her attempt to acquire a new variety of family" (59). According to the narrator, Em'ly's quest for her frontier family is arbitrary and careless, an assertion made clear by her sudden neglect for puppies she is quick to adopt:

It made Em'ly perfectly happy. To see her sitting all day jealously spreading her wings over some blind puppies was sufficiently curious . . . I longed for some distinguished naturalist . . . Em'ly scratched and clucked, and the puppies ran to her, pawed her with their fat limp little legs, and retreated beneath her feathers in their games of hide and seek. Conceive, if you can, what confusion must have reigned in their infant minds as to who the setter was! (59)

Em'ly's inclination to shelter those who do not have proper care—the setter neglected the puppies soon after birth—is freakish and unkind according to the narrator.

He sees it as unfair to the offspring because they will not understand who their biological mother is, not seeing that Em'ly provides them maternal comfort. In Wister's West, women must adhere to a man's perception of their role in society or not partake at all. This is further verified by Molly Stark's acceptance of the Virginian's murderous ways at the end of the novel.

Gilman incorporates some of the same tropes and myths of the Western and into her own texts, but she also accepts the possibility of a strong female presence out West: "Gilman's regeneration narratives both inhabit and dramatically unsettle the 'male' genres intent upon producing masculinity as an index for national regeneration. Western and adventure novels such as those made popular by Zane Grey and Owen Wister" (65). In contrast to *The Virginian*, Gilman reinterprets what Slotkin identifies as regeneration by suggesting that "ideologies of national progress--indeed, of U.S. expansionism and the project of empire--have depended upon the energies of motherhood at least as much as those of masculine contest" (Seitler 66). For Gilman, the American woman's right to venture West and discover herself was just as vital to the country's improvement as the man's Western adventure.

CONCLUSION

The closing of each text provides insight into the distinctions between the men and women authors' depictions of the female individualist. In the men's texts, the future is bleak for the female characters. Euphemia withdraws from her Parisian community into absolute seclusion. She is blamed for the death of her husband and is hated by all those around her. Alma's story ends with her in not so dire a state, yet she never achieves the professional advancement she desires. Instead, she is left with limited artistic opportunity, and she is constantly criticized by her male superiors. Both authors place their female individualists in a society that is completely repelled by their independent nature. Moreover, they present the women as ruthless in their desires and completely void rejecting the compatibility of domestic happiness and public service.

It seems that James and Howells wanted to simply experiment with placing rebellious females within their perspective of middle-class society to show their failings. On the other hand, the depictions of the female individualists in the women's texts are much more calculated. They voice nuanced messages of real political female figures and provide female readers with examples and ethical choices made by their female characters that are empowering. Although the messages vary among the texts, they all integrate real-world voices of strong women and instill in readers an uplifting message. These inspirational words embolden the female individualists to cultivate their own individual ethical code and encourage others to do the same.

According to Michele Mock, Deb's divination and the acts of the Quaker woman can be described as "early eco-feminism": "[Davis'] work calls for recognition and

awareness in the name of women and nature, approaching an early eco-feminist sensibility via dialogic impulses that rupture Western civilization's history of androcentric and anthropocentric biases" (45). Mock's portrayal of Davis as an ecofeminist captures the activism within her work, as well as her ability to artfully convey female strife through political and literary techniques that were not labeled until long after she wrote. Davis, through her character Deb, captures the essence of Mock's chosen definition of the term: "Eco-feminism seeks to reweave new stories that acknowledge and value the biological and cultural diversity that sustains all life. These new stories honor, rather than fear, women's biological particularity while simultaneously affirming women as subjects and makers of history" (Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein, qtd. by Mock 45). Davis crafts a story in which character are alienated by their traditional class and gender roles. Davis devalues masculine thought in an effort to uproot the patriarchal and capitalist ethics that rob individuals of their natural right to physical and spiritual liberation. It is through Deb's seemingly dumb and grotesque appearance that Davis reveals to her reader the true beauty of divine liberty.

Tillie Olsen, a monumental force in renewing interest in Davis' work in contemporary scholarship and a representative of Davis' literary influence, finishes her 1961 short story "I Stand Here Ironing" with a voice of concern about the narrator's daughter: "Only help her to believe—help make it so there is cause for her to believe that she is more than this dress on the ironing board, helpless before the iron" (12). Olsen's "dress" represents the problematic nature of aestheticism that Davis projects so well in her story, while the "iron" is the androcentrism institutionalized within a society like the

one from which Deb escapes. It is through Deb's story that, much before its time, Davis portrayed a number of foundational feminist ideals that resounded in the coming decades.

Alcott's most important message to female readers was the development of a strong work ethic. Alcott believed that a strong work ethic and the cultivation of communal relationships was key to a young woman's success: "Alcott openly advocates in *An Old-Fashioned Girl* a reformation in the spirit of the original American idealists: she wants to foster a free, healthy, hard-working citizenry that will work to build the independent community of America" (Schultz 45). She encouraged young women to group together and improve their opportunities for public service and domestic work, emphasizing that living a life in both the domestic and public spheres was possible.

Out of the female authors in my study, Gilman was most direct in her challenge of traditional masculine ethics. She placed great stock in the power of feminist ethics transcending generations and devoted much of her writing to the development of education for young women. She cleverly utilized traditionally "masculine" knowledge, such as scientific and evolutionary theory, to argue for women's roles in society: "Gilman can be interpreted as inhabiting a scientific discourse as a mode of female agency; the centrality of motherhood represented . . . a dialectic between the constraints of scientific culture and the ability to transform" (Seitler 82-83). "The Yellow Wallpaper" depicts the regression of the female form under the weight of science as an oppressive system. The story also represents the practice of medicine as a tool control the female body and provides readers with a grotesque and exaggerated portrait of the shocking truth behind scientific thought as a function of masculine dominance.

Comparing the depictions of the women written by Davis, Alcott and Gilman to those of James and Howells offers insight into the different approaches nineteenth-century American authors took in portraying the life of the non-traditional woman. The women writers endeavored to reveal the dangers of cultural and domestic oppression, arguing for the positive influence of the female individualists on society. On the other hand, the male authors only prove their inability to accept the female individualist as a productive member of society by alienating and exiling her. Thus, James and Howells create blatant scenarios of woman-versus-man, whereas Davis and Alcott paint portraits of communities in which men and women take mutual responsibility. While Gilman worked to depict the dangers of masculine dominance.

Although the conclusions vary among the texts' women characters, their existence in American literature is paramount to our acknowledgment of an emergence in the female individualist character. As these authors exercised liberty in their literary depiction of women going against the grain and establishing a sense of autonomy, they marked a cultural shift in the perception of the American woman. Their portrayal of the female individualist also highlights the development of an emerging female readership, one that encouraged Davis, Alcott and Gilman to create an endearing, truthful portrait of the American woman and pressured James and Howells to explore the complexity of a realistic female character.

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