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Nuclear Alternatives:

Interracial and Queer Families in American Literature, 1840-1905

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Doctor of Philosophy

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Interracial and Queer Families in American Literature, 1840-1905

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An abstract of a dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the

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2013

Abstract

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By

Maureen Terese McCarthy

Nuclear Alternatives: Interracial and Queer Families in American Literature, 1840-1905 explores various ways white Americans imagined black-white interracial and non-traditional families before and after the American Civil War. It moves through time, exploring what makes an interracial family visible, and analyzing how these families are constructed with regard to racial categorization and gendered expectations. *Nuclear Alternatives* contends that family is performative, meaning that it relies on repeated acts, social recognition, and particular performative speech acts such as naming. It argues that, throughout history, family is an idea separate from the bodies or structures that usually define it. My understanding of family encompasses visions beyond the nuclear, and is based on an understanding of family as a chosen, constructed, and action-based social bond. The families in this dissertation consist of persons who identify as white and those who identify as black, and often, they are not immediately legible as families. My families always stand at the site of some type of indiscretion or threat, in the realm of ambiguity and doubt, a circumstance I call "productive ambiguity." Where we find interracial families we also find category crises and ruptures, hybridity and amphibiousness that render queer family structures possible. Because interracial families disrupt the default monoracial concept of family in the United States, they represent a particularly fruitful site for exploring how families in general are formed, recognized, and interpreted.

I have found examples of interracial families in well-known literature such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Dred* (1856), Mark Twain's *Puddn'head Wilson* (1894), as well as in archival finds such as minstrel show performer Thomas Dartmouth (T. D.) Rice's *Otello* (1844) and antisuffragist Rachel Baker Gale's *No Men Wanted* (1903). In each of these texts, I find "problem" families—families that seem not quite to fit into conventional definitions but still function the ways families are supposed to function: sharing resources, exchanging affection and care, building relationships that are presumed to be long-term. Current discussions surrounding same-sex marriage, transracial and international adoption, interracial families, and nontraditional familial structures make discussions of interracial families and an understanding their historical meaning more important than ever.

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Chapter 1

Nuclear Alternatives: An Introduction

Around 1860, P. T. Barnum exhibited a family consisting of a black mother, her black daughter, and her two albino daughters in his American Museum. In a Currier and Ives lithograph of the group, the woman and her girls do not look like they belong together [Fig. 1]. While the family exhibited by Barnum was not "actually" interracial, it was presented that way—as a biological curiosity and a social impossibility. The lithograph, crafted to heighten the differences among the people in the image, relied entirely on the caption to indicate this as a biological family. The "white" albino girls, looking very European, stand in striking contrast to their mother's and sister's dark

Fig. 1 "The Albino Sisters and Their Black Mother and Sister" from P. T. Barnum, "An Illustrated Catalogue and Guide Book to Barnum's American Museum."

features. The caption operates in direct competition to the image, arguing "the white children's features being so decidedly Ethiopian as to preclude the possibility of doubt as to their being purely African. They are beyond all doubt, *White Negroes*" (Barnum). The disconnect between the image, which highlights difference, and the caption, which emphasizes similarity, creates an ambiguity that marks this family as a curiosity. How can a group of people be at the same time biologically related, biologically distinct, racially similar, and racially different? This image, with its cognitive dissonance and category crises, stands as a fitting symbol of the families at the heart of this dissertation.

These families consist of persons who identify as white and those who identify as black, and often, they are not immediately legible as families. My families often assume forms beyond the nuclear, and always stand at the site of some type of indiscretion or threat. They live in the realm of ambiguity and doubt. Where we find interracial families we also find category crises and ruptures, hybridity and amphibiousness. Because interracial families disrupt the default monoracial concept of family in the United States, they represent a particularly fruitful site for exploring how families in general are formed, recognized, and interpreted. *Nuclear Alternatives: Interracial and Queer Families in American Literature, 1840-1905* explores various ways white Americans imagined black-white interracial and non-traditional families before and after the American Civil War. It moves through time, exploring what makes an interracial family visible, and analyzing how these families are constructed with regard to racial categorization and gendered expectations. *Nuclear Alternatives* contends that family is performative, meaning that it relies on repeated acts, social recognition, and particular performative speech acts such as naming. It argues that, throughout history, family is an idea separate from the bodies or

structures that usually define it. I have found examples of interracial families in well-known literature such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Mark Twain's *Puddn'head Wilson*, as well as the work of obscure playwrights such as the antisuffragist Rachel Baker Gale and minstrel show performer Thomas Dartmouth (T. D.) Rice.[1]

I use the term "queer families" not to refer to families that feature a person who experiences same-gender attraction, but rather as a designation more closely aligned with the idea of "queer kinship" advanced by Elizabeth Freeman and Judith Butler. I use the term *family* instead of the more general and expansive *kinship* for several reasons. Both terms carry specific theoretical valences that vary from field to field. In Anthropology, for example, the term *kinship* refers to a vast array of systems of classification based on biological and cultural ties, following Lewis Henry Morgan. Sometimes *kinship* is used when discussing an othered system of relationships unfamiliar to the speaker/writer. In using the term *family*, I hope to expand the definition of family to apply to what might have previously been known as kinship in certain academic circles, because of the more powerful political associations of American rhetorics of family. In American culture, the term family carries more intimate and emotional connotations, and is the term used in the legal investigations of kinship known as "family law." The term family is used in many high-stakes social, political, and moral arguments, and I wanted to engage with all of these conversations. Family may refer to such disparate concepts as a group of biologically related humans, one human and his companion animal(s), the entire human race (as is sometimes seen in ethical theology) or the planet earth (as in rhetoric about global climate change). I am most interested in the possibilities that emerge from

[1] In order to limit its scope, the archive of this project includes only examples of black-white interracial families. I do recognize that there exist examples of other types of interracial makeup of families (as well as

literature pointing us toward new and alternative constructions of the family unit. If we find new ways of reading the family in late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century literatures, we will be able to see our own entanglements over family more clearly.

Judith Butler asks, "Is kinship always already heterosexual?" *Kinship*, a term referring to the taxonomization of human relations (especially as they relate to reproduction), might in fact always refer to heterosexual formations. I contend, however, that *family*, a term which points toward the lived experience of human relations, takes a multiplicity of forms. I use the term *queer families* to refer to the intentional practice of thinking beyond the nuclear, beyond the heterosexual, beyond the monoracial or reproductive. I agree with Elizabeth Freeman that family (what Freeman calls *kinship*) is a *practice* (298): "the process by which bodies and the potential for physical and emotional attachment are created, transformed, and sustained over time" (298). Families matter because "(1) a culture's repetition of particular practices actually *produces* what seems to be the material facts that supposedly *ground* those practices in the first place, and (2) when those repetitions are governed by a norm, other possibilities are literally unthinkable and impossible" (Elizabeth Freeman 297). I argue, however, that certain kinds of ambiguity, particularly in literary texts, render these possibilities legible through a process I call *productive ambiguity*.

Productive ambiguity, found in each of my major texts in different forms, allows queer family structures to be not only possible, but also visible. Through category crises troubling clear definitions of humans based on race, sexuality, gender, or social role, new possibilities emerge that allow a theorization of families in general and throughout time,

including queer families. In other words, very specific, localized contexts provide a lens through which to see family as a whole more clearly. The project's dates span a period of massive change in race relations in the United States, a period of many shifts in thinking about interracial families and family as an institution, but throughout all of these shifts, I contend that family remains performative, constructed by language, and lived through nuclear alternatives.

From slavery to civil war to reconstruction and beyond, the wide date range of my project allows for a wide range of authorial viewpoints, historical perspectives, and ways of constituting interracial families. The American Civil War famously pitted brother against brother in a bloody ideological conflict, at the heart of which lies rhetoric about family. Slave owners defended the peculiar institution on the grounds that their slaves were like children, unable to care for themselves and therefore subject to the loving care of their "masters." Proslavery thinkers such as George Fitzhugh, John C. Calhoun, and Caroline Lee Hentz painted a picture of the peculiar institution as a series of happy extended families united under one benevolent patriarchal head.[2] Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* galvanized the abolitionist movement when it presented slavery in terms of how destructive it could be to families. Stowe's political arguments highlighted "the permanency of [heterosexual] marriage, the sacredness of the home, and the dependence of civilized life upon the family" that characterizes rhetorics of the family used in nineteenth-century America and continue today (Grossberg 10).

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2 The canonical studies of paternalism as understood by slaveholders are those by Genovese and Fox-Genovese. Censer offers a history of this idea and a discussion of the violence inherent in such a system. A study of proslavery fiction and its role in constructing this worldview can be found in Ryan *The Grammar of Good Intentions.*

In literature, as in life, family has never fit neatly into patriarchal ideals of the nuclear or plantation family.[3] This project proceeds from questions about interracial families constituted by something other than mere biology in the imaginative literature of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century United States. Who is allowed to be read as a family, in the case of an interracial group of persons, and why are some legible and others not? How does family identity function? How does it intersect with racialized and gendered identities? How do mixed-race identities function in the larger cultural context of the United States? Where and when are identities divorced from the bodies that contain them?

Through both canonical and archival sources, I interrogate the meaning of family and the complicated racial and gendered contexts within which the family exists. The texts in this project feature "problem" families, which I view as vehicles for examining how American culture creates and enforces identity categories and lines of affiliation. The texts, although seemingly unrelated, actually share many qualities, questions, and historical problems. The four main texts of the dissertation are T. D. Rice's *Otello* (1844), Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Dred* (1856), Mark Twain's *Puddn'head Wilson* (1894), and Rachel Baker Gale's *No Men Wanted* (1903).

Aside from all depicting black-white interracial families, these texts share other common characteristics. Each of them has either been classified as "unreadable" by critics or designated as such through their critical neglect. This characterization as unreadable is important because it points to either an overcomplexity of narrative or an assumed oversimplicity of plot. These "unreadable" genres and narratives echo the

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3 For some studies on exposing the enormous differences between the constructions of families in rhetoric versus practice, see Shah; Hartog, *Man and Wife*; and Shapiro.

illegibility of the families in these texts, and also present opportunities for finding and identifying these families. While Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson* and Stowe's *Dred* have been considered unreadable for their complex narrative structures, Rachel Baker Gale's plays are unreadable for a different reason. Gale's texts exhibit a clear narrative structure, but their plots are so banal, their characters so flat, and their ideology so heavy-handed, that critics have not bothered to look more closely at them. That description practically defines the parlor play, which has received very minimal critical notice as a genre. Unlike with Stowe and Twain, there exists no debate over whether or not critics should take the time to consider them—Gale's plays are simply ignored. I do not make any aesthetic claims for Rachel Baker Gale's work, but I do contend that they offer a rich field of critical inquiry. The simple plots mask complicated gender and racial dynamics that the playwright took for granted would be understood from her own gender, race, class, and political perspective. Both overcomplexity and oversimplicity render a text "unreadable" in a literary sense, but I mine these texts for possibilities. They contain the tangled and complex history of racial and family relations in the United States, and I find their very unreadability valuable for these very possibilities. Relatedly, these texts share a position tangential to "Literature" in that they occupy so-called popular genres: *Otello* a minstrel farce; *Dred* a sentimental novel; *Pudd'nhead* a humorous novel; and *No Men Wanted* a parlor play. [4]

Another common element of all my major texts is some engagement with the conventions of blackface minstrelsy, whether explicitly or implicitly through devices such as the "Negro stage dialect" that developed out of the genre. Sometimes a direct

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[4] For more on the distinctions between "popular" genres and "literature" as it is understood in the study of literature, see Levine *Highbrow/Lowbrow*.

relationship between authors may be identified, such as that between Stowe and Rice. Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* "is inconceivable without Rice's extravaganzas [as Jim Crow]" (*Jim Crow* xxvi), says W. T. Lhamon. Stowe's and Twain's minstrelized characters participate in the production of stereotypes of blackness that we continue to perpetuate and battle today in the United States. I find in these echoes of minstrelsy a previously-unrecognized literary and cultural type that I call the comedic mulatto. The comedic mulatto exploits the ideological difference between black and white to mine humor in claiming both black and white identities, as white blackface minstrel performers did. It subverts the usual dynamic of miscegenation, which produces a mixed-race child that usually cannot lay claim to either a truly black or a truly white racial identity.

I conceptualize race as a constructed concept that holds enormous social power, especially in the nineteenth-century United States. Under a system of race-based slavery, the color line determined who was free, a citizen, and entitled to control their own bodies, and who was enslaved. I begin with the assumption, shared with Nell Painter, that "race is an idea, not a fact." (ix). I ascribe to that corner of antiessentialist thought that views race as constructed through language, performed through repeated daily acts that come to be viewed as natural. Valerie Babb provides a useful framework for theorizing race in this manner: "As a means of human classification, race can ignore shared physical resemblance and categorize on the basis of assigned social legacy" (10). I see this disconnection between biological characteristics and social legacy as the space of the family.

Like Alys Weinbaum, I recognize that race, family, gender, reproduction, social status, and citizenship are all intimately connected. Laws governing marriage, divorce, custody rights, etc. shaped racial statuses and gender roles for everyone, not simply the parties involved. Companionate marriage grew more prevalent during the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, based on the Puritan conception of marriage as a spiritual partnership rather than as a means of consolidating political power. This idea, along with the contract theory of John Locke, revised how marriages were chosen. Although these developments theoretically made marriage a more equitable institution, women continued to be culturally compelled into matrimony, which remained under the system of coverture. The legal tradition in England and the United States conceptualized marriage as a contract, but once made, gave men the vast majority of power within it. According to legal scholar Hendrik Hartog,

> a tacit understanding of marriage as structured inequality pervaded everything they [eighteenth and early nineteenth century legal treatise writers and judges] wrote. In marriage, husbands dominated wives. The law of marriage set the rules that shaped and legalized that domination. Because marriage was the central social institution in the regulation of male-female relations, marriage had a determinant impact on the identities of all men and all women. ("Wives" 298)

The structured inequality built through laws and court decisions reinforced patriarchy and affected the relationship of men and women on a larger scale. These cases also—although having seemingly nothing to do with race—reinforced white privilege through the assumption and understanding that marriage laws existed also to protect property rights and lines of inheritance that gave whites an enormous economic advantage.[5]

[5] For more on the relationship of marriage law to property rights, see Clymer.

It is a painful historical fact that white leaders, artists, scientists, authors, intellectuals, advertisers, doctors, businessmen, and media collaborated to "prove" that people of African descent were inhuman and to depict them as animals. When we remember this fact, it seems impossible that black-white families could have existed, even in the imagination, during the period between 1830 and 1915. Indeed, the issue is complicated. Laws prohibited interracial marriage in most states.[6] A huge majority of black individuals were not recognized as persons under the law before the American Civil War.[7] Since "the family is in many ways a legal creation" (Grossberg ix), establishing any kind of family would seem an impossibility for the legally unrecognized. Frances Smith Foster acknowledges some of the obstacles to slave marriages: "To meet, to court, and in the case of most enslaved people, to maintain a marriage relationship, they generally had to cross hostile or alien territories. *But they did*" (xvii, emphasis mine). The families of those enslaved had to exist and operate under the constant threat of separation and abuse, but they did exist and operate, against all odds. In addition to Foster, Deborah Gray White, Eugene Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Brenda Stevenson, Melton A. McLaurin, and Nell Irvin Painter all argue that enslaved Americans forged lasting familial bonds *outside* of the law, asserting their humanity and creating identities apart from that of "slave." With this reconsideration comes the necessity of redefining the notion of "family" to include networks linked by ties of affection and mutual responsibility rather than consanguinity.

[6] The number fluctuated as northern states repealed anti-miscegenation laws leading up to the Civil War and Reconstruction repealed others in the South. Western states continued to enact these laws as they were added to the union, and southern states reinstituted them beginning in the 1870s with the rise of the "Redeemers" to political power.

[7] According to the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, in 1860, the number of free black men and women is estimated at 476,748, or 1.5% of the total population of the United States, while enslaved black men and women numbered 3,950,546—about 12.7% of the total population. That means that about 88% of black Americans were enslaved at that historical moment.

Critical legal and literary-historical discussions of the American family tend to focus either on the development of the legally-constituted white family *or* the more loosely-defined "kinship networks" of enslaved African Americans, often presented in contrast to the white family.[8] This mode of thinking perpetuates "the strong monoracial notion of family" enforced in American culture (Clymer 6). Some authors have seen the lie in the stark differentiation of the "white family" and the "black family." Hortense Spillers recognizes this distinction, outlined in the Moynihan Report, and refutes it, recognizing instead that, "[u]nder the Moynihan rule, 'ethnicity' itself identifies a total objectification of human and cultural motives—the 'white' family, by implication, and the 'Negro Family,' by outright assertion, in a constant opposition of binary meanings" (205). In recent years, scholars such as Werner Sollors and Randall Kennedy have attempted to trace the history of the black-white family, but they have remained within the rigid definitions of family associated with the white ideal or the legal code, rather than the more flexible (and realistic) definitions espoused by historians of African American families. My project seeks to enter this conversation with regard to the American family by acknowledging two things: first, that neither the "black family" nor the "white family" can be understood without reference to the other; and second, that "family" means different things to different people, and a definition solely contingent on sexual or biological ties is insufficient to understanding this complex institution.

When speaking and writing about nineteenth-century America, few literary critics describe their analyses in terms of *interracial* families. One reason is that "family" seems an inadequate term to describe the situation whereby white men

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[8] For a few examples of this practice, see Grossberg, Hartog *Man and Wife*, Berlin and Rowland; Davis and Davis; and Staples.

sexually exploited female slaves, fathering countless enslaved children. Once slavery was abolished, interracial sex and interracial families were considered much more dangerous by those who wished to ensure power and wealth remained consolidated in white hands.[9] For this reason, the interracial families found in literature from this period are usually punished in some way (such as by death in Webb's *The Garies and Their Friends*) or are so submerged in the text as to be almost unrecognizable as a family.

Now that multiracial families are becoming increasingly visible in American culture, it is time to begin exploring the history of these relationships and their literary representations. In the past, most interracial[10] families in the United States have been theorized in the context of interracial sex. These relationships usually carry the weight of the history of slavery—an economic system which materially rewarded the rape and sexual coercion of slave women by their enslavers. This is not to say that love and marriage were impossible between different races in the nineteenth-century United States. Randall Kennedy suggests in *Interracial Intimacies* that interracial sex between white women and black men found some measure of social acceptance in the South before the Civil War. He cites "a fascinating study of free blacks in antebellum Alabama" by Gary B. Mills. Mills' 1981 project "uncovered eighty-three long-term interracial relationships, of which approximately half involved white women and free

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9 Crane in *Race, Citizenship, and Law*; Harris; and Clymer, among others, argue that whiteness becomes a legal and economic commodity that was legally protected.

10 For an excellent review and justification of this term, see Sollors' introduction to *Neither Black Nor White Yet Both* (3-30). This introduction also offers a sophisticated discussion of race as a social construct, which is the primary basis of my own thinking about race and other categories of identity.

colored men. In none of these cases did he find evidence that any community action was taken against the couple" (Kennedy *Interracial* 69).[11]

A small number of famous literary works represent loving unions between men and women of different races, including Frank Webb's *The Garies and Their Friends*, William Wells Brown's *Clotel; Or, The President's Daughter*, and Lydia Maria Child's *Hobomok*. Beyond "miscegenation," however, there are other ways in which an interracial family could be imagined, for example, transracial adoption or possibly the integration "into the family" of a trusted servant.[12] In the nineteenth century, transracial adoption was much rarer than it is today, but it still existed. Despite the deeply-ingrained social prejudices of whites against blacks, some white families did adopt black children "as their own" and vice versa. Transracial adoption[13] appears prominently in stories that feature Native Americans, either as a method of assimilation into Euro-American culture (Child's "Willie Wharton"), or as a result of an abduction (as in C. M. Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie*). Two late-nineteenth-century examples, Kate Chopin's "Désirée's Baby" and Charles W. Chesnutt's "Her Virginia Mammy," feature women with unknown racial origins who are adopted into white families. Although Chesnutt reveals his protagonist's black ancestors and Chopin chooses to leave Désirée's racial status ambiguous, both stories deal with the question of what constitutes race in the first place. Both indicate that "white" families are not always as

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11 A more thorough history of sex between white women and black men can be found in Hodes.

[12] Wallace-Sanders investigates this complex relationship. She is skeptical, as am I, of the possibility of the true integration while acknowledging the rhetoric of familial inclusion of the employed in reference to black women working as nurses or caretakers in white families.

[13] Recent monographs by Callahan and Jerng have deepened the scholarship of transracial adoption in literature considerably. Both Callahan and Jerng determine "transracial" to be the most convenient term when discussing these relationships. Jerng also uses "transnational," while Callahan differentiates between *transnational* and *extra-tribal* when discussing the dynamics of contemporary American Indian adoptions. See Jerng p. xii and Callahan pp. 6-8.

"pure" as they pretend, and trouble the notion of "transracial." I address in this dissertation what I consider to be the two most prominent examples of transracial adoption in literature, both written by Harriet Beecher Stowe: Ophelia's adoption of Topsy in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Old Uncle Tiff's adoption of the Cripps children in *Dred*. This formulation of family-by-choice is the controlling idea of my dissertation project.

My definition of family is drawn largely from family communication theorist Martha Minnow. Minnow argues that the most important question to ask when determining who to count as a family is "Does this group function as a family?" In other words, "do they share affection and resources, think of one another as family members, and present themselves as such to neighbors and others?" (8). This definition relies on behaviors and attitudes rather than biological relationships, on social recognition rather than simply self-definition. Minnow's definition comes the closest to how I generally use the term "family." My conception, however, does not rely on a conscious understanding of relationships as familial as much as the actions that subconsciously make a family a recognizable unit. The example of the characters in *No Men Wanted* illustrates the distinction between Minnow's definition and mine, since I argue that the author specifically constructs them to be illegible as a family, yet I read them as such. In this case, I am including in "family" the idea of a "household," in the sense of a group of people cohabitating in a shared physical space. My definitions contrast with the general notion of the nuclear or *elementary* family, as it is known in sociology and anthropology. The elementary family is conjugal and consanguineous, and in cultural associations, usually monoracial.

Families take on many other forms beyond the nuclear, yet the United States continues to advance the nuclear formulation of family both culturally and legally.[14] In *The Neutered Mother, the Sexual Family*, feminist legal scholar Martha Fineman describes this inconsistency:

> The ideological construction and maintenance of the family is pervasive and persistent. Paradoxically, while the family may be hailed as fundamental, its very significance in the maintenance and perpetuation of patriarchal family is an 'assumed institution' with a well-defined, socially constructed form complete with complementary roles. (23)

Like gender and race, family identity requires "pervasive and persistent" ideological maintenance. Fineman recognizes the illusion of the natural family, but refers to "complementary roles," which can only be the ones we recognize as traditionally nuclear: father, mother, (caretakers) and child (cared for).[15] These limited (and limiting) definitions, however, can never encompass the multiplicity of family relationships as they exist in the world. Why do we continue to maintain that "kinship does not work, or does not qualify as kinship, unless it assumes a recognizable family form" (Butler "Is Kinship" 14)?[16] Instead, I advocate a conception of the family based on the performance theory that has proved so productive for thinking about other types of identity categories, such as gender and race.

These flexible definitions stand in contrast to the rigid ideal of the nuclear white family, the "haven in a heartless world" that offered ideological escape from the

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[14] So-called "marriage promotion" policies such as the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, the Healthy Marriage Initiative, and other tax breaks for married couples "aim. . . [to] ensur[e] that children are raised in married, heterosexual families, preferably by their biological parents" (Lauter 27).

[15] I have included "caretakers" and "cared for" in parentheses here in order to make clear that a family need not be "traditionally" nuclear (e.g., headed by a grandparent, a single parent, or same-sex parents; caring for a special needs adult or an elderly person) in order to assume a "recognizable family form," to use Butler's term. The terms "caretaker" and "cared for" were shaped by my reading of Martha Fineman's writings on vulnerability.

[16] Butler uses "kinship" in a way that I would use "family."

competitive public sphere. This image of the family is based on an assumption of whiteness (and therefore social privilege and legal freedom), Christianity, and economic stability. Known sometimes as the Cult of Domesticity, this ideology was supported by the legal structures of marriage, custody, contraception, and the recognition of illegitimate children. The narrative of this family is well-worn. It was constituted by a life-long heterosexual tie, legitimized in marriage and consummated by the birth of biological children. The father stood as the head of the household, the sole earner and the chief decision-maker. His authority based on his economic position and the Christian belief that the father represents God's authority in the home, the father was not to encounter any opposition from his wife or children.

His wife was obedient to his will, because she remained subordinate to him both ideologically and legally, under a system that still often operated according to the principles of coverture, even as the laws slowly changed to accommodate a more contractual view of marriage.[17] The mother of this family stayed home, ostensibly living a life of leisure provided for by her husband. A wife at home was considered a status symbol, along with her emergence as the primary household consumer. She ruled over this "private sphere" of the home in that she was tasked with caring for the daily cares of the household and/or hiring servants to do the work. This is the picture of the nuclear family that emerges from literature, advertisements, and other cultural images. This is the version of family that is so often called up in political arguments warning of various threats to family life and family values. This story of the family sold household products, magazines, and political ideas. This is not, however, the way that family looked in

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[17] For more thorough legal histories of marriage in the United States, see Hartog *Man and Wife*, Coontz, and Grossberg.

everyday nineteenth-century life, no matter how often the refrain of the nuclear was repeated.[18]

In fact, I operate under the assumption that wherever there is insistence on the "naturalness" or "Truth" of a given thing (in our case, the stability of the nuclear family or of racial distinctions) indicates doubt. If something is natural, there is no need to insist that it is so or to fear that it will not endure. Insistence implies doubt. This doubt, I argue, stems from the social constructedness of identity. Because identities are largely culturally determined, they are malleable, which leads to the fear that seemingly stable categories will not always remain so. Antisuffrage advocates, for example, worried that women claiming a place in the public sphere would cause them to become more manly. They cried that manly women were unnatural, that they would cause men to become feminized, they worried that gender differentiation might cease to exist. They insisted that women were ordained by God to be domestic, and that any departure from the home was therefore unnatural. This very argument, however, indicates a belief that *actions* create gender, not biology. In the case of families, tension exists between an understanding of family as a biological institution and as a cultural institution. Even those authors who seem most deeply invested in the biological ties of family, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe, reveal a commitment to caretaking as the constituting element of a familial group. Insistence on familial duty and calls to live up to family legacies likewise call up the eternal nature-versus-nurture debate and indicate again that actions, narratives, and decisions make up what we understand as familial bonds.

Nuclear Alternatives

[18] Since the 1980s, scholars have meticulously argued that this ideal of separate spheres did not hold up in life or literature. For more on this theory, see Davidson and Hatcher and Kerber.

My understanding of family encompasses visions beyond the nuclear, and is based on an understanding of family as a chosen, constructed, and action-based social bond. In each of the texts of this dissertation, I find "problem" families—families that seem not quite to fit into conventional definitions but still function the ways families are supposed to function: sharing resources, exchanging affection and care, building relationships that are presumed to be long-term. Once I have identified a family in the text, I investigate how the workings of race and gender operate in the text, and how those are related to the way families are identified and how they function. These chapters share an investment in ambiguity, reverses, and portable identities. Together, they argue that the ambiguity of identity leaves room for re-creation and alternative possibilities.

No project on interracial families can ignore the mixed-race offspring of interracial unions. The figure of the "mulatto" plays a large role in the ways that we as a nation conceive of ourselves and our racial history. Chapter 2, "The Comedic Mulatto: T. D. Rice's *Otello*, Miscegenation and Minstrelsy," argues that although it dominates the narrative surrounding mixed-race persons in the United States in the nineteenth century, the tragic mulatto is not the only depiction of the "product" of interracial unions in American culture. This chapter investigates the figure of what I call the "comedic mulatto" in T. D. Rice's 1844 minstrel adaptation of Shakespeare's *Othello.* The play features a biracial son of Otello and Desdemona, who appears with his face half covered in burnt cork (the other half presumably left white). I argue that the appearance of this child can open space to theorize minstrelsy in general as a performance of both an "authentic" blackness while maintaining their social and political claims to whiteness. I conclude that, for blackface minstrel performers, the repeated act of blacking up leads to

the performance of a humorously hybrid racial identity I identify as the "comedic mulatto." The comedic mulatto reveals the folly of attempts to fix the social meaning of either blackness or whiteness through minstrel representations. He gives the lie to conceptions of family that maintain they must be visually legible as such, monoracial, and nuclear.

Chapter 3, "Amphibious Creatures: Domestic Alternatives in Harriet Beecher Stowe's Antislavery Fiction," lays the groundwork for an understanding of family as performative by investigating how Stowe separates the ideas of motherhood and home from women's bodies or domestic structures in *Dred* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. According to Stowe, true motherhood (defined for her as a self-sacrificial devotion to family and a commitment to teaching others about Christianity) represents a position of power. Using the example of Old Uncle Tiff, a slave who "adopts" three poor white children in *Dred*, I argue that Stowe attempts to offer the ideological power of motherhood to all oppressed groups, including enslaved black men. Likewise, unlikely spaces such as the Great Dismal Swamp are transformed in Stowe's hands to blissful domestic spaces through the presence of motherhood, which Stowe equates with Christian love.

Chapter 4, "The Performative Family in Mark Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson,*" argues that familial relationships are constructed and familial identity performative. Using the theories of Judith Butler and J. L. Austin, I argue that familial performativity differs from that of race and gender because it relies on race and gender performativity in large part. I argue that family is performative in the sense that it is constructed through narrative and acts out particular scripts (such as the self-sacrificing mother) and because it relies on particular performative speech acts such as naming. This chapter explores how

the exchange of Chambers and Tom in Twain's 1894 *Pudd'nhead Wilson* contributes to destabilize racial and familial relationships as well as the notion of "truth." It further explains how different modes of performativity converge in *Pudd'nhead* to point to certain prescriptive behaviors, bodies, and languages—operating below the level of conscious performance—that define who is legible as a family.

Chapter 5, "Family Inaction: The Anti-Family in Rachel Baker Gale's *No Men Wanted,*" further explores the idea of family performativity by investigating a negative example—a household that refuses legibility as a family. This chapter introduces and analyzes a critically-forgotten parlor play, Rachel Baker Gale's *No Men Wanted* (the text of which is provided in full as Appendix A). Like many other antifeminist works of the period, this play satirizes a household of "bachelor girls" who cannot resist the allure of marriage and a nuclear family structure. I argue these bachelor girls constitute an "anti-family": a household that will not be read as a family because of its deviance from a traditional nuclear structure. Gale operates from a set of assumptions about the naturalness and stability of the categories of race and family, assumptions that go unexamined in the text, but which are undermined by the play's action and historical context. If we read against the limiting nuclear definition of family, I contend that it is possible to render families legible where they would not otherwise have been.

The Epilogue summarizes the conclusions of the project and outlines some of the current political debates about family that may be informed by the analysis in *Nuclear Alternatives*. Discussions surrounding same-sex marriage, transracial and international adoption, interracial families, and nontraditional familial structures all intersect with the ideas set forth in this dissertation. The Epilogue concludes that, in a nation led by a

biracial president, discussions about interracial families and understanding their historical meaning are more important than ever.

Chapter 2

The Comedic Mulatto: T. D. Rice's *Otello*, Miscegenation, and Minstrelsy

T. D. Rice's minstrel comedy *Otello* represents two different but related ways that white Americans experience cross-racial desire: miscegenation and blackface minstrelsy. At the intersection of these two modes lies a literary figure: the half-black, half-white son of Otello and Desdemona. A farcical adaptation of Shakespeare's *Othello, Otello* grapples with the same threats of cross-racial desire contained in the original and present as a political threat outside the theater, and performs them in the mode of the minstrel show. Young Otello occupies the space of both miscegenation and minstrelsy and allows us to identify a cultural figure that has remained critically invisible: the comedic mulatto. The comedic mulatto is a biracial figure played for laughs or the blackface minstrel himself, caught in between his desire to perform authentic blackness and his fear of being permanently associated with that blackness. The threat posed by the interracial desire of Otello and Desdemona is what produces the comedic mulatto. The minstrel performer's desire to inhabit the identity of a black man in order to mock and fix blackness into a stable and controllable category only serves to fragment blackness and undermine the integrity of racial "purity" as a concept in general and as it pertains to family. As many critics have noted, there is no such thing as a racially "pure white" identity, and arguments that attempted to "preserve" this purity always did so in the face of some threat of mixture. The family, the social unit and social institution at the heart of this battle, can be understood better through understanding the comedic mulatto. The comedic

mulatto is one site that polices the boundaries and also blurs the lines of who can be read as a family based on who counts as white.

The desire to inhabit another's identity is not unrelated to the sexual desire that constitutes the interracial family in *Otello*. Robert Reid-Pharr suggests that "race" as a concept might in fact always be "lived as desire" (4). Following René Girard, Reid-Pharr explains the process by which race becomes lived as desire:

> (Racial) combatants are absolutely certain that they are distinct from their rival. Nonetheless their behaviors, their needs, their wants their grimy obsessions are remarkably similar to those of the so-called enemy. On either side the dominant gesture is one of negation. "I am not that vile thing which I hate." But strangely this gesture always reestablished the intimacy of the rivals' relationship. (4)

Reid-Pharr's theory presents a way of understanding minstrelsy's relationship to miscegenation. Blackface minstrelsy is nothing if not the repeated practice of demonstrating "I am not that vile thing which I hate." These protests, almost explicitly made in *Otello*, actually reveal a desire for the other and a close relationship between the reviled and the reviler. Therein lies the complicated racial workings of minstrelsy, and why there seems to be more of a color "threshold" than a line, as Lhamon reports (*Jim Crow* x). This constant attraction and resistance, this need to fix the other as one, hated thing, this give and take produces the comedic mulatto as surely as an interracial marriage produces Young Otello.

If we accept Reid-Pharr's theory, then race is the interplay of wanting association and dissociation with the Other. This dynamic sounds very much like the dynamic of the blackface minstrel, who himself desires to be read as authentically black while also understood as purely white. Minstrelsy creates, bolsters, and mocks the racial hierarchy of black and white and creates ambiguity through this complex interchange. This

ambiguity begets humor: the humor of the comedic mulatto. Unlike miscegenation, which involves two (presumably) willing partners who express mutual cross-racial desire, blackface minstrelsy involves one agent acting out a group identity without the consent of that group. Eric Lott, in *Love and Theft*, similarly

> see[s] the vagaries of racial desire as fundamental to minstrel-show mimicry. It was cross-racial desire that couples a nearly insupportable fascination and a self-protective derision with respect to black people and their cultural practices, and that made blackface minstrelsy less a sign of absolute white power and control than of panic, anxiety, terror, and pleasure (6).

Lott claims here that the act of blacking up expresses a transracial desire on the part of whites, and that this desire drives much of what blackface minstrelsy was. This illicit desire is mostly submerged throughout blackface minstrel performances, but it exists all the same. Just as in Otello and Desdemona's marriage, the desire on the part of whites to contain, possess, and become the black body creates a mulatto figure, what I argue here is the comedic mulatto.

T. D. Rice's *Otello* introduces a new element to the Othello story, Otello and Desdemona's mixed-race son, young Lorenzo Otello. To indicate his mixed-race heritage, Young Otello's face is split down the middle, half covered in that hallmark of the minstrel tradition, burnt cork. Young Otello occupies the space of both minstrelsy and miscegenation, which is the space of the comedic mulatto. Both sites of interracial desire and racial mixing, minstrelsy and miscegenation together inform our understanding of the comedic mulatto, who claims authentic blackness simultaneous with authentic whiteness in order to produce laughter. Young Otello makes these processes visible, which then enables us to see instances of the comedic mulatto throughout blackface minstrelsy and in

American culture, opposed to the tragic mulatto, who can claim neither whiteness nor blackness authentically.

First produced in 1844 in Philadelphia,[19] *Otello* significantly revises the familiar story of Shakespeare's *Othello*,[20] which was most often read as a cautionary tale against interracial desire. John Quincy Adams wrote in 1835, "The great moral lesson of the Tragedy of *Othello*, is that black and white blood cannot be intermingled in marriage without a gross outrage upon the laws of nature, and that in such violations nature will vindicate her laws" (qtd. MacLean 149). His mother had written in 1786 of a similar feeling of outrage upon seeing the play: "I lose much of the pleasure of the play, from the sooty appearance of the Moor. . . . I could not separate the African color from the man, nor prevent that disgust and horror which filled my mind every time I saw him touch the gentle Desdemona" (Adams 125). This "great *moral* lesson," which stemmed from cultural beliefs and legal structures, became a cornerstone issue in the debate over slavery and over what position the formerly-enslaved should occupy in a reunited country.

The jump from Shakespeare to minstrel show was not so very great. Scores of blackface adaptations of Shakespeare's plays surfaced on both sides of the Atlantic in the nineteenth century. The only difference with Otello is that the title character was already played in blackface in "legitimate" theaters. Bob Carlin traces "[t]he roots of blackface entertainment . . . as far back as William Shakepeare's *Othello*" (6). Otello, therefore, shifts from tragedy to farce, but preserves the theatrical conventions of playing its hero. But here, the black face that so repulsed viewers of the tragedy amuses its audience with

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[19] Although first performed in 1844, *Otello* was not published until 2003, in W. T. Lhamon's collection *Jump Jim Crow.* Lhamon transcribed the text from an 1853 manuscript in the New York Public Library inscribed to John B. Wright from T. D. Rice himself. Since this recent publication, criticism of *Otello* has gained some ground among critics of literature, history, and theater.

[20] For information on source texts of Shakespeare's *Othello*, see Bullough 7:193-265 and Hall.

its recognizably, comfortably “Negro” dialect and bumbling minstrel show antics. Rice based *Otello* on a British burlesque opera by Maurice Dowling called *Othello Travestie*, published in 1835.

Otello follows the general storyline of Shakespeare’s play, opening similarly with Roderigo and Iago advising Brabantio to “look to your daughter and your bags” (Rice 344). Otello avoids arrest by bribing the police officers Brabantio deploys against him, and he confirms his marriage to Desdemona. As Otello and Desdemona tell their own versions of the tale of their courtship, we learn that he wooed her with his tales of his daring escape from Southern slavery. Receiving an urgent commission from the Senate, he leaves Desdemona until they reunite in Cyprus, where Otello and the audience first meet Young Lorenzo Otello. Iago, a Yankee, has determined to ruin Otello out of jealousy, and he convinces Otello of Desedmona’s love for Cassio. Otello attempts to smother Desdemona (with their son in the bed beside her) and thinks he has succeeded until she jumps out of the bed at the last moment and joins in a raucous dance with the entire cast. Instead of the self-evident tragedy witnessed by Adams, Rice’s *Otello* ends in laughter and song, with Ophelia alive and well. At the end of the play she and Otello dance with their mixed-race child. Young Otello’s appearance, however, does not register unambiguous support for interracial marriage, as some have claimed. Instead, the play lampoons interracial marriage, mining the ideological difference between black and white for humor.

I argue that this *ideological* difference between black and white is so vast in the 1844 United States that their integration in the comedic mulatto seemed ludicrous. *Physical* distance between black and white was notoriously (and inevitably) difficult to

determine because the genetic "divide" between black and white does is more cultural fiction than biological fact. Laws defining who "counts" as white, social boundaries and family networks policed the color line vigilantly. The reason for these policing mechanisms lies in the social, political, and economic capital involved in claiming whiteness. To claim whiteness was to have access to economic and social advancement, political participation (if male), and, most importantly, title to one's own body and labor. Historians have argued that concepts of freedom in the United States grew out of the opposition with slavery.[21] With a racially-based system of slavery, ideas of freedom and whiteness developed in opposition to ideas of slavery and blackness. Legal personhood and citizenship, denied to most persons identified as "black," was available to white men, regardless of their economic status or country of origin. Whites' blackface minstrel shows[22] performed the work of racial differentiation for native- and foreign-born alike.

Historians such as Noel Ignatiev and David Roediger have made the case that the construction of blackness onstage was integral to the construction of whiteness in lower-class whites, particularly recent immigrants from Eastern and Western Europe. Ethnic and competitive "tensions within the working class" became subsumed within the delineation between black and white. Roediger explains,

> If languages of class hinged on the quite vague definition of white workers as 'not slaves', the hugely popular cult of blackface likewise developed by counterpoint. Whatever his attraction, the performers and audience knew that they were *not* the Black dandy personified by Zip Coon. Nor were they the sentimentalized and appealing preindustrial slave Jim Crow. (116)

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[21] See Morgan and Eltis.

[22] A small but important group of scholars have dedicated their efforts to uncovering the history of the black minstrel tradition whereby African Americans performed minstrel tunes and skits both in and out of blackface. See Sampson and Abbott and Seroff.

The practice and performance of minstrelsy, therefore, was the practice of racial production, bolstering one's own claims to whiteness and one's own sense of freedom and security through the performance of another's alterity. This analysis seems to support the reading of blackface minstrelsy as an exclusively racist enterprise.

Although we often use blackface minstrelsy and its symbols as shorthand for racism, critics such as Robert Toll, Eric Lott, Dale Cockrell, William Mahar, and W. T. Lhamon caution that blackface minstrelsy represents more complicated processes and responses. The desire to perform blackness stemmed from a complex set of motives and grew from a variety of traditions, from Carnival to Shakespeare. In Eric Lott's words, "the audiences involved in early minstrelsy were not universally derisive of African Americans or their culture, . . . there was a range of responses to the minstrel show which points to an instability or contradiction in the form itself" (15). Minstrel shows embraced polarized political opinions, both exalted and demeaned black American culture and often collapsed the difference between an actor's "true" race and the one he performed onstage. I suggest that the instability Lott identifies is the tension between white minstrels' claims to both black and white identities. Certainly there existed some element of desire and titillation the enactment of marginal experience, but this desire was enacted in the service of a system that continued to hold white as superior to and separate from black. This ideology receives the mixed-race child as a paradox, since black and white are thought to be so distinct (this is the same ideology that creates the tragic mulatto). Blackface minstrelsy and the comedic mulatto play with this idea and mine this system for humor.

Because of this repeated insistence of racial superiority—however convoluted and parodied—blackface minstrel performers consciously cultivated a sense that they also

were not the characters they portrayed and mocked. Roediger claims that "blackface minstrels were the first self-consciously *white* entertainers in the world. The simple physical disguise—and elaborate cultural disguise—of blacking up served to emphasize that those on stage were really white and that whiteness really mattered." (117, emphasis in original). Ralph Ellison theorized that white men in blackface entertained anxieties about "becoming" black rather than merely performing. He writes,

> When the white man steps behind the mask of the [blackface] trickster his freedom is circumscribed by the fear that he is not simply miming a personification of his disorder and chaos but that he will become in fact that which he intends only to symbolize; that he will be trapped somewhere in the mystery of hell . . . and thus lose that freedom which, in the fluid, "traditionless," "classless" and rapidly changing society, he would recognize as the white man's alone. (qtd. Lott 25)

This fear, Ellison suggests, reveals the inner workings of white privilege in a society supposed to feature equal opportunity and calls attention to the true divide between black and white. Notice that here, again, "freedom" is identified as the defining difference. Numerous accounts of audiences in the early days of blackface minstrelsy in the United States lend credence to these fears.

Audiences sometimes were not "in" on the joke that these were white men dressed as black, and mistook white performers for "authentic Negroes" singing authentic Negro songs. Minstrel performers both desired and feared this confusion because they walked the line of wanting to appear authentic while striving to remain on the right side of the color line. Advertisements for blackface minstrels used language such as: "Every body recollects these attractive darkies; every body knows how they used to . . . give the greatest scientific negro music" ("Ethiopian Serenaders at Palmo's"). Not only does such an advertisement collapse the difference between the white performers and their

"Ethiopian" personas, but it also lends "scientific" authority to their claims of musical authenticity. Likewise theater critic H. P. Grattan recalls, "The staple of E. P. Christy's entertainment was fun—mind, genuine negro fun. The melodies were negro melodies; the songs were negro songs, songs transplanted from the sunny South, with precisely the same words that had been handed down from singer to singer and generation to generation on the old plantations" (131). These claims to unadulterated reproduction confuse the line between imitator and imitated—a line that blackface minstrels simultaneously cultivated and attempted to blur.

While they advertised themselves as "genuine," (white) blackface minstrel performers also began ensuring that audiences would understand the nature of the burnt cork mask. As Eric Lott explains, "[e]arly audiences so often suspected that they were being entertained by actual Negroes that minstrel sheet music began the proto-Brechtian practice of picturing blackface performers out of costume as well as in" (20). This visual reminder of the racial processes of blackface minstrelsy reinforced the racial hierarchy. In one of these representations, described by David Roediger, the images depicted the troupe "As Plantation Darkeys" and "As Citizens" (117). Once again, the language reveals that in potential confusion over who is white and who black, claims to freedom and citizenship were at stake on both sides of the equation. Minstrel performers did not want to lose their claims to whiteness, but they also required spectators to believe that they "transformed" into black men for a period. Thus the attempts to fix the categories of blackness and whiteness served both to perpetuate notions of racial difference and to confuse them.

Not only minstrel performers themselves, but also spectators and scholars carefully emphasized the "genuine" and entertaining nature of blackface performance. White men who witnessed blackface minstrel performances and wrote about them afterwards, generally did so nostalgically. From glowing biographies such as Edward LeRoy Rice's *Monarchs of Minstrelsy* to Mark Twain's *Autobiography*, blackface minstrels were described in such terms as "the show which to me had no peer and whose peer has not yet arrived" (Twain, *Autobiography* 58). As late as 1986, William Torbert Leonard could write, "there was a time, during a past age of innocence, when whites masquerading in blackface served to lighten and brighten the lives of millions of theatregoers" (xi). Although Leonard acknowledges that "Blackface, today in America, is justifiably taboo and anathema to many, heading an appreciable decline in derogatory ethnic humor" (xi), he tellingly dedicates his book on minstrelsy to "my father, William Carlton Leonard, who could black up with the best of them; and my mother, Hattie Williams Leonard, who tolerated it" (front matter). Constance Rourke tells a story about an early blackface minstrel performer, Edwin Forrest, who ventured outside while in full makeup for his part of a "southern plantation Negro" (72). While he was walking along, "an old Negro woman mistook him for a Negro whom she knew" (72). Rourke concludes that this anecdote proves "Forrest had studied the Negro character; he inaugurated a tradition for faithful drawing" (72). That impression of minstrel show performances as faithful drawings and innocent amusement represents the insidious racism of minstrelsy.

Drawing as they did from a variety of sources, many cultural critics in the nineteenth century viewed the minstrel form as one of America's most important contributions to the history of theater. A minstrel performer in 1863 described minstrelsy

as the "ownly original American Institution," (qtd. Toll v). William Dean Howells similarly insisted that America's "one original contribution and addition to histrionic art was negro minstrelsy, which, primitive, simple, elemental, was out of our own soil, and had the characteristics that distinguish autochthonic conceptions" (qtd. Leonard 211). Interestingly, twentieth- and twenty-first-century critics have disagreed with all of the adjectives Howells uses to describe the minstrel tradition. Far from primitive, simple, or elemental, scholars have determined blackface minstrelsy to be a complex cultural institution. Predicated on borrowing, mimicry, and misrepresentation, echoes of the complicated racial and class-based dynamics inherent in minstrelsy continue to influence American culture.

Questions of authenticity and whether or not blackface minstrels actually accurately represent their African American source texts (and personalities) have abounded ever since the inception of the genre. Notable African American critics have denied any association with the songs and antics of blackface minstrelsy. For example, Frederick Douglass published his opinion of white blackface minstrels in the *North Star* on Oct 27, 1848. They are, "the filthy scum of white society, who have stolen from us a complexion denied to them by nature, in which to make money, and pander to the corrupt taste of their white fellow citizens" (qtd. Lott 15). Alexander Saxton argues that the most unique and interesting element of blackface minstrelsy was "the persistence of African borrowings" that appeared in its music and staging (8). Saxton laboriously refutes claims by scholars such as Constance Rourke that minstrel songs "had arisen from the Southwest and from Negro life there; it showed many traces of regional origins" (79).

Far from the “freshly caught, . . . whole and rich” portrayals that Rourke extolls (74), Saxton maintains that minstrel songs actually “suppress[ed] and exploit[ed]” the cultural practices they purported to replicate (8). Saxton’s point is well-taken; minstrel shows were designed to imply that minstrel types—Zip Coon, Jim Crow, Tambo and Bones—represent true representations of black American personalities. The minstrel show, in other words, solidified in America’s cultural memory “the characteristics of Negro personality and Negro theatrical type” (Huggins 248). The stereotypes of black identity are repeated in an attempt to control what is culturally recognizable as “black.” Visual representations of minstrel performers demonstrate the strange and complex ways in which blackface performers were perceived and remembered as simply “black.” These visual representations offer evidence that minstrel performers “transformed” into black men during their time onstage—sometimes right before the audience’s eyes. As Roediger reports, “One minstrel pioneer won fame by being able to change from black to white and back in seconds” (117). The transformation was considered accurate, authentic, and complete in that they were assumed to be acting and presenting themselves exactly as “real” black men acted and looked.

The representation of blackness performed on the minstrel stage produced harmful “real-world” effects. Alice Walker theorizes that racial stereotypes “were really intended as prisons. Prisons without the traditional bars, but prisons of image” (qtd. Wonham 4). These prisons of image attempted to capture and fix blackness as something stable and apart from whiteness, apart from Americanness. Consider this odd example in which Henry Warren Howe, a Union soldier, wrote in a letter, “It is laughable to see the negroes. They look exactly like our minstrels on the stage. You don’t see any true darkies

in the North. We had two in our barracks the other day, and one tried to out-dance the other! Neither would 'gib up'" (91).[23] In this case, the soldier's experience conforms to and reinforces the stereotypes he developed by attending blackface minstrel shows, neatly placing the black men he encounters offstage into the prison of image constructed by the minstrels. The proliferation and prominence of stereotypes created and perpetuated by the representations of blackface minstrelsy were proof enough for its audiences that it was "natural."

Although blackface minstrelsy certainly exploited black American culture for financial and cultural gain, a more nuanced view holds that minstrel music, language, and humor is more hybrid than anything else. No matter how diligently blackface minstrels attempt to distinguish the divide between black and white, the two identities remain intertwined, even within the space of their own bodies (the space of the comedic mulatto). The "Negro" dialect popularized by minstrel shows provides one strong example of this interdependence. Gavin Jones contends that white authors writing black dialect—much like white minstrel performers—were wrestling with threats of racial hybridity:

> The misrepresentation of African-American dialect . . . was a popular means of encoding racist beliefs in black intellectual inferiority. Yet black language also . . . was a sign of black-white intermixture; it was a hybrid form with the force to infiltrate and adulterate the dominant language. (10-11)

Likewise, white actors performing in black dialect were performing this intermixture. The ability of black dialect to "infiltrate and adulterate" Standard English was the source of some of the humor of blackface minstrelsy, but it also signaled the simultaneity of

[23] My attention was first drawn to this source by its quotation in Lott p. 20.

blackness and whiteness contained within the body of the minstrel performer/comedic mulatto. As Lhamon argues, "[t]hese Jim Crow scripts reveal no race *line* beyond which a person is one category or its opposite. Rather, they show a wide *threshold* chocked with attraction and joint positions" (*Jim Crow* x). The minstrel form, therefore, drew from both black and white sources, and may be accurately described as *both* black and white, the form mirroring the processes of the comedic mulatto.

The language in T. D. Rice's *Otello* calls attention to the racial difference between Otello and the other characters, and constructs Otello as a ridiculous figure. Douglas Lanier argues that the blackface minstrel "version of Othello provided definitive evidence of his unrefined, uncivilizable nature" (20), in stark contrast with the high-toned Othello of Shakespeare. Minstrel farces of the play reduce Othello's speech to dialect, aligning his formerly anything-but-"rude" speech with that the audience expected of a black man (Shakespeare, *Othello* I.iii). The language of the *Otello,* in contrast, is the language of the stage "negro." This exaggerated dialect marks characters as racially other, Southern, and as descendent from slavery. It is simply one more example of the process Toni Morrison explains: "how the dialogue of black characters is construed as alien, estranging dialect made deliberately unintelligible by spelling contrived to disfamiliarize it" (688). Rice borrows much of Dowling's language, but changes the words said by and about Othello/Otello, tellingly revising the text for an American audience. The first major revision is this change from "Othello" to "Otello." This change further alienates Otello from the white characters in the play as well as his noble Shakespearean persona. In T. D. Rice's *Otello*, Otello's language is marked as black by distinctive patterns such as replacing "th" sounds with "d" sounds (e.g., "Dat I hab tuck

away dis old man's darter" (350)). In fact, Otello does not utter one "th" sound the entire play, suggesting that the change from Othello to Otello pokes fun at Otello's inability to properly pronounce his own name. Otello's grammar also marks him as other, with ungrammatical constructions such as "Iago—you am a cleber fellow" (36) and "De wars am ended" (363). Otello addresses Desdemona as "Desdemony" and "Honey," appellations which signal Otello's race and Southern U.S. origins.

Rice's other revisions further suggest that Rice intended to highlight the disparity between Otello and Desdemona. Dowling's characters use terms such as "Master Blacky" (7), "wight" (8), or "rascal" (9) to refer to Othello, whereas Rice's Otello is referred to almost unwaveringly as "nigger." W. T. Lhamon reads this particular revision as "call[ing] attention to and troubl[ing]" the racism in Dowling's text rather than participating in its perpetuation (*Jump* 444). I am skeptical of this assessment, particularly given the heavy burden of history implicit in the term. Although I recognize the full force of this history had not yet come to bear in 1844, the term already bore racist baggage. As early as 1837, "nigger" was considered "an opprobrious term, employed to impose contempt upon [blacks] as an inferior race. . . . The term in itself would be perfectly harmless were it used only to distinguish one class of society from another; but it is not used with that intent. . . . [I]t flows from the fountain of purpose to injure" (Easton qtd. Kennedy *Nigger* 5). I am not sure that the term can successfully be used ironically in a nation where to be a "nigger" was to be enslaved and legitimately/legally considered less than human—or at risk for being claimed as such.[24]

Coppélia Kahn cautions that "[t]o understand what was not 'racist' in the past, we must learn its codes, not assume we already know them" (122). Understanding this, we

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[24] For more on the ever-present legal threat of wrongful enslavement, see Clymer.

still must be careful not to abandon the historical context of these plays. They were not performed in a literary vacuum, but in a world where racism was official, legal, and quotidian. The question "are blacks . . . a lower life form on the Chain of Being and therefore not truly human?" was not merely rhetorical in the mid-nineteenth century (Cassuto 22). Leonard Cassuto tells us "[t]his question was debated both before and after the changes wrought by the Civil War and the appearance of Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859" in Congress, courts of law, and the public sphere (22). Rice's decision to change all references to Otello to "nigger" does highlight the racism implicit in the term, but I do not find evidence that Rice then troubles the racism.

Outside the theater, the debate over interracial marriage raged daily, except that almost everyone came to the same conclusion: it should never be allowed. Regulations banning or restricting interracial marriages existed in American law as early as 1661.[25] Although most black men and women in the United States were enslaved,[26] and slaves could not legally marry, interracial marriage rocketed to political prominence during the 1840s. The threat to racial "purity" posed by abolition fueled panic and proslavery sentiment. For example, as early as 1838, arguments appeared warning that "inter-racial unions promoted by abolitionists . . . would place bestial black men . . . in the heart of domesticity, where they would corrupt and soil the very angel of the house" (Lemire qtd. Kahn 138). Far from *promoting* interracial unions, however, abolitionists took every opportunity to *deny* the prudence or desirability of interracial marriage. William Lloyd

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[25] Maryland is the first to enact a ban on interracial marriage, based on "precedent" in English cases involving aristocrats and servants (Grossberg 127). This legal reasoning demonstrates the social capital that whiteness boasted in the United States, since white = aristocrat and nonwhite = servant in this comparison.
[26] According to the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, in 1860, the number of free black men and women is estimated at 476,748, or 1.5% of the total population of the United States, while enslaved black men and women numbered 3,950,546—about 12.7% of the total population.

Garrison, the most radical and vocal proponent of immediate (as opposed to gradual) emancipation wrote in *The Liberator* on Jan 29, 1831, "I would not recommend the whites to marry blacks, or the blacks to marry whites" (qtd. Lemire 83). This simple statement summed up the views of almost every abolitionist,[27] yet claims to the contrary held tremendous emotional and political sway over the public. Samuel Webb details the power this allegation had to incite a riot:

> It has been alleged . . . that it is part of the design of the abolitionists to promote intermarriage between whites and colored people; and the false and absurd charge of advocating amalgamation, has been used perhaps more effectually than any other, in exciting and arraying against us the passions, prejudice, and fury of the mob. (qtd. Lemire 91)

Between 1830 and 1840, the northern United States witnessed approximately 165 riots prompted by this amalgamationist rhetoric. After one such riot in New York City in July 1834, the American Anti-Slavery Society released an official notice to the mayor explaining, "We entirely disclaim any desire to promote or encounter intermarriages between white and colored persons" (qtd. Lemire 83). Although abolitionists released many of these stock denials over the antebellum years, the rumors persisted as a potent and political tool.

In *Jump Jim Crow*, W. T. Lhamon argues that the appearance of Otello and Desdemona's child represents a promise for a future of racial integration. Lhamon argues for the complicated nature of race in the minstrel tradition, and sees in *Otello* an example of a subversive text celebrating blackness and the possibility of interracial marriage. Lhamon maintains that Rice meant for his *Otello* to offer the hope of a united American future. Lhamon claims:

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[27] Notable exceptions include Frederick Douglass and his second wife, the abolitionist Helen Pitts (a white woman), who married in 1884.

> Young Otello is himself a "*pledge.*" He is a promise for the future that is uncertain and that his generators cannot make real by themselves. The generators are Otello and Desdemona, certainly; behind them, however, is the public that the play appeals to at the end, when the Chorus looks from the galleries to the put, summoning all to "Dance and sing / *'Til the whole house ring*." They all must raise this pledge together. (*Jump* 84, emphasis in original)

At the end of *Otello*, when "the whole house ring[s]" with celebration, "house" could refer to Otello and Desdemona's household, the physical structure of Otello and Desdemona's house (in this case, the space of the stage), the space the audience occupies, or the audience itself (Rice 158). Because "the whole house" rings with music and celebration, Lhamon concludes "The play, its actors, and its audience all accept the cross-racial marriage and the child" (*Jump* 88). The existence of Lorenzo Otello offers support for his claim; however, other forces in the play counterbalance the radical potential of the problem child.

Rather than a "celebration of [Otello's] achieved kinship" (Lhamon, *Jump* 89), the final dance merely sweeps under the rug the painful and complicated notion of interracial marriage. Coming to no adequate resolution, the company determines to "have this wedding over" the next night (Rice 383). Just as with the characters of Zip Coon and Jim Crow, the audiences are encouraged, ultimately, to define themselves in opposition to these characters. The playbill of T. D. Rice's farce, *Otello,* at the Cincinnati National Theatre on 9 May 1846 advertises that "Master Lorenzo Otello (eldest son of Otello and that there may be no partiality, nature has colored him half and half)" will be played by Master Kent (qtd. Lhamon, *Jump* 82). Lhamon says the child's bisected face "visibly emphasizes his constitutive genealogies. They are joined and neither side effaces the other" (*Jump* 82). I agree that the child's bisected face allows space for both sides of his

ancestry, but it does not represent an endorsement of his mixed-race parentage. The child's bifurcated appearance also indicates an inability to truly mix. Although racial representation may be ambiguous at times, it is based on a system of racial privilege that dictated that white was better than black. As Werner Sollors explains, "the United States racial system is a binary, dualistic one that rests on the 'either: or' quality of black and white" ("Was Roxy Black?" 72). The space of the body of the comedic mulatto defies this "either:or" quality and contains both. His face allots space for both racial heritages, and while they are allowed to exist simultaneously, they are not allowed to mingle.

That which is half and half represents what Marjorie Garber calls "the third." The third is that element which interrupts a binary—in this case that of of black and white. For Garber, the third enables the "disruptive act of putting into question" (13). In *Otello*, the third is the *mulatto*, that figure which is half black and half white.[28] The mulatto puts into question the binary nature of the color line in the nineteenth-century United States, with differing results. Being half and half, the mulatto figure may be either comedic or tragic. If comedic, he belongs to both tribes at once in a supposedly absurd flouting of the binary color line. If tragic, she belongs to neither tribe, revealing the tragic implications of an impossible binary. I argue that the comedic mulatto represents the figure of the minstrel himself, who makes competing racial claims to both blackness and whiteness. This view is supported by recent criticism on blackface minstrelsy which argues that "[f]rom the word go, blackface minstrelsy was not wholly 'black,' in any case, but mixed, multicultural, a hybrid" (Kahn 126). Just as the form of blackface minstrelsy develops as a hybrid form, the blackface minstrel performer inhabits a hybrid place in society. His

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[28] I understand that most historic and many imagined mixed-race Americans boasted a more complex heritage than "half and half," but for the sake of simplicity of argument, I use these imaginary percentages.

black mask, a claim to authentic blackness, both bolsters and undermines his claims to authentic whiteness through a complex system of representation. The comedic mulatto functions very differently from the tragic mulatto; although they both represent the position of "the third" in the larger case of America's racial history, they must remain distinct.

The "tragic mulatto" or tragic mulatta[29] figure pervades American literature and culture. She was put to different purposes: a metaphor of someone who could not find a place in the nation, someone who demonstrates that "blackness and interracialty are seen as antithetical to US national allegiance" (Raimon 13). She "bisects issues of national division and dispossession" (Raimon 13). Regardless of her metaphorical purpose, however, the tragic mulatto of fiction is consistently forced to choose one racial identity over the other. The comedic mulatto exists as the partner to the tragic mulatta, whose attempts to live on either side of the color line doom her to a life of misery. The comedic mulatto is generally male and is allowed to claim both black and white identities, whereas the tragic mulatto/a, a female can never truly be either and must therefore either be eliminated or accepted into the black community.

As a literary and cultural figure, the tragic mulatto is a "racial subversive" who has the potential to upset racial order by appearing white but masking some African ancestry (Andrews 308). Penelope Bullock says that sociologists describe "the mulatto as a cultural hybrid, as a stranded personality living in the margin of fixed status" (Bullock 280-281). Miscegenation in tragic mulatto literature is "the harbinger of mayhem, misery,

[29] For more on the femaleness of the tragic mulatto (i.e., "the tragic mulatta"), see Raimon, who argues "The very tragedy of the figure's fate depends upon her female gender. The sexual vulnerability of a female light-skinned slave is essential to propel the plot forward and to generate the reader's sympathy and outrage" (5).

and death—the very symbol of destructive intimacy" (Kennedy, *Interracial* 137). The mulatta herself in these stories functions as a "cultural hybrid, as a stranded personality living in the margin of fixed status" (Bullock 280-281). This hybridity is ironic given that the tragic mulatto is never truly allowed to identify as mixed. As Werner Sollors notes in *Neither Black Nor White Yet Both*, "Whether the interracial character is proved white or black, in either case the 'mixed-race' space is cleared in favor of a monoracial occupancy" (6). The tragic mulatto, therefore, may be defined as a mixed-race person who must choose to inhabit either one side of the color line or the other, but who never truly belongs to either.

Young Otello offers an alternative to the tragic mulatto: the comedic mulatto. The comedic mulatto exists as the partner to the tragic mulatto, whose attempts to live on either side of the color line doom her to a life of misery. The comedic mulatto is allowed to claim both black and white identities. He represents an individual whose existence as a comic figure enables him to occupy both black and white identities simultaneously, as the child's makeup allows Young Otello to do. Indeed, his very humor derives from his ability to be *both* in a segregated society where to be one was necessarily *not* to be the other. The comedic mulatto—here embodied by Young Lorenzo Otello—amuses audiences with his absurdity. The comedic mulatto highlights the cognitive dissonance between white and black, freedom and slavery. As Kahn says, "[t]he harlequin makeup of the child, then, conveys the arbitrariness of the 'coded looking relations' through which race was instituted, their defiance of the 'ocular proof' visible in mulattoes that black and white mated frequently, if not freely" (138). In other words, the child is the "third" in a supposedly rigid binary—the figure which calls into question the legitimacy of a binary

that relies on the formula black = slave; white = free, even when someone coded as "black" appears to the eye to be white.[30] Young Otello offers readers the opportunity to see the comedic mulatto in his unique capacity as a mixed-race minstrel representation.

The ending of *Otello*, then, is a raucous display of all that the audience does *not* accept or choose to be. While the play might end with "a final dance of commonality" (Lhamon, *Jump* 88), I do not believe it "works matters through" (*Jump* 88), as Lhamon asserts. In fact, there is evidence that this final dance means little except as a recognizable element of the Shakespearean travesty tradition. Richard Schoch tells us, "By 1870 audiences fully expected a burlesque tragedy to close with a rousing song-and-dance number performed by the entire company" (51). Burlesques of *Hamlet*, for example, ended with Old Hamlet's ghost "restor[ing] everyone to life . . . The ghost then beats the newly resurrected characters with a stick and the entire performance concludes with a company dance" (Schoch 51). The play allows the audience to briefly experience the thrill of witnessing an interracial sexual relationship while ultimately reinforcing codes of classification and behavior that made interracial marriage abhorrent to most residents of the United States without threatening an actual endorsement of the practice. The final dance closes a farce that has crossed certain lines of behavior, but been careful throughout to reinforce the values of patriarchy and white privilege. As David Roediger explains,

> although blackface provided a mask behind which erotic longings could find expression, the break from the repressiveness of early Victorian America was far from complete. Not only did the racial form of the shows make it uncertain how far the audience was meant to empathize with—and

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[30] Such is the case in Mark Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, discussed in chapter 4, as well as countless other narratives of slavery, including Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Brown's *Clotel*, and Craft and Craft's *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom.*

> how far it was meant to recoil from—the sexual freedom portrayed, but the content of the shows also often bowed far in the direction of respectability and sentimentality. (120)

Blackface minstrel productions delight in the play between transgressive and conventional, flirting with the lines of acceptable behavior. As Roediger suggests, this flirtation actually serves to reinforce existing systems of power and privilege. *Otello* explicitly and consistently returns to Victorian moral codes to repudiate the behavior of its characters even at its seemingly most subversive moments.

Possibly the most transgressive moment in the play occurs when Otello and Desdemona conceive their child—the moment the transracial desire between them is consummated. W. T. Lhamon suggests that Desdemona becomes pregnant at the moment when she swoons at Otello's daring tale of escape from slavery, as described in her song detailing her courtship with Otello. Lhamon builds his analysis on Desdemona's being "Greatful for the scrape I'd missed" (Rice 354) after she wakes from her swoon. Lhamon points out that "Greatful" (as opposed to the standard spelling "grateful" that Rice deliberately changes) might imply that Desdemona was now great with child, and the scrape she missed could be an abortion. If this is so, then their relationship is built on a rape—something that Lhamon fails to acknowledge. This rape reinforces pervasive images of black men as hypersexual and dangerous to white women. Desdemona's own desire obscures this threat somewhat by her own desire (which is, of course, its own brand of threat perhaps more alarming to antebellum audiences). Her admission of desire functions to excuse Otello's behavior (both for the rape and for the eventual murder). As Joyce Macdonald dryly expresses it, Desdemona "asked for it by being attracted to Othello in the first place" (247). Desdemona's admission of desire also reinforces anti-

abolitionist rhetoric that stated abolitionist women were "equally hypersexual" as black men and intensely desired sexual contact with them (Lemire 63). She did, after all, swoon during his tale of escape from slavery, suggesting her abolitionist leanings.[31] Immediately after this most shocking moment in the play, Desdemona pauses to outline some advice for other women. After her tale is done, she offers this "Moral," emphasized by the Chorus:

> *Desdemona*
> Listen, ladies, if you please
> *Chorus*
> All attention—all attention . . .
> *Desdemona, rather slower*
> Never sit on young men's knees,
> *Chorus*
> Pray don't mention—pray don't mention!
> *Desdemona*
> For though I got a husband by it
> *Chorus*
> Lucky creature—lucky creature!
> *Desdemona*
> The plan's not good—so pray don't try it [*goes to Otello*]
> *Chorus*
> We beseech you—we beseech you. (354)

Desdemona's core advice, "Never sit on young men's knees," accentuated by a slower pace, represents a genuflection to middle-class morality and patriarchal victim-blaming. Desdemona loves Otello, despite or because of his blackness, and therefore, the play concludes, "she asked for it" (Macdonald 247)—"it" being both the implied rape and her attempted murder. The chorus continues to reinforce conventional ideas about the sexual expectations of women (prodding the ladies in the audience to "attention"), the

[31] For details of anti-abolitionists' claims that white abolitionist women preferred black men as sexual partners, see Lemire, pp. 53-99.

impoliteness of mentioning sexuality in public ("pray don't mention!"), and the idea that a woman's sole goal in life was to marry (Desdemona is a "lucky creature" to get a husband). I contend that the existence of this and other "Morals" throughout the play serve to render palatable a performance that might otherwise be distasteful or shocking to mainstream audiences. Of course the play turns in on itself, and humor is found in the fact that, although one is not supposed to "mention" sexual activity, it both mentions it and acts out the physical intimacy between Desdemona and Otello. Even if we conclude that the actions of the play bear more significance than verbal genuflections to middle-class morality, their existence remains important. Rice clearly felt he could not omit these instances, which anchor the farce in a moral universe.

Other scenes in *Otello* contain explicit denigrations of interracial marriage. Scene 2 concludes with the "Grand Chorus" singing, "For if a black shall wed a white, / And afterwards go free, / In a very pretty pickle then / Our daughters soon will be. [*repeat two last lines*]" (349). This moral reads as a political argument. If one black man is allowed to marry one white woman, then "our daughters" will be in danger. This is the chorus encouraging Brabantio to seek assistance from the law, to "march . . . to the Senate" and seek retribution (349). Of course Brabantio finds none, which enables the tragedy to ensue. These lines suggest, then, that *Otello* reinforces the necessity for miscegenation laws in the United States just as heartily as Shakespeare's *Othello.* The need to protect "our [white] daughters" rings loud and clear.

However, the white community is not the only one represented. Otello reminds audiences that the black community may also disapprove of his interracial marriage:

> Black folks from sheer vexation
> Will grumble at me a few;

> And call dis 'malgamation
> Well, I don't care *damn* if they do. [*pause*]
> If I hab no objection,
> What de debil's dat to dem?
> You can't help your complexion;
> Nature made you as well as dem. (357)

This verse suggests that both society ("Black folks") and "Nature" recognize the distinction (and necessary separation) between white and black. The phrase "Nature made you as well as dem" could either mean white and black come from the same essence or, more likely, that white and black were created separately and meant to be kept distinct. The rest of the play affirms the continued segregation of black and white. Otello's final moral, related directly to the audience after he smothers Desdemona, instructs them: "when you dis relate, / Norten [Nothing] extenuate, / But merely say, Good lack, / If his wife hab but been black, / Instead of white, all had been right / And she wouldn't hab got de sack" (383). Despite Otello's assertion that he has "no objection" to marrying a white woman, his personal choice is shown to be a mistake that could have been avoided if he had simply followed the strictures of society and nature. In other words, the play asserts that marriage is not merely a personal but a social choice, one which Otello rectifies with her murder.[32] The murder avenges the "outrage upon the laws of nature" that John Quincy Adams recognized in Shakespeare's play, and reinforces the strictures against interracial marriage.

Young Otello therefore represents the site of miscegenation and minstrelsy, the site of transgression and conventionality. His humor is derived from these returns to acceptability, assuring audiences that a) mulattoes are instantly and easily recognizable and b) no one in their right mind would desire to in reality create such a monstrous,

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[32] For more on the social importance of marriage, see Grossberg; Larsson; Wallenstein; and Coontz.

comedic figure. Young Otello's makeup highlights the absurdity of the mulatto's position, leaving space for both black and white but truly identified as neither. He never speaks; he exists solely as a visual gag, a joke about the ultimate insolubility of the black and white races. His presence in a minstrel show, however, the ultimate racially hybrid genre, belies this fiction, and he is only allowed to exist in this particular moment. In the two most successful postbellum productions,[33] *Desdemonum* (1874) and *Dar's De Money* (c.1880), "the threat posed by racial intermarriage was removed altogether through the simple expedient of converting the entire cast to blackface minstrel characters" (Neill 44). No other minstrel production, to my knowledge, contains a mixed-race child.

The comedic mulatto can be deployed in different ways, but he always remains connected to minstrelsy and cross-racial desire. We find examples of the comedic mulatto in most places we find the influence of the minstrel show. Anywhere that a white author (or other cultural producer) uses the conventions of minstrelsy to bolster claims of authenticity and simultaneously for comic effect, there is the comedic mulatto. For example, all of the texts present in this dissertation feature a comedic mulatto. Twain and Stowe both famously use minstrelized black characters that were recognized by their audiences as "authentic" characters, largely due to the cultural influence of minstrelsy. The faithfulness of these characters to the ideas of what white readers recognized as true-to-life blackness gained both Stowe and Twain reputations as skillful reflectors of character and dialect. Reviewers often commended Stowe and Twain on the accurate representation of "that curious patois, the negro dialect" ("Review of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*"). These claims to accuracy stand alongside claims to humor that black characters

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[33] For a more comprehensive list of travesties and burlesques of *Othello*, see Jacobs and Johnson, pp. 55-59.

in Twain's and Stowe's work also provide. For example, Stowe breaks up *Uncle Tom's Cabin* with scenes describing the antics of the slaves Andy and Jake, who use a Tambo and Bones routine to stall the slave catcher Haley from overtaking runaway Eliza.[34] The character of Prynnella in Rachel Baker Gale's *No Men Wanted* expresses herself in a minstrelized negro dialect and delivers most of the laugh lines of the play. Written by a white woman, played by a white woman, in her, we recognize again the comedic mulatto.

Perhaps the most interesting and complex example of the comedic mulatto, however, is the minstrel performer himself. Take T. D. Rice for instance. T. D. Rice has been alternately hailed and reviled as one of the founders of blackface minstrelsy, launching the tradition's "Golden Age" (c. 1840-1865). Thomas Dartmouth "Daddy" Rice (c.1808 – 1860) was born in New York City. He began his theatrical career as an extra at the Park Theatre and cut his teeth acting lead roles in Rhodes' *Bombastes Furioso* and Inchbald's *The Mogul Tale*. In 1831, Rice debuted his "Jump Jim Crow" number in the Louisville Theatre (Ludlow 392). Rice eventually headed back up north and gained fame as Jim Crow, a "Kentucky corn-field negro" (Ludlow 392), a character which he included in almost every subsequent performance—regardless of the play—due to its popularity. The *New York Tribune* ran a piece in 1855 looking back on the era of Jim Crow that illustrates the scope of Rice's popularity:

> [F]rom that moment everybody was "doing just so," and continued "doing just so" for months, and even years afterward. . . [N]othing was talked of, nothing written of, and nothing dreamed of, but 'Jim Crow." The most sober citizen began to "wheel about, turn about, and Jump Jim Crow." It seemed as though the entire population had been bitten by the tarantula; in the parlor, in the kitchen, in the shop and in the street, Jim Crow monopolized public attention. It must have been a species of insanity, though of a gentle and pleasing kind. (qtd. Lott 3)

[34] For more on Stowe's use of minstrel show conventions, see Meer "Topsy and the End Man."

The *Tribune* excerpt demonstrates the wide range of appeal Rice's Jim Crow had.[35] Although Dale Cockrell insists that "audiences for Rice's brand of blackface theater tended to be male, youngish, and lower class" (Cockrell 69), the above quote suggests appeal across genders, class groups, and ethnicities. "The parlor" stands in for white middle- and upper-class women, "the kitchen" for immigrant and black servant women, and "the shop and the street" represent the remaining classes of men, women, and children. This broad and lasting cultural appeal points to an unthreatening political and moral stance. Beneath this catholic appeal lies a process underpinning white racial superiority. Because he purported to be a "genuine negro," Rice created and perpetuated harmful stereotypes about blackness through his representations. Rather than undermine his claims to whiteness, however, the act of blacking up strengthened them. Ken Emerson notes of this process: "What a savage irony: that aping a black man reinforced [his] sense of racial superiority and social respectability while at the same time it relieved for him an evening from the pressures that superiority and respectability created!" (16). By the end of the nineteenth century, in fact, blacking up rendered one not only respectable, but "a scholar, a gentleman, an artist of peculiar ability, a poet and composer" (Grattan 132). These claims to whiteness, respectability, and artistry were clearly bolstered through representations of a ridiculous blackness. The disconnect between the claims to authentic blackness and the self-conscious whiteness of minstrel performers may be explained in the figure of the comedic mulatto.

[35] The source of the song that brought on this gentle and pleasing insanity is unknown. As Bob Carlin notes, "Upon whom Rice based Jim depended on who is telling the story (and which of Rice's press releases they had read.) Variously, Jim Crow was created from a street song heard by Rice in Cincinnati using the wardrobe of a Pittsburgh Negro, or from a stable worker in the city of Jim Crow's first stage appearance" (11).

A striking visual illustration of Rice as the comedic mulatto, Henry L. Stephens' portrait of "Rice's Crow" depicts Rice's white face attached to crow's body [Fig. 2]. Rice's somber, pale, bespectacled face contrasts sharply with the folly of his avian body. The illustration appears as one of a series in Stephens' *The Comic Natural History of the Human Race.* The book features 39 portraits of 19th-century celebrities with their faces atop animal bodies, accompanied by a brief humorous mock naturalist entry describing the characteristics of that particular "animal." Rice's portrait heads the chapter titled "The

Fig. 2: Chromolithograph of "Rice's Crow" by Henry L. Stephens in *The Comic Natural History of the Human Race*, p. 160

Rice Crow (*Corvus Turnabouth*)" written by Thomas McKeon. McKeon's tongue-in-cheek description of "the Rice Crow" notes that "the most remarkable circumstance connected with it, is its Chameleon-like property of changing from white to black, which

transition almost invariably takes place at night, . . . this change is so sudden and complete, as to almost defy recognition" (162). McKeon's highlights the cultural paradox of the comedic mulatto: the claim to authentic blackness simultaneous with the claim to authentic whiteness.

Together, Stephens' picture of Rice and McKeon's textual description of the Rice Crow aptly illustrate the dual position that Rice occupies. With ability to completely transition from white to black, a "repeated process of changing color" (McKeon 163), Rice inhabits the color line in a unique way: as a comedic mulatto. In a world where others are forced to choose which side of the line to which they belong, Rice is able to occupy both. Unlike the tragic mulatto figure in American culture who must choose either/or, Rice fathers generations of blackface performers who lay claim to both blackness and whiteness simultaneously. This position is unstable, however, because the differences between the "races" are not in reality as clear or tangible as the exaggerations of minstrelsy and blackface performance make them appear. Paradoxically, blackface minstrelsy enacts and rehearses the great divide between black and white in order to emphasize the impossibility of racial intermixture embodied by the interracial family and the tragic mulatto.

Although blackface minstrels participated in the project to relegate blackness to a state of absolute difference, it also reveals the desire to inhabit the other in their desire to appear "genuine." This tension creates ambiguity, which in turn produces humor. The spectrum of white and black performed by blackface minstrels attempted both the fix and blur the line of racial difference, generating laughter at the comedic mulatto. This kind of productive ambiguity can be identified in other texts and with other divides than white

and black. Chapter 3 explores the productive ambiguity produced by Harriet Beecher Stowe's character of a male mother and her description of a domestic swamp in *Dred; A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp.* Stowe reassigns identities that normally are associated with certain kinds of bodies and structures, and in so doing expresses a theory of the portability of identity that will lay the groundwork for our understanding of the performativity of familial identity.

Chapter 3

Amphibious Creatures:

Domestic Alternatives in Harriet Beecher Stowe's Antislavery Fiction

The blackface minstrel tradition attempted to absolutely differentiate white from black. Harriet Beecher Stowe's project was to reverse this process and build connections between black and white by using motherhood as the ultimate vehicle for empathy. Although Stowe used minstrel tropes in her writing, she explicitly attempted to create recognition across racial lines. While *Uncle Tom's Cabin* drew connections between the ways that black women and white women experience motherhood, her second antislavery novel, *Dred*, expanded the definitions of who could be identified as a mother in the first place.

Fated always to be Harriet Beecher Stowe's *other* anti-slavery novel, *Dred; or, A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp* (1856) reconfigures many of the themes and ideas of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), and is often read as Stowe's literary answer to the reactions *Uncle Tom* engendered.[36] *Dred* includes stronger black voices and an acknowledgement of righteous black anger but continues *Uncle Tom*'s investment in the power of domesticity and motherhood. Both of these concepts however, look different in *Dred* than they did in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. *Dred* takes the idealized motherhood of the earlier novel and dissociates it from the white or nearly white female bodies which laid exclusive claim to its privileges in *Uncle Tom*. *Dred*'s mothers are black and white, male and female. Stowe also separates the concept of domesticity from the structure of the house, and we find functional homes and families even in the midst of the Great Dismal Swamp.

[36] Meer calls it the "Answer to the 'Answers'" in *Uncle Tom Mania*, and I find her term useful for characterizing *Dred*'s relationship to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *The Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

By separating these concepts from physical structures and essentialized bodies, Stowe refuses to limit the scope of the powers of motherhood and domesticity, ultimately strengthening them and deploying them flexibly for her political aims. This chapter investigates the ways in which *Dred* revises *Uncle Tom's Cabin*'s conceptions of motherhood and domesticity through "amphibious" figures who straddle categories of identity or spaces that defy single classifications. These figures and spaces become representatives of new imaginative possibilities in domestic and familial arrangements.

Often read by critics as a failure of imagination, *Dred* has been criticized for disappointing the hopes of radicalism and slave revolt embodied in the title character. Joan Hedrick laments, "In spite of the rich possibilities of the culture of resistance, *Dred* is neither an incendiary tract nor a good novel" (*Harriet Beecher Stowe* 259). Structurally, it is criticized for its plot (too complicated to be readable) and pace (too sluggish to be interesting). In the words of Leslie Fiedler, *Dred* "attempted to tell a story of a slave rebellion, but the result was a failure—mythologically inert, structurally confused, moving to no one" (176). Indeed, the many plots and subplots combine to make it an extraordinarily complex novel that neither stands up to the requirements of realism nor conforms to the boundaries of the domestic novel. In Sarah Meer's view, "The extensive criticism of the novel's structure—its proliferation of plots and what [Alice C.] Crozier saw as its disfigurement by an abrupt change of style and direction—could also be read as symptomatic of this indecision at *Dred*'s heart" (*Uncle Tom Mania* 228).[37]

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[37] Others have made the case for re-examining *Dred* and treating it as more than a poor man's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Robert S. Levine's being the most prominent. However, even those who champion *Dred* recognize the problems and ambiguities produced by Stowe's ambivalence to many of its themes: "*Dred* manifests Stowe's increasing ambivalence . . . about both black testimony and white advocacy" (DeLombard 83). "As

This collective disappointment, along with the tendency to read *Dred* mainly for its distinctions from *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* has led many to see *Dred* as a complete revision of the earlier novel. Robert S. Levine, in his introduction to *Dred* describes this revision by claiming that "[d]omesticity and sympathy go only so far in Dred, a novel that ultimately asks its readers to consider slavery from the point of view of black revolutionaries lurking in the recesses of the Dismal Swamp" (xvii). I disagree. I see domesticity and motherhood as a consistent force in *Dred*, the force that ultimately carries the day. Although Stowe treats revolution and violence in the text, they are not the values she advocates in the end. The last image we see in the novel is not bloody revolution, but rather the image of a "womanly" old man cradling a child in his arms. Joan Hedrick claims "Tom's New Testament Christian pacifism is replaced in *Dred* by a militant invocation of the Old Testament prophets who called for 'a day of vengeance'" (*Harriet Beecher Stowe* 258). I contend that Christian pacifism is hardly replaced in *Dred*; rather, it is the necessary component for motherhood to reach its full power, and even the Dismal Swamp is transformed in Stowe's hands into a productive domestic space.

These concepts, however, hinge on the productive ambiguity that Stowe creates in her text. One way of thinking about this ambiguity is through the lens of amphibiousness, or the condition of belonging to two or more categories. Much like the comedic mulatto, who simultaneously claims authentically black and authentically white identities, an amphibious creature can inhabit two worlds that seem to be diametrically opposed. Also similar to the comedic mulatto, the amphibious creature creates ambiguity with these

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the novel progresses, the problem of contradictory interpretations takes on ominous overtones, until ambiguity and doubleness threaten to make all truth merely relative, dependent entirely on the perspective of the reader" (Gail K. Smith 290).

seemingly competing claims. The amphibious creature, however, can move between genders and other identity markers (including those of family identity) rather than solely racial categories.

Many of Stowe's characters or concepts could be labeled "amphibious," and Stowe explicitly classifies one of her characters as such. *Dred* introduces readers to Old Uncle Tiff, an aged slave who cares for three white children after their mother dies. She had been a Peyton, one of the First Families of Virginia (FFV)—or so Tiff claims. When she eloped with a poor white trader, the Peytons disowned her, but Tiff refused to leave her side. After their mother's death, Fanny, Teddy, and the (unnamed) baby accept Tiff's devotion happily and without question until neighboring slaves tease Tiff about being mistaken for the children's "mammy."[38] The scene disrupts the oldest child's sense of the social appropriateness of their domestic relationship, and Tiff responds to her: "'O, Miss Fanny, Tiff knows! . . . Miss Fanny, is you 'fraid dey 'll take Old Tiff for yer mammy? . . . Don't ye be feared, Miss Fanny!'. . . And the amphibious old creature rollicked over the idea with infinite merriment" (296).[39] The narrator's naming of Tiff as an "amphibious old creature" is evidence of some rupture. What precisely is amphibious about Tiff? The narrator could not possibly mean that Tiff lives both on land and water, so what could it mean to say that Tiff is "amphibious"? Stowe must therefore mean the word in the *Oxford English Dictionary*'s third sense, that of "[h]aving two lives; occupying two positions; connected with or combining two classes, ranks, offices, qualities, etc."

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[38] "Mammy" was used to mean both "mother" for all races and to refer to a black nurse with whom we now more closely associate the term. In *Dred*, the children's biological mother is referred to as "mammy" by Tiff (83), though Fanny calls her "mother" (86). This may be yet another instance where Stowe draws a dividing line in the language used by people of different races. For more on the history of the use of the term "mammy," see Wallace-Sanders, pp. 14-16.

[39] All page numbers are drawn from Levine's edited edition of *Dred.*

("amphibious, adj."). The use of this word must therefore point to Tiff's ability to straddle separate identities. I contend that Stowe writes Tiff as a mother, an experimental attempt by Stowe to offer the redemptive power of motherhood to all the disenfranchised. Tiff, then, inhabits both male and female genders, the roles of both mother and slave, and the racial categories of both black and white. Just as Tiff negotiates these different identities, Stowe's characterization of the Great Dismal Swamp in *Dred* straddles the categories of wilderness and home. In the swamp, there are even opportunities for thinking about characters and concepts as actually living on land and water. These various versions of amphibiousness offer the space to conceptualize Stowe's terms (e.g., domestic, motherhood, home) as more fluid and portable: they, too, are amphibious.

It is impossible to understand the ambiguities and complexities of *Dred*'s characterizations without understanding Stowe's historical, personal, and intellectual relationships with motherhood. Stowe was born in 1811, at a time in the United States when the role of women in the home—particularly white women—was drastically changing. The rise of industrial production began to limit the usefulness of women who had hitherto been indispensable to the household economy, since the goods that they had previously produced themselves were now cheaper and more conveniently available for purchase. While the sphere of their material usefulness contracted, women gained ideological value as mothers, who were now figured as the moral repositories of the nation and the physical repositories of its future. With their gentle influence (rather than public rhetoric or political action), women had the power to change the course of history. Stowe and her sister, Catharine Esther Beecher, earnestly declared that American women were commissioned "the greatest work that ever was committed to human responsibility"

(*Treatise* 38), childrearing. All of these elements, along with the supposed moral purity and therefore superiority of mothers, combined to create what twentieth-century feminists called the "cult of true womanhood" or "cult of domesticity," an ideological construct that ramified in literature, popular culture, and virtually every major political debate of the time. Through her bestselling fiction, Harriet Beecher Stowe brought her version of women's "true" role to the forefront of the slavery debate.

Stowe's own mother died young, and the myth of her womanly perfection haunted Stowe's life.[40] In this Stowe was not uncommon, and her writing participates in the larger cultural practice described by Stephanie A. Smith: "Whether in speech or journal, behavior manual or instruction book, novel or autobiography, a cherished iconic memory of mother lifted the mind toward a better state and away from the sordid" (4). Partially as a result of her mother's early death, the image of Roxanna Beecher was an impossible standard by which she was constantly measured, as well as an iconic image to which her father consistently appealed. Stowe recalled, "In every scene of family joy or sorrow, or when father wished to make an appeal to our hearts which he knew we could not resist, . . . he spoke of our mother" (qtd. Hedrick 10). Stowe explains that "Although mother's bodily presence disappeared from our circle, . . . her memory and example had more influence in molding her family, in deterring it from evil and exciting it to good, than the living presence of many mothers. It was a memory that met us everywhere" (qtd. C. E. Stowe and L. B. Stowe 28). Her mother became a saint, an "angel of the house" whose memory could be put to almost any rhetorical or ideological purpose. Stowe

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[40] For a compelling argument about the massive influence Stowe's mother's image had on her life, see Hedrick's *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Life.* According to Hedrick, "Roxana Foote Beecher died young, of an excess of true womanhood" (5).

carried this message of motherly perfection and the radical potential of motherly influence to the world through her publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin.*

The concepts of domesticity and motherhood are inextricably connected to religion in Stowe's fiction. In fact, for Stowe, Christianity is the prerequisite for development of "true" domesticity or motherhood, and the three concepts bolster each other throughout Stowe's work. Good Christians make good mothers, who make good homes. Stowe's son and grandson explain the importance of religion to Stowe's philosophy and existence: "It was a theological age, and in the Beecher family theology was the supreme interest. It fills their letters as it filled their lives" (C. E. Stowe and L. B. Stowe 38). Stowe's own letters, along with her fiction, certainly participate in this preoccupation; she was constantly thinking about, coming to terms with, and doubting her own faith. Many historians and critics have discussed the painful process Stowe underwent in revising her father's strict Calvinist version of Christianity,[41] coming to believe in and preach about a loving, forgiving, personal, New-Testament God. Stowe counseled one of her students not to "think of God as a strict severe Being," but rather to "think of him as a Being who . . . looks on all you say and do with importance" (Stowe qtd. Reynolds 10). According to her family, "The three words 'God is love' summed up her theology" (C. E. Stowe and L. B. Stowe 40); however, this simple phrase belies the complexity of Stowe's philosophy.

Stowe's philosophy came to include the ideas of domesticity and motherhood as redemptive forces for good in the world. For Stowe, a true home is a Christian home,

[41] Stowe describes the process in a letter to her brother Edward: "My whole life is one continued struggle: I do nothing right. I yield to temptation almost as soon as it assails me. My deepest feelings are very evanescent. I am beset behind and before, and my sins take away all my happiness" (Stowe qtd. Annie Fields 53).

where the inhabitants strive to emulate Jesus in every possible way, including in two indispensable aspects: teaching and self-sacrifice. The mother is the moral leader of her family, the one whose divinely-instituted purpose is to teach and to sacrifice, making her the closest a human can come to Jesus on this Earth.[42] In fact, Stowe wrote in her religious treatise *Footsteps of the Master* (1877) that Jesus was more like a mother than anything else, due to the divine nature of his paternity. Stowe says, "We are led to see in our Lord a peculiarity as to the manner of his birth which made him more purely sympathetic with his mother than any other son of woman" (*Footsteps* 70). In this work, she consistently compares Jesus to a mother in his dealings with the apostles. He "love[s] and pitie[s]" Judas "as a mother loves and pities the unworthy son who is whitening her hair and breaking her heart" (216), and he listens to the apostles "as a dying mother, who knows that a few hours will leave her children orphans, listens to the contentions of the nursery" (237). As Jesus is like a mother, so mothers are like Jesus. Gillian Brown argues that Stowe's fiction demonstrates the explicit connection between God and mothers. She asserts, that "[b]y imitating God's parental economy, mothers approximate heaven in their homes" ("Getting" 104). Thus mothers are essential to domesticity, and Christianity is essential to motherhood. These three concepts (motherhood, domesticity, Christianity) mutually support each other in Stowe's writings and emerge as the key tools for political reform.

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[42] This lofty philosophy stands in contrast to the daily chores of motherhood that Stowe felt almost immediately after her marriage. She writes in a letter to her friend Georgiana May that she feels like "a mere drudge with few ideas beyond babies and housekeeping. As for thoughts, reflections, and sentiments, good lack! good lack!" (qtd. C. E. Stowe 92). At least one twentieth-century Stowe biography portrays Stowe as fulfilling her writerly duties alongside her motherly duties—even to the point where she was dictating stories in the kitchen while being almost constantly interrupted by a servant's culinary questions (Johnston 159-160). Others depict Stowe as completely stifled by the daily duties of a housewife: "The drudgery of keeping house on an inadequate income, . . . [was] too much for a frail woman unequal to any great pressure of cares. . . . The years began to swing past her now, the drab, blank years [the 1840s] in which the prophetess seemed to have lost her mission" (Wilson 215).

Much of Stowe criticism, especially feminist Stowe criticism, focuses on the importance of white biological motherhood and sentimentality in her writing.[43] Stowe extols the state of motherhood as the closest a human can come to emulating Jesus, and as a universal human condition that can connect women of different races together in empathy. Saidiya Hartman, in *Scenes of Subjection* identifies the problems of attempting to equate free white and enslaved black motherhood. She argues that "[m]otherhood was critical to the reproduction of property and black subjection, but parental rights were unknown to the law" (98). This overlapping serves to vacate motherhood of the associations to which the cult of domesticity and Stowe accorded it. Because motherhood functioned as *the* vehicle for the reproduction of black subjection, true empathy between the races was impossible. Stowe, however, focused only on the affective, sentimental power of motherhood as an ideological category, and her strategy proved politically persuasive. Her privileging of motherhood as the most perfect form of humanity allowed her to construct bridges—however imaginary—in the minds of white women to enable them to at least partly empathize with the plight of the slave mother.

Stowe's powerful conception of motherhood owes much to her eldest sister's thinking about women's role and education. Catharine Esther Beecher, one of the foremost domestic thinkers of the nineteenth century, helped to contribute to a nation's conception of the role of women with the schools she founded for girls, her lectures on education, and her many publications, including *A Treatise on Domestic Economy for the Use of Young Ladies at Home and at School* and *The Duty of American Women to Their Country*. Beecher firmly believed "that the formation of the female character should be

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[43] Literary critics and historians such as Ammons, Gillian Brown, Baym, Crane, Douglas, Fiedler, Hedrick, Sundquist, Tompkins, and Weinstein make up some of the most important voices in this body of criticism.

committed to the female hand" (CEB qtd. Boydston, et. al 44), and she organized her female seminaries accordingly. Harriet taught at Catharine's Hartford Seminary as a young woman, and Beecher "exercised strong sway over . . . [her] younger sister" as both a role model and teacher (A. Fields 53). Stowe's philosophy of motherhood is heavily informed by Beecher's theory of women's education. Beecher believed that women should be professionalized in the occupations that God had ordained they occupy: household management and the education of children. Beecher wrote countless tracts, treatises, and guide books for women, advocating for the valuation of "women's work" as a profession. Since women were to take responsibility for rearing their children, Beecher strongly believed that they should be trained as teachers. Paradoxically, Beecher understood women as having a special role for which she should be trained, but also innate knowledge that she would be able to employ.

Beecher believed women needed to take themselves and their role as wives, mothers, and teachers seriously, and to use their native talents in the service of those roles. She also identified the connection between motherhood, Christianity, and domesticity. Harriet's fiction bears witness to Catharine's belief that "every well-educated, pious woman of good common sense, who has trained young children, is *better* qualified to interpret the Bible correctly, on all points pertaining to such practical duties, than most theologians can possibly be" (CEB qtd. Boydston, et. al 247). Gail K. Smith convincingly argues that Stowe's anxiety about the "fundamental discontinuity" of certain key texts, including the Bible, is resolved in her later novels when she decides the ambiguities created by multiple interpretations can be reconciled in the figure of the mother as *the* interpreter of texts (304). In *My Wife and I*, Stowe offers

"MOTHERHOOD" (accentuated in all capitals) as the condition through which "different sections and different races can be interpreted to each other, and blended together in love" (37, 38). Harriet's fiction deems that a woman need not be well-educated in order to interpret the Bible "correctly." To Stowe, all one needs is an open and loving heart—which is often *all* that Stowe's enslaved characters possess. For example, Milly in *Dred* represents the New Testament viewpoint. Her counsels of love, forgiveness, and patience persuades Dred to abandon his quest for vengeance. She arrives in the North and opens her home to orphans of both races. Above all, mothers, those paragons of womanhood and Christianity are the ideal theological teachers.

In Stowe's and Beecher's Calvinist-rooted worldview, nothing could be more serious or important than the work of saving the souls of the young, and this work belongs to women—to mothers. However, this idea of motherhood is separate from the biological processes of conception, gestation, and birth. As Catharine expresses it:

> The blessed privileges of the family state are not confined to those who rear children of their own. Any woman who can earn a livelihood . . . and institute a family of her own, receiving to its heavenly influences the orphan, the sick, the homeless, and the sinful, [can] by motherly devotion train them to follow the self-denying example of Christ. (qtd. Boydston, et. al. 143)

As an unmarried woman in a culture where to be a mother was to wield significant ideological power, Catherine Beecher was quick to endow those biologically estranged from motherhood with all its powerful associations. Even though Beecher classifies motherhood as a female condition, this conception of motherhood contains radical possibilities: if motherhood is separate from the biological processes of birth, *anyone* could assume the position of surrogate mother. Despite Beecher's insistence on the necessity of femaleness to motherhood, the non-biological nature of motherhood could open up the category of mother to all persons, regardless of gender, sexual orientation,

race, or position as servant or slave. I contend that this is exactly what Stowe does in *Dred.* She takes the notion of the mother and not only divorces her from all biological considerations, but also takes pains to include men within the realm of good mothers. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, most, if not all, of the good mothers are white or nearly white Protestant women.[44] In *Dred*, however, any loving, Christian person capable of a kind of nurturing pedagogy is eligible, regardless of race or blood relationship to his or her charges.

There are some critics who contend that Stowe is invested in only biological motherhood. For example, Arthur Riss argues that *Uncle Tom's Cabin*'s logic is "hyper-biological." According to Riss,

> The cultural power of Stowe's attack on the Southern image of the plantation family lies in her claim that Southerners fundamentally misunderstand the nature of the domestic institution. Distinguishing her notion of the family from Southern domestic rhetoric, Stowe posits substantive blood relations as the only determining sign of a family. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the only real families are biological families. Thus, slavery is dangerous precisely because it substitutes imaginary families for real families and attempts to replace actual, substantive kinship with metaphorical and inauthentic forms of kinship. According to Stowe, the difference between freedom and slavery is the difference between "real" and "pseudo" families. Figural families, Stowe argues, offer only fictional protection.

Riss's formulation might be accurate, but his premise is flawed. Stowe does see a difference between "real" and "pseudo" families, but the difference is not biology, it is an ethics of care. For Stowe, the only true test of a "real" family is whether they love and care for each other. In other words, Stowe asks, "does this group function as a family?" much in the same way that communications theorist Martha Minnow asked it in 1998.

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[44] In *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* Eliza, Mrs. Bird, Ophelia (eventually), and (of course) Rachel Halliday, and St. Claire's late mother all fit this description.

Instead of recognizing the ability of non-biological mothers to assume the mother role, Riss sees only part of the story and therefore misses the point. Other critics have followed Riss in this misunderstanding. Emily VanDette builds an argument about the sibling bond around Riss's notion of the hyper-biological nature of *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* Susan M. Ryan also posits the difference between *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Dred* as one between biology and choice: "Instead of racially defined blood families, Stowe here champions (non-kin) interracial families and communities that, while radically unlike the plantation family of proslavery rhetoric, nevertheless involve ongoing benevolent relations across racial lines" ("Charity" 609). However, no such distinction exists between the two novels. One need look no further than Marie St. Clare to realize that, for Stowe, biological mothers are not always all they're expected to be. Since "self-sacrifice" is "the core of motherhood" (Boydston, et. al.120), Marie can never belong to that category. Despite her immunity to the "chances and reverses" of slavery that made enslaved families so fragile, Marie spurns her motherly duties in favor of selfishness (H. B. Stowe, *Uncle Tom* 325).

I am supported in my opposing view by several critics. Elizabeth Duquette asserts, for example, that "Stowe divorces maternity from biology, stressing that this is an ethics, not a mere fact of nature" (19). The ethics of motherhood as I read it in Stowe includes a dedication to teaching, piety, and care. In this, Stowe may simply participate in one of the major projects of sentimentalist novels, which Cindy Weinstein names as "a profound awareness of the relative fragility of the biological family and a commitment to strengthening and redefining it according to the logic of love" (4), and Nina Baym describes as "a network of surrogate kin gradually defin[ing] itself around the

heroine, making hers the story not only that of a self-made woman but that of a self-made or surrogate family" (38). I believe, however, that Stowe goes further than simply advocating for families constituted by love rather than biology. Stowe allows fluidity among the roles of the family, and implies that the very structure of the house is unnecessary to successful domesticity. Domesticity and motherhood are portable concepts that reside in thought and action rather than structures or specifically-marked bodies.

Stowe's theory of portable identity appears in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* through her assertion of the non-biological nature of motherhood with the maternal relationship of Ophelia to Topsy. A rigid New England virgin aunt, Ophelia seems the least likely candidate of all *Uncle Tom*'s characters for adoptive motherhood. Stiff and systematic, she is carefully juxtaposed to the hyper-maternal Rachel Halliday. Yet it is Ophelia who comes to embody the transformative power of motherhood—albeit in a troubled and convoluted fashion. Ophelia's and Topsy's relationship is riddled with discomfort for today's readers. They are both highly exaggerated and often ridiculous characters. Ophelia's relationship to Topsy is one of aversion and physical disgust at Topsy's skin color until the saintly Eva teaches Ophelia to love and reveals Topsy as "capable of good" (*Uncle Tom* 325). Along with Topsy's minstrelized character and Ophelia's blatant racism, their position as a mother-child pair is troubled for readers by Ophelia's legal ownership of Topsy. This legal ownership, however, is made palatable (for Stowe) by the spiritual ownership that bonds of love and care create for a mother-child pair. In the scene in which Ophelia demands that St. Clare make Topsy legally hers, St. Clare reluctantly obeys and then comments on the situation in his typically dry manner:

> "There, now, she's yours, body and soul," said St. Clare, handing the paper.
> "No more mine now than she was before," Miss Ophelia. "Nobody but God has a right to give her to me; but I can protect her now."
> "Well, she's yours by a fiction of law, then," said St. Clare, as he turned back into the parlor, and sat down to his paper. (*Uncle Tom* 326)

The fact that nobody *but* God can give Topsy to Ophelia illuminates Stowe's belief in a rightful, God-given ownership mothers have of their children. If God can give a child to a woman, then women have powerful spiritual title to their offspring. Gillian Brown claims that "[m]aternal ownership" is for Stowe "the ideal form of owning" ("Getting" 104), one that dispenses with issues of profit, and takes into account rather the best interests of the child.[45] For Stowe, however, Ophelia's legal title to Topsy was just as important as her moral claim to her. Only legal ownership enables Ophelia to "save her [Topsy] from all the chances and reverses of slavery" (*Uncle Tom* 325), and this "fiction of law" merely replicates the natural and moral title to their children that all biological mothers have.[46] Patricia Crain sees this move as a pernicious one, writing, "That children belong to their mothers commodifies children" (Crain 156). In Stowe's thought, this notion is strengthened by her description of her own young children as "money on interest whose value will be constantly growing" (C. E. Stowe 93). However, there is a colossal *legal* gap between figurative commodification and the ability to buy and sell one's children under slavery. Because Ophelia loves Topsy, because she intends to live with her in the "free" north, her legal claim to Topsy's "body and soul" is figured as benign. Thus Stowe

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[45] The "best interests of the child" doctrine quickly gained credence in custody courts across the United States, beginning in the early nineteenth century. "The judicial disposition to emphasize child welfare in determining custody began to refashion the preferences of the common law" (Grossberg 239), often to the benefit of the child's biological mother, and by the 1880s, surrogate families (Grossberg 257-8).

[46] This moral right to their children is not, of course, supported by the law—even in the case of white, biological, legally married mothers. In fact, through what some women viewed as a strange twist of the law, illegitimate offspring were far more likely to be given maternal custody than legitimate children (Grossberg 234-286).

"transform[s] the oppressive ownership of slavery into the protective possessiveness of motherhood" (Wearn 34).

However, despite Stowe's best intentions, the fact remains that Ophelia's ownership perpetuates Topsy's enslavement. Topsy is still trapped by what Ophelia calls "*the thing itself*" (*UTC* 233), still subject to the whims of an owner, however well-intentioned. Much of Stowe's project seeks to establish that good intentions are not enough, that slavery needs to be abolished because intention is not law. Why, then, does Stowe seem to advocate this motherly ownership? Topsy's position as a child "confuses the distinction between dependence and independence, passivity and agency, on which our narratives of emancipation depend" (Jerng 59), since she could not lay claim to herself even if she was not enslaved. Therefore the combination of motherly (i.e., good) intentions and efficiency are needed to free Topsy.

Stowe's main criticism of slavery is that good intentions cannot shield slaves from the legality of abuse, yet she endorses Ophelia's adoption/ownership of Topsy because Ophelia gets things done. She leads the march of Stowe's many efficient New England women, including Mary and the Widow Scudder (*The Minister's Wooing*) and Grace Seymore (*Pink and White Tyranny*). Her efficiency, however, is nothing without the warmth of motherly intentions, and the combination of the two seems to be Stowe's remedy for the evils and uncertainties of slavery. Likewise, intentions are meaningless without action. St. Clare remained an unreliable slaveholder because of his tendency to procrastinate. The fact that he intends to do good means nothing because he rarely follows through. Again, Stowe's criticism of this attitude is based on her religious philosophy. The Christian worldview maintains that believers must be perpetually

prepared for the second coming, that “now is the only time there ever is to do a thing in” (Stowe, *Uncle Tom* 326). Ophelia understands this philosophy and lives it. What she lacks, until Eva teaches her otherwise, is the desire to care for Topsy. Once the two are united, Ophelia becomes the ideal slaveholder: one who intends to free and care for her “property,” and who can be relied on to do so. This situation dilutes Stowe’s message about the uncertainties of slavery, but strengthens her argument about the power of motherhood.

Notions of ownership and motherhood, identity and biology become more complicated, and more liberating, in *Dred*. Tiff emerges as the black mother of white children, challenging the category of mother as the exclusive purview of the white and the female, and further complicating the idea of maternal ownership. Tiff is not a biological mother, but even more surprising, he is black, a man, and a slave. Tiff is therefore incapable of *any* kind of ownership, since he is himself considered property under the law. Unlike Topsy, however, Tiff is an adult. The characters and narrative voice of *Dred* unite to give Tiff claim to “his” children, to afford him emotional ownership over the white children who enslave him. Thus Tiff’s amphibiousness spans the categories of male and female, black and white, and, most importantly, owner and owned. *Dred* inverts the Ophelia/Topsy relationship along every conceivable register. The mother figure has transformed from a white woman to a black man, and instead of the mother needing to own her child to protect her, in this case the children own the mother. We see this paradox most clearly illustrated in a scene where Tiff commands his daughter to command him. Tiff tells her, “order me round *well*. Let folks har ye; ‘cause what’s de use of having a nigger, and nobody knowing it?” (237). Tiff seems to sacrifice

his own dignity for the benefit of his children's social standing, but in reality Tiff negotiates his position as a slave in order to gain some measure of power and "regularly demonstrates a shrewd awareness of the ways in which his performance of subordination allows him the freedom, say, to aid the rebellious slaves of the Dismal Swamp" (R. Levine xix). Tiff's amphibiousness, in other words, allows him to enact certain subversions of the slave society in which he lives, while remaining in his white neighbors' good graces.

Since Tiff is a male slave and a relentlessly comic figure, it might be difficult to believe that Stowe would portray him as a mother and welcome him into the sacred sorority. In fact there is a rare moment in the text where Tiff himself denies his own categorization as a mother to the children he cares for. After Tiff has been teased by a group of the Gordon slaves about taking his children to the camp meeting, he confronts his daughter Fanny about her reluctance to accompany him to the event:

> "O, Miss Fanny, Tiff knows!—Tiff knows de reason ye don't want to go to camp-meeting. Tiff's seen it in yer face—ye ho! ho! ho! Miss Fanny, is you 'fraid dey 'll take Old Tiff for yer mammy ?— ye ho! ho! ho!—for yer mammy?—and Teddy's, and de baby's?—bless his little soul!" And the amphibious old creature rollicked over the idea with infinite merriment. "Don't I look like it, Miss Fanny? Lord, ye por dear lamb, can't folks see ye's a born lady, with yer white, little hands? Don't ye be 'feared, Miss Fanny!" (296)

Tiff, thinking in biological terms, finds the idea of Fanny's fears ridiculous. Despite the contrast of Tiff's "ebony blackness" (Stowe, *Dred* 82) with Fanny's "white, little hands" (Stowe, *Dred* 228), however, this case of mistaken identity is not as laughable as it first appears. Fanny considers the care and instruction that Tiff provides her and her brothers

as proof enough of Tiff's position as her mother. According to the text, "the whole burden of their education lies on his shoulders" (*Dred* 285). As this care, instruction, and, even more so, the self-sacrifice of Tiff for his children fit very neatly into Stowe's own definition of motherhood, I see this scene as a moment of rupture in the text, where race and gender are both completely in doubt. Although Tiff asserts otherwise, the very existence of Fanny's fears demonstrates that her own racial status is in doubt, calling into focus the tenuousness of whiteness. The additional fact that the narrator calls Tiff an "amphibious old creature" is further evidence of such a rupture, since it points to Tiff's ability to straddle the separate identities of (white) mother and (black male) slave. From this unsettling of biological determinates comes the real possibility of reading Tiff as a mother figure.

It is clear in the text that Tiff, like Uncle Tom, represents "a site of confusion concerning traditional gender and racial markings" and "points to an elusive and unrepresentable conceptual energy that is neither precisely male nor precisely female" (S. Smith 110). The feminization of black male characters is a highly contentious issue in Stowe's work, and a large part of the reason the term "Uncle Tom" gained such currency as a slur during the Black Power movement. James Baldwin's famous criticism of Uncle Tom might as well apply to Uncle Tiff: "Tom . . . has been robbed of his humanity and divested of his sex. It is the price for that darkness with which he has been branded" (18). Although Stowe undoubtedly advocates a more docile version of black masculinity, it might be attributable to something other than blind racism. Leslie Fiedler claims that Stowe seeks not to emasculate black men in her antislavery fiction, but rather to promote for men and women of all races "the virtues that her time had come to call 'feminine,'

though their more proper name is 'Christian'" (174). As examined above, Stowe explicitly connects motherhood with the most important values of Christianity and considers motherhood the most Christ-like role a human can perform on earth, as well as the most perfect iteration of femininity. In *Dred*, it is no insult to be described in feminine terms. On the contrary, even God is figured in terms of motherhood in the novel: "If we would estimate the force of almighty justice, let us ask ourselves what a mother might feel for the abuse of her helpless child, and multiply that by infinity" (441).[47] Tiff likewise emerges as a womanly, motherly man—Tiff is his children's mother.

Even the earliest descriptions of Tiff liken him to "an old woman" and portray him "darning a stocking" (82). He "assumed . . . some feminine accomplishments. Tiff could darn a stocking with anybody in the country; he could cut out children's dresses and aprons; he could patch, and he could seam; all which he did with infinite self-satisfaction" (91). He is never counted among the men, either from a white or a black perspective. When the white characters see him, they "[find him] busy ironing some clothes for the baby, which he had washed and hung out the night before" (287), amidst a crowd of women performing other domestic tasks. Nina perceives him as "[t]he nursing, child-loving Old Tiff" (338), a description that invokes images of lactation, along with the other associations of care. When Tiff socializes with black characters, he often "[finds] himself in a prominent position in a group of negro-women" (224). Additionally, when living in the swamp, the men of Dred's refugee slave camp meet to plan their revolution, while Tiff remains with the women back in the huts (453). Even at the end of the novel, Tiff functions more as a wife to Milly than anything else—he keeps house and

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[47] This formulation of God-as-mother prefigures Stowe's subsequent illustration of Jesus as motherly in *Footsteps of the Master*.

aids her in mothering their many adopted children—and the last image we receive of Tiff is him proudly cradling Fanny's baby (542-3).

As a mother, Tiff consistently privileges his children's welfare over his own, even to the point of remaining enslaved for their benefit. As Harry explains to Nina, "that creature hasn't one particle of selfishness in him" (109). In terms of spiritual health, Tiff thinks only of the children. At the camp meeting that they all attend, Nina remarks, "[D]id you notice poor Old Tiff, so intent upon getting his children converted? He didn't seem to have the least thought or reference to getting into heaven himself" (285). Likewise, during a raging storm, Tiff is the one soul remaining on a sinking ship, giving up his place on a lifeboat to Fanny and Teddy, who beg him to accompany them. When everyone believes him dead, the narrator reflects on Tiff's value: "*Tiff's devotion to these children had been so constant, so provident, so absolute, that it did not seem to them possible they could live a day without him; and the desolation of their lot seemed to grow upon them every hour"* (541). They weep with the deepest sorrow, and mourn the loss of Tiff more dramatically than they ever mourned the death of their biological mother. Stowe brings him miraculously through the storm, and unlike most of her other faithful Christian characters, Tiff is rewarded in this life.[48]

Stowe not only characterizes Tiff as feminine, but also writes a scene where the children's biological mother explicitly passes on maternal authority to him. Before Sue Cripps—mother of Fanny, Teddy, and a new baby dies—she prophesies her death and wishes her children could die with her. Tiff, her "poor old black, faithful" slave responds,

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[48]In *Dred*, Stowe seems to be combining strategies of sentimental martyrdom that she employed in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (with Dred's and Nina's deaths) with an understanding that social and political work needs to be done in this world. For more on Stowe and the meaning of death in her antislavery fiction, see Tompkins p.127, Hedrick p. 259, and Gillian Brown p. 33.

"Law bless you, Miss Sue, don't be talking dat ar way! Why, if de Lord *should* call you, Miss Sue, I can take care of the children. I can bring them up powerful, I tell ye!" (87). With her last breath, Sue Cripps takes advantage of this offer, and implores Tiff to bring the children to Jesus:

> "Tiff," she gasped, speaking with difficulty, "I've seen the one that said *that,* and it's all true, too! and I've seen all why I've suffered so much. He — He—He is going to take me! Tell the children about Him!" There was a fluttering sigh, a slight shiver, and the lids fell over the eyes forever. (98)

The "Him" in this plea is unmistakably Jesus. Tiff accepts the injunction from their dying mother to take care of the children spiritually, mirroring the physical care he takes with them in providing for their material needs. This is a key point for Stowe, since her conception of motherhood is tied to teaching Christianity. Even beyond this, Tiff's fulfillment of his children's material and spiritual needs mirrors that of Stowe's ideal mother figure, Rachel Halliday in *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* Halliday resolves "difficulties spiritual and temporal" (*UTC* 122), and so does Tiff. From the moment of the transmission of maternal authority and therefore maternal ownership, the text suggests that Tiff completely takes over the role of mothering the Cripps children. Their father has no hand in their care, nor does he care how they are handled; this makes Tiff their only parent.

Tiff could, on first glance, be considered a "mammy," rather than a mother. He is referred to several times in the text as a "faithful attendant" (404, 87), language that would seem to relegate Tiff to an inferior status. This direct passing of maternal authority is, in this case, extremely significant. If Tiff were a mammy, the fact of his caring for the needs of the children would have been unquestioned. Mammy, as "the ultimate symbol of

maternal devotion" (Wallace-Sanders 2), would not need to be enjoined to care. Tiff's gender might be part of the difference—perhaps his position as a man (albeit a womanly one) allows him to transcend the mammy trap. In order to be sufficiently neutralized as a sexual threat, as well as to make his nurturing nature more convincing, Tiff must be feminized.

Tiff, the narrator, and other characters in the novel recognize the new ownership Tiff has over the children. Tiff calls Teddy "Tiff's brave little man" (406), and Nina pronounces, "when I see the old creature lugging about those children, I always think of an ugly old cactus with its blossoms. I believe he verily thinks they belong to him just as much" (285). Not only does Tiff claim the children, he claims responsibility for their welfare and development. The narrator, likewise, refers to the children as "his [Tiff's] children" (346, 408, 539), and other characters pay linguistic duty to the relationship as well: "Aunt" Rosy asks Tiff about "your chil'en" (224), and Nina refers to them as "his children" (285). When they escape to the Dismal Swamp and are living among fugitive slaves, one of the slaves remarks that *she is "glad we have got Old Tiff and the children here. It makes it seem more natural" (452). This is an extraordinary moment: the moment when Tiff and the children are marked as a natural family. As a "natural" family in the text, Tiff and his children defy every notion we have about nineteenth-century conceptions of family and race. It is important to keep in mind, however, that they can only be considered a natural family by someone who shares Stowe's worldview and ascribes to her particular brand of Christianity.*

If we consider Tiff a mother figure, the conclusion has far-reaching implications for how we read Stowe and how we think about motherhood as a concept. Although

Victorian motherhood currently holds many associations with domestic oppression and biological determinism (following the thinking of Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, Adrienne Rich, and Shulamith Firestone, among others), Stowe understood this role to be ideologically powerful. For Stowe, a mother wields influence and a mother commands respect—not to mention all the spiritual strengths and privileges that attended this role. For her, then, to offer this position to oppressed men and women alike was a radical move. This move, however, depended on the deployment of ambiguity and doubleness in order to negotiate the two sides of this coin: that these concepts are portable, but have some core that is Christian.

This ambiguity influences how critics discuss Stowe. Earlier in this chapter I acknowledged the critical frustration with Stowe's ambivalence to many of her characters and themes in *Dred*, but critics themselves often have trouble pinning down how exactly to discuss Stowe's themes. For example, take the discussion of domesticity in Stowe's work. Stowe is known for being a domestic novelist, and *Uncle Tom* has been dubbed the "*summa theologica* of nineteenth-century America's religion of domesticity, a brilliant redaction of the culture's favorite story about itself—the story of salvation through motherly love" (Tompkins 125). Discussion of Stowe often centers on domesticity, a term which is usually understood to be self-explanatory. There are, however, many different ways to think about domesticity: Does it refer to a physical space? A set of practices? A set of ideas? A set of relationships? The space of the nation? Critics often interweave these methods of defining domesticity when discussing Stowe, and the concept becomes tied to homes, housekeeping, and motherhood (and sometimes

nations[49]), usually without distinction. Prominent critics tend to use "domestic" as a modifier that points vaguely to all things related to the concept of home. For example, Gillian Brown claims that Stowe is at once invested in "domestic values" (*Domestic Individualism* 18, 31), a "domestic economy" (5, 24, 33), and "domestic feminism" (41), three terms which seem to refer to the condition of being bounded by a physical home, abiding by the practices of orderly housekeeping, and the importance of women's traditional roles, along with other associations. Stowe herself attributed a constellation of meanings to the term and its derivations. Stowe's fiction contributes to our understanding of domesticity as multifaceted. It is a condition, a force, an ideology. It is a "discourse" (Kaplan 585), an "ideal" (Askeland 396), a "rhetoric" (S. Smith 143 and Roberson 116-137) and a "religion" unto itself (Tompkins 125). The fact that we cannot agree about the meaning of even Stowe's most fundamental terms does not have to be a problem. In fact, this ambiguity is powerful, and gives rise to this idea of amphibiousness and portability in Stowe's thinking.

The Great Dismal Swamp is perhaps the most productive space to consider amphibiousness in Stowe's work. The very nature of the swamp is amphibious in the most basic sense of the word: it is neither land nor water, and anyone taking up abode there would be amphibious as well. As an amphibious space, the swamp gives rise to all manner of possibilities. I will demonstrate that the swamp bridges the gap between the wilderness and the home through Stowe's characterizations of Dred and the community of fugitives that live with him there. The swamp becomes, in Stowe's hands, a place of beauty, fertility, comfort, and family—a domestic haven for fugitive slaves. Although

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[49] For more discussion of the relationship between this conception of domesticity and that which is usually meant in discussion of Stowe's work, see Kaplan and also Romero.

domestic, it is also militaristic; it is a place for fomenting rebellion and burying the noble dead. This is a space where families and armies unite to create an alternative to spaces that uphold strictly delineated boundaries of races and genders. The swamp becomes a site of alternative or unexpected domesticity—Stowe shows us families, homes, and gardens thriving in this most unlikely of places, even amid the revolutionary activity the swamp also witnesses. The portability of the power of domesticity becomes evident when we examine Stowe's efforts to transform the swamp, traditionally "the domain of sin, death, and decay" (Miller 3), into a successful, productive home.

The "Great *Dismal* Swamp" does not initially sound like an appealing place to build a home. Characterized by a "defiance to all human efforts either to penetrate or subdue" it (H. B. Stowe, *Dred* 209), the Dismal Swamp is a far cry from the haven in a heartless world that the home is supposed to be in the nineteenth-century United States. David C. Miller contends that the space of the swamp was fundamentally opposed to the project of sentimental novelists. He insists the "[c]ontemplation of this mingling of forces normally thought to be opposed – life and death, good and evil – undercut the fundamental assumptions connected with the sentimentalist quest for purity and flight from death" (Miller 10). [50] Over and over in *Dred*, we see the "mingling of forces" that seem incongruous. The ambiguities of the text, far from undermining the effectiveness of Stowe's narrative, offer imaginative possibilities in the destruction of traditional boundaries.

At first, the existence of the swamp as domestic space seems impossible. Stowe sets up a dichotomy between the swamps and "civilized life" (209), she calls the swamps

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[50] Elizabeth Ammons ("Stowe's Dream") and Isabelle White have separately argued that the sentimentalist project is anything but a flight from death, and rather that death itself offers a heavenly reward for the virtuous and allows them martyrdom in this life.

“regions of hopeless disorder” (209), and describes the wild uncultivability of the land which man cannot “penetrate or subdue” (209). Stowe writes a scene between Dred and a neighboring slave that seems to demonstrate the essential divide between living free in the wild and living with domestic comforts, enslaved. Dred is contemptuous of Harry, commanding him,

> Go home—that’s all I have to say to you! You sleep in a curtained bed.—I sleep on the ground, in the swamps! You eat the fat of the land. I have what the ravens bring me! But no man whips me!—no man touches my wife! . . . Go! you are a slave!—I am free! (199-200)

From this exchange, readers might infer that Stowe envisions a radical distinction between the categories of swamp and home. One can only be free, it seems, at the expense of all domestic comfort. But this is Stowe, and Stowe’s worldview is fundamentally Christian and unequivocally domestic. Therefore, she would have been looking for a way to reconcile these two seemingly incongruous concepts. Stowe’s Christianity is the bridge. Dred always speaks in a jumble of phrases drawn from the Old Testament, and when Dred says he only “eat[s] what the ravens bring” him, he is recalling the familiar biblical story of the prophet Elijah, who was himself fed by the ravens, on God’s command.[51] I should emphasize that this is one example among many of Stowe’s practice of putting words from the Old Testament into Dred’s mouth.[52] Instead of dividing the spaces of home and swamp, therefore, this scene sets up the moral righteousness of Dred’s cause, his alliance with God, which is for Stowe the very basis of domesticity. In Stowe’s estimation, domesticity is a condition and a process by which the

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[51] “And it shall be, *that* thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there. So he went and did according unto the word of the LORD: for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that *is* before Jordan. And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook” (1 Kings 17:4-6 KJV)

[52] Other critics before me have noted and more thoroughly traced this phenomenon, including Judie Newman in her footnotes to the edition of *Dred* she edited.

nation will be redeemed, what Jane Tompkins has termed “domestic world conquest” (143). Indeed, many have noted the correlation in Stowe’s fiction between household order and moral righteousness,[53] and the swamp is no exception. Once she establishes Dred as divinely guided (a process that suggests her own abolitionism is similarly endorsed by God), Stowe can proceed in her project of claiming domesticity as a force for good everywhere, even in situations that seem too masculinized or too radical to be rightly called “domestic.”

Dred himself is hyper-masculine. At his first appearance in the novel, Stowe describes his physical presence as “herculean” and “imperial” (198). With “the muscles of a gladiator” (198), “broad shoulders” (198), and “intensely black” skin, he gives the impression of “one of the wild old warrior prophets of the heroic ages” (198). He thinks of nothing, it seems, but the day he will claim vengeance for the abuses of slavery. Referring to slaveholders, Dred promises to “slay them utterly, and consume them from off the face of the earth” (575). He leads the efforts of the fugitive and the enslaved to overthrow the system of slavery with a violent revolution—the planning for which all takes place in the fugitive slave camp in the swamps. Such a masculine, violent figure seems the furthest thing from domesticity or Uncle Tom that Stowe could possibly muster. However, the way Stowe describes Dred’s movements through the swamp indicate that Dred and domesticity, the swamp and “home” are more analogous than they originally seem.

Stowe tells us that Dred travels through the swamps “with as much ease as a lady treads her Turkey carpet” (274), and that the everyday dangers of the swamp “[are] to

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[53] This theory is related to Stowe’s recognition of the necessity for both good intentions and follow-through. Notably, Gillian Brown, Baym, Hedrick, Tompkins, and Weinstein

him situations of as much comfort as well-curtained beds and pillows are to us" (274). Here, Stowe turns Dred's masculine exploits in the wild terrain of the swamp into delicate feminine activities firmly located in the home. Carpets, in particular, have strong historical associations with femininity and domesticity. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary,* the word carpet, "Being, at first, chiefly a luxury of a lady's chamber, . . . became an attribute of luxury and effeminacy . . . as opposed to the camp or field" as early as 1581 ("carpet, n."). Stowe therefore uses an object that traditionally stood in for the essential difference between militarism and domesticity to bridge the gap between Dred's masculinity and her domestic project. By using excessively luxurious, distinctly feminine imagery, Stowe encourages her readers to conceive of the swamps as an alternative domestic space—as Dred's home, which is just as comfortable to him as any well-appointed sitting room. Stowe tells us that Dred feels not just satisfaction at his abode, but rather a "fierce delight, which must *excel* the softest seductions of luxury" (274 emphasis mine). The fact that his delight is "fierce" brings into focus the complex balancing act Stowe attempts in figuring the swamp as domestic. He may be "as comfortable as," but there can be no confusing Dred and a lady on her Turkey carpet. However, Stowe is insistent in her figuration of the swamp as home-like.

Stowe goes to great lengths to create in her readers a sense of the swamp as domestic space. She insists, first of all, that "[t]he negroes lying out in the swamps are not so wholly cut off from society as might at first be imagined" (211). They interact on a regular basis with others outside the swamps, including slaves on neighboring plantations and "poor white" traders. When they are away from it for any reason, the fugitive's camp is unambiguously referred to as "home" by Dred and the others living there. Not only

this, but when we consider that the root of the word "house" is the Old English *hus,* which Arthur C. Danto tells us was "cognate with *huden*—to hide, shelter, conceal, cover" (9), we see that the figuration of the swamp is not such a stretch. The swamp offers shelter, a place to hide, and a natural place for families to thrive for the fugitives in its community. The existence of rough structural housing (each family unit that stays at the camp is allotted its own cabin) is one more way in which Stowe figures the swamp as domestic. These cabins are not permanent, however, and the families that inhabit them perpetually rotate as fugitives move further North. The instability that this constant shifting population calls to mind the possibility that, although this may be a domestic space, it is not necessarily happy. In order to investigate this question, let us measure the swamp's camp against Stowe's own standards of domestic success.

According to Stowe's advice manual *The American Woman's Home*, co-written with her sister Catharine Esther Beecher in 1869, the three "cardinal requisites of domestic enjoyment" are "health, industry, and economy" (24). They go on to explain that, by this, they mean: (1) a constant supply of fresh air; (2) fertile land, hands, and minds; and (3) the utilization of all available time and resources. The presence of all of these qualities should constitute a functional and healthful home, fit for a family to occupy and make productive. Implied is the ethics of love and care Stowe outlined so painstakingly in all her novels. As it happens, the fugitive slave camp in the Dismal Swamp can boast all three, and would therefore qualify as a successful domestic space, according to Stowe's own definition. *The American Woman's Home*, in keeping with popular medical opinion of the time, cautions that "[t]he first and most indispensable requisite for health is pure air, both by day and night" (43). In *Dred,* Stowe laboriously

describes the site of the fugitive camp as a place where the air is imbued "with a healthy resinous fragrance, which causes it to be an exception to the usual rule of the unhealthiness of swampy land" (239-240). No one ever falls ill in this space, even during the cholera outbreak that sweeps across the neighboring plantations. As to fertility, Stowe initially claims the swamps are too wild to be cultivated, but amends her position by allowing for scattered "elevated spots in the swampy land, which, by judicious culture, are capable of great productiveness" (212). The fugitives grow plenty of vegetables to feed their ranks. The swamp also features bountiful "flowers of untold name" (239), which point to the über-fertility of the soil and add to the beauty and comfort of the area, establishing it as a domestic Eden. Finally, the fugitives waste nothing, including their time. They are always shown at some work, whether it be physical (such as hoeing potatoes) or mental (such as discussing the Bible). Fulfilling Stowe and Beecher's three main requirements for domestic success, the swamp is presented as a comfortable and productive home—better than most of the others described in *Dred*.

In my understanding of Stowe, successful domesticity is never far from anywhere that is righteous or godly and vice versa, regardless of the structures or bodies that populate that space. For Stowe, religion, domesticity, and motherhood make up a holy trinity of sorts: three portable concepts applicable to any situation. Domesticity is both tied to and separate from houses, whiteness, and femininity. Whiteness and femininity are powerful concepts in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and the true revision in *Dred* comes in the form of the alienation of the concepts of domesticity and motherhood from the vessels that used to contain them (houses, women's bodies). The depiction of Tiff as a good mother, along with the figuration of the Great Dismal Swamp as a functional home combine to

demonstrate Stowe's experimentation in the portability of the concept of motherhood and domesticity so that they are not tied to specific bodies or locations. Stowe's conception of family, motherhood, and domesticity can exist anywhere and be enacted by anyone.
This idea complicates the usual associations of Stowe as a woman bound to house and home and as an icon of domesticity in its more limited sense. Instead, her work might act as precursor to recent attempts—by feminists, LGBT activists, and others—to give us a more flexible definition of family and home. These flexible definitions come with an understanding of identity as socially constructed and therefore malleable. Stowe gestures to the constructedness of identity through the concept of amphibiousness and portability. Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson* offers us a slightly different way of conceptualizing the portability of identity: the performativity of identity. Just as Tiff is legible as a mother because he enacts certain scripts Stowe recognizes as motherly, so those in *Pudd'nhead* are legible as families when they enact certain scripts.

Chapter 4

The Performative Family in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*

T. D. Rice and Harriet Beecher Stowe provided us opportunities to think about how ambiguity can be productive. In the face of doubt, options emerge that might not otherwise have been possible, including the possibility of fluid identities (male mother, comedic mulatto). The ambiguity of Mark Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson* offers the opportunity to identify the process of constructing familial identity that otherwise might remain invisible. Family identity is integral to individual identity formation, including one's gendered and racialized identity.[54] This chapter will argue that families and familial relationships are constructed and performed in a similar process to that described by Judith Butler with regard to gender performativity. I argue that familial performativity differs from that of race and gender because it relies more heavily on narrative and on particular performative speech acts such as naming. First, I will present a brief critical history of *Pudd'nhead Wilson,* touching on the main debates surrounding the novel, and explaining how those discussions inform my understanding of the performative family in the novel. Then, I will explore how the exchange of Chambers and Tom in the novel contributes to destabilize racial and familial relationships. Finally, I will explain how different modes of performativity converge in *Pudd'nhead* to point to certain prescriptive behaviors, bodies, and languages—operating below the level of conscious performance—that define who is legible as a family.

Pudd'nhead Wilson tells the story of the Driscoll family, their slaves, and the other members of the small Mississippi community of Dawson's Landing. At the outset

[54] This idea is supported by literature in developmental psychology and communication theory. For more on this claim, please see chapter 1, "Nuclear Alternatives: An Introduction."

of the novel, two women on the Driscoll estate give birth to sons. Although the boys share a household and a birthday, their lots in life could not differ more greatly. One, Thomas à Beckett Driscoll ("Tom"), is the treasured heir to the Driscoll family wealth. The other, Valet de Chambre ("Chambers"), is his slave. Despite their differing circumstances, the babies physically resemble each other—enough to enable Chambers' mother Roxy to switch their identities after Percy Driscoll threatens to sell her. With a simple wardrobe exchange, Roxy installs her own son as the heir and relegates the Driscoll baby to a life of enslavement. They are raised according to their new stations, and twenty years later Tom[55] is spoiled, dissipated, and an incurable gambler. Chambers, in contrast, has grown up strong, patient, and meek. When Tom murders his ostensible uncle in the act of robbing him, the town is thrown into a whirlwind criminal trial. Well-known enemies of the victim, the Italian twins Angelo and Luigi,[56] are accused of the murder based on circumstantial evidence. Everyone, including Tom, is sure the twins will be convicted until their lawyer, the town "pudd'nhead," discovers both of Tom's secrets: his guilt and his born identity.

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[55] For the sake of clarity, I will refer to the children by the names with which they were raised (e.g., the man born Chambers but raised as Tom will be referred to as "Tom") unless the context requires additional clarification.

[56] Count Luigi and Count Angelo figure as the main character(s) in the novel's attendant short story, *Those Extraordinary Twins,* in which they appear as conjoined twins. The twins share a set of legs that each controls for exactly a week at a time (at the stroke of midnight Sunday morning, the power of control mystically switches). Twain explores the nature of two selves housed in one body through a series of conflicts that question the nature of the self while generating humor. One example of a conflict is that Angelo is a teetotaler and Luigi a drinker of liquor. Ironically, Luigi remains sober when he drinks, but Angelo gets drunk. One night while (presumably) Luigi is in control of their legs, the twins attend a pro-liquor political rally. After Tom Driscoll insults them, he is kicked by the twins into the crowd (In *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, after Twain separates the twins, it is Luigi who kicks Tom). When he brings them both up on assault charges, Pudd'nhead Wilson successfully argues in court that it is impossible to know which twin had control of the legs, and even if it were possible to determine, it is unlawful to punish both for the actions of one. Later, when Luigi is elected City Alderman, he cannot perform his duties because his brother cannot be present at meetings, being unelected. Unable to solve this dilemma, the town lynches Luigi, of course killing both twins in the process. Twain explains that he "extract[ed]" the "farce" of Angelo and Luigi, conjoined twins, from the "tragedy" of Tom, Chambers, and Roxy during his revision process (*Those Extraordinary Twins* 209), but the two were originally published together, and continue to be read together by critics.

Similar to Stowe's *Dred*, one of the major critical conversations about Mark Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894) is whether or not it is "patently unreadable," as Hershel Parker famously declared it (136). The ambiguity that abounds in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* has allowed it to be interpreted both as profoundly critical of a racist society and as implicitly racist, and has prompted some critics to dismiss the work entirely. Cynthia A. Current describes the novel as "seemingly a text for all seasons" because, to different critics, "*Pudd'nhead Wilson* is sharply coherent or poorly written, innately racist or inherently racially progressive, essentially about nature or essentially about nurture" (Current 310). Several prominent Americanists have discouraged others from attempting to retrieve any order or meaning from *Pudd'nhead Wilson.* Robert A. Wiggins asserts the critical attention paid to the novel "simply is not warranted by a careful reading" (182). Forrest Robinson points to the text's "sense of disorder," and John Schaar simply pronounces it a "mess" (Shaar 211).

Others, while acknowledging the ambiguities of the plot and expressing dissatisfaction with Twain's pat conclusion, find value in *Pudd'nhead Wilson.* The collection of essays edited by Susan Gillman and Forrest G. Robinson, acknowledges the "incoherence" of the narrative structure, but the editors read it "not as aesthetic failure but as political symptom, the irruption into this narrative about mistaken racial identity of materials from the nineteenth century political unconscious" (Introduction vii). This idea echoes those critics, such as Eric Sundquist, who have suggested that the narrative structure mirrors "the social and psychic turmoil that Twain . . . felt in post-Reconstruction years" (227). Sundquist goes so far as to proclaim the novel's "apparently grave artistic flaws the true sign of wisdom" (226). While I agree that *Pudd'nhead*

Wilson's "tangled textual skein" reflects a complex American culture, rooted in a system of chattel slavery (Gillman, "Sure" 87), I also see *new* possibilities for interpretation and meaning in the complexity of the narrative. Just as I find in *Dred* the possibility of "productive ambiguity," I consider Twain's novel a rich field for inquiry and analysis because of its untidy narrative structure. While it may expose unconscious psychic, political, or social forces at play, it also provides ground for new theoretical development. Perhaps most fruitfully, the ambiguity of the novel's main interpretive puzzle—whether "nature" or "nurture" reigns supreme—proves productive in thinking about how family functions.

Critics have long disagreed over whether *Pudd'nhead* endorses the supremacy of characteristics biologically inherited or of those culturally constructed. In the novel, Twain indicates that weak, immoral Tom and strong, patient Chambers are the products of their respective upbringings: "Tom got all the petting, Chambers got none. Tom got all the delicacies, Chambers got mush and milk, and clabber without sugar. *In consequence* Tom was a sickly child and Chambers wasn't. Tom was 'fractious,' as Roxy called it, and overbearing; Chambers was meek and docile" (*Pudd'nhead* 24, emphasis mine). This passage suggests that Twain views nurture as trumping nature in the formation of character. Roxy's assertion that Tom's bad behavior is due to "de nigger in [him]" (88), however, has led some critics to conclude that "[e]vents result from inherited characteristics *no less* than from social training, and thereby apparently buttress a racial myth that is everywhere else undermined" (Mitchell 296, emphasis mine). Barbara A. Chellis explains the tensions inherent in this passage and the interpretive possibilities it generates: "Mark Twain's success [is] in having lured his readers into a trap. To take

Roxy's point of view—which is easy to do because we admire her—is really to take the white point of view, the white point of view which attributes inferiority to the Negro" (103). This privileged, racist white thinking may be a trap, but not enough evidence exists to prove that Twain laid this trap deliberately.

Even critics who read *Pudd'nhead* generously sometimes determine that it ultimately endorses racist lines of thinking. Philip Foner worries that "Twain appears to be swallowing the spurious 'blood will tell' doctrine" (qtd. Chellis 101), and Louis A. Budd reasons, "since he [Tom] had been brought up as a respectable white, his criminal instinct looks like the result of heredity'" (qtd. Chellis 101). To believe that Tom's bad behavior is the manifestation of the tiny portion of "nigger" blood in him, however, may be to "ignore the complicated history of the oppositions" upon which this belief rests (Thomas 762). In fact, the logic of Budd's comment only holds if you believe that a "a respectable white" upbringing offers no incentive to lie, cheat, steal, and murder. On the contrary, I am not sure Twain held any reverence for respectable whiteness.

It is possible that Twain rejected both the idea of respectable whiteness and criminal blackness, while continuing to treat black humanity with ambivalence.[57] This conflicted attitude to race as a political, biological, and social idea manifests itself in *Pudd'nhead.* Twain is well-known for wrangling with the concept of the dual mind, which in one person harbored conflicting viewpoints, desires, and ideals. Twain's conception of this duality led to his explorations into the nature of conscience, such as his "Facts Concerning the Recent Carnival of Crime in Connecticut," in which Twain personifies his conscience as "a shriveled, shabby dwarf" who battles with him for control over his actions. For Twain, tensions between true and false, white and black,

[57] For more sustained critique of Twain and his racial attitudes, see Leonard, Tenney, and Davis.

male and female, and imitation and authenticity are never resolved. The epigraphs to chapter 5, two competing quips from Pudd'nhead Wilson's Calendar, express this tension. The first emphasizes the preeminence of training, or cultural production of meaning: "Training is everything. The peach was once a bitter almond; cauliflower is nothing but cabbage with a college education" (29). The second, "Remark of Dr. Baldwin's, concerning upstarts" (29), switches the priority to an essential, born identity: "We don't care to eat toadstools that think they are truffles" (29). These two food metaphors mirror the larger questions in the novel: is training "everything," or does some essence of identity exist and matter?

The ambiguity produced by harboring a duality enables Twain's critics to make of his writing whatever they choose, but also causes frustration. While this has been seen as a weakness in his work, perhaps it actually represents a strength. Although critical debates rage over Twain's intentions, particularly in the context of *Pudd'nhead,* he himself often cautioned against reading intentionality into his work. The "Notice" that precedes *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* famously warns, "Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot" (xxxii). Literary critics always dismiss this as a posture, a joke, but what if we take Twain seriously? What if the true value of Twain's work lies in his tolerance of seemingly incongruent ideas, which renders the usual methods of interpretation impossible? Instead, we must follow Twain's example, accept both nature and nurture as the ultimate truth, which, conversely and paradoxically must also mean that neither position contains any merit. As in the case of

the comedic mulatto, we see here Twain's implicit recognition that incongruence begets humor.

Crucially, Twain recognizes the *social* value placed on biological associations, particularly in a chattel slave society where a child followed the condition of its mother. This social value on the biological begets Roxy's assertion, and this is where the ambiguity of the text arises. Ultimately, Twain's intent is not as important as the possibilities we can see in his text. Whether or not he meant to, Twain complicates the notion of family when he allows two biologically unrelated boys on opposite sides of the color line to be switched in infancy. As a result, they occupy each other's families and upset the social order and line of descent. They relate to each other in a way that complicates the notion of family as a biological, stable, and self-evident cultural unit. Tom's and Chamber's cultural relationships to their families are tangled up in their biological relationships, and inextricable from their racial identities.

Racial identities in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* exist within a binary structure. Bodies are classified as either "black" or "white," based on a variety of factors including one's mother's racial status. The social structure of Dawson's Landing depends upon the reliability of these categories and their ability to classify human beings. The technology of fingerprinting seems to provide an empirical method of categorizing bodies. David Wilson explains that "[e]very human being carries with him from his cradle to his grave certain physical marks which do not change their character, and by which he can always be identified—and that without shade of doubt or question" (136). Unlike a man's clothing or his manner of speech (both of which can be changed), a man's fingerprints "cannot be counterfeited, nor can he disguise it or hide it away, nor can it become

illegible by the wear and mutations of time" (Twain, *Pudd'nhead* 136). This seemingly neat solution to the complicated racial politics of the novel has led some literary critics to lament the collapse of the socially constructed in the face of biological fact. For example, Derek Parker Royal declares that "[t]he real tragedy of this tragic novel is not only the reaffirmation of slavery within the community, but the ultimate triumph of Wilson's deterministic fingerprinting over Roxy's constructed fiction" (427). These readings see the use of fingerprinting as an uncomplicated vote for the essence of identity and biological truth as discoverable through science.

Other critics have not accepted fingerprinting so easily as a straightforwardly scientific method. Cynthia Current suggests that "the organization of technology in the novel takes on the traits of the social organization of race. The archive itself becomes infected with the spectacular vitality of, and the speculation and risk within, nineteenth-century biological and cultural determinism" (328). Current finds evidence that fingerprinting was integral to failed attempts by eugenicists "to find evidence suggesting that fingerprint patterns were heritable . . . [in order to] identify individuals, [as well as] groups by class and race" (323). Contrary to the hopes of eugenicists, an individual's fingerprints are truly unique, entirely independent of her parents' fingerprint characteristics (swirls, loops, etc.). Although in theory fingerprinting is totally empirical and disconnected from any constructed meaning, "[f]ingerprints . . . are in practice relational indices that must be read in and against the context of other sets of prints" (Gillman, "Sure Identifiers" 99). One cannot categorize humans based only on a box full of their fingerprints; one needs to know the human bodies connected to those prints, as well as the cultural values imposed on those bodies (as Wilson does). Wilson can

therefore see that at one point the two boys were switched, but he cannot be sure which baby was *really* born under which name—suppose Roxy has switched them before their first set of prints, on purpose or somehow by accident? Wilson's categorization system breaks down, too, if you consider how he should file Tom's and Chambers's fingerprints after his discovery. Whose glass slide should bear the name "Chambers" and whose the name "Tom"?

Susan Gillman similarly decides that "Wilson's conclusion, though strictly 'the truth,' is also illogical and arbitrary, almost more confusing than clarifying" ("Sure Identifiers" 99). Although they reveal the twins were switched in infancy, their fingerprints do not account for the cultural factors that have made them what they are—those that have trained them in their respective racial identities. Gillman explains, "Twain . . . show[s] that though fingerprints do, indeed, establish racial difference, those categories are not biologically fixed but rather culturally defined" (*Dark Twins* 91). Therefore, although fingerprinting points to Tom and Chambers' born identities, the only thing the fingerprints truly "prove, in fact, is that one can be interchangeably 'white and free' and 'a negro and a slave'" (Gillman, "Sure Identifiers" 99). When the bodies bearing cultural signifiers of "white" and "negro" are switched, there is a rupture, a category crisis. Just as Wilson may have difficulty re-filing his fingerprints in light of the new information, we as readers have difficulty compartmentalizing and understanding who is who. From this rupture can be gleaned an understanding of the arbitrariness of identity—the disconnect between the biological and the cultural, which are so often presumed to be dependent. The independence of the biological and the cultural, the failure of human categories, creates space for a different idea of family. In the

"traditional" family, the biological and the cultural align (e.g., biological father = "Dad"). *Pudd'nhead* disrupts this custom and exposes it as a social fiction. Family, then, is revealed to be just another "fiction of law and custom" in the novel (Twain, *Pudd'nhead* 13).

My definition of family is drawn largely from family communication theorist Martha Minnow. Minnow asks, does a group of people "share affection and resources, think of one another as family members, and present themselves as such to neighbors and others?" (8). This definition relies on behaviors rather than biological relationships, on social recognition rather than simply self-definition. Family identity consists of two separate but equally important elements: internal identity and external identity. According to Dena Marie Huisman, a Communications theorist, "Families not only see themselves as a family, but often as a certain *type* of family, meaning that their identity is both what makes them a family as well as the traits or characteristics the encompass their 'personality' or their 'unique' family style" (9). Conceiving of themselves as a family might be considered the family's internal identity, answering the question "Who belongs in this group?" Situating the family within a larger cultural context might be considered its external identity, answering the question "Where does this group belong?"

Like all aspects of identity, familial identity depends in part on the consensus of the community. One's own ideas about who belongs in one's family and where that family fits within a larger cultural context must be continuously negotiated with societal expectations and norms. In *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, society divides families, as people, into two categories: black and white.[58] When Chambers and Tom are switched, a man whom

[58] Class hierarchies appear in the novel only briefly and without much comment. Most poor characters are actually Tom disguised, and the action of the novel is concerned mostly with the "quality" of Dawson's

society would normally define as black is placed in the position of a man society would normally define as white. Myra Jehlen believes this switch represents “a global reversal” (112), wherein the usurper undermines the system of human classification and patriarchal authority on which this society rests. Tom inherits a father as well as an uncle who is the town judge, two strong images of patriarchal power. In Jehlen’s words, Tom grows up “wielding the same power, usurping (Twain’s repeated term) the authority of white fatherhood” (112). Having been born Chambers, Tom has no biological claim to these relationships, yet he is allowed to occupy this position in the family because he is accepted by his family and the larger community as being white, being Tom Driscoll.

Racial imitation in the novel reveals that the biological and the cultural are once again split in the performance of racial characteristics. One scene in the novel demonstrates this process particularly well. When Roxy returns from her time as a chambermaid on a river boat, Chambers tells her that Tom has been disinherited for his gambling. Roxy furiously demands of Chambers, “Take it back, you mis’able imitation nigger dat I bore in sorrow en tribbilation” (44). Chambers laughingly responds, “Yah-yah-yah! Jes listen to dat! If I’s imitation, what is you? Bofe of us is imitation white—dat’s what we is—en pow’ful good imitation, too. Yah-yah-yah! We don’t ’mount to noth’n as imitation niggers” (44-45). In other words, there is no cultural value (and instead, grave consequences) to imitating blackness in earnest. Imitation for the purposes of entertainment are acceptable, because it attempts to fix blackness into a distinct set of

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Landing. Twain only divides into rich and poor along racial lines, even possibly counting Tom’s gambling debts as a feature of his blackness.

controllable characteristics.[59] Imitation outside of the knowing gaze of the theater—passing—is socially dangerous.

Twain explicitly draws the comparison between imitation for sport and passing in the scene that describes Tom's encounter with the negro bell ringer. Tom has returned from Yale full of "Yankee" ways and fashions, and the rest of the town does not appreciate his newfound airs. Tom "enjoyed the feeling which he was exciting, and paraded the town serene and happy all day" until one day "he found the old deformed Negro bell ringer straddling along in his wake tricked out in a flamboyant curtain-calico exaggeration of his finery, and imitating his fancy Eastern graces as well as he could" (30). The irony of the above scene is at the same time amusing and deeply disturbing. Tom, born a slave, imitating fancy Eastern graces himself, is aped by another black man clothed in a parody of his fine coat. The cognitive dissonance created in this scene (who is imitating whom?) continues throughout the rest of the novel, ultimately culminating in the courtroom revelation. Ambiguity arises because we cannot determine the answer. As Barbara Chellis has noted,

> How, Mark Twain forces us to ask, can we tell, if we can't tell by color? His answer is that we cannot. We can impose distinguishing characteristics—clothes and dialect—through education; we can, in fact, impose them so thoroughly that a pure white with 100 per cent F.F.V. [First Family of Virginia] blood can be made into a slave for life. (103)

These "distinguishing characteristics" become synonymous with the categories they represent, and mask the process that has produced them. This process of masking the social construction of realities is what produces ambiguity and renders all of us—the citizens of Dawson's Landing, readers of *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, and Twain himself—unable to determine who should be classified as what.

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[59] For more on this idea, see chapter 2, "The Comedic Mulatto."

Performing Identity: Race and Gender as Bounded Acts

The process whereby repeated acts create the semblance of a stable identity is known as "performativity." "Performativity" has proven useful as a term and concept in various other contexts, which have developed divergent definitions for the word.[60] I use the concept of performativity as expounded by Judith Butler, while also making use of J. L. Austin's notion of performative speech acts. Although these two theorists are more often positioned in some opposition to one another than side by side, I believe both of their theories of performativity can help us better understand how family might function as a performative identity. In both theories, performativity is located at the moment an act creates a legible identity. In both cases, the discursive act exerts the power to designate an identity: "I thee wed" changes one's marital status from single to married, and one's designation from "fiancée" to "wife"; presenting oneself as a woman designates a person as feminine. Speech and action unite to create the category of "woman," along with a whole host of other speeches and actions. Repeated over time, space, and in representative cultural objects, these modes of performativity come to seem natural and eternal. I argue that these modes, these processes, function similarly in the construction and performance of family identity. First I discuss Butler's version of performativity, how it must be distinguished from "performance," and how these concepts function in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* as they relate to gender and race. Then, I bring J. L. Austin's *How To Do Things With Words* to bear on the conversation of performativity in the novel. Finally, I unite the two versions of performativity in a theory of how family functions both in the novel and in a larger sense as a category of identity.

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[60] For an excellent overview of some of the different iterations of the term as well as its distinction from "performance," see Parker and Sedgwick's introduction to *Performativity and Performance.*

Judith Butler identifies the process of production and masking described above as "performativity." Performativity is "a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (Butler *Gender Trouble* 33). In other words, the repeated acts of maintaining the appearance of a so-called "natural" identity constitute performativity. This process both creates the identity and erases the act of its creation, allowing the performer to believe s/he is merely behaving as s/he is meant to behave. Butler's example is gender: she claims that rather expressing an innate "femininity," women's everyday presentation of themselves *as women* through word and act is actually what creates the category of femininity. Building on a wide body of poststructuralist and feminist literature by theorists such as Lacan and Kristeva, Freud, Foucault, Monique Wittig and Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler suggests that gender performativity is "an act" equivalent to "other ritual social dramas" rather than a natural state of being (*Gender Trouble* 140).

Performativity differs from "performance," which might be described as the willful enactment of a certain role. Butler elaborates the distinction between performance and performativity:

> [P]erformance as bounded 'act' is distinguished from performativity insofar as the latter consists in a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain and exceed that performer and in that sense cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer's 'will' or 'choice'; further, what is 'performed' works to conceal, if not to disavow, what remains opaque, unconscious, unperformable. (*Bodies that Matter* 234)

This highly rigid regulatory frame comes into being through the consensus of the community, and therefore is considered "socially constructed." However, communal recognition does not in itself indicate performativity. Performativity is rather a set of acts so often repeated in the context of a particular kind of identity that it erases the fact of an

identity's construction. Performativity, in Judith Butler's formulation, holds that subjects are constituted by language. It therefore may be understood as a branch of social constructivism, although it does not encapsulate the sum total of what it means for identity to be socially constructed. I make this distinction in order to delineate how I understand the term and its usefulness for my theory.

Performativity, therefore, encapsulates the actions undertaken to enact an identity that has already been prescribed for the performer, which has existed long before the performer's birth and will exist after her death. The performer unconsciously accepts the role and its restrictions, unconsciously works to police the boundaries of that identity and to erase the fact of its construction. Butler argues that "gender is a kind of persistent impersonation that passes as real" (*Gender Trouble* viii). Butler's point is that all gender, even that which seems to be associated with "the immutable character of sex" (*Gender Trouble* 7), is in reality constructed through such everyday performances as the clothing one wears, the way one speaks, etc. The performativity of gender has recently been called into focus by the practice of using the prefix *cis-* to refer to those whose gender identity and biological sex align with conventional expectations. "*Cis-*" is a prefix from the Latin meaning "on the same side of" and is usually opposed to "*trans-*." The terms *cisgendered*, *cis male* and *cis female* are coming into common use, mostly due to efforts by the transgender activist community. These terms are meant to call attention to the performativity of all gendered identity instead of taking for granted that all persons feel a unity between their sex organs and their gender. Similarly, biological familial relationships and physical appearance do not always align with the cultural practices of

family or the social classification of race. Of course all of these categories are intertwined, and gender, race, and family identities reinforce and confirm each other.

The idea of the performativity of identity fits well with ideas about race that have been circulating at least since *Pudd'nhead Wilson.* W. E. B. DuBois' *The Souls of Black Folk* did not explicitly address performativity, but its project spoke to an understanding of the performativity of racial identity. *Souls* sought to create a new understanding of African American cultural identity through the use of the musicality of sermons and other forms of African American speech.[61] As an identity rooted in embodied characteristics, race also consists of a set of repeated actions (e.g., speech patterns) that are read as racialized. The language Butler introduced has become familiar among scholars who explore issues of racial identity such as Saidiya Hartman, Jonathan Xavier Inda, Patricia Williams, Gayle Wald, and Nadine Ehlers. This is not to say that these ideas did not exist prior to Butler, rather, that she provided a common vocabulary with which to discuss them in a racial context. The performativity of blackness in American literature may be recognized in nineteenth-century texts without anachronism because race is, in Butler's formulation, always already performative.[62] It is important to remember that performativity is "in no way the 'possession'" of those performing; it is unconscious and compulsory (Hartman 57). The actors most often perform their racial identities without recognition or understanding of the process. Saidiya Hartman describes the performativity of blackness by enslaved persons as "enactments of social struggle and contending articulations of racial meaning" (57). It bears repeating that performativity, as

[61] For more on the position of *Souls* in the understanding of racial performativity, see Sundquist, pp. 448-465; Carby, pp. 89-91; P. Wald, pp. 173-175; Wimbush, p.214; and Eversley, pp. 22-24.
[62] For more on the performativity of racial identity in African American Literature, see Blevins; Colbert; Rottenberg; E. P. Johnson; Rushdy , pp. 127-128; and Nealon.

opposed to performance, is the process by which race and any other performative identity "is made to appear as if it has always existed, thereby denying [its] coerced and cultivated production" (Hartman 57). The nuclear family, by performativity, has been made to seem as if it has always existed, that it is the most natural organization of human relationships.

The power and the vulnerability of performativity reside in this erasure of the constructedness of identity. Therein lies its power because, through this erasure, identity categories and methods of categorization are allowed to remain unquestioned. Its vulnerability lies in the fact that the lived lives and identities of human beings may not fit the mold of the supposedly "natural" and "given" behaviors dictated by society. Where we find fear or insistence, there is always doubt, insecurity, and an implicit recognition that these categories are not natural at all. Performativity can be reinforced by performance or it can be undermined by it. Certain parodic performances (such as Butler's example of men in drag[63]) can expose the workings of performativity and help theorists to conclude that identity categories are independent of physical and biological attributes. Because a familial identity cannot exist in isolation from racial and gender identities, I will first lay out how these other types of performative identity operate in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, and then present my argument for the ways in which familial identity are also performative.

In *Pudd'nhead Wilson,* the characters deliberately exploit the supposed stability of identities through conscious performance. Dawson's Landing society's dependence on the stability of social categories enables Tom to pass easily as someone else. Tom dresses as a woman—sometimes black, sometimes white—in order to steal from his neighbors

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[63] See *Gender Trouble* p. 146

undetected. In another instance, after Tom sells his mother into slavery, he sees a man waiting for him as he returns home one day.

> The man turned around, a wreck of shabby old clothes, sodden with rain and all a-drip, and showed a black face under an old slouch hat. Tom was frightened. He tried to order the man out, but the words refused to come, and the other man got the start. He said, in a low voice,
>
> "Keep still—I's yo' mother!" (108)

Ignorant of the man's identity, readers participate in Tom's surprise when Roxy reveals herself. Her "old slouch hat" and "shabby old clothes," her darkened "black face," render her unrecognizable. Having blackened her face and donned men's clothing, she successfully escapes enslavement and resists recognition by her son and the reader. By exploiting the expectation that she will remain a woman and fair-skinned, Roxy more easily orchestrates an escape. In the scene described above, the performativity of race and gender, the everyday scripts of behavior that render identity legible, are exposed by the explicit performances of "blacking up" and cross dressing. In particular, Roxy's darkening of her skin calls into focus the fact that her physical appearance does not match with the social identity she has been assigned. Gillman notes the irony of Roxy blacking up to escape slavery and imprisonment, since her surest method of remaining hidden in plain sight is to perform the black identity society has assigned to her (*Dark Twins* 73).[64] Frederick Anderson similarly suggests that Roxana "blacken[s] her face in order to make her color conform to her Negro speech" (295). This speech is just one aspect of the identity to which she has conformed, but it remains a key cultural marker throughout the text. Operating here are different levels: the distinction between performance (the

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[64] This method of escape can be found elsewhere in literature about American chattel slavery. For example, George Harris darkens his skin and passes as a Spaniard in Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

conscious enacting or putting on of a false identity) and performativity (the everyday actions that define a recognized and "natural" identity).

The dialect Roxy uses represents one key aspect of the performativity of race. Her speech patterns introduces her to the readers as black before they are given a visual description of her,[65] which allows Twain to highlight the absurdity of a woman who *sounds* black but *looks* white:

> From Roxy's manner of speech, a stranger would have expected her to be black, but she was not. Only one sixteenth of her was black, and that sixteenth did not show. She was of majestic form and stature, her attitudes were imposing and statuesque, and her gestures and movements distinguished by a noble and stately grace. Her complexion was very fair, with the rosy glow of vigorous health in her cheeks. (12)

No matter how very fair in complexion, because Roxy *sounds* black, we know she *is* black, in the sense that society and the law treat her as such. Roxy even uses this logic herself, insisting, "I's a nigger, en nobody ain't gwine to doubt it dat hears me talk" (102). Her upbringing has constructed her as authentically black, despite possessing the physical appearance of a white woman. Unlike Roxy, who uses her speech to enable her escape from slavery (by darkening her skin and dressing as a man), marked speech patterns plague and embarrass Chambers when he is reinstated as the (authentically white) Tom Driscoll:

> The real heir suddenly found himself rich and free, but in a most embarrassing situation. He could neither read nor write, and his speech was the basest dialect of the Negro quarter. His gait, his attitudes, his gestures, his bearing, his laugh—all were vulgar and uncouth; his manners

[65] Twain famously uses careful dialect in his writing to signal characters' statuses (racial, class-based, regional). His "Explanatory Note" to *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* boasts his methods of accurately representing different accents: "In this book a number of dialects are used, to wit: the Missouri negro dialect; the extremist form of the backwoods South-Western dialect; the ordinary 'Pike County' dialect; and four modified varieties of this last. The shadings have not been done in a haphazard fashion, or by guess-work; but painstakingly, and with the trustworthy guidance and support of personal familiarity with these several forms of speech" (xxxiii). Note Twain's use of "normal" to indicate a white dialect. For more on Twain's use of dialect, see Fishkin, Tamasi, G. Jones, and McKay.

> were the manners of a slave. Money and fine clothes could not mend these defects or cover them up; they only made them more glaring and the more pathetic. (144)

Chambers here represents the most perverse form of the comedic mulatto outlined in chapter 2: he who "is" white but bears all the cultural markers of blackness. Not only, then, can we not "tell by color" what a person's race is (Chellis 103), but we cannot even be sure we can tell based on speech patterns or other cultural markers. The list of cultural markers that identify Chambers as culturally black trump the ability of fine clothes to change his upbringing. Chambers' reinstatement as Tom fails because he has imitated black folks since infancy. He has become black, and remains so despite his new legal status. This situation evokes a category crisis. When the cultural markers of a person's race (or gender or family) do not align with the physical cues—or, in this case, the person's legal status—we are unsure of how to proceed.

The presence of cross dressing may also point to larger epistemological crises. Clothes are the identity markers most easily cast off or exchanged in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. Roxy's exclamation as she switches the babies' clothes typifies this condition in the novel: "Now who would b'lieve clo'es could do de like o' dat?" (19). Clothes not only supplant the true Tom Driscoll with the usurper, they also allow Tom to steal from his neighbors and to escape the murder scene undetected, disguised as a woman.[66] Throughout the novel, Tom assumes the identities of women old and young, white and black, as well as a male "tramp" simply by changing his clothing.[67] Majorie Garber's *Vested Interests* explores the significance of cross dressing in literature and culture.

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[66] For more on cross-dressing in Twain's work, see Gillman's "Dementia Americana" and "Sure Identifiers" as well as Skandera-Trombley.
[67] The convention of the identity as easily exchanged as a garment reappears in chapter 5 with Rachel Baker Gale's *No Men Wanted.*

Garber argues that "one of the most consistent and effective functions of the transvestite in culture is to indicate a place of what I call 'category crisis,' disrupting and calling attention to cultural, social, or aesthetic dissonances" (16). She elaborates, defining "category crisis" as "a failure of definitional distinction, a borderline that becomes permeable, that permits of border crossings from one (apparently distinct) category to another: black/white, Jew/Christian, noble/bourgeois, master/servant, master/slave" (16). In *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, cross dressing could be read as pointing to such a category crisis, because Tom and Chambers are both and neither black and/nor white. I propose that familial identity in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* is itself thrown into its own category crisis when Wilson reveals Tom as the "real" Chambers; when Roxy reveals the truth to Tom; when Roxy switches the babies. In these moments, the revealer risks exposing the instability of family identity.

Relative Roles, Everyday Drama: The Performative Family

I argue that one is not born into, but rather becomes part of a family. The performativity of race and gender contribute in large part of the performative dimensions of family identity. As Elizabeth Freeman notes, "Kinship matters for queer theory in a way that Judith Butler reminds us that 'bodies matter': (1) a culture's repetition of particular practices actually *produces* what seems to be the material facts that supposedly *ground* those practices in the first place, and (2) when those repetitions are governed by a norm, other possibilities are literally unthinkable and impossible" (297). Freeman precisely expresses the basis of my theory that family is itself performative without explicitly stating it. In fact, Freeman uses the term "kinship" in order to push back against anthropological taxonomies such as those advanced by Lewis Henry Morgan. She also

bases her theory of queer kinship on nonstandard sexual practices, whereas I contend that queer families can exist even where no sex happens at all. I adopt Freeman's idea that family (what Freeman calls *kinship*) is a *practice* (298): "the process by which bodies and the potential for physical and emotional attachment are created, transformed, and sustained over time" (298).

Like gender and race, family is supposed to be natural, biological, and self-evident. However, this text makes clear that, similar to the ways that race and gender are performed and perceived, family is similarly a performative identity.[68] It, too, relies on repeated acts that seem natural and unconscious. As Butler explains in *Gender Trouble,* "As in other ritual social dramas, the action of gender requires a performance that is *repeated*. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meetings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation" (140). Race and gender, along with other performative identities such as a familial identity, therefore are constantly repeated and renegotiated. Because sexuality and biology play a large part in the definition of families, race and gender must necessarily figure into family construction in a large way, and nuclear family roles are divided along gendered lines. Indeed, race and family are both figured as particular kinds of biological connections. However, a performative family identity remains different from those of race or gender, in part because it relies on the interplay of these other two, but also because it relies more overtly on performative speech acts for its constitution.

The example of motherhood reveals the performativity of nuclear family identities in terms of repeated, scripted acts. Adrienne Rich, in her landmark *Of Woman Born*,

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[68] No one has yet theorized familial identity as *performative*, but the idea that family is *socially constructed* is not new. Others such as Weinbaum and Shah have theorized this point, but no one has connected this construction to the idea of the performativity of identity in Butler's formulation.

"distinguish[es] between two meanings of motherhood, one superimposed on the other: the *potential relationship* of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the *institution*, which aims at ensuring that that potential—and all women—shall remain under male control" (13). What Rich identifies as an institution is what I deem performativity. To Rich, institutions "create the prescriptions and the conditions in which choices are made or blocked; they are not 'reality' but they have shaped the circumstances of our lives" (42). Rich's formulation may function effectively as a description of Performativity, which likewise offers preordained scripts that individuals must follow in order to be socially accepted. The Family or Motherhood may be an institution, but it differs from other institutions such as The Church or The Government in that it is expected to be naturally constituted, not constructed by humans or established by contract.[69] In this way, motherhood, too, is performative. It is not based on the physical ability to bear a child, but rather on the cultural scripts which a mother is supposed to automatically understand how to execute the moment she receives a child into her care. Like gender itself, motherhood is supposed to be natural, eternal, and its love and care "continuous and unconditional" (Rich 46). The potential for motherhood in the existence of the womb renders motherhood a gendered construct despite the fact that men can function as mothers if they choose to do so.[70] Because motherhood as a cultural construct is not primarily based on the physical capacity to bear a child, but on the standards of care set for a certain kind of (usually female-gendered) parent, the role is

[69] Although marriage, the legal basis of the family, is established by contract, the family as a legal institution is often viewed as separate from the Family as a cultural institution. Motherhood certainly is not generally considered as being established through a contractual relationship, particularly since one of the parties is always necessarily a child, who is not considered a legal person in most cases (in the context of the United States).

[70] See, for example, the character of Tiff in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Dred*, discussed in chapter 3.

theoretically open to men. The difference is that for men, motherhood is not an expected, prescribed role (as it is for women), but rather a conscious choice.[71]

Likewise, race constitutes and circumscribes motherhood. Just as gender is related to race, and cannot be fully understood outside of a racial context, so too is motherhood and family. Alys Weinbaum argues for "the inextricability of the connection between race and reproduction" (5), and identifies a "race/reproduction bind" as forming the basis of American literature and culture. She describes how, in the late nineteenth century, discussions of race and genealogy were almost always intricately tied to the discourse of nation and nation-making or nation-preserving. This relationship is most clearly realized in a slave society where children follow the condition of their mother, since the child directly inherits its mother's race, regardless of its paternity or appearance. In addition to a mother's racial legacy, Patricia Hill Collins suggests that "[r]acial domination and economic exploitation profoundly shape the mothering context not only for racial ethnic women in the United States but for all women" (56). Motherhood, as a social institution exists within the context of racial, economic, gendered, and other factors. Motherhood, however, is only part of the equation, only one of the roles within the family. As a collective identity, the performativity of family proves more difficult to pinpoint or explain than that of race or gender.

Simply conforming or not conforming to the expected roles of father, mother, or child is not the sum total of the performativity of family. With gender, Judith Butler identifies certain performative "gender attributes" that "effectively constitute the identity they are said to express or reveal" (*Gender Trouble* 141). Families, however, may not be

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[71] For more on single women in American culture and their position as potential mothers, see chapter 5, "Family Inaction: The Anti-Family in Rachel Baker Gale's *No Men Wanted.*"

said to exhibit any specific physical attributes, except perhaps "family resemblance" or a common name. Family members may exhibit a certain physical resemblance to each other, but then again may not (e.g., the increasing instance of transracial adoption in the United States renders those families more culturally legible as families than they might have been in the past). Therefore, what enables detaching the family from biological considerations is a necessary next step after thinking about race and gender, and makes it easier to understand these other modes of performativity. If we accept that race and gender are in fact performative identities, we must accept that family is. Familial performativity depends in part on the scripts associated with race and gender. The three concepts are so tightly woven in theory and in practice that they must function similarly and they must function together, just as in Weinbaum's race/reproduction bind. Like gender and race, familial identity depends on repeated acts and roles that different people replicate and reproduce, often below the level of conscious performance. Performing family is different both from performing gender and performing racial identity, however. Familial identities depend on the narratives of affiliation that classify them as a unit and define their position in a larger society. The performative speech acts of calling this unit into existence through narrative and defining relationships through naming constitute families. The narratives surrounding family and the repeated scripts of behavior that families act out combine to function as performative.

J. L. Austin, in his seminal *How to Do Things with Words* includes naming as one of the consummate examples of a performative utterance—that which Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick would clarify as an "explicit performative utterance" (*Touching Feeling* 4). In Austin's words, a performative utterance is "the uttering of the sentence is . . . the doing

of an action, which would not *normally* be described as ‘just’, saying something” (5). As an example Austin argues that *saying* “‘I name this ship the *Queen Elizabeth’* . . . when smashing a bottle against the stern” is the *act* of naming (5). In fact, naming might be considered the ultimate performative utterance, because it attaches a linguistic signifier to a person, thing, place, or idea. As long as the person doing the naming has the “capacity” to do so, the name stands and is valid (Austin 23). This notion, in the abstract, applies very neatly to the idea of a performative familial identity. Generally someone in a family unit is given the capacity to name a child and the child assumes its name. This name, generally gendered and racialized, also many times contains class-based valences. However, in the case of *Pudd’nhead Wilson,* the situation becomes complicated. When Roxy exchanges the boys’ identities, she switches their names. Although no one has authorized her to do this, her action remains valid until discovered years later, by which time the boys have already built their identities around their false names. Roxy’s act of renaming Tom and Chambers takes on authority because she is the only who can physically distinguish the two boys—she is the only one who parents them. Her role as caretaker endows her with an authority that legal and social systems do not: Chambers is recognized as Tom because Roxy calls him Tom, and vice versa. Roxy’s act of renaming inducts the new Tom into the Driscoll family. This act represents a crucial feature of the performativity of familial identity: Roxy’s act of naming installs Tom as a Driscoll, despite her supposed lack of authority. However, because she is not ultimately authorized to perform this act of renaming, she is able to undo the act later when she establishes herself as Tom’s mother and reconstitutes her biological family.

A key aspect of the performativity of familial identity is sharing a common family name. Judith Butler identifies naming as "one of the conditions by which a subject is constituted in language" (*Excitable Speech* 2), and a family name interpellates a subject into specific familial relationships. A family name is not *necessary* for the constitution of a family, but it does represent the most immediate, concrete, and recognizable way to render a family culturally legible in American society. According to a 2011 sociological study on marital name change among women, "Names are more than just labels; instead, they reflect the ways people organize and classify their social worlds" (Hamilton, Geist, and Powell 148). The system of familial naming currently recognized as standard in the United States is based on English Common Law and the assumption that all families are nuclear and based on a heterosexual marriage. This system descends directly from the system of coverture, whereby women's legal and social identities were subsumed by their husbands' upon marriage. Although few legal vestiges of coverture remain, the cultural practice of a woman adopting her husband's surname continues as the norm.[72] Feminism has taken issue with this practice, and debates rage everywhere from academia to online discussion forums on whether women "should" change their names upon marriage to men. The most commonly-cited reasons in support of a marital name change posit a common name as the signal of a family unit, both within the marriage relation and where children are concerned. This reason, among others (religion, "tradition") prompts most

[72] No national data exists, but previous studies that have attempted to explore the reasons behind women's marital name choices suffered from lack of available subjects who "have made unconventional marital name choices such as retaining their birth name as a last name, hyphenating, or selecting another name that results in a last name that is different than their spouse's" (Scheuble and Johnson 230): Only 1.5 to 5 percent of women were found to have made unconventional marital naming choices in national probability samples, and "[e]ven large samples of 1,000 or more married women would contain only 15 to 50 women making a non-traditional last name choice" (Scheuble and Johnson 230). This suggests that somewhere between 95 and 98 percent of (heterosexually) married American women have adopted their husband's surname.

women in the United States entering a heterosexual marriage to change their names. Perhaps even more forcefully, most Americans believe that women *should* change their names upon marriage to a man. In fact, in the above sociological study, approximately half (49.9%) of American respondents indicated that women should be *legally obligated* to change their surnames upon (heterosexual) marriage (Hamilton, Geist, and Powell 157). This suggests a strong cultural bias for a family surname that has diminished little since Twain's time.

A family surname, clearly a gendered notion, also intersects in important ways with the idea of race. Slavery erased naming patterns in African American communities. One of the strategies United States enslavers used to dehumanize slaves was to remove their African names and replace them with names of the enslaver's choosing. Orlando Patterson concludes, "While there were many variations both within and between regions, most slave surnames in the United States were those of the owners and changed with a change of owner" (56). In the novel, Thomas à Beckett Driscoll's name is given no explanation; the grandeur of the name speaks for itself, and "Driscoll" marks the child as belonging to the premier family of Dawson's Landing. Valet de Chambre/Chambers, on the other hand, receives "no surname—slaves hadn't the privilege" (13). Rather than choosing the name of a grand historical figure, Roxy chooses a phrase she "had heard . . . somewhere, the fine sound of it had pleased her ear, and . . . she had supposed it was a name" (13). The haphazard nature of her choosing contrasts to the careful Driscoll name—and the fact that the phrase is not, of course, generally used as a name—render Roxy ridiculous. These elements also bring into focus the absurdity of naming a slave, who has no legal status or claim to family lineage. According to Hortense Spillers,

"Domesticity appears to gain its power by way of a common origin of social fictions that are grounded in the specificity of proper names, more exactly, a patronymic, which, in turn, situates those subjects that it covers in a particular place" (214). Slaves, excluded from this patronymic, are excluded from the power of domesticity—excluded from The Family.[73] Without names, slaves are not "situated in a particular place." This non-relation of slaves results in

> "family," as we practice and understand it "in the West"—the vertical transfer of a bloodline, of a patronymic, of titles and entitlements, of real estate and the prerogatives of "cold cash," from fathers to sons and in the supposedly free exchange of affectional ties between a male and a female of his choice—becom[ing] the mythically revered privilege of free and freed community. (Spillers 218)

Therefore the inheritance of a family name, the recognition of familial ownership, and the legal relations that constitute a family are all prohibited in the case of slave families. As Judith Butler has argued, "it is not possible to separate questions of kinship from property relations (and conceiving persons as property) and from the fictions of 'bloodline'" ("Is Kinship" 15).[74] One of the key functions of families is to provide avenues for the consolidation of wealth and property, and whiteness is one form of property that is bequeathed within families. Alys Weinbaum writes that, in the 1890s, which is when Twain wrote *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, "Whiteness was no longer simply a matter of reputation but something that had retreated further out of reach through its legal consolidation, such that whiteness understood as inalienable 'status property' worked as a principal of exclusion of new black nationals from the full entitlements that were their

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[73] This does not mean that enslaved persons did not create familial networks or that enslaved communities did not recognize family relationships. For discussions of enslaved African Americans' kinship networks and families, see Foster, Johnson and Staples, White, Berlin and Rowland, J. Jones, L. Levine, Staples, Rawick, and Billingsley.

[74] I use *family* as my key term in an attempt to expand its meaning to include those relationships we might otherwise refer to as *kinship*. Butler here employs *kinship* in a way that I would definitely use *family.*

right as a consequence of their recent enfranchisement" (21). In this way, ownership and status are never entirely separate from ideas of race, and this is a large part of what becomes destabilized in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. At the end of the novel, Chambers is referred to not as "the true Tom Driscoll" or "the true son of Percy Driscoll," but rather as "the true heir." This claim to title, status, and property are in fact what constitutes his whiteness despite his exhibition of many of the cultural features of blackness.

Family in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* is constituted by a performative utterance not only in the moment of naming, but also at the moment when the child is told he belongs to his parents. Austin would deem Roxy's revelation to Tom of their relationship as a descriptive or reporting utterance. He would not recognize, in her revelation, a performative utterance, because, he would argue, Roxy's physically bearing Tom—not her telling him that she did so—would be the salient action. However, in this instance, the fact of Tom's ignorance of their biological relationship means that Roxy's telling of it necessarily reconstitutes the families that existed initially (when Tom was "Chambers"). Therefore, the act of telling Tom calls the familial relationships into existence where they did not exist before for either party. By effectively re-renaming him, Roxy compels Tom to become Chambers, her son. The ambiguity of their relationship allows Roxy to rename them both, to reconstruct their affinity within a framework that benefits her. Tom listens to Roxy and responds verbally to her news that he is "a nigger and a *slave*" until she tells him his birth name, at which point he reacts with physical violence:

> "You's my *son* --"
> "You devil!"
> "En dat po' boy dat you's be'n a-kickin' en a-cuffin' today is Percy Driscoll's son en yo' *marster* --"
> "You beast!"

> "En *his* name is Tom Driscoll, en *yo's* name's Valet de Chambers, en you ain't GOT no fambly name, beca'se niggers don't *have* em!"
> Tom sprang up and seized a billet of wood and raised it, but his mother only laughed at him[.] (52)

Tom disbelieves Roxy until she asserts that Tom has no claim to the surname Driscoll, or any other. This is the moment of the reversal of the renaming, which perhaps is made possible because of Roxy's lack of authority to complete the act. Roxy connects Tom to her with her revelation that she is Tom's biological mother. Nothing has changed legally or materially in this moment. Tom retains the privilege to whiteness that he has enjoyed since he was switched; the rest of the community continues to recognize him as white. Roxy can produce no tangible proof of their biological relationship, yet Tom believes her, and begins to think of her as his mother. From this moment, Roxy insists that he be known as Chambers and she as Mammy[75] when they are alone. The moment of revelation results in a renaming and a shift of familial roles. No longer "Marse Tom," Roxy's "Chambers" must treat his mammy with respect.

Families rely on narratives of origins to establish their social significance as well as to create an illusion of continuity and permanence. According to communications theorist Dena Huisman, "communication, and storytelling in particular, is at the root of family identity and how public *performance* of family identity is situated in culture" (Huisman 3, emphasis mine). Huisman and other communication scholars consistently refer to the performance of family identity without investigating the meaning or implication of using that term. Constructing a discourse about who belongs in a family, how that family came to be, and that family's relationship with larger communities,

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[75] At this historical moment, the term "mammy" was used to mean both "mother" for all races and to refer to a black nurse with whom we now more closely associate the term. For more on the history of the use of the term "mammy," see Wallace-Sanders, pp. 14-16.

remains a large part of the performativity of familial identity. K. M. Galvin calls families "discourse-dependent," particularly those families that are not immediately recognizable as families to those in the larger community. For example, Tom is told he hails from a First Family of Virginia (FFV)—just as Chambers does. Both sets of parents take pride in this mark of American aristocracy, and ensure their sons know of the connection. Roxy's story, however, complicates the Driscolls' narrative about their own racial history. She reveals to Tom that "My great-great-great-gran'father en yo' great-great-great-great-gran'father was Ole Cap'n John Smith, de highest blood dat Ole Virginny ever turned out, en *his* great-great-gran'mother, or somers along back dah, was Pocahontas de Injun queen, en her husbun' was a nigger king outen Africa" (89). Roxy's meaning is clear: she and Tom both come from the best stock, and their family line can be traced back even before the FFV's.

These narratives of family identity call into being and define the family just as they erase the fact that they are doing so. Roxy repeats portions of this narrative to Tom throughout the novel, most notably when she blames Tom's illegal and immoral behavior on "de nigger in [him]" (88). Roxy has just discovered that Tom has refused to challenge someone who kicked and insulted him, and she is outraged:

> "En you ain't got no mo' feelin' den to come en tell me, dat fetched sich a po' lowdown ornery rabbit into de worl'! Pah! it make me sick! It's de nigger in you, dat's what it is. Thirty-one parts o' you is white, en on'y one part nigger, en dat po' little one part is yo' *soul*. 'Tain't wuth savin'; tain't wuth totin' out on a shovel en throwin' en de gutter. You has disgraced yo' birth. What would yo' pa think o' you? It's enough to make him turn in his grave."
>
> The last three sentences stung Tom into a fury, and he said to himself that if his father were only alive and in reach of assassination his mother would soon find that he had a very clear notion of the size of his indebtedness to that man. (88-89)

In this instance, Roxy repeats the narrative of Tom's origin in an attempt to instill in him a familial pride. She insists on including both aspects of his parentage: the black and the white parts, equating the white with honor and goodness. Cynthia A. Current reads "Roxy's narrative of descent" as "suggesting an amalgamation with families such as the Driscolls, implies that such families themselves are not 'white,' that they already, at the very origin of America, and even generations before, are a random mix of European, Indian, and African blood" (319). Therefore, despite the importance of the rehearsal of family histories on both sides of the racial divide, these stories reveal nothing about racial origins, and instead further complicate racial histories. It is interesting that here, Tom rejects the authority of his biological father, rejects the false debt of whiteness and FFV respectability that his lineage provides him, according to Roxy. Her inability to create a sense of solidarity in him with his biological father (and, again, neither Tom nor readers receive any proof of the truth of Roxy's assertion) reveals the limits of biology in the constitution of families, as discrete units of racialized persons.

A question remains as to why Tom recognizes and accepts Roxy's claim to motherhood while resisting his father's claim to his allegiance. Perhaps the answer lies in Roxy's repeated acts as a mother. She was the individual tasked with providing Tom with the care traditionally associated with a mother, so it is possible that these repeated acts have created a bond between them more easily defined as familial. Roxy even goes so far as to consent to be sold into slavery for Tom's benefit, an act the narrator extols as above and beyond the normal calls of motherhood: "a mother who, in voluntarily going into slavery—slavery of any kind, mild or severe, or of any duration, brief or long—was making a sacrifice for him compared with which death would have been a poor and

commonplace one" (103). Tom betrays his mother's trust and attempts to be rid of her forever by selling her to a hard master down the river. In this sense, Tom reveals himself incapable of even the most basic of familial pacts. By knowingly placing his mother in a physically dangerous and legally vulnerable situation, Tom attempts to sever the ties Roxy has called into being with her narrative. Tom is unable to destroy her, however, and Roxy returns, identifying herself to him in no uncertain terms: "I'se yo' mother!" (108). Roxy reasserts her claims to Tom, forces him into repentance, and demands filial allegiance. After her return, Tom does everything she asks of him, repeating the obedience expected of a son to his mother. In effect, Tom finally consents to identify as part of Roxy's family.

Tom and Roxy's relationship does not progress easily or naturally once their biological connection is revealed. Tom's struggles against the narrative Roxy tells, his attempts to exert his power over her as a white man, ultimately prove abortive, but their existence exposes the impossibility of a biological essence of familial identity. The fact that narrative in itself is a mutable, constructed, slippery form, suggests that familial identity is always dynamic, perpetually in process, constantly renegotiated by the parties involved. *Pudd'nhead Wilson*'s very ambiguity provides readers with the opportunity to see this process in action. It reveals a situation where the very names of the characters is unstable, and identity can change with a quick costume modification. The illusion of the stability of families and identity is exposed by Roxy's ability to switch the children at all. Her recreation of the original biological family, her ability to also restructure and make legally viable the original conditions of the boys' births demonstrates how law and community function in creating different categories of persons. Twain's seeming

capitulation to the stability of identity in the end, with the restoration of each boy's position, actually remains complicated by the incongruous cultural markers that Chambers and Tom bear. Likewise, the possibility of the switch has ruptured the stability of the community, throwing all identity into crisis.

Twain gives us the space to think about familial performativity, particularly because *Pudd'nhead* is so concerned with performance, authenticity, social construction, and its relationship to identity, in the context of family. Twain unloosens the identities from the identifying characteristics that are supposed to announce the identity's presence, and that allows for new and different constructions and conceptions of family. The racially ambiguous character Tom creates the opportunity for a queer family because he is given the explicit opportunity to choose to believe his family narratives or not, is allowed to negotiate his familial and racial identity. Significantly, this negotiation occurs outside of the space of the law, in an ambiguous position of being only one of two (three, if you count David Wilson) who have access to the truth of their biological relationship. The very liminality of this position makes these explicit negotiations possible, because once Tom's family relationships are defined by law, his negotiations become terrifyingly irrelevant. He is immediately relegated to the status of property, with no social or legal recourse to family at all.

In Twain, the ambiguity produced by the switch of Tom and Chambers makes clearer the processes of familial performativity. In the next chapter, Rachel Baker Gale presents us with an anti-family, whose members all pass across racial lines only to be quietly restored to their original positions. Gale indicates that, although the white and black women in her play may be able to pass as each other, no ambiguity is produced

since racial identity remains a stable category. The performance of racial crossing becomes another window through which to view the idea of familial performativity, and the anti-family stands as fertile ground for investigating the processes by which the social construction of family remain invisible.

Chapter 5

Family Inaction:

The Anti-Family in Rachel Baker Gale's *No Men Wanted*

Familial identity may be performative, slippery, and mutable, and that which is supposed to be natural is revealed to be socially constructed when measured against the lived experience of historical persons. Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson* afforded the opportunity to discover the performative processes that constitute families. This chapter further explores the performativity of familial identity through a negative example: the anti-family. While the performativity of familial identity renders invisible the constructed nature of the "traditional" family, other familial formations make the process of construction legible. By mocking the radical formulations of family that emerged at the turn of the twentieth century, Rachel Baker Gale's 1903[76] parlor play *No Men Wanted* tacitly acknowledge the flexibility of familial constructions while insisting on the preeminence of the nuclear.

No Men Wanted follows a household of "girl bachelors" who cannot resist the allure of marriage and a nuclear family structure. Hating men represents the unnatural, anti-family state that must be rectified through the course of the play and restored to the natural, pro-family hatred of girl bachelors. Before resolving on this "natural" order, however, the play experiences a number of turns that show the characters consciously performing across racial lines as well as beyond the recognized boundaries of acceptable gendered behaviors. These switches demonstrate the playwright's belief in the stability of the identity categories of race, gender, and family, which stability I argue is the illusion

[76] Bzowski lists the original publication date of *No Men Wanted* as 1889, but I have been unable to corroborate this information. This chapter works from a 1903 edition.

of the performativity of identity, grounded in the social legibility of these categories. The recognized *performance* of family becomes opposed to the *performativity* of familial identity that renders invisible the social construction of families.

I argue that Gale's *No Men Wanted* is meant to feature an "anti-family," by which I mean a household that cannot be read as a family because of its deviance from a traditional nuclear structure. It *cannot* be read this way, because the author characterizes their relationships and their home in a manner that ensures readers *do not*. Gale operates from a set of assumptions about the naturalness and stability of the categories of race, gender, and family, assumptions that go unexamined in the text, but which are undermined by the play's action and historical context. If we read against the limiting nuclear definition of family, I contend that it is possible to render families legible where they would not otherwise have been.

In *No Men Wanted*, Elizabeth, Isabelle and their maid Prynnella have agreed "to have no thought of matrimony for a year" (14). The three live together in their "cosy [sic] . . . bachelor apartment" (5), "showing the world that [they] can be happy though unmarried" (5). All is not as it appears, however, and the audience learns from the outset that each of the women has "a follower" whom she encourages. Neither wanting the other to discover her secret, Isabelle and Elizabeth each confesses privately to Prynnella and asks her to hide new items of clothing they have bought for their respective evenings out. Both intend to sneak out of the house to attend a concert with their beaus: Isabelle feigns a headache and Elizabeth fakes a minor injury, and they retire early to their rooms, waiting for the opportunity to slip out in their new garments. Thinking they are both truly incapacitated, however, Prynnella exchanges her "grotesque" hat and coat for the new

items Isabelle and Elizabeth had bought, grabs two bunches of violets also meant for her white employers[77] and runs out to meet her admirer, Persimmons (10). While she is gone, Isabelle puts on Prynnella's hat, Elizabeth Prynnella's coat, and they tiptoe out of the house without noticing each other. Prynnella runs back in, frightened because two strange men (Isabelle's and Elizabeth's suitors) hailed her on the street by her employers' names. Moments later, Isabelle and Elizabeth run home also, having been "called . . . honey" by a "horrid colored man" (13), later discovered to be Persimmons. After Elizabeth scolds Prynnella for having a follower, Prynnella mixes up the two notes that arrive for Elizabeth and Isabelle from their respective admirers. Isabelle declares that Prynnella "is no worse than we are and ought to be forgiven" and they decide to live as girl bachelors no longer (15). The three then rush to meet their dates, wearing their own clothing.

No Men Wanted is one of eleven[78] comedic plays Rachel Baker Gale (1858 - 1923) published throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Gale is one of the countless popular writers who fall outside the realm of critical literary study because of their chosen genre. She grew up in a family as prolific as the Jameses or the Beechers, but the Bakers wrote comedies and other popular genres instead of philosophical or religious tracts, and so have not been the subjects of biographies or treatises. In March 1859, Rachel Elizabeth Baker was born to Emily F. Baker (*nee* Bowles) and George Melville Baker in Massachusetts. Gale's father wrote and published parlor plays, comedy speeches, and other popular entertainments. According to his

[77] The word "servant" was considered a highly disrespectful term and an undesirable label by domestic workers at the turn of the century. Salmon reports in 1897 that "the word 'servant' continue[s] to be a mark of social degradation" (155-156). Therefore I try to use "domestic," "employee," or "worker" wherever possible, but apply the label "servant" where historically appropriate. Likewise the term "mistress" carries the weighty connotations of slavery and oppression, and is replaced with "employer" in this chapter.
[78] Although she published eleven, Gale wrote at least twelve, including an unpublished antisuffrage drama called *Wigs on the Green* that she personally performed in for a charity benefit in 1910 ("Fun Found in Woman Suffrage Movement").

obituary, George Melville Baker (1832 – 1890), "won his greatest reputation . . . [with] his position as writer to the amateur stage" ("Reader Baker Dead"), completing 79 parlor plays in his lifetime.[79] Gale's brother, Robert Melville Baker (c. 1874 – 1929), published sensational novels and plays, and wrote the stories for several silent films, including *Flirting with Fate* (1916), which featured Douglas Fairbanks ("Playwright Dies").[80] Her sister, Emilie Baker Loring (1864 – 1951), achieved fame as a best-selling romance writer, first publishing around age 50, and authoring almost 100 novels over the course of her career.[81] Her uncle, Walter H. Baker, ran a publishing company that specialized in the parlor play.

Gale, too, wrote parlor plays, a genre defined by its suitability for amateur performers and its capacity to be performed in an average middle-class home. The preface George M. Baker (Gale's father) wrote to his edited collection of *Amateur Dramas for Parlor Theatricals* (1867) offers a clear idea of the genre of the parlor play: "The plots are simple, and easy of comprehension by the most inexperienced amateur. The stage-directions are carefully noted; no scenery is required; the furniture and properties can be readily supplied; and all of the pieces can be represented in the house or exhibition-hall" (iii-iv). The parlor play, then, is characterized by accessible plotlines needing little by way of scenery or costume (i.e., able and appropriate to be performed in almost any white, middle-class parlor). Interestingly, in a parlor play such as Rachel Baker Gale's *No Men Wanted*, the "house" (of the theater) is contained within a literal

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[79] What would have been the 80th, a Civil War melodrama called *After Taps*, was completed by Rachel Baker Gale (before her marriage, so it was published under Rachel E. Baker) based on her father's notes (Kritzer, p. 394; McMahon, p. 71).

[80] *Flirting With Fate* may be viewed at *Internet Archive:* http://www.archive.org/details/Flirting_with_Fate

[81] Loring's name was used as shorthand for insubstantial, formulaic literature. For example, Gonzalez, when attempting to prove the poor taste in literature of the Filipino population, references Loring: "the Filipino is not a book-buying man. . . . Textbooks—yes, the nation buys them. But works of an imaginative kind—hardly. Emilie Loring is a national best-seller" (28).

house—a structure containing a nuclear family unit. The "company"—those engaged in performing the play—may be actual visitors in the house (aka "company").

Bettina Friedl, whose 1986 *On To Victory* remains the most comprehensive scholarly collection of parlor dramas to date, claims that "private theatricals were probably the most important form of educated home amusement in the nineteenth century" in the United States (2). Pamela Cobrin, a feminist scholar of theater, describes parlor drama as a distinct and important genre of literature in nineteenth-century America: "this genre had its own scripts, . . . its own theatre architecture, its own acting styles, its own evolution, an entrenched culture specific to parlor drama, [and] a vast following (at least among a particular class and social status)" (386). Despite its distinctness and its importance, most scholars of United States literature ignore it, probably due to its status as "popular" literature. Another, related reason for its absence from literary criticism lies in its status as a genre that most often catered to women. Although parlor dramas featured some all-male and mixed-gender casts, most scripts called for casts of majority or all women.

The genre's position as an amusement located in the home suited it well for female-centric amusement. As such, the parlor play became the foremost vehicle for ideas about the women's suffrage movement, which dominated the national political conversation about women well into the twentieth century. Caroline Corbin observed in 1908, "the two ideals of the new woman and the old stand squarely face to face appealing to mankind for approval. In the great coming social struggle which is to prevail?" (15). No matter which answer an individual gave to this question, they framed their arguments with women's capacities or potential as wives and mothers. Both sides of the women's

suffrage debate assumed women's special position *as women* (read: as feminine wives, mothers, or charitable single people) as the basis of their arguments. Only a few radical, fringe voices claimed that women should desire anything other than to fulfill these roles.

The debate over women's proper social and political role therefore ties directly to the conception of family. Gender roles provided the groundwork for the construction of families, since the notion of the Protestant, white, nuclear family held great ideological sway in the nineteenth century. This notion depended on the rigid policing of "traditional" gender roles that upheld the separate spheres doctrine and the assumption that all parties involved were white. Most parlor play writers claimed the privileges of whiteness, and only considered women of color in the context of women's rights insofar as to recognized that to extend voting rights and civic responsibilities to white women meant extending them to all women, including ethnic and racial minorities. "The Woman Question" was truly the *white* woman question, and the debate over women's roles in and out of the home largely ignored or actively excluded ethnic minorities, women of color, foreign-born white women, and perhaps even religiously "deviant" women such as Mormons.[82]

Many parlor plays feature working-class women of color marked by exaggerated accents who exercise newfound freedoms to disastrous consequences.[83] For example, in Lilian Clisby Bridgham's *A Suffragette Town Meeting,* the ladies of a small town gather to plan their municipal affairs after gaining suffrage (and, "hence," full political power). Much to the ladies' dismay, their Irish maids are in attendance and insist on ignorantly

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[82] Nancy Cott in *Public Vows* argues that those "marital non-conformists most hounded and punished by the federal government were deemed 'racially' different from the white majority. They were Indians, freed slaves, polygamous Mormons (metaphorically non-white) and Asians" (4).

[83] For more examples see Goodfellow, Freund, and Eleanor Freeman. The racism inherent in the struggle for women's suffrage is well documented.

commenting on every matter of business, slowing any real progress. Bridgham's play opposes suffrage, and therefore outlines the pitfalls of allowing *all* women the vote. Other plays take advantage of racist views in order to obtain the right to vote for white women. In *Melinda and Her Sisters*, a pro-suffrage parlor play, Melinda asks antisuffrage mayor Dooless whether his late wife "was as intelligent as old black Joe, the negro stable-boy" (Belmont and Maxwell 353). When he protests, she tells him it is he who insults his wife's memory by opposing women's suffrage: "by denying women the political right to vote and by allowing old black Joe that same right, you place old black Joe mentally and economically in a position superior to that of the late Mrs. Dooless" (353). Race remains intimately tied to questions of gender roles, with foreign-born and African American women excluded from the privileges and restrictions of the cult of true womanhood.

The separate spheres doctrine, the cornerstone of what 1980s feminist scholarship called "the cult of true womanhood," dictates that (white) women remain in the home. Although everyday life offered more opportunities for the mingling of spheres, political rhetoric of the time indicated an understanding of gender roles as clearly defined and separate. Madeline Dahlgren, an influential antisuffragist, insisted that "[t]he proper sphere of woman . . . is of the highest. As wife and mother she is queen of the most holy aspirations. When she moves in her own proper orbit she fulfills her true duties as a citizen" (6). Note that women were conceived of as citizens, but the idea of republican motherhood reigned.[84] A woman was expected to rear her sons to be "good citizens to govern and protect the state" (Seawell 119) and to prepare her daughters for a life of

[84] Linda Kerber coined the term "republican motherhood" which has become widely used in feminist scholarship. See Kerber "The Republican Mother."

domesticity. Men occupied the "public sphere," earning money to sustain their families and representing the family unit in all endeavors outside the home, including at the ballot box. Suffrage directly threatened the "separate spheres" doctrine by offering women an official entry into the public sphere.[85]

Because cultural conceptions of womanhood fixate on women's roles as wives and mothers, the context of marriage law is crucial for understanding Gale's play, the historical situation of the bachelor girl, and their position within the questions of family I have explored throughout this dissertation. In Nancy Cott's words, "marriage shapes gender roles for everybody" (*Public Vows* 3-4). Likewise, gender roles affect marriage. Marriage is understood by many in the United States as "a fundamental building block of our society" (Clinton qtd. Robillard), even today.[86] Marriage was assumed then and is assumed now as the starting point of the family. Therefore, an understanding of marriage in its legal and social context informs our understanding of family as it is deployed culturally and politically. According to legal scholar Hendrik Hartog,

> In marriage, husbands dominated wives. The law of marriage set the rules that shaped and legalized that domination. Because marriage was the central social institution in the regulation of male-female relations, marriage had a determinant impact on the identities of all men and all women. ("Wives" 298)

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[85] The "public sphere" is a term used frequently throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and is theorized by Jürgen Habermas in *Structural Transformations of the Public Sphere*. Habermas details the development of the ideal of the bourgeois public sphere in the 18th centry, as a space separate from the state for critical consideration of the state's activities as well as rational debate among "private persons." Habermas is invested in maintaining the boundaries between public and private spheres and "bracketing" difference so as to create the illusion of equality among participants in the public sphere. Feminists such as Fraser, Benhabib, and Young have critiqued this division as a false dichotomy. For a more detailed summary of Habermas's public sphere theory and the debates it has influenced, see C. Calhoun's introduction to *Habermas and the Public Sphere.*

[86] On 18 March 2013, Hillary Clinton used these words when announcing her support for same-sex marriage.

Just as feminists since Mary Astell have argued, Hartog acknowledges the impact of marriage law on all men and (especially) women, even those who choose to remain single.

The unique location of the parlor play as a "private amusement" in a private home made it a safe space for those arguing both for and against suffrage. Through the parlor play, both pro- and antisuffrage women could claim the domain of the home as the highest order for women, all the while drawing (what seemed then) radically different conclusions as to women's proper social role. Prosuffrage arguments held that women, as mothers, deserved a voice in the running of local and national governments, which increasingly regulated schools, food, and provided for the poor. Many local suffrage movements at the turn of the twentieth century, for example, organized over the issue of milk safety. With no government oversight to ensure milk safety, the bacteria in milk often put young children at risk of serious disease and death. The women's suffrage movement attempted to leverage the powerful cultural images of women as mothers in order to argue for their special interest in a public issue such as milk safety.

This issue, like all aspects of the women's suffrage debate was dramatized in parlor plays such as *Something to Vote for* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. In Gilman's play, the corrupt milk executive character asks an antisuffragist, "Isn't it rather a new thing for you to interest yourself in public matters, Mrs. Carroll?" (150). She replies confidently, "Oh, but milk is really a domestic matter" (150). Mrs. Carroll originally scorns women's suffrage and even forbids its mention. Throughout the course of the play, however, she determines that such a domestic matter (in this case meaning "of the *home*," rather than "of the home *nation*") is indeed something worth voting for. She concludes,

"That's what the ballot is for, ladies—to protect our homes! To protect our children! . . . all who are in favor of woman suffrage and pure milk say Aye!" (161). By linking women's suffrage to such powerfully *domestic* issues, suffragists did not need to stray very far from the images of women's traditional roles. By locating these debates in the parlor, they rendered them less threatening to those who viewed suffragism as the attempt of women to wrest power from men.

Antisuffragists agreed wholeheartedly that women deserved influence in the domestic sphere, but argued that this did not extend to voting. Instead, women should use their "influence" to enact social change, through women's clubs, volunteerism, and by discussing matters of importance with their husbands, fathers, and sons. Antisuffragists saw the vote as the line which would force unprepared and unfit women into the public sphere. Antisuffrage parlor plays often depict a dystopian future where the extension of female suffrage has caused a switch in gender roles, with disastrous consequences.
In *Vice Versa* by Mrs. E. J. H. Goodfellow, Will Brown returns to his hometown after a five-year absence to find that women's suffrage has reversed gender roles. He encounters incompetent ladies as the ticket master, baggage master, postman, doctor and census-taker. His male friends "are kept quite busy" misplacing or inadvertently injuring their children, cooking, and cleaning (92). In the end, the women admit that they would "rather have the old time back" when they occupied their proper sphere (102), and men and women return to their original roles.

According to theater scholar Emma Dassori, the parlor play in general represents a conservative genre wherein women's new roles (as voter, as citizen) are largely rejected. She reads parlor plays in general as "boldly farcical in their treatment of the

Woman Question" (305), exaggerating the virtues or evils of one position or the other. Dassori claims that "[t]he majority of suffrage dramas written during the nineteenth century were anti-suffrage comedies" (301), and this trend suggests that other political issues were approached from a non-progressive angle (e.g., pro-temperance[87]). Specifically, Dassori identifies marriage as the preferred solution in a parlor play to women's progressive tendencies. In these plays,

> Younger women characters are either repelled by the older suffragists from the outset, or else decide to trade in their new-woman ways for the love of a man and the accepted domestic role. Indeed marriage often serves as an antidote: the love of a man triumphs over a woman's desire to be "new." (Dassori 305)

Over my own reading of hundreds of parlor plays, I have also noticed this pattern of young women maintaining or developing skepticism for "emancipated" roles. These plays most often conclude that women truly desire a husband above everything, no matter what she might claim. Rachel Baker Gale's plays participate in this longstanding tradition of cultural material that insists women need men—and need to conform to traditional gender roles—in order to "be happy."[88] By situating the younger generation as skeptical or hostile to the ideas of the women's suffrage movement, parlor playwrights signal that

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[87] George Melville Baker was one of those playwrights who advocated temperance in his plays, such as *A Drop Too Much* (1866)*, We're All Teetotalers* (1867), and *Little Brown Jug* (1870)*,* as well as in his collections, publishing *The Temperance Drama* in 1874 and *Baker's Temperance Dialogues* in 1909. The temperance movement also unites some of the other authors in this dissertation: Beecher family also wrote and spoke in favor of temperance, and Mark Twain delivered a New Year's Eve Temperance lecture that recycled the humor of *Those Extraordinary Twins*, where one conjoined twin is made drunk by the other. See "Mark Twain and Twin Cheer New Year's Party."

[88] Unfortunately, this attitude has not disappeared with the arrival of more equality for women. In too many romantic comedies to count, the young woman character throws her life into her career and says (implicitly or explicitly) she doesn't need a man to be happy. Despite her protest, the end of the movie finds her happily coupled with a man, finally truly fulfilled. Twenty-first century examples abound, including *Hitch, No Reservations,* and *Miss Congeniality.* Even films that challenge existing familial structures, such as *Friends with Kids*, usually end in romantic heterosexual coupling. Although today's romantic heroines are not usually expected to *give up* their careers for marriage, the genre perpetuates the trope of the woman who really wanted a boyfriend/husband all along. To be fair, many of these films feature a man who also mistakenly believes he does not want a relationship either. The overriding message is clear: men and women "naturally" want to be coupled, and should be.

this "new woman" craze is merely a fad that will pass. The "debate," therefore is always already decided, and the new women characters made to be ridiculous from the outset.

Pamela Cobrin advances a different view. She suggests that although the debate seems to always already be decided, the mere entertainment of the ideas of suffragism renders these plays radical. By allowing women the space to enact alternative roles, alternative lifestyles, and alternative family structures—even if they are ultimately rejected—parlor plays render these alternatives visible. Cobrin claims that, because of the radical possibilities inherent in even the act of a woman performing, "all parlor performance was radical, feminist, and political" (393), regardless of its ideological message. I agree with Cobrin that there might be some radical potential in the performance of new roles for women in parlor plays, however, to suggest that this renders the genre inherently radical is a mistake. Parlor plays so mercilessly lampoon suffragists in particular and new women in general that it is difficult to imagine a sympathetic audience would take anything away from the performances other than the sense of self-righteousness that usually accompanies watching propaganda with which we agree. For the undecided, however, parlor plays might have offered an opportunity to test the waters of new womanhood.

Rachel Baker Gale's plays represent a complicated answer to the question of whether the parlor play should be read as inherently conservative or progressive. Gale's plays participate in the debate over white women's role in society, and most often determines she should conform to the roles of wife and mother.[89] Gale seems to support

[89] The notable, strange exception is *Rebellious Jane*, published in 1916, which features a daughter who drags her mother and female friends to fend for themselves out West, and who determines it was beneficial to be rebellious. The characters, for the most part, however, still decide they "would rather have a husband" than anything else (50).

women's limited entrance into the public sphere, especially for single white women, and even accepts that women should be allowed to vote. Time after time, however, Gale lampoons suffragists as foolish and advocates the retention of "truly womanly" values and preaches wifehood and motherhood as the ultimate destiny of all women. Even when advocating suffrage, Gale does not concede any ground to women's new roles: "Let the women vote, I say! but let it be home and children *first"* (*Clinging Vine* 21). To navigate the tension between allowing women some leeway in terms of their lives while maintaining a commitment to true womanhood, Gale's plays consistently turn to moderation as a solution.

Her 1889 *The Clinging Vine* offers an example of how Gale's work privileges domestic ideology after first entertaining the notion of women's political freedom. In the play, the ladies of the Bartonsville Woman's Club assemble to decide whether or not to expel one of their members who has failed to "repress all feminine ideals which do not lead toward the emancipation of women" (10). This statement, meant to exaggerate the position of the pro-suffrage camp, satirizes New Women as unreasonable and rigidly uncompromising. The club holds a formal trial of the women who has thus failed, Mrs. Redding. Priscilla Dane, Mrs. Redding's defense lawyer, "*a very attractive young woman, dressed in [a] stylish tailored suit*" (9), speaks in favor of woman's "proper role." Priscilla engages in this debate with the "strong-minded" lawyer Susan Peabody, who represents the clubwomen in favor of expelling Mrs. Redding. Susan's "*mannish fashion*" and enthusiastic support of equal suffrage clearly marks her as the mouthpiece for the "wrong" side of the debate. The debate between the two women eventually turns personal, since Susan recognizes the hypocrisy of a female lawyer arguing that women

are happiest when sewing shirts for their husbands and making bread for their children. Susan asks, "Why do you not live up to these principles and become a clinging vine yourself?" Priscilla answers "(*sweetly*) like yourself, I am still waiting—waiting" (20). Therefore it seems that Priscilla's unmarried status gives her the prerogative to work, as long as she intends to abandon the profession in favor of motherhood at some point.

When the club discovers Mrs. Redding has spent her time caring for neglected children whose mothers are out politicking, they resolve to dedicate more attention to their families and less to the emancipation of women. The moral is pronounced: "it is the natural instinct of a wife and mother to give loving care to her husband and children. To travel on the 'broad highway' is but a fleeting fancy, which in time will lose its allurement. . . . [to be a "clinging vine"] is woman's true calling" (21-23). Gale's plays often struggle with the tension between traveling the broad highway and perfecting the home, always determining homemaking as the more appropriate pursuit for women. Like *The Clinging Vine*, *No Men Wanted* features an all-female cast of characters that seem to be consciously performing their commitment to women's rights, while all the time remaining devoted to women's "true calling."

Gale's plays often revolve around a female world, calling for all-female casts. *The New Crusade,* published in 1908, dramatizes the "servant problem" that so occupied the minds of middle-class white American women at the time.[90] The play features a cast of twelve women; five "ladies" looking for servants and seven "girls" looking for work as

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[90] According to the 1890 United States census, there were 1,454,791 domestic workers in the country that year (Salmon 100), 1,216,639 of whom were women (Rubinow and Durant 583). Domestic service, however, was branded as a black or Irish profession and therefore beneath the dignity of native-born white American women. Catharine Beecher writes, "to become a domestic assistant in the family state would be regarded as the depth of humiliation to any in a high social position" ("Something for Women" 8). As a result, the country experienced what it called a "servant problem." As an increasing number of middle-class households became financially comfortable, they desired the status and assistance a servant provided and even a flood of Irish and freedwomen into the market could not meet the high demand.

servants. The potential employers want girls who are willing to work hard for five dollars a week and who are experts in everything. The potential employees want an easy situation that pays eight or nine dollars a week, offers the charms of the city (Boston), two days off a week, and no entertaining. Since they cannot come to any agreement, the "fine ladies" decide to try "cooperative housekeeping" for a few weeks, meaning that they each do some share of the work for all five of the households. Rather than hiring an experienced maid or cook to help, they hire a starving woman who is only too glad of a warm meal and a roof over her head. The experiment results in disaster, and their husbands are on the verge of leaving them due to their burnt meals and inexpertly cleaned clothes when the formerly "independent" girls come back, desperate for employment. Both groups learn to moderate their expectations and be grateful for what they have.

The New Crusade represents a typical piece of Gale's work. Just as in *The Clinging Vine,* here she demonstrates two extremes of an issue and counsels moderation in the end, but always with a strong preference for the traditional way, privileging the conservative middle-class position. Although the ladies in *The New Crusade* learn to be "more charitable" (28), the real lesson is for the servants themselves to appreciate a good, honest position without looking for perquisites. This imbalance is depicted in a particularly puzzling manner, since it is the fine ladies who suffer most—the worst the servant girls suffer during these six weeks, it seems, is boredom. However, the inequitable numbers in the cast (five employers to seven employees) demonstrate who wields the power. Gale ensures the ladies occupy the moral high ground as well. The settlement girl, Merry, functions as a foil to the too-high aspirations of the servant girls. When she discovers their outrageous demands, Merry exclaims, "Say! Youse bunch

makes me tired. You get a home wid a meal ticket thrown in and de coin every week. . . . Why, youse got it handed to you on a silver platter and youse turn up your nose at it" (23). Merry's short monologue rebukes the girls for selfishness, which they come to understand in the course of the play. Conversely, the ladies are never explicitly told that their expectations are too high. Unmistakably, Gale writes for a middle-class white audience who would sympathize with the ladies over the girls.[91]

A seemingly minor lesson of *The New Crusade* teaches that cooperative housekeeping, an idea related to the women's liberation movement, is impractical and silly. This fringe moral of the story actual represents a cornerstone in Gale's thinking about family and how women's roles relate to and construct family relationships. For Gale, this kind of family does not work. Cooperative housekeeping "expanded the meaning of 'family' and 'household' from private homes to the public community" (164), according to Suzanne M. Spencer-Wood. Because cooperative housekeeping was most closely associated with young, single, working-class women (the kind of women who would stay at the YWCA, for example, which was one of the foremost models of the cooperative living movement), it represents one of the models of new womanhood and a new way of constructing family relationships that antisuffragists and critics like Gale rejected.[92] It is clear that, in *The New Crusade*, the cooperative mode of family is undesirable, false, and only ever temporary. The women who attempt cooperative housekeeping are doomed to fail because they attempt to force the domestic to be a

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[91] Gale, who married a very rich man, could afford to scoff at a cooperative housekeeping model. When her husband died in 1916, he left at least some of his approximately $850,000 fortune ($850,000 of 1916 dollars would be worth about $17.7 million dollars in 2012). Rachel Baker Gale was his second wife; they had no children, but John E. Gale did have a son from a first marriage. See "Made Public Bequests."

[92] Notably, feminists such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman reified the cooperative housekeeping model. See *Herland* for an extreme, utopian example.

public rather than a private enterprise. Just as the arguments of the suffragists attempted to expand the definition of the domestic, the practice of cooperative housekeeping "materially blurred the distinction between community and family household" (Spencer-Wood 175). Gale explicitly rejects this blurring, and in effect "votes" to keep families nuclear, private, and distinct from the public realm, along with the antisuffragists.

No Men Wanted presents another view of a cooperative living experiment doomed from the start. The cast of three women have resolved, in the style of *Love's Labour's Lost*, to date no men for one year. These "girl bachelors" have decided to forgo matrimony—at least temporarily—but the text does not indicate why. And while the women continually avow that "It requires a sledge-hammer to impress it upon [men] that they are not wanted" (5), they each secretly *want* men in both senses of the word. By not providing a clear motive for such abstinence, Gale suggests that there can be no rational reason for young women to choose a single life (or a Boston marriage) in what amounts to another cooperative household. The play satirizes the situation of bachelor girls, a new category of womanhood emerging at the turn of the twentieth century. *No Men Wanted,* like so many romantic comedies, determines that the bachelor girls would rather be married than single—marriage once again serves as the "antidote" for diseased thinking (Dassori 305).

The term "bachelor girl" was used in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to refer to an emerging class of new women who chose to live singly (apart from their guardians but not yet married) and pursue a career rather than a husband. Julie Coleman's *Love, Sex, and Marriage: A Historical Thesaurus* classifies the bachelor girl as a woman "with sufficient independence of mind and income to choose to remain

single" (357). This issue of choice is key. The bachelor girl *decides* to live singly, and has the means and opportunity to do so. This characterization aligns with the accounts of the bachelor girl by her contemporaries. For example, an 1898 article in the *Ladies' Home Journal* describes her "as bright, industrious, neat, quick to speak, equally quick to act, and quite old enough to have decided what she wishes to make with her life" (Ashmore 22). The period roughly between 1865 and 1922 saw a boom of books and articles providing anecdotes about who bachelor girls were, how they lived, how they ought to behave, and speculated on when they would accept their "ultimate destiny of womankind": wife- and motherhood ("As a Bachelor Girl Saw It"). The articles discussing bachelor girls obsess over their abilities (or deficiencies) as housekeepers, presumably because the ability to keep house and entertain demonstrate innate domestic tendencies, while a deficiency in these skills signals a lack of womanliness.[93] This poem by George Birdseye from 1899 illustrates the general attitude with which the bachelor girl was treated in the articles about her:

> She's a satisfied bachelor-girl,
>   She vows that she never will marry;
> She has been in society's whirl
>   And known many a marriage miscarry.
>
> She is pretty, well furnished with brains,
>   And it doesn't quite enter her plans,
> While around her all pleasant remains
>   To link her glad life with a man's. . . .
>
> She had joined a girl bachelor's club,
>   Into which not a man was allowed
> (As it happened, just there was the rub,)
>   And to celibacy all were vowed.
>
> At the very last meeting, though loathed,
>   A general confession was planned.

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[93] See Bunce; "The Bachelor Girl in her Skylighted Studio"; "When the Bachelor Girl is a Bachelor No More"; and "As a Bachelor Girl Saw It."

And 'twas found every girl was betrothed,
    So the club then was forced to disband.

All betrothed but our bachelor-girl;
    To her colors still faithful and true.
That sole banner she still will unfurl:
    Who will order it down, I or you?

Although the bachelor girl, "well-furnished with brains," received a more positive portrayal than her sister the old maid, she was more fervently expected to eventually order down her banner of singleness of her own accord because her independence was chosen rather than forced.[94] In other words, it was inconceivable that an intelligent woman who was offered marriage would not accept.

Birdseye's poem expresses the belief contained in *No Men Wanted* that bachelor girls were simply biding their time until the "right" man came along to marry. Gale's play begins with the premise that "It's no use—when a woman's heart begins to flutter, all [the] good intentions to give matrimony de other side [of] de road won't hold it steady" (3), and proceeds to prove itself right. As Birdseye's poem indicates, a number of self-proclaimed bachelor girls perceived the unhappy marriages of friends and relatives as arguments against marriage for marriage's sake, but acknowledged that if they could find a true companion, they would be willing to enter the yoke:

> If [a happy marriage] could always be assured us, we would gladly forswear the delights of female bachelorhood, and give some one the right to provide for and protect us; but matrimony is certainly a lottery, and until we find that life has become undesirable to us without some one in particular, we won't take the step on merely general principles. (Stanley 831)

This attitude valuing marriage as a partnership and an individual choice rather than a necessity caused some to regard bachelor girls with suspicion rather than admiration.

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[94] For more on the distinction between bachelor girls and old maids, see "Envy the Bachelor Girl," Greene, and Ashmore.

Although the historical trend tended toward companionate marriage, social mores continued to dictate that women's purpose was to procreate within the confines of a patriarchal system of coverture and inheritance. The bachelor girl recognized and rejected the legalized domination of women by men through marriage. It was, in fact, one of the main reasons for her existence. The bachelor girl threatened the ideas that women naturally wished to be wives and mothers, and exposed the lie that companionate marriage meant a life of happiness. The romantic ideal of the woman as happy wife was too often disproved by a bachelor girl's personal experience. She chose to trust her experience rather than her novels, and decided to forswear the "lottery" of matrimony in favor of a future that she could more readily control (Stanley 831).

Others viewed the bachelor girl's resistance to marriage as a threat to families, racial purity, and social order. Any "[s]exual and social practices by which individuals sought intimacy outside the reproductive marriage . . . were perceived as perversion, betrayal, and distortion of 'the race' and of racially defined communities" (Shah 77). Magazines from the period even go so far as to caution white bachelor girls that, by not procreating inside marriage, they were contributing to "race suicide" (qtd. Israel 110). This concept of social duty was probably especially felt in the case of the "'genteel' single white women living outside of their nuclear families" (Kent 61). Once again here we see the integration of gendered and racialized expectations with structures of the family. The nuclear family, constituted by marriage, becomes a method of policing gendered and racialized social expectations in this context.

The bachelor girl therefore represented a two-fold social threat: the woman uninterested in marriage because of promiscuity, and the woman uninterested in marriage

(and therefore, family in general) because of “manliness” or lesbianism.[95] Bachelor girls, without fathers, husbands, children, or chaperones had the freedom to do as they pleased. This freedom caused suspicion in those who recognized both the radical potential and the vulnerability of a woman “without protection.” Protection meant both literal protection from abuses such as rape, but also carried with it connotations of restriction and control of a woman’s social and sexual behavior. A woman without protection operated outside of the realm of patriarchal authority on many levels, and perhaps most pressingly presented a potential threat to patriarchal lines of inheritance through promiscuity. With no supervision, the bachelor girl’s behavior was open to scrutiny, and although Emily Post does not censure bachelor girls for attending public events alone with a man, she acknowledges the good girl’s dilemma: she “must either live her own life, caring nothing for the world’s opinion or the position it offers, or else be chaperoned” (295). Even the bachelor girl who lived “the life of a Puritan spinster” (Post 294), however, was not free from suspicion. The world then suspected her of something perhaps worse than promiscuity: wanting to be a man.

The term “bachelor girl” seems to indicate that these women aspired to a male role. Although less derogatory than some of the other terms used to denote unmarried women, “bachelor girl” relies on “the male term as a core element” (Coleman 357), linguistically linking bachelor girls to their male counterparts. Gale chooses to term the women in her play “girl bachelors” instead of the more common “bachelor girls,” switching the nouns and their modifiers. By doing so, Gale further alienates the characters from the true womanhood Gale espoused, and emphasizes the unnaturalness,

[95] Although the term “lesbian” is anachronistic in this context, I use it to signal the more nebulous anxieties surrounding sexual deviance in women in the nineteenth century.

the unwomanliness of their position as single and independent. Without men to be defined in relation to, girl bachelors define themselves in relation to self and female other. For this reason, girl bachelors represent an anxiety about the instability of gender roles, the fear that women who live only with women will become "manly." *No Men Wanted* takes up the logic of women's liberation but imposes a notion about the stability of true womanhood onto the white characters. Because unwilling to acknowledge the anxiety over and instability of gender and sexuality, Gale implies that all women (naturally!) want to pursue heterosexual, intraracial, legal marriage. Here again we see anxiety as the hallmark of instability.

The threat of masculinity always hung over the bachelor girl and any female-only household. Why else would a woman desire to live *without* a man, except for her desire to *be* one (which made her unsuitable as a mate for a man)? Anxiety surrounding the masculinity of women represents fear of the productive ambiguity that I have traced throughout this dissertation. Nineteenth-century cultural critics recognized that a woman's desire to live as free as a man produced opportunities for her to deviate from sexual norms. The new woman, in stark contrast to the true woman, was "mannish," "coarse," and "strong-minded." Her outspoken nature and desire for the public eye disqualified her from femininity, and opened up another possibility of deviant sexual behavior. Elizabeth Cady Stanton was once attacked as "the fruit, the harvest of boy-like training and the life-long aspirations to be like a man" (Dahlgren 17), and these same suspicions surrounded any woman who desired to live independently. Rachel Baker Gale, along with other playwrights, cartoonists, and authors of the period instructs that new woman characters appear "*dressed in mannish fashion.*" (*Clinging Vine* 9). Antis worried

the entrance of middle-and upper-class white women into the public sphere would force them to act more mannish and therefore oblige husbands to become more womanly. This particular phenomenon is often represented in the plays, such as in William Bentley Fowle's 1856 parlor play *Women's Rights*, in which two married characters explicitly delineate the anti-suffrage attitude towards the relationship between sexual differentiation and performances of gender:

> Mrs. Manly. O, would I were a man!
> Mr. Manly. That might involve the necessity of my becoming a woman.
> Mrs. Manly. Why so?
> Mr. Manly. I did not know you wished for a divorce,--the natural consequence, if one alone should change. (48)

As demonstrated by this exchange, anti-suffragist believed that women's desires for manliness would cause men to grow more feminine. Some even went so far as to suggest that blurring the distinction between gender roles would cause the human race to devolve until there was no sexual differentiation and the human race ceased to exist. Interestingly, this anxiety depends on the notion that a person's *actions* rather than his *biological makeup* decide his gender.

In an intriguing turn, antis therefore seem to be recognizing the performativity of gender, all the while insisting on its essence. If the repeated actions of a woman can change her into a man (the anxiety displayed in Fowle's play), then there must be no internal or biological basis for her being a woman in the first place—it is merely her repeated "womanly" actions that make her such. This seemingly radical notion is contrasted to other critiques of the bachelor girl where she is unable to conceal her femaleness. Helen Ludington concludes her 1909 parlor play *The Suffragette* with the new woman character bemoaning, "He says I'm not a woman, I'm only a Suffragette" (30). This line demonstrates the anti-suffrage tenet that not only unwomanly actions but

also the incorrect ideology could exclude someone from femininity. Interestingly, although those opposed to the idea of the new woman worry about the effects of women acting like men, they continue to insist upon the essentialness of gender. Their view seems to be that women do themselves a disservice by trying to be men (or trying to "beat" men at their own game).

A brief story published in *The Baltimore Afro-American* in 1905, "The Bachelor Girl's Grief" features a bachelor girl whose "ideal" is to be a man, but who meets with "one insuperable obstacle": "Do whatever I may—woe is me—O cannot conceal the fact that I am only a girl!" (3). "The Bachelor Girl's Grief" demonstrates both the growing anxiety surrounding the masculinization of women who desired independence and, perhaps, a long-term relationship with another woman.[96] As noted above, this exposed suffragists to the same criticism of manliness leveled at bachelor girls. Suffragists, bachelor girls, and cooperative housekeepers (along with professional women and others) all represent different iterations of the new woman who threaten gender roles for everyone. These threats to womanliness carried within them threats to the family through their ambiguous statuses and their potential to disrupt lines of patriarchal lineage and inheritance upon which white supremacy in the United States was built.

Another reason, besides the threat of sexual deviance, that enemies of the new woman feared manliness in women was the notion of *equality within difference*—ominously foreshadowing the phrase "separate but equal." Antisuffragist rhetoric written by women was careful to include disclaimers as to women's capabilities. They conclude

[96] For more on mannishness as a projection of anxiety surrounding female relationships, see Newton. This sketch also—probably inadvertently—illustrates the social realities which dictated that a bachelor girl not be allowed the complete independence and freedom of a bachelor man. Suffragists targeted these social realities, which really did restrict women's opportunities.

their treatises with clarifications: "These reasons are not, in the smallest degree, based upon the assumption that women are not equal to men, but merely that men and women are not identical" (Seawell 12). The strict policing of gender roles stems from an understanding of the division of labor as concrete and inversely proportionate. Since only so much labor needs to be done, what roles women take from men must result in men stepping into the roles of women. The thinking goes that to the exact degree that women enter the public sphere, men would be forced into the private sphere. In Goodfellow's *Vice Versa,* Sam Black tells the audience of his wife, who "was appointed to the office last term, and I—yes, I guess, I was elected housekeeper at the same time" (94). Gale's plays indicate that she agreed with this view. Whenever a suffragette appears in one of her plays, she expresses a desire to overthrow the men. For example, in her 1910 *Coats and Petticoats*, the suffragettes sing a song about forswearing domestic accomplishments in order to demonstrate their equality with men:

> We are the suffragettes
> Know us by our badge of yellow.
> We do not stew and fret
> Each one a jolly fellow.
> No more to sew, to brew, to bake.
> In other ways we'll take the cake.
> We'll be the presidents of our land
> And show the men we have some sand. (23).

These "jolly fellows" have grand ambitions—to be the "presidents" of the United States, usurping the leadership roles traditionally accorded to men. The stage directions instruct that their march should be accompanied by signs bearing the slogans "Votes for Women" *or* "Down with the Men," indicating that the two ideas are the same. Here, Gale equates suffragism with a (presumably false) hatred of men similar to that exhibited by the bachelor girls in *No Men Wanted.* Here again we see the special roles for men and

women outlined, and the women's suffrage movement situated as erroneously opposed to those differentiated roles. The ideas of women's true role espoused by the antisuffrage movement made up a large part of how Gale viewed family and women's role within it. Although Gale demonstrated some ambivalence to the women's rights issue, she shows a clear preference for women to adhere to their prescribed roles of wives and mothers (and, if they cannot manage that, as charitable old maids who wish they were married).

Gale's bachelor girls in *No Men Wanted* stand in direct contrast to these ideals of family and femininity. Gale carefully constructs their relationship as non-domestic and non-familial: the household in *No Men Wanted* represents the "anti-family." The previous chapter established that families rely on narratives and naming for their constitution and recognition in the community. In *No Men Wanted*¸ the household has no stronger reason for living together than "showing the world that we can be happy though unmarried" (5). This reason, external to the participants, does not provide adequate basis for a lasting relationship. Gale herself implies in her plays that love and care constitute a family in a manner similar to that of Harriet Beecher Stowe and other sentimental novelists. By this I mean that Gale prefers love to follow familial lines, but where family connections fail to produce love, a family joined only by love and care is preferable to a consanguineous one absent of love. For example, in Gale's play *A King's Daughter,*[97] the main character Nan has been badly treated by her former guardians, her aunt and cousin, and decides to live with a very distantly related (or possibly unrelated) "aunt," essentially as a servant. Nan describes their relationship: "It is so lovely to work for some one who gives you more than money in return—*love.* Aunt Clarissa is so good to me" (48). She consistently refers to "the love and affection which Aunt Clarissa bestows on me" as the guiding reason for

[97] Published in 1893 under Rachel E. Baker.

her happiness (48). Gale reinforces the fitness of this familial arrangement by allowing Aunt Clarissa, secretly wealthy, to name Nan as her heir. Similarly, in *The Chaperon*,[98] Jill discovers a long-lost sister and mother, and lives with them happily, but decides to incorporate her adoptive gypsy mother (her "chaperon") into the family out of love for her.

Unlike in all of Gale's other plays, the household in *No Men Wanted* is based not on love, but on hatred. An implicit motivation behind their living together is the hatred of men. As opposed to Gale's usual reliance on love as the constituting emotion of a family, hatred constitutes this anti-family. Once they realize they both have broken their vow to live as girl bachelors for a year, they discuss their previous associations:

> ISA. I thought that you hated men.
> ELIZA. (*shyly*). I *did*.
> ISA. Now that the cat is out of the bag, I must say that I hate girl bachelors!
> ELIZA. (*have exchanged notes*). So do I. Oh, it is such a relief to have you know it. (15)

At the end of the play, their hatred has transferred from "men" to that which they, until the moment before, claimed to be. The switch, sudden and complete, suggests that these women have "all along" been destined to abandon their experiment, which clearly did not bring them happiness. When they announce to Prynnella that they "have decided to be girl bachelors no longer" (16), Prynnella exclaims, "Lor' bless yer, Misses! 'pears to me dat's de most sensiblest thing youse can do" (16). Prynnella has acted as the voice of reason throughout the play, and here her initial prediction, that "when a woman's heart begins to flutter, all de good intentions to give matrimony de other side ob de road won't hold it steady" (3), is fulfilled. Thus the anti-family dissolves in favor of three new,

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[98] Published in 1891 under Rachel E. Baker.

"natural" families, based on affection for men—not the far more tenuous bond of hatred of men.

Even Martha Minnow's broad definition would not include the household in *No Men Wanted*. According to Minnow defining a family depends on "whether the group of people function as a family; do they share affection and resources, think of one another as family members, and present themselves as such to neighbors and others?" (8). Although Elizabeth and Isabelle's relationship most closely resembles what was called a "Boston Marriage" (more common in the United States) or a "female marriage" (the term used in the United Kingdom), they do not describe it as such and do not function as a loving, committed couple would. A Boston marriage refers to the relationship between two women who live together for an extended period of time, who experience an intimate partnership beyond friendship, which may or may not be sexual in nature. In the nineteenth century, women in Boston marriages "were presumed to be asexual" (Rothblum and Brehony 5), but every couple was unique, and there exists no concrete evidence either way. The fact or absence of genital contact, however, has no bearing on the historical and social significance of these relationships. According the Sharon Marcus, "The question of whether or not women in female couples actually had sex becomes less important than the fact that they themselves and many in their social networks perceived them as married. The mere fact of both members of a conjugal unit being women was not sufficient to discount their relationship as a socially recognized form of kinship" (20). While this was true for many of the historical examples that Marcus includes in her *Between Women,* it does not hold true for the characters in *No Men Wanted*, who are *not* recognized as a married couple despite their domestic

partnership. For example, unlike many of the women who have left historical record of their enduring partnerships, Elizabeth and Isabelle in the play do not exchange any terms of endearment stronger than "dear." Considering "how often Victorian friends . . . used the language of physical attraction to describe their feelings for women whom a larger context shows were friends, not lovers" (Marcus 55), this weakened language is significant.[99]

If anything, their sneaking around, guilt, and anticipation of anger on the part of the other more closely resembles a pair of spouses plotting infidelity than a strong marriage of any sort. Although Gale demonstrates that the women's affection for and loyalty to each other is not strong enough to constitute grounds for a Boston marriage, Elizabeth's and Isabelle's attempts to leave the house produce anxiety for abandoning her partner. For example, Elizabeth worries, "If Isabelle should know that I have accepted an invitation to the Pop Concert to-night, she would never forgive me" (5). Before she escapes, Isabelle pauses and exclaims, on two separate occasions, "Poor dear! I feel guilty to deceive her so" (4) and "Poor Elizabeth! . . . It is heartless to leave her, but I will be all the more devoted to-morrow. I will wait until she has surely retired, then—I am off for a lark" (9). Although the girl bachelors express their devotion to each other, the impulse to leave for a lark with a man remains stronger. At one point, Isabelle frets that she "must do penance a whole year for this deception" (11)—a time period which amounts to the time she was supposed to have remained single. The partnership between Isabelle and Elizabeth seems to exist (they do express affection for and "devot[ion]" to

[99] For more on the language Victorian women in both British and American contexts expressed their friendships, see Marcus, pp. 54-62; Cott *Bonds of Womanhood.*

each other), but is not durable. It certainly cannot withstand the allure of heterosexual matrimony and the promise of a real family.

In this anti-family, no one wants to remain in the home, because they are all preoccupied with finding a true home with a husband. Contrary to a true home in, say, Harriet Beecher Stowe's work, the house in *No Men Wanted* is an "apartment" where no one wants to be (4). At her first chance, Prynnella celebrates her freedom to leave: "Nothin' to hinder me from goin . . . I gets de hat, de coat, de violets, an' all de fun'" (10), and immediately exits. All of the action of the play, in fact, revolves around the three characters' various attempts to leave the house, eventually culminating in the successful departure of all the characters offstage. Their actions mirror Isabelle's insistence that she "could not stay in the house" (13). The space of the home in this play is decidedly non-domestic and does not serve as a haven or a place of comfort to the characters. Their desire to leave makes all of their actions within the home frantic and uncomfortable. Isabelle "feel[s] quite like a thief entering [the] apartment" (4), and from then on all the actions of the characters are frantic attempts at escaping the nondomestic space. Prynnella brings tea but no one eats, Elizabeth has "never saw [Isabelle] quite so nervous" (8). Prynnella must literally run back and forth to satisfy the bogus needs of her employers. Almost everything the characters say to each other turns out to be an untruth designed to allow them to leave their "[a]wfully jolly and cosy [sic] . . . bachelor apartment" (5). Each (white) woman fabricates an ailment that would prevent her from sitting up with the other. Isabelle's is a headache:

> ISA. I do believe that I shall have one of these dreadful headaches. (*Looks behind her screen for box.*)
> ELIZA. Oh, I hope not. I thought that we would have such a cosy evening together. (*Sits at dressing-table and arranges her hair.*)

ISA. (*seated at R. of table*). Yes, I have been thinking about it all day. (7)

Despite the fact that neither character truly wants to remain at home for the evening, they both perform the desire expected of them as "girl bachelors." The implication of this performance for Gale is that no girl could ever truly desire a home filled with only females; her natural desire for a real family will always trump any childish urge for independence or female affection.

The fact that Gale writes other families with non-normative structures (aunts adopting nieces, etc.) elicits a question: why are those all-female family arrangements acceptable, but the household in *No Men Wanted* is not? One answer may lie in the fact that Elizabeth and Isabelle are operating under the false assumptions that the women's rights movement has created. Another explanation, however, lies in their relationship as biologically unrelated, which raises the spectre of sexual deviance. Prynnella remarks, "It's mighty queer how dese young ladies done behave" (7), and it is possible that the queerness[100] of this pair relates to the threats of bachelor girls as not truly womanly. They occupy space of what Nayan Shah might call "queer domesticity." Shah uses "queer domesticity" to describe any household structured around a different notion than the nuclear family, especially those involving nontraditional sexual relations. The girl bachelor household at the turn of the century would definitely fall within the parameters of this definition. In an all-female household, explicitly rejecting (at least temporarily) the ultimate destiny of woman as wife and mother, girl bachelors queer the domestic space.

[100] The term "queer" was used to mean "strange," "different," and, to a much smaller extent, "homosexual," but also "spoiling . . . ruining . . . [and] worthless" (Herring 22). For more on how the term "queer" was deployed in the nineteenth century, see Herring.

Elizabeth and Isabelle never physically touch each other in the play, but they do initiate a great deal of physical contact with Prynnella. Elizabeth asks/commands Prynnella to rub her feet, and Isabelle asks Prynnella to rub her head. Prynnella helps Elizabeth rise from her chair and limp to her bedroom. Both Elizabeth and Isabelle run to Prynnella, embracing her and crying in her shoulder when approached by Persimmons on the street (13,14). Not only are they very comfortable with Prynnella's body, the fact that they allow and even welcome her use of the term "honey" when addressing them indicates a level of intimacy that they do not allow with any of the men. When Persimmons addresses them as such, they are reduced to tears.

When Elizabeth and Isabelle forbid Prynnella to even look at a man who may desire her, it solidifies this structure of the queer domestic, with Prynnella being forced to remain exclusively devoted to Elizabeth/Isabelle:

> ELIZA. If he ever comes near this house again, or you speak to him—
> ISA. Or look at him—
> ELIZA. You will be discharged at once. (14)

By forbidding Prynnella to even look at Persimmons—whom Prynnella has just described as "bery good looking"—Isabelle not only forbids Prynnella to encourage him, but also to express any more desire for him (14). This inunction seems extreme, particularly considering that Isabelle and Elizabeth both know that Prynnella knows about their own breaches of contract. The complex functionings of desire, therefore, figure strongly in the play. Who hates whom? Who desires whom? And how are hatred and desire related?

Similarly to the way that the women believe they hate men only to discover their actual desire for them, the contempt with which Prynnella's character is treated may point to an intersection of rivalry and desire. As I mentioned in chapter 2, Robert Reid-Pharr

suggests the possibility that race might actually be "lived as desire" (4). Likewise, Eric Lott sees in the performance of blackface minstrelsy the enacting of a desire to inhabit the body of the other, which at its base is a sexual desire. These conceptions of race point to a deeper lesson in the misrecognitions of Elizabeth, Isabelle, and Prynnella as each other than the one drawn by Gale. The racial misrecognitions pass without comment, and order is restored at the end of the play when all three women don their own clothing and head outside the house to meet their respective partners. These omissions suggest that Gale believes firmly in the stability of racial categories, and since all return to their "true" race, no comment is necessary. While the humor of Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson* relies on dramatic irony and ambiguity, Gale's play derives almost all its humor from the absurdity of switching the differently-raced characters Elizabeth/Isabelle and Prynnella. Gale seems to believe that race is somehow stable and does not interrogate the movement of the characters between white and black. Contrary to Twain's novel, in which the imposture begets serious consequences (someone with all the identity markers of a white man is sold into slavery, while a man with all the identity markers of a black man is received into white society), at the end of Gale's play, everything is simply resolved. Without discussion, without question—everything goes back to "normal" without any consideration of the implication of the misrecognition that just happened.

Unlike *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, which explicitly engages with the integrity of racial categories and identities, *No Men Wanted* takes these things for granted, and uses the seeming stability of these categories as the very basis of its humor. The most striking aspect of the play, the racial reversal, passes unremarked upon by Gale. In *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, Twain struggles with the meaning of racial identity within a switch across the

color line. In *No Men Wanted,* Gale offers a classic example of racial performance while maintaining the inherence of racialized identity. The assumption Gale displays about the stability of racial identity parallels her assumptions about gendered identity (they want to be married) and familial identity (that it is constituted through marriage). By denying the ambiguity inherent in the misrecognition situation, Gale suggests that identities remain stable in all of these various areas.

In order for the misrecognition of Prynnella as Isabelle and Elizabeth to occur, there must be a baseline of physical similarity that would enable an intelligent person to reasonably confuse the two identities. The role of Prynnella *could* have been performed in blackface to highlight the absurdity of the misrecognition—but it was not. No indication is made in the costume notes that she should be played in blackface, and more compellingly, archival evidence reveals the costumes of the actors. Figure 3 shows a clipping from the *Boston Daily Globe* on 31 December 1904, a photograph of the Winchester High School cast of *No Men Wanted*. This picture demonstrates that the actress performing Prynnella did not perform in literal blackface, no matter how her dialect may be considered a type of blackface performance.

Although the picture itself is pixilated and difficult to decipher, the use of the title "Miss," along with its context from a high school play in the Boston area, where schools were segregated until the Boston busing crisis, indicate that all three of the amateur actresses identify as white. We can assume that this cast indicates both how the play was performed and that Gale wrote the play for white actors (all of Gale's plays are written for a cast of white actors—she herself performed in at least one of them, *Wigs on the*

Fig. 3 A 1904 Cast of *No Men Wanted,* pictured in "Applause Rewards Dramatic Efforts: Pupils of Winchester High School Do Good Work in Annual Plays Before Large Audience."

Green, for a charity benefit in 1910[101]). Further, the extreme caricature of black Southern vernacular[102] in which Prynnella speaks is an indication that the role was written for a white actress who needed linguistic cues to mark her as black. Gavin Jones, in his study *Strange Talk* records that, "[i]nstead of putting on blackface, white performers needed only to 'put on' black dialect to portray African American after the Civil War" (G. Jones 162). This is certainly the case with Prynnella. Eliminating the necessity of burnt cork as an explicit racial marker, Gale writes a character whose manner of speech is just as

[101] See "Fun Found in Woman Suffrage Movement." Gale's brother, Robert Melville Baker, directed this production and her husband's granddaughter (from his first marriage), Barbara Gale, danced in it.
[102] Conventions such as substituting a "d" for a "th" sound and a "b" for a "v" sound, along with colloquial terms like "Honey" as a term of endearment or phrases such as "Shure's your born" mark Prynnella as Southern and black.

unmistakably marked as black.[103] Like Roxy in *Pudd'nhead Wilson,* Prynnella needs only to open her mouth for her performed race to be evident, despite the fact that her appearance is in every other way, read as white. Unlike Roxy, Prynnella offers extreme ambiguity in her position as both black and not black through the many layers of the text in performance. In performance, Prynnella bears closer resemblance to Tom or Chambers, both of whom are similarly simultaneously black and not black.

The critical history of black or "Negro" dialect in literature is long and contested. George Philip Krapp, an influential linguist writing in the 1920s, viewed dialect writing as "an exaggeration of relatively minor linguistic differences" (qtd. G. Jones 216). Conversely, Toni Morrison asserts in her important *Playing in the Dark* that in literature written by white authors in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, "the dialogue of black characters is construed as alien, estranging dialect made deliberately unintelligible by spelling contrived to disfamiliarize it" (688). Morrison's argument has carried significant weight when it comes to discussing the social currency at stake in dialect literature. While acknowledging Morrison's concerns, Gavin Jones in *Strange Talk* argues that racism does not explain everything about dialect literature written by whites. Jones considers this use of unfamiliar spelling as the sincere effort to capture unfamiliar sounds. For him, "[d]ialect texts are easily identifiable by their techniques of representing the phonetics of unfamiliar speech" (2). Even those "humorous burlesques of 'broken English'" like Gale's carry possibilities for resistance and may be open to a more complicated interpretation than scholars such as Krapp had envisioned, according to Jones (6).

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[103] Interestingly, [George Melville] *Baker's Comic and Dialect Speaker* and *Baker's Humorous Speaker* contributed to the large body of collections that taught white actors how to speak in "Negro" dialect, a gross exaggeration of historical speech patterns.

Gavin Jones makes the case that using the term “dialect” needs not inherently recognize standard (white) English: “The term *dialect* is employed throughout this study in an effort to preserve the political dynamic of subordination *and* resistance that defined linguistic conflict at the end of the nineteenth century. To recognize dialect is not simply to confirm the dominance or purity of standard discourse” (11). Jones emphasizes “cultural contact and merger” (12) that force the speech patterns of Anglo Americans to face “constant threats of change from the impact of linguistic otherness” (12). Jones, therefore, views dialect as a tool of subversion of the dominant discourse, since language itself is so mutable.

To illustrate Jones’s argument as it might apply to *No Men Wanted,* let us consider how Gale employs dialect in her work. Almost all her plays include characters with elaborate Irish or “Negro” accents, providing ample opportunity for linguistic comedy and providing definite racial markers for white actors (e.g., *The New Crusade*, *Mr. Bob*, *Rebellious Jane*). Dialect marks these characters as less educated and socially subordinate to the white characters, but Gale has a penchant for placing “truth” in the mouths of these servants. In the tradition of the fool, Gale’s servants often speak (Gale’s version of) truth to the audience in lengthy monologues. Prynnella begins *No Men Wanted* with one of these monologues, grumbling about girl bachelors and the futility of fighting against the natural urge for matrimony. She pronounces, “When it comes to a new hat and a secret, I can see de finish to no matrimony (*Exits laughing*.)” (5). Prynnella’s lines throughout the play predict its outcome, and render the bachelor girl characters even more ridiculous, since Gale seems to suggest that even this uneducated

black woman knows what the outcome of this silly experimental new womanhood will be.

In a Victor/Victoria moment, Prynnella is played by a white woman performing a black woman passing as a white woman. This dynamic mirrors the dynamic of a single woman playing the part of a bachelor girl who wants to be married pretending that she doesn't. These repeated switches, rather than creating confusion and ambiguity, hinge on the ultimate social recognition of the bachelor girls as "true" women and of Prynnella as black. This recognition is made possible by the distinction between performance (the conscious enacting or putting on of a false identity) and performativity (the everyday actions that define a recognized and "natural" identity). Butler elaborates the distinction:

> Performance as bounded 'act' is distinguished from performativity insofar as the latter consists in a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain and exceed that performer and in that sense cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer's 'will' or 'choice'; further, what is 'performed' works to conceal, if not to disavow, what remains opaque, unconscious, unperformable. The reduction of performativity to performance would be a mistake. (*Bodies that Matter* 234)

In *No Men Wanted*, the women's irresistible attraction to men amounts to a "norm that precede[s], constrain[s], and exceed[s] the performer." It is not understood by the playwright or her audience as a choice in any sense. Rather, their decision to remain girl bachelors is presented as a misguided choice; their commitment to the charade after they have abandoned it, a disavowing of the lived experience of women who lived in Boston marriages or as permanent bachelor girls.

The play remains very conscious of itself as a piece of performance, as well. When Elizabeth's women's deception is discovered, Prynnella comments, amazed, "You ought to go on to de stage" (12). This moment acts as a breaking of the fourth wall, a self-referential joke that recognizes the play as a play—as somehow separate from real

life. This condition of the play is also what allows women to be mistaken for each other just by donning each other's brand new (i.e., unknown to others) hat and coat; what allows this mistake to pass unremarked-upon. This is simply a parlor farce, after all—nothing serious going on here. Once again, the performance allows the performativity of everyday identity to remain invisible. By framing some life events as choices and some as inevitable, the play offers women a familial destiny grounded in the most acceptable mode of family: the nuclear.

The nuclear family here functions as a method of policing normative sexual, gendered, and racialized behaviors. By presenting marriage as the reward for choosing their desired social position, the play reinforces cultural fictions about the naturalness of the desire to construct families in only one way. Its most remarkable moment, the racial switches, *No Men Wanted* creates a category crisis that it then ignores. Prynnella's ambiguous racial status opens space for a particular kind of queer family, as does the ambiguousness surrounding all of the core characters in this dissertation. Category crises such as the doubt of Prynnella's racial essence reveal that there was no essence to begin with, and allow us to see the processes by which identity is constructed through language. With the example of the anti-family, we see that the processes of performativity do not cease to function because they are denied. In fact, the very act of denying them can act as a window into the processes of implicit construction that make nuclear families, gender, race, and other identity categories seem natural, immutable, and eternal.

The anti-family in *No Men Wanted* may also offer us some perspective on the other families discussed in this dissertation. They all contain at least one character who has the ability to inhabit two different, competing identities at once. This ability creates

ambiguity and defies categorization in a way that allows us to look past simple designations of black or white, male or female. Without these taxonomical markers to guide us, we must focus more closely on the words used to construct and describe these characters and the actions they take. Identifying these "problem families" and accepting their ambiguity rather than trying to explain it away produces the opportunity to deconstruct the processes of performativity.

This chapter and this dissertation have argued that familial identity is constructed similarly to the ways that gender and race are constructed, and that gender and racial identities remain intricately tied with familial identity. In Martha Fineman's words, however, "[t]o state that something is socially constructed, in my opinion, is to concede that it is powerful and resistant to change. . . . differences, however constructed, have real material effects" (35). I do not believe that by recognizing the constructedness of familial identity we therefore have the tools (or even the desire) to dismantle it. This recognition does offer us an opportunity, however, to begin to understand family as it exists in literature, culture, and law. This recognition leads to political consequences and many questions about how we choose to live our lives. I explore these issues briefly in the epilogue.

Epilogue

Nuclear Alternatives in 2013

In September 2011, *The Guardian* ran a story with the headline "Black and White Twins." The article described a curious phenomenon: fraternal twins who appear to belong to different races. The article's lead exclaims, "James and Daniel are twins. What sets them apart is that one is white and one is black" (Moorhead). In a bizarre echoing of Barnum's exhibit of "The Albino Sisters and Their Black Mother and Sister," the article dwells on the physical differences between the two young men, who were born to a white mother and a black father. Delving into the science that makes his body biologically possible, the article also reports on the racism that the "white" twin, Daniel, experienced. According to the twins' mother, Alyson Kelly, the children who bullied Daniel "couldn't stand the fact that, as they saw it, this white kid was actually black. It was as though they wanted to punish him for daring to call himself white" (qtd. Moorhead). James and Daniel's story demonstrates the still-powerful liminality that a racially ambiguous person occupies. The threat of a racially ambiguous person lies in his inability to be categorized and his inability to be contained by the usual taxonomies of race and family. He continues to threaten the powerful structures of white privilege on which Anglo and Anglo-American culture is based.

As I write (March 2013), the Supreme Court of the United States is hearing arguments in two potentially landmark cases for gay rights. *United States* v. *Windsor* asks whether the federal government may constitutionally define marriage as only between one man and one woman. *Hollingsworth v. Perry* questions the constitutionality of California's infamous Proposition 8, which banned same-sex marriage in the state. At the

heart of these cases is the question of equal protection under the law and the institution of marriage. They hinge on questions such as: Why does marriage exist? What constitutes a marriage? How has marriage changed? These basic questions about what we often consider a "building block of our democracy" have their roots in what constitutes a family.

Legal families and sexual families, affective families and genetic families are almost never the same thing. They weren't in the nineteenth century, and they are not now (although I would say that the law is getting closer to closing the gap). And forget about affective families—the law almost never recognizes any instances of affective kinship where there is no biological relationship, with the exception of formal adoption. So, if families are not always based on sexual relations or affection, what are they based on? How do we as a nation, as a society, decide who can be considered a family? Or—more importantly—who gets to decide?

"Culture warriors" in the United States bemoan the "destruction of the family" that comes with legislation supporting the recognition of same-sex unions or adoption by one or both partners of a same-sex couple. This same segment had the same complaint when women began agitating for political recognition. Today, as in the nineteenth century, these social conservatives rely on a definition of family based on a heterosexual, monogamous, preferably Christian marriage, where sexual activity occurs only after marriage and primarily for the creation of new life. These children are welcomed into the family, and they are all tied by biological, religious, and emotional bonds. The father of these children stands at the head of the family, a bulwark never failing, the chief decision-maker and the chief wage earner (roles which are not merely incidentally

linked). The mother of these children loves them unconditionally, sacrifices her own well-being to theirs, and trains them to adhere to her beliefs. In return for this care and love, the children obey their parents and will care for them in turn when they grow old. One can see the benefits of such an arrangement. Everyone knows their role, everything tidily works for the betterment of humankind. The family is a succinct, affective, legal unit, and everything is simple. The problem is humans aren't simple. Families rarely, if ever, exist in this form in life (their main place is in fiction).

Already, a huge cultural shift in the ways families are structured has begun. The visibility of queer families continues to increase in popular culture, and with these new conceptions comes political pushback. We live in a nation led by a biracial president, watch reality shows following "sister wives" (*Sister Wives*), and follow the stories of celebrity international adoptions such as those by Madonna and Angelina Jolie. Today, there are more interracial marriages (United States Census Bureau; Wang),[104] multiracial children (Saulny),[105] transracial and international adoptions ("Parenting Dilemmas"),[106] mothers working (Parker and Wang), and fathers providing childcare than ever before.[107] Attitudes towards marriage are changing: In 2011, only 51% of those 18 and older in the United States were married, "a record low" for the country (Cohn, et al.). Middle-aged

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[104] 9.5% of all (heterosexual) marriages in the United States were interracial, according to the 2010 census, up from 7.4% in 2000 (United States Census Bureau). The percentage of interracial opposite-sex cohabitating couples rose from 15% in 2000 to 18% in 2010, and that of interracial same-sex cohabitating couples rose from 14% in 2000 to 20% in 2010 (United States Census Bureau). Pew Research Center's analysis of data from the United States Census Bureau's American Community Survey in conjunction with its own polling data finds that in 2010, about 15% of new marriages in the United States were interracial, compared to only 6.7% in 1980 (Wang).

[105] The *New York Times* reports that the 2010 United States census recorded an almost 50% increase in the population of multiracial children since 2000 (Saulny).

[106] A recent story on NPR reported that "approximately 40% of adoptions in America are transracial—and that the number is growing" ("Parenting Dilemmas").

[107] According to a Pew Research poll, mother have reported increasing their percentage of time spent on paid work from 8% to 21% from 1965 to 2011 (Parker and Wang). Fathers reported increasing their percentage of time spent on childcare from 2.5% to 7% in that same time (Parker and Wang).

Americans have increasingly adopted the financial responsibility of both aging parents and young or adult children (Parker and Patten).[108] Families are often constituted with reproductive technologies, and some choose to include sperm donors or surrogate mothers in their family circles (Holson). For better or for worse, these signal cultural shifts in how families are lived and understood. I believe it is impossible to move forward with integrity towards true progress without a thorough understanding of the history of family in the United States and around the world. It is my hope that this dissertation will further and deepen this effort by advancing a hypothesis about the nature of families as we experience them.

The literature examined in this dissertation provides insight into the ways that families are constituted, confirmed, and lived. Through the ambiguity surrounding characters such as Young Otello, Tiff, Tom Driscoll, or Prynnella, we begin to see that the discreet categories we have constructed breaking down, and with them, the notions that family can only take a few specific forms. Literature provides us with tools for navigating ambiguity, as well as the opportunity to live comfortably with ambiguity and accept it as a part of life. I hope that this dissertation communicates the great value I see in ambiguity. Ambiguity, I think, is a circumstance that we need to accept and embrace more in our understanding of literature, history, and human relations. Rather than relentlessly attempting to ascribe fixed meaning to a process, person, or relationship, the literature teaches us to allow the ambiguity to stand as an invitation to create new meaning in a continual process of understanding that we will never truly understand.

[108] In 2012, 47% of adults aged 40 to 59 reported both having a parent over 65 years of age and supporting at least one child (Parker and Patten)

Literature allows multiple possibilities to exist simultaneously, and that is my dream for the formation of families as well. Understanding family as relying on actions and narrative rather than biology, as I suggest in this dissertation, has the potential for radical political meaning. Accepting family as performative demands new legal and social structures to allow persons to construct their own families, including allowing inheritance rights to those not necessarily connected by biological or sexual ties. It means allowing women the ability to decide not to marry or procreate without harassment or demonization. It means providing legal protections to unmarried same-sex *and* opposite-sex couples. It means expanding conceptions of family to accommodate those constituted by non-traditional reproductive technologies. It means opening the conception of family to include multiracial, multigenerational, nonbiological, and polyamorous figurations. These represent huge changes in the way we conceptualize ourselves as individuals and as a society, and I do not expect to see them manifest in my lifetime. I do believe, however, that the study of literature and history can open up new ways of seeing the world, which can lead to political and social action.

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Appendix A: Full Text of Rachel Baker Gale's *No Men Wanted*

Characters.
ELIZABETH RAWLEY and ISABELLE GRANGER. *Girl Bachelors.*
PRYNNELLA ABERCROMBIE, *their maid.*

Costumes modern.

SCENE.—*Living –room of the girl bachelors. Entrances R., L., and C. A small table C. laid for two. Up stage R., dressing-table with chairs. Screen around it. The same up stage L. Large chair down R. Small couch down L., with small table in front of it, upon which is desk telephone.*

(*Discovered at door C.,* PRYNNELLA *with two boxes, which she holds in front of face as she enters; coming down to table drops them in chair.*)

PRYNNELLA. Talk about de bird in de hand! It aint' [sic] in it wid boxes when dey come double. (*Looking at boxes with hands upon hips.*) Now, who could hab sent me dese yere? (*Reads address upon hat-box.*) "Miss Prynnella Abercrombie." (*Same business with other box.*) "Miss Prynnella Abercrombie." Dat's my name, sho's yer born. (*Opens hat-box and takes out evening hat.*) I declar to goodness! My Persimmons done sent me a hat. He an me gwine to de hop concert to-night, if I can get off widout de young ladies a knowing of it. If dey knew I had a Persimmons, dere would be a heap ob trouble. (*Puts on hat and admires herself in glass.*) Dere will be a fluttering ob Persimmons heart-strings when he sees dis yere picture. (*Takes coat from the other box; same business with coat.*) Prynnella, youse jest made, you is. (*Listens.*) De young ladies! (*Removes hat and coat quickly.*) Me an de young ladies hab agreed to hab no followers for a year, an' me wid a heart jest a buzzing like a buz-saw [sic] when I see my Persimmons. (*About to exit with boxes.*) It's no use—when a woman's heart begins to flutter, all de good intentions to give matrimony de other side ob de road won't hold it steady. (*Exits.*)

ISABELLE (*enters cautiously; looks about; goes to door C. and calls softly*). Prynnella! (*Comes down, taking off hat and coat.*) I feel quite like a thief entering my own apartment in such a cautious manner. Having accepted Mr. Meriton's invitation to the Pop Concert tonight, Elizabeth must not know when I leave the house. Poor dear! I feel guilty to deceive her so. (*Leans against table.*) Let me see. Yes, I will have a headache and retire to my room early.

PRYN. (*enters C.*). Did you done call me, Miss Isabelle?

ISA. Yes. (*Mysteriously.*) Is Miss Elizabeth at home?

PRYN. Not yet, Miss.

ISA. Has anything come for me?

PRYN. Only letters, Miss Isabelle.

ISA. Has anything come for *you*?

PRYN. (*excitedly*). For me, Miss Isabelle? W-what could dere come for me?

ISA. A hat-box.

PRYN. Y-yes, Miss Isabelle, but—

ISA. Sh! It is for me.

PRYN. What! My Persimmons done send you a hat!

ISA. Persimmons! Who is he? (*Sternly.*) Prynnella, have you a follower?

PRYN. Y-as, Miss Isabelle, I must 'fess he done follow, but he ain't done *cotch* [sic] up quite yet.

ISA. Remember our contract, Prynnella. He must be kept at arm's length for a year.

PRYN. Arm's length! Lor', Miss Isabelle! If he's only that fur away, he'll cotch me sooner than a whole year.

ISA. Where is the hat-box?

PRYN. I'se gwine to fetch it. (*Goes up stage.*)

ISA. One moment, Prynnella. Bring it here and put it under my dressing-table. Miss Elizabeth must not see it. Con you keep a secret?

PRYN. Ise powerful good at such things.

ISA. I am going to the Pop Concert to-night.

PRYN. You be, Miss Isabelle!

ISA. Did you say that there were letters for me?

PRYN. Yes, Miss. I done put dem into your room.

ISA. Very well. (*Crosses to door up L.*) Prynnella, remember it is a secret. Sh! (*Exits.*)

PRYN. I declare to goodness! When it comes to a new hat and a secret, I can see de finish to no matrimony. (*Exits laughing*.)

ELIZABETH (*enters cautiously; listens at door L., then at door C.; calls*). Prynnella! (*Comes down.*) I wonder if my coat has arrived. If Isabelle should know that I have accepted an invitation to the Pop Concert to-night, she would never forgive me. (*Listens.*) She is coming now. (*Pretends to be very indignant and walks up and down the stage.*)

ISA. (*enters reading letter; sees* ELIZABETH). Oh! here you are, Elizabeth. What is the matter? (*Sits in chair down R.*)

ELIZA. Oh, these men! It requires a sledge-hammer to impress it upon them that they are not wanted. (*Takes off hat and coat and throws them down.*)

ISA. Yes, I know. Bores, every one of them.

ELIZA. Whom do you think that I met at our door with flowers for you?

ISA. Cannot imagine.

ELIZA. (*severly*). Mr. Thomas Meriton.

ISA. (*aside*). How nice of Tom. (*Aloud.*) That man again?

ELIZA. Yes, and I gave him a piece of my mind that he will not soon forget.

ISA. (*aside*). Poor Tom! (*Aloud.*) Where are the flowers?

ELIZA. Isabelle Granger! What do you take me for! Do you think that I would encourage him by accepting them for you?

ISA. O-oh! Of course not. You did perfectly right, Elizabeth.

ELIZA. The audacity of these men. Here we are, two sensible young women, showing the world that we can be happy though unmarried. (*Sits upon arm of* ISABELLE*'s chair.*) Awfully jolly and cosy [sic], isn't it, Isabelle?

ISA. Just immense! I never believed that a bachelor apartment could be so nice. (*Aside.*) I wonder if those flowers were violets.

ELIZA. What did you say, dear?

ISA. Nothing. I was thinking about those violets—

I mean flowers. This is showing the men, Elizabeth, that we do not care that for them. (*Snaps fingers.*)

ELIZA. (*same business*). Nor that—nor that—nor that! I would not cross the room to speak to one of them.

ISA. Neither would I. (*Telephone rings; both start.*) I will go.

ELIZA. No, let me.

ISA. No, I insist. (*Crosses and sits at telephone.*)

ELIZA. (*aside*). If it should be John!

ISA. Hallo—yes. Hallo—yes—Miss Rawley—lives here—yes.

ELIZA. (*aside*). It *is* John.

ISA. (*to* ELIZABETH). Mr. Remington, Elizabeth. I will settle *him.*

ELIZA. But he may have something important—

ISA. (*through telephone*). Hallo—very sorry, Mr. Remington, but she cannot speak with you. She is not well this evening.

ELIZA. Isabelle!

ISA. Oh, no, could not think of disturbing her.

ELIZA. But, Isabelle—

ISA. No, couldn't possible do it. Good-by. (*Rises.*) There, Elizabeth! You can thank me for *that.* (*Crosses to her room and exits.*)

ELIZA. Thank you for upsetting everything. Now, he won't meet me at all. I must leave the house early. (*Takes up transmitter.*) No (*puts it down*), it would never do to telephone him from here. How shall I manage it? (*Thinks.*) I will sprain my ankle and retire to my room early. (PRYNNELLA *enters with hat-box; sees* ELIZABETH *and turns to exit,* ELIZABETH *discovers her.*) Prynnella.

PRYN. (*hides box behind her and looks in at door* C.). Yas, Miss Elizabeth.

ELIZA. Bring in the box. (PRYNNELLA *hesitates.*) Bring it to me. I know all about it.

PRYN. But, Miss Elizabeth, it's—

ELIZA. Yes, I know. Put it under my dressing-table.

PRYN. (*aside; crossing to dressing-table*). Miss Isabelle's hat! Dere will be a heap ob trouble now.

ELIZA. (*bringing* PRYNNELLA *down front*). Prynnella, that box contains a new coat.

PRYN. Lor'! Miss Elizabeth! I thought it was a hat.

ELIZA. (*mysteriously*). Miss Isabelle must not know it, but I am going to the Pop Concert to-night. (ISABELLE *enters;* ELIZABETH *changes manner.*) Let us have supper at once, Prynnella.

PRYNNELLA *exits.*

ISA. I do believe that I shall have one of these dreadful headaches. (*Looks behind her screen for box.*)

ELIZA. Oh, I hope not. I thought that we would have such a cosy evening together. (*Sits at dressing-table and arranges her hair.*)

ISA. (*seated at R. of table*). Yes, I have been thinking about it all day.

PRYNNELLA *enters with teakettle and plate of toast.*

ISA. (*aside to* PRYNNELLA). My hat-box is not under my dressing-table.

PRYN. But, Miss Isabelle, I—

ISA. Bring it at once. I will keep watch.

PRYN. But—

ISA. Not another word. Go. (PRYNNELLA *exits shaking her head.*) How shall I manage it. (*Watches at door C.*)

ELIZA . (*seated at table*). Come, Elizabeth, [sic] the toast will be cold.

ISA. Yes, in one moment.

ELIZA. How nervous you are.

ISA. (*comes down and sits at table*). A headache always makes me very nervous. (*Looks at* ELIZABETH *intently*.) What have you done to yourself?

ELIZA. Why, what is the matter?

ISA. I never saw your hair so unbecoming.

ELIZA. Dear me! (*Rises and arranges hair at dressing-table;* ISABELLE *runs to door C. and waves frantically.* PRYNNELLA *appears at door C. with another box.* ISABELLE *takes it and runs behind screen.*)

PRYN. (*busies herself at table*). It's mighty queer how dese young ladies done behave.

ISA. (*behind screen, looking at hat-box*). Strange looking hat-box. (*Returns to table.*)

ELIZA. (*crosses to table and sits*). There, is that better?

ISA. Decidedly. (*Leans head upon hand.*) Oh, my head!

ELIZA. This cup of tea will make you feel better.

(PRYNNELLA *takes cup from* ELIZABETH *and gives it to* ISABELLE.)

ISA. I shall retire early.

ELIZA. Oh, do! That is—it will be better for your head. (*Sighs.*) Of course it will be dull without you, dear.

ISA. It is so fortunate that I am not going out to-night.

PRYN. (*astonished.*) What, Miss Isabelle!

ISA. (*giving her a look*). Do be careful, Prynnella. When you jump like that, you jar my head terribly.

PRYN. I begs your pardon, Miss Isabelle.

ISA. Oh, my head! Oh, my head! (*Bell rings; both rise.*) I will go.

ELIZA. Certainly not. (PRYNNELLA *exits.*) I never saw you quite so nervous, Isabelle.

ISA. It is this horrid headache.

PRYN. (*enters with two boxes; aside*). Boxes 'pears to come double ebery time tonight. (*Aloud.*) Something for both ob you Misses.

ELIZA. (*opening box; aside*). John!

ISA. (*same business*). Tom.

TOGETHER. Violets! (*Look at one another; laugh heartily.*)

ELIZA. If this isn't the best joke.

ISA. I should say so. I saw these violets down town, and knowing that you loved them so—

ELIZA. Yes, and I could not resist buying these for you. (*They exchange flowers, both laughing.*)

ISA. How thoughtful of—both of us. I shall wear mine now. (*Rises quickly.*) Oh, my head! (*Crosses and sits in large chair.*)

ELIZA. Try my smelling salts. (*Rises and crosses to dressing-table; pretends to sprain her ankle.*) Oh, dear!

(PRYNNELLA *removing dishes and cloth from table.*)

ISA. What have you done? (*Crosses to her.*)

ELIZA. (*with an exaggerated limp up and down stage*). I turned my ankle. Oh, dear!

ISA. Let me look at it.

ELIZA. (*limping to couch*). No, indeed, not with your poor head aching so. Come and rub it, Prynnella. (PRYNNELLA *brings footstool and places* ELIZABETH*'s foot upon it.*) Oh, do be careful, Prynnella. Oh, dear! a glass of water, I feel faint. (PRYNNELLA and ISABELLE *both rush to table for water.*) Thank you. (PRYNNELLA *rubbing her ankle.*) It is so fortunate that I am not going out this evening.

PRYN. (*astonished.*). What, Miss Elizabeth!

ELIZA. (*pushes her away and looks at her*). Do be careful, Prynnella. When you jump like that, you jar my ankle.

ISA. Let me see if it is swelling.

ELIZA. No, no, you shall not touch it. Remember, you have a headache.

ISA. (*leans head back in chair*). Yes. Oh, my head! Do rub it, Prynnella. (PRYNNELLA *crosses and runs to her*.) Gently.

ELIZA. Prynnella, ease my foot a little. (PRYNNELLA *crosses and changes position of foot.*)

ISA. Oh, my head! (PRYNNELLA *runs to her*; *business of both calling* PRYNNELLA *at once until she dances from one side to the other very much excited.*)

ELIZA. If you will help me to my room, Prynnella.

PRYN. 'Deed I will, Miss Elizabeth. Ise powerful sorry. (*Assists her to rise.*) Oh, do be careful! [sic]

ISA. Let me help.

ELIZA. No, no, Prynnella will take care of me. (*At door up* L.) I hope that you will feel better in the morning.

ISA. I hope so. If you need anything, be sure and call me.

ELIZA. I will. Good-night.

ISA. Good-night. (ELIZABETH *exits with* PRYNNELLA .) Poor Elizabeth! She must be suffering. It is heartless to leave her, but I will be all the more devoted to-morrow. I will wait until she has surely retired, then—I am off for a lark. (*Exits into her room.*)

PRYN. (*enters and puts the room in order while talking*). Mighty queer! Miss Elizabeth won't let me help. Says she gwine to sit up a while. Powerful strange, when both was to go to de hop concert, an' I was gwine, too. (*Thinks a moment.*) I declar to goodness! Miss Isabelle in dat room wid a terrible bad headache—an' Miss Elizabeth in dat one wid a powerful bad ankle—an' here I be! Nothin' de matter wid me. I'se all right. Nothin' to hinder me from goin' to de hop concert. Well, I guess not. Dey won't want de new hat an' coat. I'll change wid em for the ebening. (*Takes her hat and coat, which should be grotesque, from hall* C*; takes hat from box and puts hers in its place; same business with coat. Bell rings as she pins on hat; takes it off.*) Miss Elizabeth done call me. (*Knocks at* ELIZABETH*'s door; waits a moment, then opens it.*) Yas, Miss Elizabeth. Yas, --yas, I will, honey. (*Comes down; same business with coat; bell rings; takes it off.*) It's Miss Isabelle. (*Same business at door.*) If dose bells ring again, I don't get to no hop concert. (*Puts on hat and coat hurriedly.*) Persimmons won't keep me at no arm's length when he sees dese yer. (*Takes both bunches of violets.*) If you ain't jest made to-night, Prynnella. I gets de hat, de coat, de violets, an' all de fun. (*Exits with a great deal of manner.*)

ISA. (*enters cautiously; crosses to door up* L.*, listens and comes down*). It is time for me to leave the house, and Tom promised to meet me at the corner. I am just dying to wear my new hat. (*Takes hat from box.*) It looks like an antique laurel wreath. Prynnella must have given me the wrong box. I will ask her. (*Exits* C. ELIZABETH

opens her door cautiously, looks out, listens, steps out, then exits hurriedly and re-enters.) No Prynnella. I suppose that I must wear this old thing. (*Puts it on.*) No hat-pin—in my room. How provoking. (*Exits into room.*)

ELIZA. (*opens door; crosses to door R., listens and then comes down*). I hope that Isabelle is asleep and has forgotten her headache. (*Laughs.*) My little scheme worked beautifully. (*Takes coat from box.*) My new coat! It looks more like one from ancient Rome. There must be some mistake. I will ask Prynnella. (*Exits C.*)

ISA. (*enters wearing hat*). I must look like an unpruned grapevine. (*Sits at dressing-table behind screen.*)

ELIZA. (*enters C.*). I cannot find Prynnella.

ISA. (*aside*). Elizabeth! (*Takes off hat and looks over screen.*) What is the matter, Elizabeth?

ELIZA. Why, Isabelle, how you startled me!

ISA. I left the smelling salts on my dressing-table. How is your ankle?

ELIZA. (*limping*). Just the same. I was looking for Prynnella. (*Yawns.*) Are you going to sit up?

ISA. (*same business*). No; going back to my room in just a moment. Good-night.

ELIZA. (*limping to door*). Good-night. (*Exits.*)

ISA. That was a narrow escape. (*Puts on hat again.*) I must do penance a whole year for this deception. (*Looking for violets.*) How stupid! Left the violets in my room. (*Exits.*)

PRYN. (*enters very much out of breath, hat all awry*). I declar to goodness! no automobile coats for me! I was never so skeered in my life. At one corner ob de street, one man walks up to me an' he says, "good ebening, Miss Rawley!" I was so frightened. I jest walked along a trembling like a mould ob jelly. At de very next corner if another man didn't say, "Be that you, Miss Granger?" I couldn't say nothing, I was so paralyzed, but I made a bee line for dis yere house and here I be. (*Takes off hat and coat and opens boxes.*) For de Lawd's sake! Some one done take my hat and coat. Shure's your born, dere will be trouble now. (*Has violets in hand.*)

ISA. (*enters*). Oh, you have my violets, Prynnella.

PRYN. Yes, I was jest gwine to put dem into water for you, Miss Isabelle.

ISA. It won't be necessary. I will wear them. (*Pins on violets.*) Oh Prynnella! this is not the hat that I ordered.

PRYN. (*pointing to the box*). Bery box I done brought in. (*Changes subject quickly.*) How is your head, Miss Isabelle?

ISA. (*laughs*). Not so bad but that I can go to the Pop Concert. Sh! Mum's the word, Prynnella.

PRYN. You ought to have an automobile coat, Miss Isabelle.

ISA. I should be afraid of the combination. Good-night. (*Exits.*)

PRYN. Dat was jest de trouble. Dere was *too much* combination.

ELIZA. (*enters.*) Have been looking everywhere for you, Prynnella.

PRYN. Miss Elizabeth! You done walk on dat turned ankle?

ELIZA. (*laughs*). Of course, it was turned—when I walked.

PRYN. And you didn't hab no pain. (ELIZABETH *shakes her head.*) No nuffin? You ought to go on to de stage.

ELIZA. Are you sure that you gave me the right box, Prynnella? This is not the coat that I ordered?

PRYN. I gave you jest the one what was giben me. Sure's you're born, honey.

ELIZA. I shall be late. Good-night. (*Exits.*)

PRYN. Done forgot her violets. (*At door c.*) Miss Elizabeth!

ELIZA. (*at door* C.). Well!

PRYN. (*hands her violets*). You forgot dese yere.

ELIZA. Oh, yes. (*Exits.*)

PRYN. Both de young Misses powerful mystified about de new hat and de Monte Carlos coat. (*Business of placing boxes behind screen and putting the room in order.*) I wonder whar Persimmons is. He promised to meet me at de corner, but youse don't catch dis yere female out again dis yere night. No, sir! not for all de hop concerts an' Persimmonses in de world. I'se tremblin' now, I'se so skeered. (*Takes book from table.*) I'll jest hab de time ob my life wid dis yere book. (*Places small chair in front of couch; sits upon couch and places feet upon chair.*) Not so bad, Prynnella. I'll be powerful glad when dis yere Romeo and his Juliet gets through wid dere troubles. (*Reads and finally falls asleep; book slips to floor.*)

ISA. (*outside*). Prynnella! Prynnella! (PRYNNELLA *still asleep; at door c.*) Oh, Prynnella!

PRYN. (*waking; springs to her feet*). I declar to goodness! (*Runs up stage and meets* ISABELLE.)

ISA. Oh, Prynnella! (*Bursts into tears.*)

PRYN. What eber is de matter, Miss Isabelle?

ISA. (*with head on* PRYNNELLA*'s shoulder*). Oh, dear! Oh, dear! that horrid man!

PRYN. What man, honey?

ISA. (*crying*). A—a horrid colored man.

PRYN. (*aside*). Must hab been Persimmons.

ISA. Came up to me and said "Is that you, honey" (PRYNNELLA *shaking with laughter.*) Prynella, are you laughing at me?

PRYN. bless yer, no, honey, dat's emotion. I was a feeling for you.

ISA. And Tom didn't meet me. Oh, dear! Oh, dear! (*Weeps upon* PRYNNELLA*'s shoulder.*)

ELIZA. (*runs on; does not see* ISABELLE*; goes to other side of* PRYNNELLA*; same business*). Oh, dear! Oh, dear! I was never so frightened in my life. A colored man spoke to me. (*Hides her face and cries.*)

(*sees* ELIZABETH). Elizabeth Rawley!

ELIZA. (*looking up*). Isabelle Granger! Where have you been?

ISA. My head ached so terribly, I could not stay in the house. Where have you been?

ELIZA. My ankle pained me so, I thought that perhaps the fresh air would make it feel better. (*Bursts into tears.*) But it didn't—I met a horrid man, as black as the ace of spades.

ISA. (*same business*). So did I.

ELIZA. (*limping to couch*). He called me "honey."

ISA. (*crossing to large chair*). That is what he called me. (*Leans back in chair*). Oh, dear! my head. It would have been better if I had remained at home.

ELIZA. (*giving coat to* PRYNNELLA*, who exits with it*). I wish that I had. (*Business of both saying.*) Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Who could it have been?

ISA. Elizabeth, Prynnella has a follower, she told me so.

ELIZA. That explains it, then. He was waiting to see her. Isabelle, we must be very severe with her. No men are allowed in these bachelor apartments.

ISA. Certainly not.

ELIZA. You must speak to her, Isabelle.

ISA. Oh, no, my head aches terrible.

ELIZA. Then I will. (PRYNNELLA *enters.*) Prynnella, please lift my foot upon the chair.

PRYN. Yes, Miss Elizabeth. (*Crosses to her; business with ankle.*)

ISA. Bring me my shawl, Prynnella. (PRYNNELLA *places shawl over* ISABELLE*'s shoulders.*)

ELIZA. Prynnella, I have heard something that displeases me very much.

PRYN. I'se sorry, Miss Elizabeth, but I ain't done nothin' I can think of.

ELIZA. Did you not tell Miss Isabelle that you had a follower?

PRYN. Yes, Miss, but as I done tole her, he ain't cotched up yet.

ELIZA. We were to have no thought of matrimony for a year, and here you are, at the end of a month, encouraging a man and allowing him to pay you attention. I am very much surprised.

PRYN. (*crying*). But, Miss Elizabeth, if I'se a fascinator, it ain't my fault.

ISA. He must have been the man who spoke to us to-night. What does he look like?

PRYN. He's bery good looking, Miss Isabelle.

ELIZA. If he ever comes near this house again, or you speak to him—

ISA. Or look at him—

ELIZA. You will be discharged at once.

PRYN. It's mighty hard, Misses, I don't go to no card clubs—no theatres, an' I think that I might have something frivolous.

ELIZA. That will do, Prynnella. (*Bell rings;* PRYNNELLA *exits.*) There! I have done my duty. I was sorry to hurt Prynnella's feelings, but the dignity of this establishment must be upheld.

ISA. Of course. If we are not careful, she would soon be accepting an invitation to something. A pop concert, for instance.

ELIZA. (*looks at her*). Y-yes, it might happen.

PRYN. (*enters with two notes; holds up notes; aside*). Twins again! (*Gives a note to each, and exits with dignity. Both open notes hurriedly and read, then rise suddenly.*)

ELIZA. Isabelle Granger!

ISA. Elizabeth Rawley!

ELIZA. This note is intended for you.

ISA. And this for you. (*Both very much excited; walk up and down.*)

ELIZA. Your headache was all a farce.

ISA. And your limping all a sham. (*Imitates.*) "Oh, my ankle!" (*Limps up and down stage.*)

ELIZA. "Oh, my poor head!" (*Imitates her.*) "Men are such horrid bores."

ISA. "It requires a sledge-hammer to impress it upon the men that they are not wanted." (*Both stop and look at one another; then laugh heartily.*) We are in the same box, anyway.

ELIZA. Yes both guilty, but I would not have believed it of you, Isabelle.

ISA. I thought that you hated men.

ELIZA. (*shyly*). I *did*.

ISA. Now that the cat is out of the bag, I must say that I hate girl bachelors!

ELIZA. (*have exchanged notes*). So do I. Oh, it is such a relief to have you know it. (*Reading note.*) John says that he met some one at the corner who came out of this house, and when he spoke to her, she ran away.

ISA. Just what Tom says. Who could it have been?

TOGETHER. Prynnella!

ISA. We have all been deceiving one another. She is no worse than we are and ought to be forgiven.

ELIZA. As we each have a follower, we cannot very well help it. (*Goes to door* C. *and calls* PRYNNELLA.) It is not too late to meet the men now.

ISA. Just the thing.

PRYNNELLA *enters, looking very unhappy.*

ELIZA. Prynnella, we were very cross to you a few moments ago.

ISA. Yes, and made you feel badly.

PRYN. I'specs you did, Miss Isabelle. Neber had no cross word from either ob you since I'se been in dis yere house.

ELIZA. We have decided that you may encourage your Persimmons.

PRYN. (*looks first at one and then at the other*). You really mean it!

ISA. Yes, Prynnella, we have decided to be girl bachelors no longer.

PRYN. Lor' bless yer, Misses! 'pears to me dat's de most sensiblest thing youse can do. Miss Elizabeth and Miss Isabelle, I has a 'fession to make. I was a goin' to de hop concert.

TOGETHER. Hop concert!

PRYN. Yas, Misses; an' one more. I thought as youse both wouldn't know it, an' I left de house.

ELIZA. Prynnella!

PRYN. I did, an' at de corner two gentlemen done spoke to me.

ELIZA. My John!

ISA. My Tom! (*Bell rings.*) Quick, Prynnella, there they are now. (PRYNNELLA *rushes off* C.*; business of both girls rushing to dressing-tables and arranging hair*.)

PRYN. (*enters.*) De twins—I mean, two gennlemen [sic] to see both of you Misses.

ISA. My hat, Prynnella. (PRYNNELLA *takes new hat from box.*) Where did this come from?

PRYN. From dis yere box.

ISA. But it was not here ten minutes ago.

PRYN. (*innocently*). Then somebody must hab worn it out an' brung it back again.

ELIZA. My gloves, Prynnella. (PRYNNELLA *gives her gloves, then takes coat from box.*)

PRYN. I 'specs dis yere powerful becoming, Miss Elizabeth.

ELIZA. Prynnella Abercrombie, you're a witch. Where did you find it?

PRYN. In dis yere box.

ISA. Quick, Prynnella, my gloves. (PRYNNELLA *rushes from one to the other.*)

TOGETHER. Violets! (*Both pin on violets and rush to door.*)

ISA. (*slapping fingers*). I wouldn't give that for a girl bachelor. (*Both rush off.*)

PRYN. (*imitates her*). My hat! (*Pins on hat.*) My gloves! (*Same business.*) Violets! (*Takes large bunch of flowers.*) Humph! Girl bachelor. (*Rushes off.*)

CURTAIN

Source: Gale, Rachel Baker. *No Men Wanted.* Boston: Walter H. Baker Co. Pub., 1903. Print.