The Whole(y) Family: Economies of Kinship in the Progressive Era

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In his chapter of the collaboratively written novel The Whole Family (1908), Henry James writes that “one has only to look at any human thing very straight . . . to see it shine out in as many aspects as the hues of the prism; or place itself, in other words, in relations that positively stop nowhere” (167). The comment, typically Jamesian in evoking the multiplicity and complexity of social ties, also connotes human beings and things. His metaphor of the prism suggests that social relations are always refracted by and understood through inanimate objects, and his troping of sociability in terms of visual “shine” rather than tactile feelings or emotions implies that the aura of the commodity may have much to do with the form and experience of human interconnections in modernity. James’s remark captures the problems of both the cooperative venture that was The Whole Family and the state of American kinship in the Progressive Era: viewing the family in much less “straight” terms than he pretends to, he gesturers toward a set of possible liaisons extending laterally, “positively stop[ping] nowhere.”1 And The Whole Family even makes literal this “shinniness” that either threatens or promises to engender such a complicated sociability: the family at the center of the novel owns a silverplate factory, which turns out to have serious implications for the question of how marital relations in particular can be limited. June Howard has recently situated the novel in terms of the family business of Harper & Brothers publishing house, but there is another “family business” lurking in the novel, one whose past includes much more literal investments in the business of family.2 The silverplate factory grounds The Whole Family in a historically specific legacy of competition between intensive and extensive families—that of monogamous versus plural marriage in the Oneida Community.

The Whole Family consists of 12 chapters published serially in Harper’s Bazar, each written by an author affiliated with Harper & Brothers.3 William Dean Howells conceived of the project as a portrait of an American family of “middling circumstances, of average culture and experiences,” whose typicality and peccadilloes would be charmingly explored in a plot narrated by each family member in turn, as they discussed the upcoming nuptials of one of the daughters (“Letter to Elizabeth Jordan” 225). Elizabeth Jordan, the editor of Harper’s Bazar, excitedly took on the challenge, and Howells kicked off the series with a first chapter. As might be expected from an author whose most famous works centered on bourgeois married couples, Howells begins with the paterfamilias: “The Father” introduces Cyrus Talbert, a businessman living in upstate New York, who is dismayed to learn that his daughter Peggy has affianced herself to a college classmate whom he has not met. The chapter depicts Talbert through the typical Howellsian strategy of an onlooker who narrates—neighbor Ned Temple, the new owner of the town newspaper. Temple explicitly links the Talbert father with the state, noting that Talbert is “a despot, perhaps, but he was Blackstone’s ideal of the head of a state, a good despot” (12). Although Talbert’s authority is clearly on the wane, Temple’s offhand remark alerts us to one context for The Whole Family: the fact that the federal government had recently intervened upon the marriage tie whose regulation was constitutionally remanded to the individual states. It had done so in at least two ways: in 1890, the Mormons were forced to renounce polygamy as a condition for Utah’s entrance into statehood (Grossberg 123), and in 1907, the year that The Whole Family began serialization in Harper’s Bazar, Congress declared for the first time that women who married foreigners must follow the national allegiances of their husbands (Cott 143). More broadly, the years between 1887 and 1906 saw a steep rise in the degree to which state legislatures took control over the formation of families, tightening laws concerning the age of consent, interracial union, the mental and sexual fitness of the partners, and remarriage (Mintz and Kellogg 126). Talbert may not interfere so directly with his daughter’s marital choices, but the first chapter suggests that he too wants to keep his own family under some degree of control.

“The Father” proceeds through the family tree as it was, in fact, articulated through the legal kinship terms recognized and increasingly demanded by the Progressive-Era state—that is, those centered on the monogamous, male-headed household recently bolstered not only in the aforementioned acts, but also by a series of Supreme Court cases affirming the rights of husbands (Cott 160).4 For the novel’s first 12 pages, Talbert and Temple discuss only wives, children, and houses; a passing remark upon the family home’s panoptic “lookout at the top” implies that although Talbert may feel embattled, he still claims some right to supervise his wife...
and daughter (Whole Family 9). As he turns to the reader to describe
the silverplate factory from whence Talbert supports the household,
Temple mentions his friend’s daughter- and son-in-law, then the
younger children still living at home: so far, only characters
descended from Talbert by marital and reproductive relations have
entered the novel. Talbert’s mother-in-law gets a brief mention, as
do the family doctor, Talbert’s future son-in-law, and Talbert’s
unmarried, unnamed sister; thus the characters are sequenced and
discussed with “nuclear” relations at the forefront and extended
family and friends in the background.

In the chapter’s only plot development, Ned persuades a reluc-
tant Cyrus to announce his daughter Peggy’s engagement in print
and thereby to signal his paternal authority over the upcoming nup-
tials. If Cyrus is a benign figure for state control over kinship, the
newspaper signals the role of the supposedly independent, print pri-
cate sphere in bolstering that control: as Ned puts it, “you can have
the engagement reach our public in just the form you want” (28).
Yet Cyrus also understands that he gives up some prerogative by
permitting outsiders access to his family matters; the newspaper also
signals the capacity of popular media and the identifications it pro-
duced to undermine the boundaries of the domestic family and
widen the borders of the household. When Temple’s wife later ex-
presses doubt about the proprieties of announcing the engage-
ment, Temple asks, “What is the matter? . . . It’s a public affair, isn’t
it?” She replies, “It’s a family affair—,” but Temple trumps her
comment: “Well, I consider the readers of The Banner as part of the
family” (29). As critic Susanna Ashton writes, his statement “sets
the stage for exploration throughout the rest of the text as to where
the family does indeed begin or end” (65), and indeed the serial
novel was a perfect form for suggesting that “family” could go on ad
infinitum, enveloping any number of characters, writers, or even
readers.

This first chapter of The Whole Family, then, also recapitulates
Howells’s vision for the collaborative endeavor of “publishing the
family.” As Howard has aptly titled her book about the novel, The
Whole Family puts the modern family on public display, even while
simultaneously acknowledging that the family is a construction
whose roles are at least partially interiorized through publications.
That is, its authors and readers alike seemed to recognize that con-
temporary family feelings were products of the print materials that
were increasingly mass-marketed to gendered and age-stratified
niches, which included not only household entertainment magazines
like Harper’s Bazar, but also the publications of reformist women’s
clubs and settlement movement leaders (Schneider and Schneider
93–113). The writers of The Whole Family clearly had great
metafictional fun thematizing problems of literary style and novelis-
tic unity in terms of family harmony or lack thereof. Ashton’s
research on the production and reception history of the novel also
reveals that readers of Harper’s Bazar were explicitly invited into
circuits of identification and belonging. The audience was given a
list of the 12 authors and invited to guess the authorship of each
chapter; one reader suggested that women’s clubs could use the
guessing game to study literary styles, and this same reader identi-
fied him- or herself as belonging to “the big BAZAR family” (qtd.
in Ashton 76 n. 13). The Whole Family was, in a sense, an advertise-
ment not only for Harper & Brothers but also for a “modern.”
“American” family whose relations were supposedly governed by
companionable mutual regard and shared activities, rather than by
economic relations, absolute paternal or conjugal authority within
the household, or the force of law beyond it (Mintz and Kellogg 113).

Yet Talbert’s concerns, and the orderly march of family mem-
bers across the chapter, also resonate with Howells’s own seemingly
benign regulatory role within print culture. As several critics have
described it, the larger project of literary realism organized in the
late nineteenth century saw Howells at the helm of the Atlantic Monthly, where he brought outsiders into print, organizing a cadre
of authors in part by pigeonholing them into the gendered categories
of an important realism (male) and a less important domestic region-
ality (female). In this way, even as Howells fostered relations of
patronage and influence across gendered and generational lines, he
also controlled other possible promotional relations among these
authors, other ways of critically constellation their works. Gender
and generation are very much a professional as well as familial issue
in The Whole Family, and the problems of regulating both kinship
and writers are not merely analogous but thoroughly intertwined.
For Howells intended his first chapter to serve as a template for the
succeeding ones; he had imagined them being developed in chapters
proceeding dynastically from grandmother to father and mother, then
through their children all organized in a hierarchy of relations
dicted by maleness and marriage (first son and daughter-in-law, then
daughter and son-in-law, finally a little girl and boy), and
finally through their unmarried adult relations, including a maiden
aunt and a young girl, ending with a “Friend (female) of the
Family . . . [to] sum it up” (“Letter to Elizabeth Jordan” 224). The
novel’s table of contents, however, reveals the unruly way in which
the chapters actually emerged when Jordan solicited individual
authors; the father appears first, met immediately by his own sibling
the aunt, and the other family members follow haphazardly. This
happened because the monthly serialization process demanded that
each chapter be published when it was ready, with the cumulat-


manuscript forwarded like a chain letter to the next available author, for him or her to build upon in the next chapter. Authors had other professional commitments to juggle, and so the novel was handed off to whomever could write his or her part soonest (Bendixen xix; Jordan 261).

In short, the characters’ generations and genders fail to present themselves in proper order because their male and female creators were already entangled in work relations elsewhere. Yet even so, Howells’s initial blueprint attempted to merge the form of the novel, the professional relations among his authors, and the logic of patrilineal kinship. This makes the usual disjunctions between author and first-person narrator especially striking in *The Whole Family*. From among an elder set of established writers and a younger, emerging group, each author was chosen for his or her facility with a particular kind of character or story. Howells had, of course, made his mark on literature with *A Modern Instance*, his 1882 novel of marriage and divorce, and as the “dean of American letters,” he was perfect for *The Whole Family*’s “Father.” But the rest of the older generation of writers led lives that far exceeded the confines of the domestic novel or the roles their characters were supposed to play. Mary Eleanor Wilkins Freeman, commissioned to write the second chapter on “The Old-Maid Aunt” because of her famed portrayals of New England women, had both a female companion and an unsuccessful marriage from which she eventually obtained a legal separation (Glasser 155–57, 201–02). Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, who contributed the eighth chapter narrated by “The Married Daughter,” married very late (Kessler 81). Recruited for the part of the seventh chapter’s “Married Son,” Henry James had a homoerotic life or lack thereof that has been fully recuperated by recent queer critics. Several in the younger generation led even rarer lives. Mary Heaton Vorse, known for her portraits of the elderly and hence solicited for the staid voice of the third chapter’s Grandmother, had premarital sex, married twice, and miscarried what appears to have been an illegitimate child (Garrison 25–26, 61, 184). The autobiography of Jordan, who took on the fifth chapter narrated by the schoolgirl Alice, reveals that she never married and lived among women her entire adult life. Edith Wyatt, who gave voice to Mrs. Talbert in the ninth chapter, lived with her mother and also remained single (Bremer 270). Alice Brown, another New England writer in Freeman’s tradition who provided the eleventh chapter narrated by the daughter Peggy, never married but enjoyed a “Boston marriage” with the bohemian poet Louise Imogen Guiney and an apparently unconsummated epistolary relationship with the Reverend Joseph M. Lelen (Fisken 53). Mary Stewart Cutting’s life seems not to have been documented. Only three authors structured their personal lives with monogamous marriage at the center—John Kendrick Bangs, the humorist who penned the son-in-law Tom Price’s chapter six (Bangs 88, 253); Mary Raymond Shipman Andrews, the author of “boys’ books” who wrote the schoolboy Billy’s chapter 10 (Kondelik 29); and Henry Van Dyke, who capped off the project with a final chapter on “The Friend of the Family” Gerrit Wendell (Kunitz and Haycraft 1445). Significantly, the characters of these three authors—Price, Billy, and Wendell—each meddle considerably with the wayward desires of other characters. Given that many of the project’s other authors led such unconventional intimate lives, though, not a few must have viewed Howells’s dynastic and patriarchal template with some amusement.

Both the structural disordering of the novel’s generations, and the incongruities between the family the writers portrayed and the forms their actual social lives took, seem to have set the stage for the authorial high jinks that followed. Freeman performed the most wicked reversal of gender and generational hierarchies, as all of the novel’s critics have recognized. Her chapter, “The Old-Maid Aunt,” displaces the father and recenters the novel on the “spinster” aunt Elizabeth, whom she nicknames Lily and turns into an alluring, somewhat narcissistic woman who seems to be in her mid-30s. As Elaine Showalter and Cynthia Griffin Wolff each have shown, the name Lily has its own history in women’s writing and had changed from symbolizing purity in antebellum literature to indicating modern sexuality by the postbellum years (Showalter 139, Wolff 114–15). Sweeping in for a visit, this newly minted Lily is a veritable flirtation machine; she immediately wrecks Peggy’s impending nuptials by rekindling the affections of the groom-to-be Harry Goward, who had once admired her, and throughout the course of the novel she takes claims to several other men’s interest. Howells might have depicted himself as the beneficent patriarch of realism in the figure of Cyrus, but in the figure of Lily, Freeman presents herself and her fellow New England women writers as potentially quite dangerous: not elderly recorders of fading household traditions, but cosmo- politan women who, far from being sexually sterile, are capable of engendering all kinds of desires. Lily’s transformation reminds us that many female magazine writers, including several involved in *The Whole Family*, subordinated motherhood and marriage to other interesting intimacies across the boundaries of generation, reproduction, and heterosexuality, and that in even their supposedly domestic works these affinities were often mediated by the exchange of objects and cultural practices. Generally, critics have seen these relations as either matrifocal and removed from the market or exploitative and gender neutral. But this Lily comes across as thoroughly gilded, an icon both for the era’s cosmopolitan and consumerist New Woman
and for James’s powerful “shining”—that is, of creating through material and affective exchanges a sense of relationality far exceeding the bonds of blood and marriage. If within the terms of the novel Cyrus is explicitly linked to the US government’s increasing interest in regulating marriage, I would suggest that Lily is linked to the market’s ability to foster both hetero- and homosocial, nonmarital social ties based on labor and consumption.

The metaphorical gilding of Lily occurs on a more literal level in the novel as well, as its writers make direct connections between her ability to incite desires and the activities of the family-owned business, the Plated-Ware Works of Eastridge. Cyrus’s mother-in-law, Mrs. Evarts, referred to throughout the novel as the Grandmother, comments: “Machinery has put a stop to many of our old occupations, and the result is a generation of nervous women who haven’t a single thing in life to occupy themselves but their own feelings. . . . If one wanted to dig into the remote cause of things, one might find the root of our present trouble in these changed conditions, for Cyrus’s sister . . . is one of these unoccupied women” (62). As Dale Bauer notes, the Grandmother speaks as if industrialization has literally produced an excess of freedom in the form of neurasthenia, for Lily’s indiscriminate pursuit of men results directly from the elimination of women from an all-female domestic production process—troped here, I would add, in the nostalgic terms of women’s agrarian digging and root gathering (114). Grandmother later states that “Lily Talbert is one of those women who live on a false basis” (68). These comments prefigure discussions of the Talberts’ silver factory itself, in which the eldest son, Charles Edward, a would-be artist, dismisses the thin and shiny plating as “awful metallic wash” (168) and a friend of the family calls the manufacture the “business of metallic humbug” (300). In short, the novel more than once analogizes attachments based falsely on desire—perhaps the most “human thing” generating that Jamesian “shine”—to commodities made of false silver.

Certainly, money and extramarital sexuality have long been analogized, but in The Whole Family, the analogy reveals a historical connection. The unnamed “human thing” at the center of the novel, one that united love and labor in a way that was anathema to American marriage law, must surely be Oneida Community, Ltd., which was the only silverplate factory in the 1900s in all of upstate New York. This corporation was formed out of the remnants of a communal living arrangement whose family had encompassed some 300 members (Muncy 195). Indeed, the connection between the Talberts and Oneida appears once more when the lawyer for the silverplate works, Cyrus Talbert’s son-in-law Tom Price, remarks that “On the whole I am glad our family is no larger than it is. It is a very excellent family as families go, but the infinite capacity of each individual in it for making trouble, and adding to complications already sufficiently complex, surpasses anything that has ever before come into my personal or professional experience” (Whole Family 124). His joking redundancy “complex complications” clearly links the interferences of extended family members (particularly Lily) to the myriad and shifting relations among the writers as each jostled the others to make his or her character central, mainly by introducing sudden unmotivated plot shifts. The joke also suggests the noun complex, the word for a cluster of symptoms whose basis was the nuclear family romance, and which had recently entered the English language in its psychosomatic sense when James Strachey translated Sigmund Freud’s work in 1900. But most importantly, the remark calls forth complex marriage, a form of union in which everyone was married to everyone else, invented by John Humphrey Noyes and practiced among Perfectionists at Oneida until 1879. For all its associations in the antebellum American mind with “free love” and despite the fact that Oneidans themselves referred to their sexual practices this way from 1848 onward (Spurlock 83), complex marriage was actually among the most systematized of the utopian sexual experiments. Monogamy was prohibited; elder members introduced the young into sexual intercourse; men withheld ejaculation in a practice called “male continence.” Noyes, founder of the community, was the final arbiter of who would sleep with whom. The only unregulated aspect of complex marriage—and its link to the “complex complications” that so annoy the lawyer Tom Price—was that its supervision occurred entirely outside of New York domestic law (Muncy 160–79; Spurlock 79–83). Those who abused the system were taken to “mutual criticism circles” within the community, in which other members pointed out their errors (Muncy 184).

The Whole Family likewise included “mutual criticism” not only between characters but in the forms of ongoing correspondence between irritated authors and Jordan and metafictional commentary that included jabs at other authors involved in the project. But the presence of Oneida in the novel is more than just a formalist coincidence on the order of analogy. Howells, the very man who introduced the detail of the silver factory into the plot, had a direct connection with cooperative systems of marriage and manufacture. His father was a follower of the philosophies of Robert Owen, founder of the New Harmony community of 1825–28, and the Howells family spent a year between 1850 and 1851 running a cooperative venture at New Leaf Mills, “a community of choice spirits for the enjoyment of a social form which enthusiasts like Robert Owen had dreamed into being” (Howells, Years 38). In the 1880s, Howells himself would become enamored of Tolstoyan socialism (Lynn 27).
And most directly, his own wife, Elinor Mead Howells, was a niece of Noyes. Although Elinor’s mother rejected her brother Noyes’s commune to modern capitalist corporation in the 1880s. In order to compete with the Connecticut monopoly on silverplate, in 1901 the company hired sculptor Julia Bracken to design its high-end tableware. Cyrus Talbert and his son-in-law Tom Price likewise want the artistic eldest son, Charles Edward, and his equally artistic wife, Lorraine, to design for the Plated-Ware Works. Oneida made itself into a national brand early in the century by enlisting Quaker Oats to offer Oneida spoons as premiums (Noyes 190), and by 1905 and 1906 it was sending emissaries to South America and Australia to pursue the possibility of foreign markets (Edmonds 50). Similarly, Talbert intends to “turn out more ice-pitchers than any firm in the world” (Whole Family 149) and has enlisted his journalist friend Gerrit Wendell to promote his products in Wendell’s travels to Asian countries.

But both the actual and the fictional companies were also beset by the complications of “family” rhetoric in an era when household production no longer made family roles and labor roles coterminous. Alarmed by the national defeat of the Mormons in Reynolds v. United States in 1878, Oneida had given up complex marriages for its managerial positions (Noyes 109–15).

Thus the novel’s claims to realism are also part of a literary history shaped not only by gender, economy, and representational crisis, as Howard and Ashton contend respectively, but also by the dichotomy between monogamous marriage and the plural marital forms invented in the US during the antebellum nineteenth century but eventually stamped out by the federal government in the postbellum era and beyond. The relationship between American realism and the nineteenth-century problem of plural marriage has yet to be fully understood, though certainly one would want to pursue such “incidents” as, for instance, Mark Twain’s comments on the Mormons in The Innocents Abroad (1869), Verena Tarrant’s experience in the Cayuga Community in James’s The Bostonians (1886), or the shadowy presence of Fourierism in Joseph Kirkland’s forgotten novel Zurz: The Meanest Man in Spring County (1887). For now, I can do no more than offer The Whole Family as perhaps the end point and limit case for this relationship.10

1. The Family Business

In 1907–08, both the fictional Plated-Ware Works of Eastridge and its historical counterpart, the Oneida Community, Ltd., were moving along the same trajectories toward national and international dominance. Oneida had transformed itself from utopian socialist community to modern capitalist corporation in the 1880s. In order to
era, and of outsiders running a family business in terms of a problem marriage: a tenuous partnership emerging outside the family insofar as Peggy meets her beau at college, but beset by interference from both within the household and beyond it. From within her home, Peggy’s younger siblings manage to lose a crucial telegram in which her fiancé explains his seeming infatuation with Lily and declares his love for Peggy. From beyond the Talbert household, Peggy’s older, married sister, Maria, lives up to her nickname “Meddly-Maria”. Charles Edward and his wife, Lorraine, plan to spirit Peggy away with them to Paris; and of course Lily, the only character outside the direct line of descent and marriage, throws Peggy’s plans completely awry by arousing her fiancé.

The newly named Oneida, Ltd., on the other hand, seems to have allegorized its stigmatized marital system through a series of economic changes and, eventually, images. At first, the company simplified its economic affairs, eventually selling off its canning, thread, and animal trap manufacturies and concentrating on the business of making silverplate. But once Oneida focused on silver, it both obliquely referred to and effaced its own scandalous history of familial formation by associating female youth and sexual allure with desirable commodities, and these commodities with marriage. Bracken’s newly designed silver teaspoons were initially offered in 1901 as a premium in boxes of Quaker Oats, a product associated with home and babies. But by 1911–12, Oneida had enlisted illustrator Coles Phillips to create advertisements centered as much on young women as on the silverware they promoted, in what Oneida’s own company historian calls, somewhat dubiously, “the first ‘pretty-girl’ advertisement in America” (Edmonds 47).

Because Freeman’s second chapter recentered The Whole Family around Lily Talbert, the other authors were forced to focus on the complications the “pretty girl” both reflected and seemed to engender. As Howard has noted, Lily greatly resembles critic Martha Banta’s model of the Beautiful Charmer; Alice Barber Stephens’s illustrations of Lily for the novel also resonate with the mildly flirtatious “American Woman” series of images that Harper’s Bazar ran on its covers during the months that the novel was serialized (Howard 197–98). Lily is not only a consumer but a commodity. Yet she not only represents “modern” gender and sexual identity as themselves commodity forms but also obliquely figures the links between obsolete and emerging affiliative forms: first, the shift from the socialist communes of the antebellum years to market-niched groupings based on consumption, and second, the rhetorical and legal changes to marriage that both drew from and competed with these forms of sociability. In other words, it is not a coincidence that the showy Lily delays the formation of a marital couple.

A set of Oneida ads suggests the paradoxes that emerge when a former polyamorous community markets to the heteronuclear family, and also calls to mind The Whole Family’s linked themes of gendered consumption, a profusion of possible social roles, and familial entropy. An advertisement from 1903 features an elderly, sexless, fully domestic woman holding a spoon and a fork in each hand; the copy suggests that both have attained “a beautiful old age.” The ad implies a perfect fit between the aging woman and the long-lasting commodity—but the woman holds the utensils as if she knows how to use them, such that the ad ultimately subordinates form to function. But as the advertising manager of the American Cereal Company had informed Oneida executives about this kind of image, Oneida was “trying to advertise silverware . . . and not old women” (Edmonds 46). Oneida then briefly turned to advertisements showing its cutlery grouped in artistic arrangements, one ad suggesting that the silver was “for Christmas” and so emphasizing the commercial basis of its rituals.

But later ads by Phillips suggest that Oneida’s solution was to focus not on silverware at all, nor even on the larger families suggested by Christmas dinners, but on heterosexual brides-to-be and newlywed women—this time young rather than old. The advertisements of 1911 and beyond feature Phillips’s “Fadeaway Girl,” an illustration technique he debuted in May 1908 on the first color cover of Life Magazine. In the fadeaway, predominantly female bodies appear in the same plane as the background, the latter taking the place of clothing so that the model’s heads and limbs seem to float detached from their corporeal moorings (see Fig. 1). With the “Fadeaway Girl,” woman became pure geometry, all surface. This play between figure and ground suggests blurrings between surface and depth, exterior and interior selves, subject and object, decorator and decoration, pieces and wholes. The fadeaway was the perfect technique to sell things to women now allowed to partially display their legs in public, and now fully liberated from the antebellum doctrine of sincerity into a profusion of possible masks and personae—the Beautiful Charmer, the Outdoors Pal, the New England Woman (Banta 46).

As Howells seems to have recognized when he introduced the silver factory into The Whole Family, silverware was the perfect product with which to emphasize the specular nature of female consumerism, whereby women looked at objects that supposedly enhanced their looks while also looking at other women looking at commodities and at men looking at themselves and other women. But silverware also lent itself to the project of containing these energies by invoking the marital household. In an example from Oneida,
a 1911 fadeaway ad printed in the *Saturday Evening Post* directly addresses the relays between depth and surface, interiority and publicity, that structured “modern” familial roles in the Progressive Era, while explicitly registering magazine culture’s contradictory role in all of this. It shows a heterosexual couple conversing about plated versus solid silverware; the husband asks, “how is table silver the worse for having a center of different metal?” (Fig. 1). Here, interior matters less than exterior: both products and the supposedly private relations between men and woman are on display. The ad twins this discussion of silverware’s interiority with an imagistic suggestion that not only shopping but reading itself helps forge the interplay of heterosexual affection. For the ad self-reflexively depicts the man perusing his own *Saturday Evening Post*, his gaze arrested by the

same kind of picture we are looking at, while the woman glances at him with an open book in her hand. According to the visual logic of the ad, then, marital roles are learned, heterosexuality comes at least partly from the outside in, and middle-class male-female relations are open to a wide audience in a way unthinkable during the antebellum years. Yet each partner seems as enchanted by his or her reading materials as by his or her spouse. This sets up a geometry of desires that travel outside this family to the *Saturday Evening Post* reader and back: Are we supposed to want the magazine? the silverware? to be part of the marriage portrayed? An ad printed in the *Post* two years later continues the motif of print culture, for it features a woman writing in her diary with an open case of silver beside her. Now the man is literally out of the picture, and the woman’s gaze toward the reading public, her direct address to herself in the form of the diary, and her willingness to have her diary “published” imply that the silverware has given her a sense of social selfhood beyond that offered by her marriage.

A 1912 ad takes this idea to an extreme, portraying a younger girl with an open wooden box of silver again; this time she appears to be not yet married, and the box seems to be part of a potential trousseau (see Fig. 2). Her emotions are mediated neither by a husband nor by reading materials but directly by the commodified object. The caption for this advertisement reads “A Case of Love at First Sight.” At first, the girl appears to be praying for marriage; the connection between cutlery and incipient bridehood certainly belies Oneida’s legacy of polyamorous unions. But the advertisement also seems to capture Lily’s “false basis,” for the girl might as easily be worshipping the goods themselves: the “case of love,” like Freud’s “case of hysteria,” refers to emerging psychoanalytic methods for analyzing female desire. And of course a “case of love” acknowledges that romance is itself a packaged commodity, a mass-mediated substitute for older relations of production between men and women. The ad’s implicit threat is that the girl might bypass the groom altogether, that the love between bride and her trousseau—or the triangular love connecting the magazine reader, the young woman, and the consumer goods—might be far more fulfilling than heterosexual marriage and reproduction. Perhaps the “case of love at first sight” occurs even between the would-be bride and herself, miniaturized and replicated in a series of tiny reflections on the glinting surfaces of the silverplate she so admires.

In short, in Oneida ads silver serves equally to multiply “love” and emotional connection and to bind the dyadic couple solely to one another. In *The Whole Family*, Lily’s relationship to her niece’s fiancé, Harry Goward, mimics the 1912’s specular replication of desiring brides. Lily and Harry seem to know one another because
some time ago at a Halloween party they had performed a mock engagement that they describe as taking place within the context of a “mirror trick” (Whole Family 130). Lily herself takes these reflective relations to a gynosocial extreme, for she declares that “I believe I am nearer to loving [Ned Temple] for his love for another woman than I ever was to loving him for himself” (50) and that upon meeting the unnamed woman whom Cyrus Talbert courted before he married Mrs. Talbert, “I fell in love with her myself!” (40). Elsewhere, she remarks that another long-lost lover “may be in the Far East, with a harem” and that she herself “like[s] the harem idea better than the single wife” (47). Seen in light of the Oneida Community, Ltd., silverplate in The Whole Family is a kind of Baudrillardian mirror of overproduction. That is, the novel acknowledges that labor may engender new forms of collectivity, but consumption engenders a surfeit of possible signs and therefore of possible social imaginaries (Baudrillard 19–20). Perhaps the most interesting shift The Whole Family captures is that the modern family, unmoored from functional relationships of dependency and exchange between men and women, adults and children, is now itself arrayed along this hall of mirrors. For the family appears within the novel as it must have appeared in early-twentieth-century life, as a set of templates for subjectivity and behavior that yielded no usable product, nothing more than potentially endless replication and recombinati

2. The Business of Family

Of all the novel’s chapters, James’s “The Married Son” looks most pointedly at the “human thing” of the domestic family and redescribes it as both a rigid ideological construct forged in the crucible of modern industrial labor relations and a flexible improvisatory form reworked by emerging consumer practices. At one point, the narrator, Charles Edward, explains that his grandmother’s venerable “Character” comes from her own daughter’s appropriated artisanal labor: “Mother . . . arranges herself, exactly, to appear a mere contemporary illustration (being all the while three times the true picture) in order that her parent shall have the importance of the Family Portrait. . . . Mother makes [Grandmother’s Character] up for her, with a turn of the hand, out of bits left over from her own” (Whole Family 158–59). Here, family relations have not simply been superseded by those of industry, nor has the manufacturing system only produced an overheated space of pure emotionality, as in the Grandmother’s comments. Rather, we see the work of “family” in the age of mechanical reproduction. Charles Edward seems to recognize that in enshrining the Grandmother, the Talberts figuratively compensate for the loss of household production and the resulting diminution of kinship based on dependency. His statement also calls to mind the history of graphic art that underlies The Whole Family, for he describes a woman who no longer takes her cues from her own mother but from “contemporary illustrations” like Charles Dana Gibson’s “Gibson Girl” of the 1890s, the “American Woman” covers, or the domestic scenes sketched by the novel’s illustrator, Stephens—even as, sitting at some sort of metaphorical spinning wheel, poor “Mother” also seems to be the last site of genuine craft labor. In James’s view, the aristocratic “Portrait” of a
multigenerational matriarchy is pure fabrication, a retroactive by-product of contemporary artistic performance on the order of Judith Butler’s model for gender, and yet no less a powerful reality for that. Alice Brown echoes this view in her comment to Jordan that the authors had become a sort of family: “We have said we were a purple cow and the result is that we veribly ‘be’ one” (Letter to Elizabeth Jordan, 27 Feb. 1906). Lily certainly recognizes the performative nature of family when she describes taking advantage of “the rôle of an old-maid aunt” (31), and it is she, rather than Mrs. Talbert, who more consistently and constantly molds herself after the “contemporary illustrations” that signal the death knell of middle-class women’s productive powers and the waxing of their consuming desires.

Although capitalist production may have disaggregated the household economy, James’s chapter makes clear that the distribution of its products actually requires consumers to be interpolated into obsolete roles. Yet once these roles are reconfigured as signs of “modernity” available for the taking, they can also be combined in multiple ways, and The Whole Family has tremendous fun with this. In addition to calling attention to the jumbling of generational structures in the order of chapters, The Whole Family features “spinster” Aunt Lily seducing Peggy’s much younger fiancé, an eldest daughter (Maria) who performs the duties of a mother toward her own siblings, and a shockingly precocious younger daughter (Alice). Gender and genre receive this treatment as well: When Twain (Samuel Clemens) turned Jordan down for the role of the youngest son, Billy, she hired Andrews, a female writer of boys’ stories, to do the job. Andrews wrote the tenth chapter, “The Schoolboy,” in the form of a confessional letter from Billy, in which he describes having witnessed a courtship between the family doctor and the supposedly affianced Peggy. Brown followed this up with her chapter, “Peggy,” which triumphantly reveals that Billy’s letter was actually written by Jordan’s character, the youngest daughter, Alice. At the very least, it is fair to say that Brown’s chapter in particular makes a mockery of what Michael Davitt Bell has identified as the realist wish not to call attention to the act of writing or the fact of representation. But here also, yet another “false basis” for a relationship, Alice’s rendition of a fictional engagement between Peggy and the doctor, enters the picture in the form of a literary hoax rather than a mirror trick. And in its exposition we see a woman writing as a woman (Brown), revealing another woman writing as a boy (Andrews) to have actually written as a girl (Alice) writing as a boy (Billy), in a veritably Shakespearean moment of literary cross-dressing. Perhaps the chapter even anticipates Virginia Woolf’s Orlando (1928) by 20 years, insofar as its play with the referentiality of both gender and literature may pay subtle tribute to Brown’s intriguingly masculine companion, Guiney, who called herself her father’s “young Amazon” and her mother “my wife.” Indeed, Guiney wrote stories narrated by male heroes and eventually assumed a male persona in her exchange of letters with another lifelong friend, which suggests that Brown was fully aware of both “performative” kinship and the literary power of gender crossing (Tully 176, 179–80).

And these energies continue centrifugally. Near its end, The Whole Family suddenly turns even further outward, focusing on two minor characters whose sole functions seem to be first to make explicit the linked reconfigurations of economy, kinship, and the gendering of genre by condensing them, and then eventually to displace the forms these changes invoke onto the past or into “foreign” territory. These characters are Lily’s long-lost lover Lyman Wilde, “the most radical and temperamental leader in the great handicraft development in this country” (221), and the business partner who replaces him in Lily’s heart, a Mrs. Ronald Chataway, “Magnetic Healer and Mediumistic Divulger” (290). Lyman Wilde’s name, of course, resonates with the very queer Oscar’s, and therefore with gender transgression, the sex trials of 1895 that solidified the criminal status of the homosexual, and a love of the artificial. But his character actually seems to be modeled on Elbert Hubbard, whom T. J. Jackson Lears calls “the most visible and eccentric craft leader in America” and who, between 1895 and 1915, published a little magazine called the Philistine, in which he railed against both marriage and Christianity (68). In fact, James may be directly alluding to this man when Charles Edward’s bohemian wife, Lorraine, appears in a dress the other characters misrecognize as a “Mother Hubbard”; by this time Oscar Wilde and other proponents of “artistic dress” had appropriated the housewifely garment initially named after a nursery rhyme (Severa 380). The link between sexual experimentation and the Arts and Crafts movement also shows up in this novel as a last vestige of communities such as Oneida. Lyman Wilde’s workshop, called “At the Sign of the Three-legged Stool” in what may be queerly read as a mild phallic joke, certainly reanimates traditional production processes (220). But it also seems to be a toolbox of “modern” female desire with Wilde himself at the center, since even the Talbert daughter-in-law Lorraine briefly and incongruously discusses her attraction to him. Wilde, however, goes one better than these suggestions of heterosexual promiscuity and renounces his love for Lily, running off to England to join a supposedly celibate Pre-Raphaelite fraternity in which spiritual relations among men will take the place of marriage.

After Wilde rejects Lily, the mesmerist and magnetist Mrs. Chataway appears, offering the novel’s busiest desiring machine an
infinite social horizon, “a connection which will lead to the widest possible influence” (291). Lily’s mentor seems to be a part of the Spiritualist movement that took flight in the second half of the nineteenth century (indeed, even the postcommunal Oneida Community experienced a takeover of its governing board by Spiritualists) (Noyes 43–44). Mesmerism and magnetism caused controversy from their very entrance into American culture, precisely because they evoked sexual congress outside of marriage: antebellum commentators worried that male mesmerists’ invasion of female willpower violated feminine purity (Brown 86–90, Smith 3–28). As Molly McGarry has argued, the Spiritualist ability to channel both male and female spirits also offered interesting possibilities for gender transgression; male and female mediums spoke with and as the opposite sex. Finally, Spiritualists transformed the communal-productive basis of early-antebellum socialist utopias into a series of reflective, specular, and affiliative relations for which the magnet was not only a hokum tool but a powerful metaphor. Spiritualism, that is, abstracted earlier communal labor practices and family forms into ethereal, invisible, unpredictable bonds between people present and absent. A mesmerist and her magnets could eventually “shine out in as many aspects as the hues of the prism,” as James wrote, by bringing new believers into the fold and charging them money to meet their spiritual antecedents, thereby placing herself “in relations that positively stop nowhere” as she broke the barriers between subject and object, male and female, the living and the dead, monetary and emotional ties (167). In *The Whole Family* the magnet, whose powers of reflection are weak but whose powers of attraction are strong, makes the affective and social possibilities registered by silvery plate into a powerful lure.

3. Circumscribing the Family

Yet in the end, relations do stop. I have noted that *The Whole Family* appeared in the context of a governmental crackdown on affinal forms (specifically polygamy and marriage to national “outsiders”). More broadly, during the postbellum years the Civil Rights Acts and Freedman’s Bureau brought former slaves’ relationships under the supervision of the state; the Mormons were forced to abandon their practice of polygamy; Native Americans were allocated “federal” (stolen) property only if they formed monogamous male-headed households; new immigration laws forbade polygamists from entering the US; the Progressive Era, married women’s nationality had been officially subsumed under that of their husbands; and states began to develop a series of eugenic tests to determine the fitness of couples to marry and thereby reproduce (Grossberg 147). And in 1907, the year that the first installment of *The Whole Family* appeared in Harper’s Bazar, the US revised its immigration laws yet again to exclude even those who believed in polygamy (Cott 139).

A very prescient earlier writer had explicitly argued that the US crackdown on kinship formation was a way of regulating the creation of new economic possibilities that might themselves emerge dialectically, that is, from the very nonmarital social formations enabled by both capitalism and the influx of immigrants into the US. Dyer D. Lum, the anarchist and socialist, wrote an 1886 pamphlet arguing that the antipolygamy movement was merely an extension of Northern capitalism and a centralized state, this time moving west rather than south. Lum asserted that the federal government’s seize of power over kinship and thus over free association set a precedent for overriding the arbitration processes of the labor movement: this argument illuminates some juridical aspects of Oneida and ultimately the politics of *The Whole Family*. In Lum’s view, labor activists should have had a vested interest in combating any governmental attempts to enforce the private property relations that appeared under the sign of monogamous marriage. First, he contended that the antipolygamy movement sought to force Mormons to give up communalism, to divide and privatize their collectively owned and maintained property. Although this did not follow for Mormons, who continued to maintain vast systems of cooperative distribution and production even after outlawing polygamy, it certainly did for Oneidans. Having given up complex marriage voluntarily in 1879, they were forced by money problems to reorganize as a corporation under four joint owners, the formerly affinal bonds among its members transformed into dividends shared among stockholders and profits shared among workers. Second, Lum argued that making Mormons adhere to federally mandated monogamy would ultimately rescind the judiciary autonomy of Mormon customary tribunals and by extension other ones as well: recognizing connections between Mormon arbitration processes and labor union negotiations, Lum defended absolutely a system in which “people should settle differences and disputes in private … reputable citizens should freely give their time to act as referees, and … the entire community should consequently move on harmoniously and united” (32). The Oneida Community intended to keep these prerogatives. Early on after abandoning complex marriage, Noyes attempted to introduce Circumscribed Marriage, forbidding community members to marry outsiders. When this failed, he regulated monogamous marriage by forcing couples to apply to a council of elders and endure a one-month waiting period. Eventually this control over the sexual pairings and
separations of members reemerged as a much more limited control over stock ownership and distribution: the official courts’ power to legislate marriage, as well as Oneidans’ wishes to couple, trumped Noyes’s charismatic power over kinship, leaving him jurisdiction only within the sphere of a free market. Having lost Noyes, however, the Oneidans were hardly any freer to marry as they chose than they were before; the choice of partner was now free, but the form of the relationship was increasingly regulated by the state.

Magazine fiction, newly collectivized in that authors now worked for particular publishing houses, may have engendered “communities” of authors and readers, and even eroticized social life. But it was not socialized; it did not produce the workmen’s associations to which Lum refers. As Ashton’s work examines in detail, The Whole Family’s collaborative “buck” stopped with the literary labor market: authors were paid a one-time fee rather than splitting the royalties, all of which went to Harper & Brothers, and they negotiated their contracts individually. The novel itself also performs a literary version of the federal crackdown on free sexual association and independent legislation, and of the retreat from communalism to private economic interests. As the Talbert daughter-in-law Lorraine remarks, “Stopping, that’s art” (167); a cease-desire is, indeed, what the bourgeois novel requires to be a novel at all. Thus the penultimate chapter of The Whole Family closes down its own multiplying affinal possibilities entirely, by dispatching Wilde to England and banishing Lily and Mrs. Chataway together to New York City. The novel represents the renewal of state control over kinship, specifically its focus on plural marriage, in the figure of Tom Price, business enthusiast and lawyer for the Plated-Ware Works: “I think I shall take up politics and try to get myself elected to the legislature, anyhow, and see if I can’t get a bill through providing that when a man marries, it is distinctly understood that he marries his wife and not the whole of his wife’s family, from her grandmother down through her maiden aunts, sisters, cousins, little brothers, et al.” (124). Tom fantasizes using the law not only to reduce the power of the extended family but also to prevent something that looks quite like Oneidan complex marriage, in which everyone is married to everyone else. Like Lum, only with the opposite goal, Tom recognizes that the state apparatus exists in part to ensure that new social relations are neither legitimate nor enduring. His remark suggests that capitalism is best furthered and regulated not predominantly by governmental interference in the economy per se, but by laws that reproduce the model of a wage-earning husband whose wife and children must depend solely upon him for sustenance.

In the end, The Whole Family contains the threat of pantagamy, polygamy, polyamory—of proliferative affinities in general—not merely by displacing it onto Wildean aestheticism and magnetic spiritualism, nor simply by exiling Lyman Wilde to England and rhetorically recasting Lily and Mrs. Chataway as a couple in flight from the family, nor even just by invoking legislation against plural marriage, but also by displacing the problem of excess desires onto Asia. That is, the novel participates in the era’s radically antimodernist, eroticized turn toward “Oriental” objects and ideas (Lears 175), even while the US had also turned toward Asia as an obverse way to regulate its own citizens’ sex lives. Especially after the Mormon surrender, Asia served as a rhetorical foil and a fulcrum linking nationality and monogamy: as Nancy Cott has detailed, even mid-nineteenth-century political theorists had racialized polygamy by associating it with “Asiatic” cultures, and the 1875 Page Act enforced racist immigration quotas by prohibiting Asian women suspected of prostitution—i.e., of having multiple partners and mixing business with sexuality—from entering the US (114–15). The Whole Family has its own racist geopolitics of family, by means of which the many “hues” of James’s “prism” are separated and hierarchically reordered into an Anglo-Saxon heterosexual-monogamous nation and its desiring Others. Frantic about the dissolution of Peggy’s engagement, Cyrus telegrams his old friend Gerrit Wendell, a reporter who has just returned from a professional trip to the “effete, luxurious Orient” (293). As with the opening chapter, this final one reaffirms the interdependence of the family form and print publication, but it controls the problem of a family that has become, like the imagined community of Ned Temple’s newspaper, too broadly horizontal; the chapter exerts this control by invoking the spectre of the “Orient.”

Wendell seems to have been traveling not only as a peacetime correspondent, as he claims, but also as an informal salesman. He jokes that since his trip the Shah of Persia “uses nothing but Eastridge silver-plated ice-pitchers now,” and the Empress of China “has recovered her digestion, due entirely to the abandonment of chop-sticks and the adoption of Eastridge knives and forks” (299). In family, in this chapter, all of thoroughly modern Lily’s problematic consumer desires, all of the residual dynamics of utopian socialist plural marriage, and indeed the specular logic of relatedness itself, are now displaced onto anachronistic “Far East” and put to the service of domesticating Asian cultures into Western families. Furthermore, while Wendell’s solution to the silverplate factory’s sales problems is to penetrate the Asian market, his solution to the Talbert family’s marriage problems is to reintroduce a conquering imperialist masculinity into this collection of “early-Roosevelitian personalities” (296) whose powermongering and role swapping have so dismayed the family patriarch. Wendell urges his friend
Stillman Dane, who has also been Peggy’s professor of psychology at college, proposes to Peggy.

Although he jokingly calls himself a “Sage from the Orient” (282), “Still-man” Dane’s very name implies both masculinity and Nordic supremacy. He and Peggy are last seen departing for their engagement trip on a steamer heading East, and the final illustration shows them at the back of the steamship with Peggy waving a white handkerchief; the caption reads, “That brave little girl, waving her flag of victory and peace” (315). This movement of the dyadic married couple away from extended family—and away from the scene of industrial manufacture, mass consumption, and print publication—promises to regenerate “America.” As with other bridal tours, this one will bind the couple to one another and to their country. Yet the ship is moving East, toward not only Europe but perhaps eventually China, and so the flag could well be read as a trademark. It promises to bring the “riches” of middle-class domesticity, its tableware and sexual norms alike, to a new market, in a transnational model of what Amy Kaplan has called “Manifest Domesticism.”

In its final chapter, then, The Whole Family seals off both the US nation and the marital union, protecting each from interference by outsiders. After Peggy Talbert and Stillman Dane have left the port, the remaining Talberts and Gerrit Wendell discuss their lunch plans. The eldest daughter, Maria, suggests that they all go out together, but Wendell intervenes, telling her to take her husband, Tom, and the youngest siblings, Alice and Billy, out. “Your father and mother are going to lunch with me at Delmonico’s,” he dismisses her, excluding children and extended family alike (316). And the last lines of the novel firmly reject the extended relations that have threatened marriage in this novel: Wendell affirms that “...we don’t want the whole family” (317). The novel has certainly adjudicated the problem of the endlessly expanding “business family” by marking the boundaries between the married couple and various outsiders—including and especially the consuming woman whose sexual and economic desires seem boundless and the history of complex marriage that underlies its own particular family business—and by recasting these problems as Asian. Yet the position of the engaged couple on the steamship remains contradictory. The boat may be pointing East, but Peggy and Stillman Dane, feckless angels of the intertwined economic and afinal histories of the US, have their backs to the future, for in the novel’s last illustration they are still facing West.

With this image in mind, we might see The Whole Family and other collaborative novels as aesthetically Janus-faced, looking toward both sentimentalism and realism and suggesting the problems and promises that plural marriage offered to each genre. Facing the sentimental tradition, the collaborative novel in both form and production process mimicked the sentimental bonds of extrafamilial sympathy and identification. But sentimental literature denied the role of the market in matters of the heart, whereas Oneida, ambivalently links sentimental-style collaboration to the homosocial contractual relations forged among stockholders and consumers, and even occasionally to the heterosocial ones among paid professional writers. Oneida lurks within the novel as an American “family business” that once grounded industrial production in expansive, nonbiological kinship relations such as those sentimentalism often privileges, but then used its history of complex marriage as the template for a corporate structure. Oneida haunts the novel to suggest that plural marriage might be a logical metonymic endpoint to both sentimental bonds and emerging, often intangible economic interconnections in a national and global market. Indeed several of the novel’s authors—most notably Freeman and James—teasingly ask: especially when these economic relations involved both men and women, as magazine writing increasingly did, what, precisely, was to distinguish the marital bond from any other and thus to limit it to a hetero-gendered dyad?

This was, of course, also a problem for the single-authored, traditionally realist novel, toward which The Whole Family also faces. The signal feature of American realism, as Brook Thomas has argued, is a set of relations among characters unregulated by any overarching moral view which in his view provides a vision of judicial equity when postbellum contract law had failed to do so. Although this is an elegant and plausible argument, Thomas does not discuss kinship as an ideologically available figure for both the “pre-political” basis of the nation-state and the “post-political” effect of market relations and thus a powerful rhetorical container for anxieties about the limits of connectivity and membership. By multiplying the scene of possible contracts that compete with or supersede the judicial—among characters and with readers—realism provides a social vision in which the marital union is only one among many bonds for men, just as sentimentalism revealed this about women. Yet in a novel whose very production process foregrounded professional ties among men and women, this vision of social multiplicity is easily allegorized in marital terms. This particular allegorical marriage, though, refuses the terms of monogamy. In contrast to feminist and queer arguments that the realist novel’s narrative closure successfully represses perverse desires, both the plot of The Whole Family and its collaborative production process suggest the lingering presence of two historically and perhaps even momentarily competing forms through which non-heteronormative...
desires came into social meaning—as homosexual identity, certainly, but also as the alternative hetero/homo-relational form of plural marriage. For the realist novel that *The Whole Family* both aspired and failed to be, complex marriage and polygamy may occupy an important inside-outside position, evoking what the modern family might be, or maybe even already is in practice, while also serving to articulate what the family must not be in law. The dim presence of this “alternative” family form is structurally similar to the sentimental novel’s incestuous seducer who both threatens and guarantees an endogamous “national” family, and the naturalist novel’s prostitute who both undermines and exposes the economics of the marital sexual contract. If *The Whole Family* is indeed a work portraying an American family “of average culture and experiences,” it suggests that the realist novel as a whole, and even the family itself at the turn of the twentieth century, was still shadowed by the exiled social form of plural marriage.

Notes

1. My use of the term *liaisons*, with all its sexual innuendos, is deliberate and reflects this essay’s insistence that *The Whole Family*, and James in particular, explored the multidimensional “relations” within and among kinship, capitalism, and sexuality, putting the problem of “stopping” these relations at the novel’s very core. I follow Ross Posnock’s productive suggestion that James “appropriates and elaborates sexual desire” into expansive “practices of curiosity and representation,” sublimating rather than repressing eroticism; Posnock cites and relies on, but does not attribute, James’s phrase “absolute straightness” and “relations [that] stop nowhere” (23). However, I do not assume that sexuality can be thus neatly contained even in James, nor was sublimated by all of *The Whole Family’s* writers, if their biographies are any indication.

2. Other useful previous criticism includes Ashton, Bauer, and John W. Crowley, “The Whole Family.”

3. The magazine’s spelling was changed to *Bazaar* in 1929 (Howard 1). The novel was serialized in 1907 and published in book form in 1908; henceforth I will use the year of the novel’s publication. Howard provides the fullest publication history of the novel. See also Ashton and Bernstein.

4. The cases were *Tinker v. Coehlo*, 193 US 473 (1904); *US v. Bitty*, 208 US 383 (1908); and *Thompson v. Thompson*, 218 US 611 (1911). As Cott explores in detail, each case described the marital union as male dominated and “private,” that is, governed by individual male decisions rather than by laws guaranteeing women’s protection or sexual freedom (160–62).


6. Crowley identifies 1899 as the year journalists dubbed Howells with this title and suggests that Howells was ambivalent about the title (Dean 56).


8. Authors seem to have disagreed about Lily’s age; in a letter to Jordan, Alice Brown asks, “...has [Lily] lied about her age or has she not? Is she still ‘eligible’?” (1 June 1906).


10. I have explored plural marriage in Kirkland’s *Zarya* in *The Wedding Complex: Forms of Belonging in Modern American Culture* (2002); Nancy Bentley and William R. Handley each have explored the relationship between plural marriage and American literary genre in “Marriage as Treason: Polygamy, Nation, and the Novel” and *Marriage, Violence, and the Nation in the American Literary West* (2002), respectively.

11. I thank Paul Gebhardt of Oneida, Ltd. for locating and providing these images. I also thank an anonymous reader at ALH for pointing out several key features of this advertisement.


13. For a theory of “consumptive labor” that encompasses the production of social forms not equivalent to the relations of industry—i.e., identity groups—see Joseph.
14. For a discussion of how eroticism was reified into identity under late-nineteenth-century capitalism, see Floyd.

15. In his classic argument for queer studies, “Capitalism and Gay Identity,” John D’Emilio argues that industrial capitalism broke up the family, sending its members out to same-sex environments to do wage work and thereby fostering all kinds of queer groups that competed with the family of origin as a source of identity. Paradoxically, industrial capitalism also produced the heteromonogamous family and bound women tightly to it. Much less often released from the home into independent homosocial environments than men were, women found their work privatized, denied the status of labor, made functionally dependent upon male income, and rhetorically troped as the antithesis of both the market and the political public sphere.


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Unnatural Selection: Mothers, Eugenic Feminism, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s Regeneration Narratives

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In a 1915 short story in *Vanity Fair*, ANITA LOOS, the well-known author of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, portrayed a young woman in the thralls of an unfortunate decision. In a story entitled “The Force of Heredity, and Nella: A Modern Fable with a telling Moral for Eugenists,” Loos tells us that “twelve years had elapsed since Nella had promised her old mother that, come what might, she would always be eugenic.” In the duration of those twelve years, Nella moves to New York City, becomes a manicurist at a fancy hotel, and disavows “the teachings of her good old mother.” In a rash, last-minute decision, Nella eschews her poor but “healthy” and “masculine” fiancé, Gus, for betrothal to the wealthier Sigsbee van Cortland, a Copper King, who also happens to have a wooden leg. While Nella’s true love is Gus, who was “as handsome as handsome is” with “a fine, sensitive mouth,” the Copper King could produce the “tinkle,” and so Nella set her fate.

In a chance meeting with Gus many years later, Nella lies on her chaise lounge weeping, miserable and neurasthenic. On a walking tour of her home, we find out the reason behind her anguish as well as the moral of the story:

Together they wavered through one exquisitely furnished room after another and finally stopped before a door on which was a sign reading: NURSERY. Gus opened the door. Inside, holloping pitifully around the room, were eleven children. Gus looked once again and recoiled. They had all been born with a wooden leg!
The intended humor, and horror, in Loos’s fable depends not only on the way it plays on prevalent concerns about single, economically independent young women in urban areas, but also on the way it glosses the premises of early-twentieth-century eugenic theory, which argued that if the “right types” mated, a general evolution toward a more perfect form could be expected; conversely, imperfect unions would result in a degeneration from a more perfect form. According to Lamarckian conceptions, even acquired characteristics—like a wooden leg—could be inherited, and hence the joke of the fable. While Loos lampoons and rejects Lamarckian premises, her story still raises intriguing questions about how the reproductive role of women in relationship to the threat of degeneration became popular. If some of the greatest anxieties over cultural progression of this period were organized around theories of heredity, what kinds of pressures, urgencies, or appeals were placed on the category of motherhood, and how did women-authored narratives or feminist rhetorics react to or participate in the generation of these appeals? The figure of the mother emerged with new meaning and significance at the fin de siècle as a fantasy of moral idealism, a symbol of a quintessential American identity, and, moreover, as a privileged site of material and biological value. One of the central claims of this essay will be that eugenic conceptualizations of motherhood not only served certain white feminist goals, buttressing national expansion and concurrent nativist ideologies, but they also brought about new narrative models through which reproductive ideologies were sedimented.

That “The Force of Heredity, and Nella” appeared in a magazine as popular as Vanity Fair suggests a more complicated social and literary history of the discourses of eugenics than tends to be acknowledged. In American literature, naturalistic writing, which frequently posed itself as a form of scientific realism, and the imperialist adventure novel, with its logics of race and civilization, are usually understood as the genres that most typify this cultural conversation. In British literature, the gothic genre—in which the a-natural can be the central figure—most personifies the logics of degeneration by both producing and indulging fantasies of cultural instability and biological chaos. But what is underdescribed in this loose generic history is fin-de-siècle “women’s literature”—fiction and non-fiction by and about women and its mediation of these discourses. What gets lost, more specifically, is the significance of eugenic ideology for white feminist intellectuals and authors of this period. In this literature, it is not a monster, but often a mother who negotiates, threatens and ultimately restores a sense of cultural survival and national futurity to the social world.

While Loos’s fable renders modern eugenic anxiety as hyperbole and farce, the work of Charlotte Perkins Gilman demonstrates how eugenic thought helped constitute a particular brand of feminism during this period. In His Religion and Hers, Gilman makes an argument for the necessity of women, as mothers, to regenerate “the race.” She writes:

Is the race weak? She can make it strong. Is it stupid? She can make it intelligent. Is it foul with disease? She can make it clean. Whatever qualities she finds desirable she can develop in the race, through her initial function as a mother. We should have conventions of young women gathered to study what is most needed in their race and how they may soonest develop it. For instance, far-seeing Japanese women might determine to raise the standard of height, or patriotic French women determine to raise the standard of fertility, or wise American women unite with the slogan, “No more morons!”

Gilman fuses this edict with the rhetoric of feminist protest—it is a call to arms, a political battle cry that would send mothers into the streets, into the convention halls, to reformulate nations. But how should we understand the relationship between the feminist rhetoric of this argument and its eugenic impulses? Or, to extend this to her fiction, how can we reconcile the feminist themes of Gilman’s much acclaimed short story “The Yellow Wallpaper” and her eugenic thinking? How can we reconcile the gap that extends between the contemporary feminist reclamation of “Yellow” and the rest of her fiction, like the eugenic premises of the critically under-examined and out-of-print novel The Crux?

These apparent contradictions pose a problem for how one might go about doing the history of feminism. The 1970s and 1980s project of the reclamation of feminist texts, while marking a significant moment in feminist scholarship, suffered from the much noted problem of presentism in which nineteenth and early-twentieth-century women-authored texts were often treated as confirmations of contemporary feminism—exciting proof of the on-going fight for liberation. In response, many later feminist literary projects focused on the critique of early feminism. On the one hand, this criticism importantly offered a more detailed classification of nineteenth-century women’s literature by understanding how “the cult of sentiment” at times could reinscribe various class and racial hierarchies—indeed, how sentimental narra-
tives often depended upon the subordinated labor of working-class women and women of color. On the other hand, these re-evaluations may have also generated a structural opposition between the problems of a feminist text from the past and the current project of feminist cultural analysis. The historical situatedness of a feminist text within dominant ideological discourses becomes something we can objectify and thus distance ourselves from, once again affirming and assuring, by contrast, what is “enlightened” and progressive about feminism now. Robyn Wiegman outlines these problems when she argues that contemporary political discourses often fail to attend to the continuity between the ideology in the text and our own politics and subject positions. Accordingly, she recommends that the rethinking of the historical shape of western racial and feminist discourse should be a “vehicle for shifting the frame of reference in such a way that the present can emerge as somehow less familiar, less natural in its categories, its political delineations, and its epistemological foundations.”

In re-thinking Gilman’s work, then, I do not feel that the answer lies in making a move to maintain the “liberatory” aspects of her politics while repudiating her nativist ideology, or, as one critic suggests, in understanding her racism as part of “this extraordinary period of intellectual and political ferment” that should not “mar the importance [and] boldness” of her literary contribution. Rather, I would like to employ Gilman’s body of work as a useable history, as a means by which to gain a fuller purchase on the contemporary inheritance of early-twentieth-century feminism’s campaign to free white women from masculine hegemony through a commitment to popular science, specifically “eugenic discipline.” I thus suggest that we re-read Gilman’s work not for its contradictions but for the coterminous ideologies of feminism and eugenics that she engages. Gilman herself uses eugenics for a feminist agenda articulated on behalf of current social problems—further demonstrating how feminism and eugenics during this period were not only compatible but were mutually constitutive, each inextricably rooted in the constitution of the other.

Much recent criticism has begun to take the power of this coterminous relationship into account. Daylanne English’s new work traces how the mission of racial uplift deliberately borrowed from both eugenic and genetic theory to “bridge the gap between the individual and the collective.” Louise Newman’s recent book, White Women’s Rights, specifically analyzes how evolutionary constructions of racial progress and sexual difference were central to the ways in which white women activists in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries conceptualized issues of equality, making it possible “for white women to overlook the ways in which white culture was implicated in systems of oppression that governed the lives of nonwhite women.” Along with Gail Bederman, who describes how, for white feminist reformers, “sexual equality was a racial necessity,” Newman provides a nuanced sociological account of how discourses of “civilization” and “evolution” shaped the way feminists from the period positioned themselves in relation to large-scale social processes. However, a sociological analysis of eugenic rhetoric does not fully address the problem of how to view late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century women’s fiction. As an empirical mode of analysis, it does not attend to representational technologies, and therefore it cannot adequately explain the ways in which scientific ideas shaped, and were shaped by, political as well as aesthetic imperatives. In particular, it cannot account for how these discourses helped bring about narrative innovation (new narrative forms that became a central device for the production and publicization of scientific rhetoric), and thus many questions about the relationship between feminist literary production and reproductive ideologies remain unanswered. What follows is, in part, a reading of an over-looked novel where such relationships are negotiated and given voice. From The Crux we learn that cultural forms are not just reflecting the contemporaneous mood about nation, gender, body and self but are actively participating in the construction of their meanings. The aesthetic encounter with gender politics I engage may thus contribute to what we know about the shape and structure of American politics.

I am particularly interested in how Gilman fuses eugenics and feminism to constitute a new narrative form; in particular, a literary subgenre of feminist “uplift” that I call “regeneration narratives,” or, more broadly, feminist regeneration literature. 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 respond to Teddy Roosevelt’s call for men to “gird up our loins as a nation, with stern purpose to play our part manfully in winning the ultimate triumph.” Richard Slotkin has characterized the typically male genres of the western and the adventure novel as performing a “regeneration through violence,” in which
the articulation of male strenuousness through martial rhetoric assures American national superiority over its dominated others. In this sense, we can view novels like Owen Wister’s *The Virginian* as “Darwinian laboratories” of masculine progress.16

By contrast, Gilman’s regeneration narratives articulate a paradigm of white, middle-class motherhood as a model of social progress. Her work—like the regeneration scenario that Slotkin describes—in part depends upon the narrative logic of the western or adventure novel that prescribes a separation from modern life and a temporary regression to a more “natural” state. Yet, by simultaneously foregrounding the economic autonomy of women and their reproductive status, Gilman’s regeneration narratives suggest 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. By substituting reproductive competence for masculine virility, Gilman’s regeneration narratives attempt to remedy “the ills of modernity”—what she characterizes in *Women and Economics* as a time in which “human motherhood is more pathological than any other, more morbid, defective, irregular, diseased.”17 Gilman’s fiction and non-fiction function together as an agenda for feminist rescue. By representing eugenic ideology as the source of this rescue, they racialize the language of feminism.

Eugenic Feminism

The concerns over national degeneration in the turn-of-the-century U.S. may seem odd in a cultural climate that tends to be characterized by technological, urban, and economic progress. The reassuring grant of social progression, however, was always troubled in practice, not only by the vicissitudes of urban growth, immigration and changing understandings of social identity but just as resolutely by confusing shifts in gender norms.18 As the rapid expansion and commercialization of the nation’s urban centers facilitated women’s entry into and circulation within a proliferation of publics as workers and consumers, tensions arose over the changing character of “femininity,” over how to protect “innocent” youth from modern perversity, or how to encourage sociobiological responsibility in the face of competing sexual, social and economic possibilities. While the “new woman” was stretching the boundaries of gender definition, white, middle-class feminist reformers were busy worrying over the destruction of the home through moral and social “contagion” in the form of prostitution, sexual disease, drunkenness, and the new public character of femininity. Because of women’s capacity to pass down either health or disease to future generations, young girls, as potential mothers, became the focus of a campaign to stave off the degeneration of the nation.19

One of the more surprising aspects of feminist reform campaigns was the frequency with which self-proclaimed feminists like Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Margaret Sanger, and Victoria Woodhull advocated for sexual and economic freedom, reproductive necessity, and eugenic discipline simultaneously.20 As Daniel Kevles points out, the eugenics movement was not simply upheld by a small element of radical conservatives but also included progressives, radical liberals and advocates of women’s rights. Part of the feminist agenda was to push for legislation that would make prostitution illegal, which resulted in the passing of one of the first laws directed against prostitution in 1917; another part of it was to promote sex education at younger ages and to sponsor sexual purity literature like “Hygiene and Morality” by the nurse, Miss Lavinia Dock. Other efforts involved the push for safe and legal birth control, and, in turn, a campaign to convince poor women to use it. Finally, more drastic measures included a program of “negative eugenics”: legal segregation and sterilization of “the unfit.” At stake in these efforts was either the protection of the family from physical and moral contagion or the protection of the nation from the onslaught of degenerate children. As Margaret Sanger succinctly put it in 1919, “More children from the fit, less children from the unfit.”21

In agreement with Sanger, Victoria Woodhull, suffragist and self-proclaimed “free lover” who famously ran for president in 1872, argued in a short pamphlet titled “The Rapid Multiplication of the Unfit” (1891), “The first principle of the breeder’s art is to weed out the inferior animals to avoid conditions which give a tendency to reversion and then to bring together superior animals under the most favorable conditions.”22 In their view, women had to make the right choices in terms of marriage, avoid the danger of sexual contamination, and give birth to the right types. If such procreation became impossible as a result of impoverishment, disease, racial intermixture, or hereditary defect, birth control would then be at their disposal to allow them to make the choice not to have children; if all else failed, sterilization programs would be in place to ensure the appropriate outcome.
Gilman’s work embraced these concepts and helped generate them as part of the white feminist progressive agenda. Much of her non-fiction, in fact, is taken up with the two-fold question of how to improve the social conditions of women and how women can improve the race. For Gilman, these questions were not simply juxtaposed but were fundamentally related to one another. As a strong advocate for sexual and economic reform, Gilman argued that it was a “human necessity” for “women as individuals to meet men and other women as individuals.”23 Her well-known theories of domestic efficiency sponsored the “kitchenless home” and socialized child-care. Gilman argued that the conventions of housewifery were part of a sexuo-economic contract obliging a woman to “get her living by getting a husband” or, more pointedly, by exchanging sex for sustenance.24 To disrupt the regulatory connection between sex and domestic survival, Gilman advocated that women obtain careers and establish communal eating arrangements for their families instead of providing for the cooking themselves. She argued throughout, “When the mother of the race is free, we shall have a better world, by the easy right of birth and the calm, slow friendly forces of social evolution.” 25 Freedom in the domestic sphere rested on the principle, for Gilman a scientific one, that as mothers women were responsible for the care and regeneration of the race as a whole.

In a 1927 article for the *North American Review*, for example, Gilman argued that birth rates of “many races” should be restricted for “sheer economic and political necessity.” In an earlier 1908 essay that appeared in the *American Journal of Sociology* entitled “A Suggestion on the Negro Problem,” she argued for the coercive removal of African Americans from the general populace, for their “present status is to us a social injury.” Her “proposed organization” was to place them in an “industrial army” until such point as they evolved to as high a level as whites.26 Likewise, in the fictional piece *With Her in Ourland*, the main character Ellador criticizes U.S. immigration policy, which she feels allows for “the crowding injections of alien blood, by vast hordes of low-grade laborers.”27 Whether addressing the need to regenerate the race or the imperative of sexual equality, Gilman summons the language of eugenic science. Her descriptions of African Americans and immigrants are fueled by nativist rhetoric, suggesting that each racial group carried in their biological make-up the capacity to contaminate the Anglo-Saxon race. At the same time, her feminist narrative depends on this eugenic view-point, for it suggests that white women’s very identities (including their racial and class status) constituted a counter-discourse, an antidote if you will, to the problem of racial contamination.

For Gilman and other progressive feminists, eugenic theory allowed them to imagine different configurations of gender and power in relation to the social body. The determinations of eugenics aided in the production of an idealized model of femininity, a realignment of gender with a set of moral and biological norms and a system of social value. Eugenics became a mode through which (white) women’s social significance could be restructured. In this case, the mother appears as a biological subject organized not so much by a founding maternal identification as by identification with social and moral power, with a desire to participate in the civic-national sphere. In Gilman’s work, this alignment of gender and power is developed and clarified in a narrative that features white women’s assimilation to a system of social responsibility in relation to sexuality—what Foucault calls “governmentality.”

In Foucault’s formulation, “The individual delimits that part of [her]self that will form the object of [her] moral practice. . . . And this requires [her] to act upon [her]self, to monitor, test, improve, and transform [herself].”28 But the need to revise Foucault’s pronouns is telling. The self-governance he describes is an attribute of the modern subject—moral agent—presumed male. Gilman’s argument is precisely with this sort of rhetoric; her intention is to demonstrate how women, more properly mothers, need to be understood as the new moral and civic subjects. In Gilman’s regeneration narratives, this transformation involves suturing women’s sexual choices to a system of social hygiene discourse such that female sexuality can be understood as, to borrow a phrase from Judith Butler, “a regulatory fiction.”29 In Butler’s sense, Gilman’s narratives do not so much strive to repress female sexuality as they do to compel the incorporation of female desire into the regulatory ideals of heterosexual reproduction in such a way that these ideals are experienced as part of the constitutive core of women’s own essence. The regulatory fiction of sexual responsibility, then, is both a norm that manages female sexuality and a fantasy of female political agency, a fiction actively written and maintained within the obligatory frame of reproductive familialism.

We can, in fact, trace the beginning of these concerns to “The Yellow Wallpaper,” in which the female narrator takes up rooms in a “heredi-
“Yellow” also dramatizes, as much as it repudiates, Silas Weir Mitchell’s recommendation that nervous women undergo an actual process of infantilization/primitivization in order to re-develop into healthier individuals. As Walter Benn Michaels notes, Mitchell instructed women suffering from neurasthenia to practice balancing themselves on all fours and then eventually to practice walking again in a literal drama of re-evolution. Michaels argues that the repetition of this treatment in “Yellow” expresses “the return to infancy as a moment of willed begetting” that “is the work of something like self-generation.” However, in her belief that domesticity made women “atavistic,” Gilman structured “Yellow” as a narrative of degeneration in which an individual, burdened with the traumas of patriarchal modernity or affected by a “hereditary estate,” reverts back to some earlier, lower form of humanity.

Gilman’s language resonates with associations in the human sciences of the infantile with the primitive that were increasingly available with the publication of texts like G. Stanley Hall’s Adolescence and Alexander Chamberlain’s The Child: A Study in the Evolution of Man. Gilman was a reader of Hall, who, along with his student and colleague Chamberlain, argued that in children one could find both atavistic traits and an intense emotional life that tended toward repression in adults. Hall expresses the child-savage analogy in the following way: “The child comes from and harks back to a remote past; the adolescent is neo-atavistic, and in him the later acquisitions of the race slowly become prepotent.” In other words, according to Hall, children follow the developmental path of their forbears, and physically recapitulate the evolutionary process in their individual life span. When the narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper” creeps about on all fours, she mimics a regression to the emotional intensity of the child-savage position that Hall describes. Borrowing from evolutionary discourse, degeneration theory and Hall’s theory of “recapitulation,” Gilman dramatizes feminist concerns over female agency and eugenic concerns over the social body simultaneously. In “Yellow,” in fact, feminism and eugenics appear structurally integral to each other—it argues, without sexual equality, that the woman’s body (and therefore her reproductive function) degenerates, and thus disables her role as a healthy producer of the social world.

In contrast to “Yellow” (what we might call a “degeneration narrative”)34; Gilman sought to create a genre that would reflect “the new attitude of the full grown woman, who faces the demands of love with the highest standards of conscious motherhood.”35 In “Yellow,” the narrator finds it impossible to be a mother, rather she can only be a degenerated child/animal who stoops down and creeps. In her novel The Crux, a young girl undergoes a continuous process of physical and metaphoric evolution which enacts a movement away from this kind of atavistic femininity and toward something like the work of socially responsible reproduction.36 The Crux, published serially in The Fore-runner in 1910 and then as a novel by Gilman’s own Charlton company in 1911, tells the story of an intergenerational set of white New England female friends and relatives—suffering from “arrested development” (71) and “arthritis deformans of the soul” (61)—who relocate west in
Colorado to start a boarding house because “the place was full of men who needed mothering” (164). The men, themselves, moved to Colorado to try to win their fortunes in the silver mines, a plot that rehearses the conventions of the male western. However, the women’s westward movement to a more “natural” space reconfigures the symbolic logic of a more traditional western plot, especially a novel like *The Virginian*, where a New England greenhorn travels west in order to realize his own sense of “manliness.” In *The Crux*, the women move west both to rejuvenate themselves and to forge a “home”—a space of gendered care—within its open spaces. The novel exemplifies a culture in uneasy transition, eschewing the vestiges of New England Puritanism for what is represented as the enlightened sexual-civic discourse of the West. It is an important piece of work, for it complicates what we know about the feminist and eugenicist writings of the period and allows us to view Gilman’s body of work in a new fashion. Positioned between the 1898 publication of “Yellow” and the 1914 publication of her utopic feminist novel *Herland*, *The Crux* asks that we re-read these more studied works differently and points specifically to the development of the eugenic/regenerative rhetoric dramatized within them. It thus contributes to a conversation about early feminism’s transections with issues of citizenship, civic consciousness, and sex. Where “Yellow” represents medical men as misguided practitioners, *The Crux* characterizes its (pointedly female) doctors as the ideal citizens of a new republic; where “Yellow” portrays heterosexual marriage as the breeding ground for female hysteria and bad mothering, *The Crux* argues that eugenic unions are the origins of a fit and vigorous national identity.

Significantly, the specter of sexual disease haunts *The Crux*. The central character, Vivian Lane, falls for Morton Elder, “a motherless boy” with “no good woman’s influence about” (182) who, unbeknownst to her, “has lived the bad life. . . [and] has had the sickness” (172–3), a euphemism for syphilis. Dr. Jane Bellair tries to warn her good friend Vivian of his illness, but her concern is not so much that Vivian will catch syphilis as that she may decide to marry and have children with the syphilitic Morton and thus deteriorate the national “stock.” She advises: “You must not marry Morton Elder. I know he has syphilis . . . one of the most terrible diseases known to us; highly contagious . . . hereditary” (225). Here, the logic of syphilis has been borrowed to establish a domain of masculine sexual deviance in binary opposition to the healthy feminine regime that Gilman’s work imagines. Syphilis is not a dangerous disorder because of its effects on the individual bodies of the men who disseminate it or the individual bodies of the women who catch it, but its threat lies in its reproductive effects on and within procreative heterosexual unions. In other words, the novel codes syphilis as a danger not because it is a sexually transmitted disease but because it is a sexually transmitted disease that is also “hereditary.” Stopping the force of degeneration means that mothers, burdened with the cleansing of the future, must eschew sexuality for reproductivity; they must substitute for sexual feeling a desire to reproduce.

In *The Crux*, the threat to reproductivity is perilously huddled within a simple, but fatal, kiss. Indeed, the fatal kiss is a central conceit in *The Crux*, imposing itself on the text as a warning and thus signals an intervention in typical heterosexual narrative form—specifically the sentimental romance form. The kiss is deployed, and ultimately deferred, not as a plot device that inspires either romantic suspense or heroic reward but as the site and scene of horror. In the typical fairy tale or romance novel, the kiss is a fundamental generic convention—with its consummation comes heterosexual union and thus narrative closure. However, in *The Crux* the kiss is fatal: it is not the inevitable gift to the hero, who, after struggling with some tragic flaw, is rewarded by the woman-in-waiting, nor is it a precursor to the downfall of the sexually promiscuous woman who must be punished for her indiscretions. Rather, in *The Crux*, heterosexual romance itself is a dangerous funnel for social and sexual disease. Ultimately, for Vivian, “love had become a horror” (241).

The first kiss between Vivian and her hometown sweetheart occurs before he moves to the city and falls victim to urban degeneracy and is thus described within romantic narrative conventions: In “the radiating, melting moonlight” amongst the “rich sweetness of flowers” on a “tender soft June night . . . he took her face between his hands and kissed her on the mouth” (28–29). The second kiss occurs years later, after Morton’s “fall,” and generates anxiety at a co-ed dance. The encroaching Morton, trying to coerce Vivian back into a relationship with him, pushes up on her during another moonlit night, this one more like the setting of a gothic novel than a romance: he comes upon her in the “sudden darkness” of the garden. Moving closer, “he kissed her white shoulder.” His “coarsened complexion” (141) stands in obvious
contrast to the “white purity” of young, untainted femininity that Vivian represents. “He was breathing heavily. His arms held her motionless.” But, willfully, “she kept her face turned from him” (141). He lets her go, but not before extracting a promise for marriage. Underscoring the potential horror of this promise, the scene ends with Vivian glimpsing “the sight of Morton Elder’s face as he struck a match to light his cigarette . . . [which] made it shine out prominently in the dark shelter” and induced in her feelings of “sudden displeasure” (205). The moonlight of her adolescence (romance’s most hackneyed symbol) is replaced by the light of a diseased man’s cigarette.

Taken together, the two kissing sequences provide the outline for Vivian’s sexual development: it begins in a picturesque landscape of a small New England town and ends in a modern scenario of sexually transmitted disease. The lure of the fatal kiss transports Vivian from the sheltered knowledge of adolescence to the risky sensations of adult modern love. This developmental narrative both repeats and troubles the literary conventions of romance. It adheres to the romantic prescriptions for female sexual development in which the heroine must either overcome or fall prey to some sexual adversity. But it also interrupts a narrative of heterosexual closure, for Morton cannot rescue; he can only contaminate. This rewrites a social scene that tended to conscript disease and contagion onto the woman’s body; instead, it relocates the site and circulation of disease in the body of a wayward young man. This shift is particularly significant when we remember, as Elaine Showalter, Mary Douglas, and others argue, that there is a whole history in which women, represented as diseased and contagious, are fitted to carry the symbolic burdens of social or national crisis.39 Gilman thus reworks the narrative by which romantic bonds and family ties are consolidated and re-arranges the traditional narrative patterns of late-nineteenth-century family values. It is in its critique of the normative family that Gilman’s narrative turns to conservative ideologies of “advancement.” If a contemporary model of feminism typically positions itself against scientific renderings of identity, here, in Gilman’s narrative arrangement, reforming masculinist structures like the family meant embracing motherhood as a site of biological value; positioning women at the center of national progress—at the center of the birthing of history—meant corroborating the racialist impulses of national-patriarchal discourses.

Unnatural Selection

When Vivian defends her decision to stay with Morton by invoking that afflicted word “love,” Dr. Bellair staunchly replies:

Will you tell that to your crippled children? Will they understand if they are idiots? Will they see it if they are blind? Will it satisfy you when they are dead? They may be deformed and twisted, have all manner of terrible and loathsome afflictions, they and their children after them, if they have any. And many do! Dear girl, don’t you see that’s wicked? Beware of biological sin, my dear, for it there is no forgiveness. (225–26)

Dr. Bellair censures love or sex without eugenic consciousness through the effigy of the deformed body of the future child, for “love” in this modern scenario can only result in the reality of “biological sin.” Significantly, there are no healthy children in the novel at all, only potential mothers. The absent presence of the unborn child hangs menacingly over The Crux, shaming its characters to act on behalf of the national future and appearing only in horrific, disfigured form to disrupt the fantasies of heterosexual love and underscore the toxic effects of heterosexual vice. The potential horror of syphilis, then, is the traumatic center of the novel, the heterosexual crisis plot serving ultimately as a dramatic repository for anxieties over female sexuality.

After speaking with Dr. Bellair, Vivian turns for comfort to her grandmother, who eventually assures her fears by carefully describing the beneficial role of eugenics in modern society. She explains that “the women’s clubs and congresses have taken it up” and assures Vivian that “some states have passed laws requiring a medical certificate—a clean bill of health—to go with a license to marry” and that, most importantly, “we are beginning to teach children and young people what they ought to know.” “Don’t be afraid of knowledge,” her grandmother affirms, “when we all know about this we can stop it! We can religiously rid the world of all these—‘undesirable citizens’” (245–246).

The grandmother’s advice hints at the collaborations through which eugenics found public support, understanding the state as a means of social control in combination with feminist reform. But her response is not at all the kind one may expect from a grandmother consoling her heartbroken, disillusioned granddaughter. Or is it? Vivian’s grandmother—standing in as a kind of “ur-mother” in the novel—hardwires eugenics to motherly advice. In her role as Vivian’s caretaker, the regulatory ideals of eugenic science register as domestic affect. This
new affective register—which casts sentimental bonds not within the terms of domestic feeling but within the terms of eugenic prescription—proposes a strategy for imagining collective feminist struggle and hygienic social progress simultaneously. It also hints at the major function of this strategy: it is enacted at the service of the formation of a new kind of family, the one consisting primarily of women and embedded in scientific decree. On the one hand, this augments an already epistemic familialism, whose function is to designate and maintain a quarantined and hygienic space for white middle-class culture. But, as I have been arguing, it also rearranges conventional familial ideology in its attempt to reconfigure the imagined feminine sphere (private and domestic) as a world of (reproductive) labor and responsible public life.

In a certain sense, this paradox recalls Priscilla Wald’s work on Typhoid Mary, a case of contagious disease that, she argues, formulated a “carrier narrative . . . that worked to contain dramatic changes in familial and social structure by linking transformations in gender roles to the fate of the (white) race and therefore the security of the nation.” As Wald describes it, the carrier narrative, “by using contagious disease as an explicit manifestation of the dangers of social contact,” reconceptualizes citizens in the industrialized nation in terms of social responsibility. For Gilman and eugenic feminists in general, the threat of contagion deployed in and by their culture’s carrier narratives posed a central problem. Deflecting moral and actual manifestations of disease away from the unsuspecting family required a complete refashioning of the domestic sphere within the terms of science and a rigorous and conscious regime of differentiation between desirable and, to use Vivian’s grandmother’s term, “undesirable citizens.” For Laura Doyle, whose book Bordering on the Body analyzes key novels in modernism and the Harlem Renaissance, this meant positioning the figure of the mother within a regulatory economy of “racial patriarchy.” As Doyle forcefully argues, “In these economies, mothers reproduce bodies not in a social vacuum” but rather are “the cultural vehicle for fixing, ranking, and subduing groups and bodies” within a racially based kinship matrix. Eugenic feminists were aware not only of the threats consolidated by the carrier narrative that Wald describes but also of the patriarchalisms of the traditional kinship narrative, especially, for Gilman, the constricting and potentially dangerous predicates of the heterosexual couple (represented by the syphilitic Morton). The eugenic family, as conceived by Gilman, involves not only the repudiation of sexual feeling that I discussed earlier nor only the racial matrix that Doyle discusses, but, in addition, implies a kind of de-heterosexualization of the middle-class family. White progressive-era feminists, in this sense, capitalized on the fear of contagion by emphasizing that the more incipient threat was to reproduction. This allowed them to position women at the center of debates about social progress. Gilman’s narratives take this a step further by insisting on the disaggregation of reproduction from heterosexual/patriarchal authority. In her short story “Making a Change,” for example, the main female character sets up a socialist childcare facility on her rooftop and thus defines motherhood as a public identity and childcare as a form of community labor. Similarly, in Herland men are irrelevant to the reproductive process altogether. In the novel, the women become pregnant by their own will, not by intercourse, thus eliminating the conduit for contagion that might lead to degeneration.

An avid reader of theories of civilization and degeneration, Gilman, in her work, refunctions the Darwinian concept of “natural selection” into a theory of social evolution prescribed, in part, by Herbert Spencer, to whom she referred in her autobiography as the man who taught her “wisdom and how to apply it.” Spencer asserted that evolution created qualitative and quantitative differences between the male and female mind, and that when the body and brain were challenged, energy set aside for reproduction would be used up. In other words, if cerebral activity in women was too excessive, there would be losses in energy needed for “race-maintenance.” For Spencer, the body was a closed and finite system, one that required a balance between physical or mental depletion in one area and preservation of energy in another, a process he identified as the body’s need for “equilibrium.” According to Spencer, this process of economization and expenditure of bodily resources was differentiated by a gendered physiological economy: a greater portion of women’s energy is designated for reproductive activities, leaving them with less strength for other forms of labor or intellectual pursuit. Of course, Gilman found his anti-feminist characterization of women disturbing. But in the theories of Lester Frank Ward, the American paleobotanist turned sociologist who promoted the theory of “gynaecocracy,” or the superiority of the female sex type, Gilman found a way to re-interpret Spencer’s blind spots when it came to women’s physiological nature. Relying on Ward’s emphasis on the
female sex as the primary factor of hereditary transmission, Gilman argued that while both sexes were vulnerable to the excesses and burdens of modern life, it was the female who, “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.”47 (It should come as no surprise that Gilman described Vivian as an enthusiastic reader of Lester Ward’s theories at the start of The Crux.) Socially responsible motherhood thus required an evacuation of what Gilman called “sex attraction” in order to mitigate the problems that could arise when young girls were poised for male interest. She writes, “The more widely the sexes are differentiated, the more forcibly they are attracted to each other . . . so as to retard and confuse race-distinction . . . and seriously injure the race.”48 In other words, female sexuality, and, more specifically, non-eugenic sex, was what she perceived as one of the greatest problems of modernity. She argued: “We, as a race, manifest an excessive sex attraction, followed by its excessive indulgence; an excess which tends to pervert and exhaust desire as well as to injure reproduction.”49 For Gilman, via Ward, neither work nor education damaged women’s reproductive abilities; rather, sexual pleasure did. Toward this end, Gilman advocated against a model of reproduction based in heterosexual difference and desire and for a model of sexual sameness.

As stated earlier, we can see this most of all in Herland where all the women reproduce parthenogenetically (without the need for heterosexual intercourse). The all-female residents of this world dress in “sexless costume[s]” and are “actuated with a common impulse . . . [and] moved by precisely the same feelings, to the same end.”50 Throughout her work, Gilman provides an example of how conceptions of eugenic science offered feminist authors and intellectuals the means to re-define their relationship to heterosexual imperatives. This re-definition required a narrative that placed female agency within the parameters of familial social structures, rooting both the female body and the social body in biology.51

“The Delight of Mere Ascent”

In many ways, Gilman’s regeneration narratives repeat and complicate what T.J. Jackson Lears has described as the era’s ethos of antimodernism. In No Place of Grace, Lears characterizes turn-of-the-century American culture as riven with a regressive antimodernist sensibility. This sensibility, Lears argues, was the result of a widespread recoil from overly consumptive modern existence and encompassed a search for more intense forms of physical and spiritual experience that would integrate all aspects of life and thus stand in opposition to the divided or discontinuous self of modernity. In her own way, Gilman was involved in a similar search, one that would allow for the more integrated selfhood that Lears describes as well as work toward the building of a better, less neurasthenic and less syphilitic social world. However, Lears insists on a relationship between this search and the emergence of a “martial ideal.” According to him, the violence of “the warrior,” or war hero, and his willingness to suffer serves as an antidote to overciviliization. Opposing the decadence and disorder of modern society, the figure of the warrior personifies wholeness and intensity of experience, and the concept of war promises social and personal regeneration.52 But Gilman found the celebration of the brute, the warrior man troubling as it conjured up notions of masculine sexual dominance and even rape while simultaneously designating women as auxiliary attachments to social change.53 Gilman’s regeneration narratives manage the problem of male violence by imagining a space of eugenic familialism that would safeguard women’s reproductive resources against incursions by syphilitic males, where the disavowal of sexual energy—which for Gilman is the same as the disavowal of hyper-masculine authority—becomes a means for the perpetuation of the Anglo-Saxon race. Nevertheless, in accordance with Lears’s characterization of the antimodernist impulse, she locates the rejuvenation of young women’s bodies and thus their ability to reproduce in the spaces of nature.

In The Crux, a climactic trip in the mountains most fully expresses Vivian’s feminist regeneration, one that is both antimodernist and evolutionist in nature. She enrolls her students in a summer camp program in “the high lying mountain lake” (277) where Dr. Bellair owned “a piece of wild-rough country” (277). Here in the “untouched wilderness” Vivian would awake “to slip out for a morning swim” where she would “glide, naked, in that water . . . and swim out . . . turn on her back and lie there—alone with the sky” (278). It is here that Vivian’s body first comes into narrative view. The Crux thus imagines “the wild mountain country” as a regenerative space where her body
emerges, or ascends, in a way that her New England routine would “repress.” And it is Vivian’s body that becomes the vehicle for her grandmother’s, Dr. Bellair’s, and, by extension, feminism’s eugenic yearnings.

Not surprisingly, race is the repressed sign of this process of ascension, for Vivian’s new body, and thus new self, takes shape in and through the miming of a frontier life rife with racial metaphor: she “learned to cook in primitive fashion” and “grew brown and hungry and cheerful” so that upon her return, her grandmother remarks that she “is certainly looking well—if you like that color” (279). If Vivian’s swimming ritual acts as a catalyst for an unmediated relationship to her body, her camping trip enables an unmediated relationship with the racially encoded spaces of nature. Vivian’s racialization, evidenced in her new brown skin, produces a hybrid body particular to American cultural forms that dates back to the colonial period and repeats itself within the new concerns of American modernity—that the restoration of self, health and Anglo-culture itself requires and is confirmed by one’s proximity to and/or movement through a racialized space or body. In this cultural imaginary, primitive culture—and primitive landscapes—are equated with nature and health and provide a means through which Anglo-culture can experience both. Nonetheless, while a flirtation with “the racial primitive” and their landscapes may be momentarily imagined and always seem metaphorically available as a therapeutic resource for white health, the derisive comment made by Vivian’s grandmother suggests the anxieties over racial and cultural miscegenation that this new body may evoke.

Thus, in The Crux contact with white culture’s primitive others is ultimately recuperated by re-establishing Anglo-Saxon civility through heterosexual union. The restoration of Vivian’s self, the literal “naturalization” of her body, is quickly made hygienic through the staging of a last-minute, closing chapter Anglo-marriage—not to the syphilitic Morton but to a male doctor. Vivian’s relationship to her female doctor friend finds a surrogate in a heterosexual marriage to Dr. Hale and thus shores up her interpellation into the space of hygienic medical culture. Not surprisingly, her marriage is based not on “love” or “desire”—the fact that Dr. Hale is nearly twice her age (more of an archetypal father figure than a lover) ensures this fact. Further, Dr. Hale himself has rejected typical heterosexuality, having been used and discarded by a seductress in his youth. This abuse led him to distrust most women and all sentiment. More than anything else Vivian’s marriage is a medical marriage; it replaces questions of desire with the eugenic rules that govern women’s reproductive choices. It is the subgenre of evolutionary uplift—the eugenic-feminist regeneration narrative with its emphasis on physical health and its allegories of ascent—that creates the conditions of possibility for the emergence of both Vivian’s eugenic consciousness and her “erect” (114) body and guides her away from irresponsible, indeed syphilitic, couplehood that Dr. Jane Bellair—and her hard-boiled medical dogma—guards her against. The novel’s telos of New England immobility, physical activity (going west), “erect posture” (114), ascent (climbing mountains), and, finally, the “right type” of marriage inscribe eugenic progress as feminist advance and vice versa.

Gilman’s regeneration narratives mean to de-rail the ideals of masculinity that the western and adventure genres tend to establish by replacing the typically male protagonists with a series of college-educated, white, middle-class women. As with the western, many of Gilman’s 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. These “Westward expansions” act as an analog for the expansion of feminine identity. In turn, this new identity acts as an analog for evolutionary progress: Gilman’s women do not only “go west,” they also go “up.” She often describes her female characters as dwelling in “upland valleys” surrounded by “steep canyons,” and “the clean, wide, brilliant stillness of the high plateau” or even residing in sanatoriums called “The Hills” where they experience “the delight of mere as-sent.” Geographical elevation is highlighted in Gilman’s narratives not only as a typical aspiration in narratives that are relentlessly conscious of women’s domestic confinement, but that also act as a Darwinian allegory of evolution, where one’s physical ascent to a higher place guarantees the commensurate logics of superior social status, economic mobility, health, and moral being. And, as in the male western, the emergence of this identity, the basis for its theory of progress, is predicated on racial ideologies and U.S. expansionism. In Gilman’s brand of eugenic feminism, the female crossing into “male” terrains and subject positions operates entirely in keeping with U.S.
nationalist assumptions—that it is the duty of white people (male or female) to expand, extend, colonize, and reproduce. Gilman’s narratives thus produce a disturbing territorial and regulatory regime; they operate as a “map” of sorts in which the rhetorical imbrications of time and location (of modernity and geography) reconvene the hierarchies of social categories one might hope feminist politics would disassemble.

The eugenic feminism that Gilman’s work represents aligns with 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. In her later fiction, Gilman moved the body out of its crouched and degenerated position and mobilized it within a narrative of regeneration, which restaged the crisis of modern personhood as the predicament of eugenic motherhood. In bridging the gap between female subjectivity and the body politic (and between apprehensions over individual contagion and national health), the project of eugenic feminism fundamentally changed conceptions of both family and motherhood. Reproduction itself became both identity and imperative, a paradox of compulsory sexual agentiveness. The conditions upon which the regeneration narrative depends, and upon which Gilman’s social utopias are imagined, thus dramatizes white women’s identification with a power that requires an investment in their own renunciation.57

* * *

If we could characterize Gilman’s regeneration narratives succinctly, it might be to note how they are saturated with the longing to create compensatory feminist utopias as a means to solve the perceived problems of degenerate modernity. Furthermore, they can be understood in terms of how these “fictions of progress” seemed to secure white women’s centrality to cultural evolution, allowing them to experience reproduction as a world-making practice. In turn, we might begin to unravel the participation of eugenic feminism in producing and stabilizing a distinct set of cultural meanings about sexuality, race, and gender that root identity in biology. Thus Gilman can be interpreted as inhabiting a scientific discourse as a mode of female agency; the centrality of motherhood represented, for her and her feminist counterparts, a dialectic between the constraints of scientific culture and the ability to transform themselves. Motherhood emerged as a function in the formation of worlds that enabled women to stake a claim in the struggle to define their bodies, in essence making them “matter.” This model of motherhood, in its accumulation of imperatives for self-management and in its racialist impulses, demonstrates how movements that we commonly take as radical or progressive—such as feminism—engage or are constituted by other discourses—such as biology—to exert regulatory, prohibitive functions. We might want to explore how this produces non-reproductive sexualities as waste and investigate how sexual pleasure itself came to be a sign and symptom of degeneracy. We could then join existing critiques of early feminism by authors such as Amy Kaplan, Louise Newman, and Michele Birnbaum that track how white female agency of this sort reinforces itself through rhetoric of empire and racial privilege. My point here, though, is not simply one of repudiation in contradistinction to the earlier feminist reclamation of Gilman’s work. Rather, it is in the interest of producing an account of how the histories of our feminisms are not politically transparent but are fraught with a complex, and I would suggest dialectical, history of promise and damage. In this instance, the driving forces of white progressive feminism helped instantiate and inform what we might think of as a new version of liberal humanism, one in which the mother acts as ideal civic progenitor. In a move from an ideal of self-governance to an ideal of eugenic familialism, a public valorization of motherhood emerges in ways that parallel, indeed are grounded in, the tenets of popularized evolutionism and eugenics. To understand the larger implications of this move and how it refracts light upon our contemporary moment, we may want to recognize how contemporary projects such as the human genome project suggest that a genealogy of mothers may be less a part of our past than a trajectory to our present.58

NOTES

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1. Anita Loos, “The Force of Heredity, and Nella: A Modern Fable with a Telling Moral for Eugenists,” *Vanity Fair* (Feb. 1915): 42. All future references to the story are from this publication and page number.


4. The representations of a sanctified motherhood as either an imperiled or a prescriptive ideal is not new in the context of American history. However, I am arguing that the figure of the mother emerged with new meaning not only for the social world at this time but for white progressive feminists who could now imagine their value in a world increasingly laden with biological forms of social control. For different accounts of the figure of the mother in American culture see Stephanie Smith, *Conceived by Liberty: Maternal Figures and 19th-century American Literature* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1994); E. Ann Kaplan, *Motherhood and Representation: The Mother in Popular Culture and Melodrama* (New York: Routledge, 1992); and Rosalind Pollack Petchesky, *Fetal Images: The Power of Visual Culture in the Politics of Reproduction* in *Theorizing Feminism*, ed. Anne Herrmann and Abigail Stewart (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1994).


6. In tandem with this project, I am preparing an edition of *The Crux* for Duke Univ. Press.


10. In many ways, this follows what Foucault calls “genealogy,” which he describes as a new way of performing historical analysis that deliberately cultivates “the details and accidents that accompany every beginning.” This mode of understanding the displaced and recurrent origins of a discourse is “to identify the minute devations—or conversely, the complete reversals—the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us.” Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1977), 80, 81.

11. In this essay, I am limiting my scope to a particular expression of white progressive movement feminism at the turn of the century. This was by no means the only practice of feminism during this period. Other activities at this time by non-white women focused on issues of gender oppression, including black clubwomen’s organizational and Ida B. Wells’s anti-lynching activism. However, I am wary of simply including these practices under the larger rubric of “feminism” because this would problematically subsume them under the very category that I am trying to problematize (precisely because of its historically exclusionary terminologies and tactics). Instead, I would suggest that the political practices of women of color from the turn of the century are deserving of a more contextual and specified understanding of their work, especially around issues of race and gender. For work that does do this justice see Paula J. Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: Bantam Books, 1984); Hazel Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: the Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987); and Ann DuCille, *Skin Trade* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1996).

12. Daylanne English, “W. E. B. DuBois’s *Family Crisis*,” *American Literature* 72 (June 2000): 296. Surprisingly, however, English tends to dismiss the value and impact eugenics had within feminist practices of the period, writing that eugenics only appealed to “a few female American intellectuals and activists” (294).


14. Gail Bederman argues that this kind of “racially-based feminism” advocated strongly that women’s sexual responsibility was integral to the relative outcomes of either racial survival or racial destruction. She writes: “White, native born Americans could choose either women’s sexual dependence, leading to racial decline and barbarism, or women’s sexual equality, leading to racial advancement and the highest civilization ever evolved.” Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1995), 136. For a study of how feminism and evolutionism intersected in the British context see Rhi Feksi, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1995).


18. My understanding of this campaign is informed by Lauren Berlant’s work on sex, citizenship, and “the aura of the little girl” in the contemporary U.S. She argues: “Sometimes, when the little girl, the child, or youth are invoked in discussions about pornography, obscenity, or the administration of morality in U.S. mass culture, actually endangered living beings are being imagined. Frequently, however, we should understand that these disturbing figures are fetishes, effigies that disguise, displace...


21. Quoted in Kevels, *In the Name of Eugenics*, 90.


24. Ibid., 110.


34. For my argument on degeneration narratives, see “Down on All Fours: Atavistic Perversions and the Science of Desire from Frank Norris to Djuna Barnes,” *American Literature* (Sept. 2001).


37. An interesting addendum to this comparison is the fact that Owen Wister was diagnosed with neurasthenia by the physician S.W. Mitchell (infamous for his “rest cure”), as was Gilman, but Mitchell did not advise him to “rest” but rather to take a trip to the West for some exercise. In fact, while Gilman wrote “The Yellow Wallpaper” as a critique of Mitchell’s therapy, Wister wrote *The Virginian* in praise of it. See Barbara Will, “The Nervous Origins of the American Western,” *American Literature* 70 (June 1998): 293–316.


43. Ibid., 5, 4.


49. Ibid., 32.

50. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland* (1914; New York: Pantheon, 1979), 84, 22, 87. Val Gough characterizes *Herland*’s descriptions of its mothers as part of its “lesbian subtext” in which Gilman articulates “a lesbian-feminist vision of the nurturing and collective capacities of women.” Gough perhaps too hastily translates *Herland* into a presentist political currency—of feminist sexual subservience—that places the text in an ideological context that elides the specificities of Gilman’s project. Her descriptions can be read as “butch erotics,” and her critique of heterosexuality resembles something subservive, from a perspective outside of the feminism of the period. See Val Gough, “Lesbians and Virgins: The New Motherhood in *Herland*,”
In the 1880s, early in her career, the American suffrage leader Anna Howard Shaw sported what was at that time a distinctly mannish hairdo. When someone snidely asked her in a roomful of people why she wore her hair so short, she retorted, "I will admit frankly that it is a birthmark. I was born with short hair." Shaw was obviously intending to be clever, but she had unintentionally delivered a Krafft-Ebingism. It was only a few years before her witticism that the sexologists had defined the female sexual invert as congenitally "a man trapped in a woman's body." Whether or not Shaw was aware of how she had revealed herself as a sexual invert, shortly after this incident she began to grow her hair longer and to arrange it in a decorous bun—a style she continued to wear until her death thirty years later. As she later observed of her willingness to adopt a more conventional hairstyle: "No woman in public life can afford to make herself conspicuous by an eccentricity of dress and appearance. If she does so she suffers for it herself, which may not disturb her, and to a greater degree, for the cause she represents, which should disturb her." Shaw saw the suffrage cause as so crucial that she would make whatever concessions to conformity she was convinced she must make in public. As her personal correspondence indicates, however, at home with her lover, Lucy Anthony, she was as butch as she pleased.

Shaw's position points up a conflict that I have found ubiquitous in my recent work on late-nineteenth-century women. In our era, we would describe as lesbians and who were absolutely crucial in the movements to get the vote for American women, to open higher education to them, and to make a place for them in the professions. The conflict led to ironic contradictions and double lives. In brief, the conflict was this: the nineteenth century had constructed a clean and clear definition of "woman." She was, needless to say,