RICE UNIVERSITY

"If These Walls Could Talk": The Semiotics of Domestic Objects And the Expression of Ipseity In Nineteenth-Century American Women's Literature

by

Lauri Donna Coulombe

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

Doctor of Philosophy

APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE:

Scott Derrick, Associate Professor,
Director
English

Helena Michie, Agnes Cullen Arnold
Professor in Humanities
English

Deborah Harter, Associate Professor
French

HOUSTON, TEXAS

MAY 2008

INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

ABSTRACT

"If These Walls Could Talk":

The Semiotics of Domestic Objects

And the Expression of Ipseity

In Nineteenth-Century American Women's Literature

by

Lauri Donna Coulombe

This project examines the decorative/architectural encoding of women's transgressive individualist desires in nineteenth-century America as depicted in women's literature. This literature illustrates the crucial role the interior of the home and everyday domestic objects such as wallpaper, looking glasses and textiles played in the formation and expression of women's ipseity. Because of the difficulty of narrating such transgressive stories of the interior of the self as the search for selfhood, individuality, sexual or intellectual freedom, these writers told their stories through narratives of "things" with which they were intimately familiar, allowing the lives of domestic objects and spaces to express the socially subversive lives and experiences of the women who lived among them. In my

examination of this literature, I analyze wallpaper as a replacement object for written text and intellectual stimulation, looking glasses as tools through which to conceptualize and find evidence of a developing individualist self, "creature comforts" as necessities in the display of an independent and sexually aware self, and intimacy with personal possessions as indicators of intimacy with the owner of those possessions.

Although critics recognize the importance of women having a "room of one's own" in which to develop a sense of self, very little has been said about the importance of the actual interiors of the rooms in which these women lived, despite the fact that that there was an immense quantity of objects found in the homes of the middle and upper classes in the nineteenth century and that this quantity is reflected in literature, and despite the seriousness with which women were expected to study and utilize these objects. Theories of identity formation in literary studies lack an approach that considers how identity is mediated by and revealed through a subject's non-consumeristic interaction with objects and specifically with objects that have what I call "object individuality." Objects, social scientists argue, have a direct impact on our "selves," and, as the inherent qualities and particularizing features of an object limit and direct an object's use and meaning, object individuality has a direct impact on subject individuality and should be considered.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Scott Derrick, Helena Michie and Deborah Harter for giving their intellectual expertise and time, and for sharing my journey through these object lessons. I also want to thank my family, especially my parents, Gerald and Aileen, and my sister Cheri, for their love and support over the years, and Toby for providing both day in and day out during the whole of this project. I would not have made it this far without them. They have kept these object lessons in perspective.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION:

How Walls Talk: The Semiotics of Domestic Objects 1

CHAPTER ONE:

Looking Glasses and Ipseity: Deciphering the Reflections in Caroline Lee Hentz's *Ernest Linwood* 83

CHAPTER TWO:

Creature Comforts and "Self" Denial: "A Crusade Against Duty" in Elizabeth Stoddard's *The Morgesons* 143

CHAPTER THREE:

Wallpaper and "Meaningful Work": "Hop[ing] for [a] better profession" in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wall-Paper" 214

CHAPTER FOUR:

Private Possessions and Sexual Expression: Becoming the Object of Affection in Edith Wharton's *The Reef* 258

CONCLUSION:

Shaking the Secret Selves out of Snuff-Boxes 299

BIBLIOGRAPHY 301

INTRODUCTION

How Walls Talk: The Semiotics of Domestic Objects

In this project, I argue that nineteenth-century American literature written by (and largely about and for) women illustrates the crucial role typical domestic objects and the architectural interior of the home played in the formation and expression of women's ipseity during this period in history.[1] These objects, including wallpaper, looking glasses, clothing, textiles, books and a note-case, are used or "misused" by female characters in order to reach ends that would have been considered highly improper or transgressive for their positions as white, middle- to upper-class women in the mid-nineteenth to early-twentieth centuries, making this use particularly unique and interesting. That is, these women, in searching for selfhood and individuality, sexual and intellectual freedom, were desiring and experiencing things they were not supposed to have, want, or, in some cases, even conceive of, according to the social standards of their times.

---

[1] According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "ipseity" is "Personal identity and individuality; selfhood." Although the terms "individuality," "selfhood" and "ipseity" are considered synonymous, there can be shades of difference. Whereas both "selfhood" and "individuality" have multiple meanings, some of which I consider in chapter one, "ipseity" appears to have no other definition than the one just given, and this is the reason I have chosen to use it in my title even though it is not in regular use today. I will use the three terms in their more synonymous senses throughout this project.

Due to the difficulties of narrating such complex and improper experiences of the interior of the self, the writers told their stories through narratives of the interior of the home, and thus in concrete, understandable, and familiar terms. The lives of these "things" and rooms gave expression to the lives and experiences of the women who lived among them, often by providing a physical manifestation of a difficult to describe or hard-to-define feeling or experience, but also by providing the means to achieving these feelings and experiences. I am not suggesting the authors were necessarily actively encoding these narratives, but one can only describe one's experiences through what one knows. These women, authors and characters, knew the home—it was their sphere, the center stage of their daily lives, whether they liked it or not. As a consequence, these complex experiences are rendered in terms of women's daily life experiences in the home.[2]

The natural benefit of using domestic objects and room interiors to describe complex and, particularly, subversive experiences is that these things were all part of the world women were expected to inhabit. As Elaine Freedgood

---

[2] I do not mean to suggest that being more or less restricted to the home was empowering for women, nor do I want to demonize the home and claim it was a prison. Rather, I want to complicate this binary. I do, however, also want to argue that the problem is not the home itself, but the lack of choice women had as to whether or not they would remain there, work there, and concentrate their energy there. Without access to both spheres, women were denied the same means men had with which to build those aspects of self that must be built socially, publicly, or communally. I think, like today, women probably wanted both a private home life and a public work life. As Charlotte Perkins Gilman writes in *Women and Economics* (1898), women should "live in it [the home] as a man lives in his home, spending certain hours of the day at work and others at home" (245).

reflects when writing about mahogany furniture in British novels in *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel* (2006): "[t]here is nothing particularly confusing, alarming, or notable about the presence of wooden furniture in a Victorian novel: it doesn't stand out, it just stands" (51). The use of these objects, furthermore, was accepted and even encouraged. As studying wallpaper, gazing in a mirror, redecorating one's room or touching a note-case are not in themselves violations of any nineteenth-century social codes, stories depicting such activities would not have appeared particularly transgressive. Embedded in these unassuming activities, however, are stories of women using objects in unconventional ways and in order to obtain goals they were not supposed to have. The authors, in turn, were knowingly or unknowingly participating in a semiotics of domestic object use in order to tell a part of the narrative that they may otherwise have been unable to tell. Women, characters and authors, were covertly expressing desires and changes in women's individuality through what was easily and abundantly available to them: the material culture that surrounded them.

That there was an immense quantity of things found in the homes of the middle and upper classes in the nineteenth century is well established, as is the contention that this quantity is reflected in the novels of the period. Freedgood, for example, writes that the "Victorian novel describes, catalogs, quantifies, and in general showers us with things" (1). Indeed, critics assert that there are more things depicted in the novels of the nineteenth century than there were during the

eighteenth, when, as Cynthia Wall argues, there existed an "old, deep suspicion of description as something that got in the way of narrative" (qtd. in Freedgood 4). In her analysis of objects in British novels, Freedgood contends that,

> Because we contemporary readers of Victorian fiction have lost many of the possible meanings of the things of those bulky, item-ful novels, what might be called the social destruction of meaning in the novel has unwittingly been abetted by practices of reading that ignore the literal or material qualities of objects, the very qualities that might take us back in time to the meanings and resonances these objects may have had for earlier readers. (51-52)

Like Freedgood, I intend to "follow[] the things of the novel as if they might be significantly, rather than weakly, meaningful"; but, rather than taking this journey in an attempt to see "if they might have ideas about *history* in them that the novel does not and perhaps could not narrate explicitly," I aim to see if these objects have ideas about the *women* who, historically, would have been connected to them, "that the novel does not and perhaps could not narrate explicitly" (52, my emphasis). The idea is to make the object into "what Marx would call a 'social hieroglyphic': to treat it as a complex and partly legible sign" (51). By treating objects as signs, we open up a new level of text; in terms of this project, that

means uncovering stories about the various desires and experiences of women who want simply to be themselves, or to be the "selves" they want to be. [3]

Although many critics have recognized and written about the importance of women having a space, a "room of one's own," in which to develop a sense of self or individuality, a recognition of the importance of the actual interiors of the rooms in which they lived is often completely absent from these studies. For example, in an updated introduction to her pioneering book on nineteenth-century women's domestic novels, *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America 1820-70* (1978, 1993), Nina Baym states that the novels she discusses advocate "an individualism that had not traditionally been a woman's option" (xx). She writes: "I perceive the novels as meaning to perform, and performing, emancipatory work by persuading women readers to insist on their right to personhood" (xx-xxi). Baym sees this personhood, or individualism, developing

---

[3] In order to highlight the idea of a self as a personal identity that one can own, deny, build, gain, lose and so on, and even as something that would have been considered new for women in the nineteenth century, I will distinguish between, for example, "herself" and "her self" as well as between "self-denial" and "self denial." In grammatical terms, this is the difference between using "self" as a noun and "-self" or "self-" as part of a reflexive pronoun (i.e. herself) or self-compound (i.e. self-denial). There are, for my purposes, distinct differences here. For example, "my self," as in "this self is mine," allows the self to be viewed more objectively and as something that can be possessed, whereas "myself" indicates simple reflexivity. If I write, for instance, "Cassandra lost *herself* in her domestic role," that would suggest Cassandra escapes into this role. If I write, on the other hand, "Cassandra lost *her self* in her domestic role," that would indicate that Cassandra has lost her identity, the essence of what makes Cassandra "Cassandra," by taking on a role that goes contrary to Cassandra's natural desires and way of being. Another example is the difference between "self-denial," which suggests a denial of things for the self, and "self denial," which would indicate a denial of self, of identity, rather than of things. These distinctions will be made throughout this study.

as the characters expand their "interior life and self-consciousness—they think, therefore they are" (xxi). She goes on to say that "the newly born self is protected and developed in a private space—a room of her own that bears the signature of her identity, materializes it, makes it available for scrutiny. The self, in some sense, is itself a domestic site" (xxi).

In order to illustrate that the novels are "committed" to the "motif of individual self-development," Baym conducts plot analyses of the stories (xli). In her focus on the actions of the characters, Baym surprisingly says almost nothing about the characters' homes, how they look, how they are furnished, and what part, if any, material objects play in the characters' developing selfhood, despite the fact that the novels are "generally set in homes and other social spaces that are fully described" (26). If these spaces are, as Baym writes, "fully described," should we not consider the possibility that there might be critical information embedded in these descriptions, particularly if we bear in mind just how many objects a full description would be likely to include? By not considering the physical manifestations of the home, Baym, when she argues that the protagonist of woman's fiction "had to create the domestic scene that represented her," seems to forget that this "scene" is also physical (xxvii). It is precisely this tangible aspect of the nineteenth-century woman's "domestic scene"—the actual walls, rooms, spaces and objects—that I want to explore.

One critic who conjoins domestic objects and spaces with selfhood is Gillian Brown. In *Domestic Individualism: Imagining Self in Nineteenth-Century*

America (1990), Brown argues "nineteenth-century American individualism takes on its peculiarly 'individualistic' properties as domesticity inflects it with values of interiority, privacy, and psychology" (1). In her analysis of "these domestic dimensions of individualism," Brown turns to themes such as interior decoration and architecture as "definitions and redefinitions of selfhood" (1). She goes on to say that the "nineteenth-century self-definitions this book explores locate the individual in his or her interiority, in his or her removal from the marketplace. Hence Stowe [the focus of Brown's first chapter] can identify the fate of slaves and the power of women with the state of home, political economy with domestic economy" (3). The selfhood or individualism that Brown examines is thus linked to the physical home and even with the things or objects within that home.

Despite claiming to be a study on individualism, Brown's book focuses not on what these household objects or their use in, for instance, home decoration say about the individual woman who uses or watches over or lives among these things, but on what they say about the home, the family, and, eventually, the nation. For instance, in her discussion of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* the system of slavery's "domestic violation" is

> nowhere . . . so marked as in the careless condition of the Southern kitchen. Dinah's kitchen in Little Eva St. Clare's New Orleans home "looked as if it had been arranged by a hurricane blowing through it." In Dinah's domestic arrangements, "the rolling pin is under the bed and the nutmeg grater is in her pocket with her tobacco—there are sixty-five

different sugar bowls, one in every hole in the house." (13)

Rather than expound upon the rolling pin and nutmeg grater and what they suggest about Dinah, who uses them; or about the mistress, who watches over Dinah and her use of these objects; or even about the master who owns the objects, the kitchen and, indeed, Dinah, Brown instead uses the location of these objects to illustrate a general sense of "promiscuous housekeeping" and "the variable state of Dinah's kitchen," which, in turn, signals the promiscuous and variable state of the home (and finally all homes like it across the nation) due to the institution of slavery (13,15). In this way, Brown's analysis focuses on institutions—the family, slavery, and the nation—rather than on the individual.

Similarly, while we know that Ophelia's meticulous housekeeping, as evidenced by her kitchen, shows that she "understand[s] the political nature of Dinah's housekeeping and therefore recognize[s] the political connection between Dinah's kitchen and slavery," we learn little more about Ophelia or this revealing kitchen despite the fact that it could likely say a great deal about Ophelia as an individual woman; indeed, Ophelia's kitchen seems to be important for Brown only in so far as it represents "the model American home" (14-16).[4] In such an analysis, individual objects or rooms lose what I will describe as their object individuality through their treatment as metonyms for the home, which, in turn, is a metonym for the nation. Likewise, characters like Dinah and

---

[4] What we do learn about Ophelia's kitchen is left unanalyzed. Brown writes that "In Ophelia's new England Home 'the old kitchen floor never seems stained or spotted; the tables, chairs and the various cooking utensils never seem deranged or disordered.' There, 'everything is once and forever rigidly in place'" (13).

Ophelia become representative types rather than individuals, who, furthermore, stand less for other similar women than for the homes from which they come, becoming metonyms themselves. I intend to honor this neglected individuality by focusing on the individual women whose lives put them most in touch—literally and figuratively—with domestic objects and other physical aspects of the home, and by granting these objects their own individuality.

This overlooked physicality of the home and its objects is also arguably lost in the popular analogy between the home and the self. In this view, the "[h]ousehold interior becomes a metaphor for the psyche" or "for a self now imagined as a three-dimensional, walled-off interiority" (Bryden and Floyd 10; Shamir 432). My analysis does not merely rehearse this popular metaphor and metonym whereby the home and its objects become important for selfhood only through their representative or symbolic capacity, but considers the very physicality of the house itself. This space, to borrow from Bachelard's title, is not only poetic.[5] While "all those spaces within—the inside of the chest, the inside of a wardrobe, the inside of a drawer—" may, as Bachelard believes, "enable[] us to image and imagine human interiority" (qtd. in Brown, *A Sense of Things* 7), I believe the house is more than "the topography of our intimate being" (Bachelard xxxii), more than a "*tool for analysis* of the human soul" (xxxiii). The home is also

[5] I am naturally referring to Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*.

a physical structure filled with physical objects—objects that help us to imagine *and* develop our interiority.[6]

How, one might ask, can objects such as furniture be involved in the process of developing selfhood? While the answer to this question can be found in the section "Object Individuality's Effect on Subject Individuality," the short answer is that objects are part of us. Evidence for this can be seen, for example, in our language, particularly if one examines the metaphors we use daily to describe our subjective experiences. In *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought* (1999), linguist George Lakoff and philosopher Mark Johnson explain that metaphors allow us to use sensorimotor experience (i.e. grasping an object) to describe, explain and understand subjective experience (i.e. understanding an idea). In fact, Lakoff and Johnson argue that we can "hardly" think about subjective experience without metaphor and that, in general, "abstract thought is mostly metaphorical" (59, 7).

Among these metaphors are "primary metaphors," which are "acquire[d] automatically and unconsciously via the normal process of neural learning," and are based on early, "everyday experience" that "pair subjective experience and judgment with sensorimotor experience" (56, 49). These experiences—subjective and sensorimotor—are "so regularly conflated—undifferentiated in experience—that for a time children do not distinguish between the two" (46). Lakoff and

---

[6] When critics argue that architectural interiors are personal interiors but neglect to examine the objects in those interiors, this, to me, suggests that the interiors of the persons are in some senses empty.

Johnson explain that "[u]niversal early experiences lead to universal conflations, which develop into universal (or widespread) conventional conceptual metaphors," and the "'associations made during the period of conflation are realized neurally in simultaneous activations that result in permanent neural connections being made across the neural networks that define conceptual domains" (46). That is, these metaphors "are realized in our brains *physically*" (59). They are, further "mostly beyond our control. They are a consequence of the nature of our brains, our bodies, and the world we inhabit" (59).

Lots of metaphors, including many primary ones, are based on conflations that involve objects. For example, the primary metaphor "Difficulties Are Burdens" (an example of which would be "she's weighed down by responsibilities"), describes the subjective experience of difficulty through the sensorimotor experience of exerting our muscles, such as to lift or carry heavy objects (50). Another primary metaphor, "Purposes Are Desired Objects" (i.e. "grabbing an opportunity"), conflates "satisfaction" with "holding a desired physical object" (53). Objects, therefore, are so integral to the lives of people universally that our actual, physical interactions with objects become the very real basis for understanding and describing many of our subjective experiences, including our conceptions of our selves.

Our conception of the self, according to Lakoff and Johnson, is "fundamentally metaphoric" (13). The metaphors we use to describe our "inner lives," which is to say our selves, are

> based on a fundamental distinction between . . . the Subject and one or more Selves. The Subject is the locus of consciousness, subjective experience, reason, will, and our "essence," everything that makes us who we uniquely are. There is at least one Self and possibly more. The Selves consist of everything else about us—our bodies, our social roles, our histories, and so on. (268)

There are also "five special cases of the basic Subject-Self metaphor [which] are grounded in four types of everyday experience," the first of which is "manipulating objects" (269). As Lakoff and Johnson write, "[h]olding onto and manipulating objects is one of the things we learn earliest and do most." Therefore, "[i]t should not be surprising that object control is the basis of one of the five most fundamental metaphors for our inner life. To control objects, we must learn to control our bodies. We learn both forms of control together. Self-control and object control are inseparable experiences from earliest childhood." This conflation gives rise to the primary metaphor "Self Control is Object Control" and its variations, such as "Self Control Is Object Possession" and "Taking Control Of Another's Self Is Taking Another's Possession" (270-73). These metaphors "capture the logic of much of inner experience and characterize how we reason about it" (288).

The use of objects in the metaphors that we use to think about and describe our selves shows that objects are part of us, both "in a metaphorical sense" and "in cold concrete actuality," as the experiences on which these metaphors are based involve the actual use of physical objects. As social scientists

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton write in *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self* (1981):

> It is . . . relatively easy to admit that the things people use, own, and surround themselves with might quite accurately reflect aspects of the owner's personality. Not surprisingly, the clothes one wears, the car one drives, and the furnishings of one's home, are all expressions of one's self, even when they act as disguises rather than as reflections. But it is more difficult to admit that the things one uses are in fact part of one's self; not in any mystical or metaphorical sense but in cold, concrete actuality . . . [because objects are signs and] [t]hese signs are part of what organizes my consciousness, and because my self is inseparable from the sign process that constitutes consciousness, that chair [in the author's living-room] is as much a part of my self as anything can possibly be. (14-15)

Although Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton assert that objects are part of us "*not* in any . . . metaphorical sense but in cold, concrete actuality" (my emphasis), as they explain, objects are signs that provide structure for our inner lives, our consciousness, and thus our conceptions of our selves, which is, I think, akin to what Lakoff and Johnson argue if one considers that the metaphors we use to also provide structure for our inner lives originate from the actual use of objects. Objects are, according to Lakoff and Johnson's analysis, part of us metaphorically *because* they are part of us "in cold, concrete actuality." In this sense, objects shape us by giving us the tools we need to have certain primary physical expe-

riences, experiences that, at one time in our lives, are so conflated with primary subjective experiences that they are indistinguishable, making the objects part of the self.

Lakoff and Johnson conclude that there may be a scientific or neurological connection between objects and persons in addition to the psychological connection already established. Of course, what I am most interested in is the literary connection, or the connection as represented in literature, and what I see the texts I examine in this project performing is a kind of literalization. That is, in these works, objects function like the metaphors we use to describe our experiences: they make subjective experiences conceivable by describing them in terms of physical or sensorimotor experiences, experiences we can "grasp" (to use the Understanding Is Grasping metaphor). In one chapter, for example, I examine a character who takes control over her self by learning how to possess objects, metaphorically and then literally, so that "Self Control" truly becomes "Object Possession." Objects in the literature I examine, as this example illustrates, both function like metaphors and take an active part in literalizing the metaphor by enabling the physical experience that allows us to understand a more complex, abstract experience.

To return to the question I began with, it is because the things one uses are so much a "part of one's self" that objects like furniture can be involved in the process of developing selfhood. It is, furthermore, as a result of this crucial connection between subjects and objects that the interior architecture of the home,

its rooms and objects, was able to provide a language for the nineteenth-century woman in which she could describe complex and even subversive thoughts, activities and behaviors, allowing the authors to—if even unconsciously—tell a story they otherwise may have had no way of telling.

OBJECT IDENTITY

While the study of material culture, of objects, of "things," has become increasingly popular in the context of literary studies, according to Bill Brown in his own important contribution to this field of inquiry, *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (2003), in this recent criticism, "the identity of objects has hardly been voiced as a question" (17). The absence of inquiry into "the identity of objects" that Brown's own study seeks to fill is, I believe, largely due to another suggested failure that Brown attributes to this recent criticism: its focus on consumerism.

Like Brown's, my study is "about something other than the 'consuming vision,' 'the culture of consumption,' the 'fables of abundance,' the 'market' or 'mass markets.'" Such perspectives, Brown argues, "have come to dominate studies of the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era just as they dominated that age and era themselves" (*A Sense of Things* 13).[7] My historical focus also covers

---

[7] See, for example, Rachel Bowlby, *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing and Zola.* New York: Methuen, 1983; Lori Merish, *Sentimental Materialism: Gender, Commodity Culture, and Nineteenth-Century American Literature.* Durham: Duke UP, 2000; Simon J Bronner, *Grasping Things: Folk Material Culture and Mass Society in America* Lexington: U of Kentucky P, 1986;

the "Gilded Age," as it roughly encompasses the period from the Civil War to World War I, specifically beginning five years before the start of the Civil War and ending two years before the start of the First World War.[8] That studies on materiality in the nineteenth century tend to focus on consumption and on the second half of the century hardly seems surprising since, as these critics all point out, the "revolution in mass production and distribution in the United States during the later nineteenth century meant that Americans suddenly lived in a far denser medium of market goods, with implications for virtually every field of human activity" (Bentley 195). Focusing on this time period, therefore, makes it difficult to avoid an examination of objects in terms of consumerism, to, in Brown's words, "sacrifice the clarity of thinking about things as objects of consumption, on the one hand, in order to see how, on the other, our relations with things cannot be explained by the cultural logic of capitalism" (*A Sense of Things* 5-6).[9] At the same

---

Simon J Bronner, ed., *Consuming Visions: Accumulation and Display of Goods in America, 1880-1920.* New York: Norton, 1989; Ellen Gruber Garvey, *The Adman in the Parlor: Magazines and the Gendering of Consumer Culture, 1880s to 1910s.* New York: Oxford UP, 1996; Deborah Anne Federhen et al., *Accumulation and Display: Mass Marketing Household Goods in America, 1880-1920.* Winterthur, Del.: Winterthur Museum, 1986; Walter Benn Michaels, *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism: American Literature at the Turn of the Century.* Berkeley: U of California P, 1987; Richard Ohmann, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century.* New York: Verson, 1996; and Richard Wightman Fox and T.J. Jackson Lears, eds., *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880-1980.* New York: Pantheon, 1983.

[8] Although my study reaches into the first decades of the twentieth century, I still refer to this period in my project as the nineteenth century for the sake of convenience.

[9] For evidence of a focus on this time period simply consider some of the titles listed in the previous footnote.

time, this overwhelming focus on consumption makes it all the more necessary to approach objects from a different angle, particularly if one wishes to address the identity of objects.

When critics focus on the consumption of objects, the consequence is two-fold. First, by essentially arguing that objects are meaningful only in terms of our economic relationship to them, critics are ignoring other ways in which objects become meaningful.[10] As Mimi Hellman argues, while scholarship that focuses on "the production and circulation of goods" is "critical for its emphasis on material goods as potent signifiers," this scholarship "locates this signification primarily in the conditions informing the distribution and acquisition of things, rather than in those that governed the manipulation and visual, spatial, or social effects of those things within the interiors for which they were destined" (417). By generally eschewing consumption as the rubric for my study, I, like Brown and Hellman, seek to locate other bases of signification for material objects.[11]

---

[10] Critics may define the value of a commodity differently, but it always comes back to money. Rachel Bowlby writes that the commodity's value "is derived from its monetary price relative to other commodities, and not from any inherent properties of usefulness or necessity" (2.) Arjun Appadurai argues that it is "the demand, as the basis of a real or imagined exchange, [that] endows the object with value" (4). Appaduari's definition still comes back to money since, as Simon Bronner writes, in the nineteenth century (and arguably today), "cash was the primary value of exchange" (160).

[11] The issue of consumption does arise in one text I examine (*The Morgesons*); however, the focus is not on the objects as commodities, as things for sale, but as possessions, things that have already been bought. Put another way, it is not the process of consumption that is important but, rather, the end result, and the result is that, once you own something, you have control over it. Commodities are not possessions until they are purchased.

The second and corresponding effect of studying objects only as commodities is, I would argue, the inability to address an object's identity in that consumerism strips the object of what I call "object individuality." An object has individuality if the object must be what it is in order to function as it does in the text; it must, for example, be wallpaper and not a mirror, and specifically wallpaper with a particular type of pattern and color. If the wallpaper was a mirror, or if the wallpaper simply had a very different set of characteristics, it would "mean" something different and would no longer signify in the same way. When objects become commodities, as we shall see, the only thing that seems to matter is that it is a commodity.

The new focus on commodification the United States saw after the mid-nineteenth century, as Rachel Bowlby writes in *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing and Zola* (1983), "marks the ascendancy of exchange value over use value, in Marx's terms," so that, from this point in history on, "it is not so much the object in itself—what function it serves—which matters, as its novelty or attractiveness, how it stands out from other objects for sale" (2).[12] Bowlby explains that, once an object "enters the market as a commodity with a price," "'[t]he language of money' speaks the value of the commodity in terms which have nothing to do with its particular material aspects or relative utility," because the commodity is "a sign whose value is derived from its monetary price relative to other commodities, and not from any inherent properties of usefulness or ne-

[12] Commodification is defined by Bowlby as the process "whereby more and more goods, of more and more types, were offered for sale" (2).

cessity" (24, 2).[13] The result is that, "[c]ut off from its specificity or heterogeneity by entry into the commodity market, the object is free to be invested with properties real or imagined which may enhance its desirability, and hence its monetary standing, by comparison with other objects competing for the finite supply of purchasers' money" (24).

Through commodification, then, an object is stripped of its "specificity," "heterogeneity," "inherent properties," "particular material aspects," "relative utility" and "function," and is thus stripped of its object individuality, the basis of its identity. Without such individualizing, identifying properties, these objects can be any objects, or even, as Bowlby writes, "anything at all" (26).[14] Indeed, "since [the object] is defined not by any substance or given utility, but simply in virtue of the fact that it 'goes to market,' in Marx's phrase, with a price, a social value[,] it can easily take the form of a person or a person's time as that of a physical object" (26). Once seen as a commodity, actually or critically, the object "in itself" becomes irrelevant.[15] It is no wonder then, with the current critical focus on the

---

[13] It is interesting to consider that money, the basis of consumption, is itself, as Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton write, "one of the most purely symbolic objects devised," as its worth is based on the fact that people agree it is worth something and has nothing to do with the object's physical properties, such as the paper or plastic from which bills, checks and credit cards are made (31).

[14] Appardurai argues that commodities "are distinguishable from 'products' 'objects,' 'goods,' 'artifacts,' and other sorts of things—but only in certain respects and from a certain point of view" (6).

[15] By actual commodification I am referring to the modern danger of materialism in which the "acquisition and maintenance of objects can easily fill up a person's life, until there is no time to do anything else, not even to use the things that are exhausting all of one's physic energy" (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 53). When this occurs, the act of consuming objects completely overshadows the

commodification of objects, that, as Brown remarks, "the identity of objects has hardly been voiced as a question."[16] This omission, however, as Brown's own work shows, is not solely the fault of the focus on consumerism.

Although many objects are mentioned in *A Sense of Things*, as one critic writes, "few if any objects are (to borrow Brown's language about [Sarah Orne] Jewett) 'affectionately singled out and lingered over'" (Bentley 199). This seeming lack of focus on things in a book about things is perhaps more accurately a focus on things in their metaphysicality rather than their physicality. Put another way, it is a focus on things rather than on objects. In his introduction to a special edition of *Critical Inquiry* entitled "Things," Brown suggests thinking about things

---

objects themselves. Similarly, I am arguing that when critics focus on consumption as the rubric for studying things, the objects themselves become relatively unimportant in their analyses.

[16] In *Wild Things: The Material Culture of Everyday Life*, Judy Attfield provides a useful critique on the pairing of commodities and theories of consumption with studies of individuality from a material culture perspective. Attfield essentially applies individuality to material studies (in a modern, non-literary context) just as I want to apply material studies to individuality (in a nineteenth-century literary context). Attfield explains that she "promot[es] 'individuality' as a valid concept in the context of material culture . . . because of its centrality to an understanding of how people relate to the world through things in the process of individual identity formation" (134). Due to the connections between our work, I find quite pertinent her assertion that "consumption theory does not lend itself readily to exploring the autonomy or agency that pertains to a sense of individuality" (134). That is, "consumption as a context still falls short at ground level when it comes to explaining the specific singularity of autonomous identity—how different things have different meanings to different individuals at different times, in different places. *It is even less capable of furnishing a context for observing how the material world accommodates to the contemporary nature of individuality*" (136, my emphasis). Individuality, she further argues, "is not transferable to a commodity that can be bought, but on the contrary is a trait that is experienced as emanating from, [sic] a sense of interiority which grounds people in the everyday world" (134).

> as what is excessive in objects, as what exceeds their mere materialization as objects or their mere utilization as objects—their force as a sensuous presence or as a metaphysical presence, the magic by which objects become values, fetishes, idols, and totems. Temporalized as the before and after of the object, thingness amounts to a latency (the not yet formed or the not yet formable) and to an excess (what remains physically or metaphysically irreducible to objects). ("Thing Theory" 5)

The difference between objects and things, then, is "thingness," and, insofar as the "question of things and their thingness" is the focus of Brown's book, it is fair to say, as the same critic quoted above complains, that Brown "largely ignores actual objects" (*A Sense of Things* 12-13; Bentley 200). What we find, instead, is a focus on thingness at the expense of objects. That is, what Brown writes of Henry James seems also to be true for Brown: "As any reader of James knows, the word 'things' in the Jamesian lexicon names a potent source of attraction, conflict, and anxiety; it does not necessarily name a group of physical objects" ("A Thing about Things" 223). While I argue that the "mere" physicality of the object is crucial, for Brown, as for James and apparently, as we shall see, also for Mark Twain, this materiality is dispensable.

In Brown's analysis of Twain's *The Prince and The Pauper*, for instance, Brown notes that the central object in his analysis, the monarch's Great Seal, is "named but perpetually underdescribed (almost undescribed)" (*A Sense of*

Things 41). This lack of physicality, Brown argues, highlights the seal's thingness:

> the aesthetic perception of the "trivial thing" [the seal] is utterly beside the point. The "mystery of the Great Seal" clearly dramatizes how an object that is neither a "primitive" fetish nor a modern commodity can have "metaphysical subtleties" that exceed its physical form—how it can become "something transcendent." (42)

This object, the seal, in becoming "something transcendent," gains a thingness, a metaphysicality, that Brown prizes. Similarly, in James's *The Spoils of Poynton*, Brown argues: "Though the novel itself maintains a descriptive spareness, James does not really interrupt Balzac's investment in things; rather, he intensifies that investment, granting things not a physical but a metaphysical potency" ("A Thing about Things" 230). The metaphysicality rather than the physicality of an object is therefore the loci of a thing's meaning for Twain, James, and Brown, and it is this meaning that Brown is after in *A Sense of Things*.

In order to truly focus on object identity, I would argue that the physicality of an object cannot be treated as something one can take or leave. As Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton assert, this physicality is one of the characteristics that make objects unique from other signs: "Relative to other signs such as emotions, or ideas, objects seem to possess a unique concreteness and permanence. Obviously, this characteristic of objects is grounded in their physical structure" (14). Separating an object from its physicality is like separating a

person from her body: it is an unnatural division that ignores a crucial aspect of an entity. The effect of neglecting the physicality of objects is therefore similar to the effect of studying objects only as commodities, as both approaches strip objects of (among other things) their "inherent properties," "particular material aspects," and "function." As I argued above, without these characteristics, objects have no individuality as they can be any objects or even "anything at all" (Bowlby 26). This lack of individuality, as Nancy Bentley appears to recognize, is apparent in Brown's work: "Brown can seem somehow indifferent to the allure of particular things, despite his claims otherwise"; as a result, "[m]ost of Brown's observations about things, though striking, are applicable to any or all objects" (199). If Brown's observations are "applicable to any or all objects," then these objects lack individuality and, therefore, the identity that Brown claims to seek in *A Sense of Things*.

One final reason for the lack of attention to the identity of objects in literary studies that I will offer for consideration is provided by Freedgood and is perhaps the simplest reason of all. She writes:

> These things [the objects described in Victorian novels] often overwhelm us at least in part because we have learned to understand them as largely meaningless: the protocols for reading the realist novel have long focused us on subjects and plots; they have implicitly enjoined us not to interpret many or most of its objects. Even with the recent critical attention to the detail, the fetish, and material culture, the "things" of novels still do not get

> taken seriously—that is to say, they do not get interpreted—much of the time. (1)

Although I do not focus solely on realist novels, I think the basic theory that readers are not taught to read the objects in literature (in detail or at all) holds true in other genres as well. Objects typically found in the interior of the home, such as those I examine, are particularly likely to be passed over as "mere" description.[17] Things, in this way, are often just not seen as "part of the story," and, when they are, it would seem from Freedgood's explanation that the lack of concern for object individuality is a result of not having learned how to properly read objects—that is, how to grant them the importance they deserve.

Freedgood, in *The Ideas in Things*, moves in a direction that is new to this field by examining the social lives of these neglected things in nineteenth-century British fiction, thus granting them the "hardly voiced" object identity and the object individuality that is lacking in literary studies. Each object Freedgood examines is "mentioned repeatedly, often at crucial narrative moments, but with no attendant indication that it has meaning beyond the limited or weak metonymic function that many fictional objects are typically 'allowed' in the usual literary reading of the Victorian novel" (2). Freedgood finds this "fugitive" meaning by tracing the history of these objects (mahogany furniture, calico curtains, and tobacco); as she writes, "each of these objects, if we investigate them in their 'objectness,' was highly consequential in the world in which the text was produced" (2).

---

[17] If a reader has not noticed a sofa, it is not assumed she/he has not read the text. This is precisely why study guides concentrate on characters and plot.

Freedgood's contention is that, by learning about the "history of the depletion of mahogany," for example, we can theoretically reread *Jane Eyre*, through its representations of mahogany and other types of wood, as a "story of imperial domination—the history of deforestation and slavery from Madeira to Jamaica" (2).

Once Freedgood has obtained this crucial history, however, she seems reluctant to shift her focus back to the text in which the objects were found, to take mahogany and actually reread *Jane Eyre*. In her chapter on *Mary Barton,* Freedgood even admits that "what follows is not so much a 'reading' of that novel as it is a meditation on the way that the history of calico unravels the ideological work of domesticity as Gaskell tries to deploy it" (57). The result is that, in Freedgood's analyses, we learn a good deal more about mahogany and other wood, Madeira wine, calico, the "cotton famine," slavery and tobacco than we do about *Jane Eyre, Mary Barton, Great Expectations* or any of the characters therein. In this sense, Freedgood seems to be more interested in using texts to read the life history of objects than in using objects to read texts. Indeed, a weak reading of objects for Freedgood is when they "tell us something about [a] character and not about themselves or their own social lives" (12). While I agree that we need to learn about the social lives of objects, this, in turn, should tell us about the social lives of the characters who use those objects, and that is what my reading seeks to accomplish.

As with the objects Freedgood examines, those on which I will focus in the chapters to follow were also "consequential in the world in which the text was

produced," and some, such as mirrors and wallpaper, "highly" so. There was, at the very least, a historical relevance or meaningfulness that contemporary readers may well have recognized and which allows the particular object or group of objects to "work" as they do in each text. Examining the history of, for example, mirrors reveals that larger, clearer glasses were becoming common in the average home during the same decade in which Caroline Lee Hentz published *Ernest Linwood* (1856). The historical newness of the kinds of reflections allowed by the improved, enlarged and more accessible mirrors would have provided Hentz's readers with a reference for understanding the discovery of another new kind of reflection: one that reveals an evolving sense of self. Examining the objects historically allows the reader to see one way in which it does matter that the object is what it is and not something else, that it, in other words, has object individuality.

From this examination of the object in its historical significance I move into an examination of how it functions in the text—what its "work" there is—and specifically how it is significant to the character on whom I focus. In this portion of each chapter (which comprises the majority rather than the minority as in Freedgood's case), I illustrate how the domestic objects I examine are all tools or potential tools in the process of defining, developing and displaying some particular aspect of the character's identity or ipseity.[18] While each chapter considers

---

[18] My specific focus on how *domestic* objects are or can be *used* by characters in order to *develop or display their ipseity* also distinguishes my study from Freedgood's.

the social lives of objects, this information is then used to actually (rather than theoretically) perform a rereading of the text and the woman whose story is told there. Before going into more detail about each chapter, I first want to address the relationship between objects and subjects, the grounds for my focus on domestic objects, and the ways in which objects can be used.

OBJECT INDIVIDUALITY'S EFFECT ON SUBJECT INDIVIDUALITY

The importance of considering the identity or individuality of objects is tied to the idea I introduced briefly in the first section on the important role objects play in our conceptions of ourselves. Cultural anthropologists and social scientists agree that objects play important roles in our lives,[19] but in their classic *The Meaning of Things,* Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton are clear that objects have a direct effect on the development of our very selves:

> Objects affect what a person can do, either by expanding or restricting the scope of that person's actions and thoughts. And because what a person does is largely what he or she is, objects have a determining effect on the development of the self, which is why understanding the type of relationship that exists between people and things is so crucial. (53)

---

[19] See Appardurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective.* New York: Cambridge UP, 1986; Daniel Miller, ed., *Material Cultures: Why Some Things Matter.* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1998; Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, *The World of Goods: Towards An Anthropology of Consumption* . New York : Basic, 1979; Stephen Harold Riggins, ed., *The Socialness of Things: Essays on the Socio-Semiotics of Objects.* New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1994; and Susan M. Pearce, ed., *Experiencing Material Culture in the Western World.* London: Leicester UP, 1997.

If objects are part of us, shaping our individuality, then, I would contend, a consideration of object individuality is crucial; it matters, in other words, if the objects in question are rolling pins or rifles, and even which rolling pins or which rifles. As Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton affirm: "One of the most important, but unfortunately most neglected, aspects of the meanings of things is precisely the ability of an object to convey meaning through its own inherent qualities. Yet most accounts of how things signify tend to ignore the active contribution of the thing itself to the meaning process" (43).[20]

How the "inherent qualities" of an object can quite literally limit and direct an object's use and meaning is illustrated in Hellman's examination of actual pieces of furniture in eighteenth-century France. In "Furniture, Sociability, and the Work of Leisure in Eighteenth-Century France," Hellman argues that the design of the furniture and decorative objects of the elite class governed their own usage, both in terms of what they could be used for (i.e. writing, serving tea or dressing one's hair) and how they could be used (i.e. sitting and leaning forward, kneeling or standing). A thing's design includes such factors as the number and placement of legs, the lack or height of a back, the location and accessibility of storage compartments, the addition of flaps or extensions that can be opened to create space for a specific activity and so forth.

---

[20] Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton cite, as examples, Freud, Durkheim, Jung, and even Piaget. In, for example, "the Freudian scheme, things per se do not serve any transcending purpose; they do not help a person to change or grow. What they do is to lend their semblance to the preconscious, which projects meanings into them to neutralize part of the repressed energy of the psyche" (23).

Hellman contends that these physical features both revealed the intended functions of these often "highly specialized" objects of furniture and structured the object's use potential: "A dressing-table chair, for example, had a low back so it would not impede the hairstyling process, while a shaving chair featured an adjustable headrest and an extra back leg to carry the weight of a backward-tilted body" (419). Similarly, a small table could be identified for its purpose depending on the existence of "tiered receptacles for storing handwork supplies," or "built-in bottle coolers and shelves that provided ready access to wine, silverware, and other items during meals," or a built-in inkwell and compartments for stationary and other writing supplies (419). At the same time that these various features made it clear what the purpose of the object was, they also limited other uses. As the descriptions suggest, a shaving chair would not have been very functional as a dressing-table chair or vice versa, while the size, lack of free surface space or placement of legs could make a particular table unsuitable for game playing or hairdressing.

In addition to defining and structuring the use potential of the object, these physical features also manipulated the user's appearance while in action. On the simplest level, "opening the uppermost lidded compartments [of a dressing table] might extend the arm in a graceful way, while bending over the writing surface might emphasize the curve of a powdered neck" (427). On a more complex level, something as precisely constructed as a desk chair would not just allow certain positions and actions but require them. The desk chair "was meant to suit per-

fectly someone leaning forward over a desk" by "facilitat[ing] a pose of evenly distributed body weight and parted thighs" through such physical properties as "a seat that projected strongly at the center front," legs that "were placed at the center front, center back, and sides of the seat (rather than at the four corners)," and the occasional "addition of a fifth leg." Through this design, the "chair offered comfort and ease only if the user recognized and submitted to the dictates of its design" and "it also rendered any other pose virtually impossible" (428).

As Hellman's study suggests, the very physicality of an object along with its particularizing features are inextricable parts of its individual identity as, without their individuating properties, a desk chair, a shaving chair and a dressing-table chair would all simply be chairs. Amplifying the differentiating features of objects in this way brilliantly illuminates how critics of material culture who do not recognize and examine object individuality can be recognizing the importance of things without *recognizing the importance of things*, or focusing on the metaphysicality of an object at the expense of its physicality to the extent that it costs us the object. Indeed, without any true individuating properties, a chair could even be indistinguishable from a table. This recognition of an object's individuality, finally, is particularly important when the identity of subjects is involved.

In *A Sense of Things*, Brown points out that, in contrast to the lack of focus on object identity in recent criticism of material objects in literature, "[t]he criticism of the past decade has been profoundly successful in showing how literary texts exhibit multiple modes of fashioning the identity of subjects" (17). What this criti-

cism of identity formation largely lacks, however, is a consideration of those "modes of fashioning the identity of subjects" which are mediated by and revealed through the subject's *non-consumeristic* interaction with objects, and thus with objects that have individuality.[21] If objects, as Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton argue, "affect what a person can do," and an object's individuality, as Hellman's study shows, affects how it can be used, then an object's individuality significantly contributes to the object's "determining effect on the development of the self."

To further compound the importance of the fact that different objects have different effects, we must recognize that different people use different objects. As such, certain persons will experience the unique effects of (for example) rolling pins and certain (potentially other) persons will experience the unique effects of rifles, and different rolling pins and different rifles will produce varying experiences due to each object's individuality. Additionally, because different people do use different objects, the different objects used can themselves reveal information about their users. As Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton claim, "[a] person who has a gun in his or her house is by that fact different from the one who does not" (16). Although their point here is the error of thinking that objects

---

[21] Even in the social sciences, as Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton write, "[t]he most extensive studies of objects as expressions of the self have been done in connection with the status-giving role of things," which, at least in the West, again comes back to consumption, as such status is usually achieved by one's (monetary) ability to secure certain items that are expensive and/or rare (which is often the cause or result of an item's expensiveness) (29). See Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 29-31.

are neutral and separable from the people who use them, such as the gun lobbyists who claim that "Guns don't kill people, people do," their claim also stresses that different objects identify the people who have or use them as different from those who do not. Object individuality is, therefore, inextricably linked to subject individuality.

A brief example of how object individuality affects subject individuality can be derived from returning to Hellman's study on the furniture of the elite in eighteenth-century France. The article makes it clear that these often highly specialized and elaborate pieces of furniture were not available to all classes, but were specifically part of the interiors of the lavish homes of the elite. Not only could they afford these more intricate pieces, but they also had the leisure time to interact with them and learn how to use them (as Hellman claims, some of these pieces were so elaborate that they required an instruction manual). In this sense, the furniture of the elite was the elite furniture.

Hellman goes on to argue that the actions and appearances these elite objects of furniture supported were socially desirable because they "required individuals to exercise the attributes of polite conduct" (434). They could limit the level of intimacy between a man and woman, situate a person to appear at ease, require a woman to sit in a graceful or rigid position, allow her to show off the whiteness of her neck or force her to move carefully and slowly, and they accomplished these effects without seeming to produce them; that is, they made them seem natural, also in accordance with the rules of polite conduct. The indivi-

duality of the object not only defined, limited and directed the object's use and the actor's appearance while using the object, therefore, but, through this, also contributed to the subject formation of the user. That is, in a very concrete way, the specific pieces of furniture used by the elite class in eighteenth-century France actually helped to construct their proper and socially acceptable elite selves. What Hellman's work begins to show is that, when critics fail to consider the role of object individuality, they are overlooking a crucial type of power that objects possess: the power to limit and direct the way the object can be used and, therefore, how it can affect the development of the self.[22]

One example of this omission in a literary context, specifically in nineteenth-century British literature, can be seen in Laurie Kaplan's "Sir Walter Elliot's Looking-Glasses, Mary Musgrove's Sofa, and Anne Elliot's Chair: Exteriority/Interiority, Intimacy/Society," which makes some of the connections I will explore in the American cannon. As the title suggests, Kaplan examines both objects and the individuals using the objects in more specificity than is usually found in a literary study, as I have been claiming. In her examination of the role of furniture in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, Kaplan argues that Austen uses furnishings "to establish the characters' social interactions" by bringing characters into proximity to each other, either directly by placing them on the same sofa, for example, or indirectly, by having one character take another's place in or on some piece of furniture. In

---

[22] Although I am arguing here that object individuality directs the way objects can be used, there is still some room for play, as the same objects can be used differently by different people. Objects can also be misused, an idea I will discuss later, and this opens up the functional potential of objects greatly, as I will show.

this way, the furniture both connects the characters physically and emotionally and illustrates that intimacy.

Kaplan also argues that Austen uses furnishings "to comment on such abstract qualities as vanity, independence, dignity, pride, comfort, social importance, self-importance, and taste," which she accomplishes by creating links between characters and particular pieces of furniture, such as those described in the article title. Mary's sofa and Sir Walter Elliot's looking glasses can then relate things about Mary or Sir Walter Elliot to the reader, such as her dissatisfaction with life and his narcissism. The connections between these objects and traits, however, are not examined, suggesting these objects are merely symbolic of the traits to which they are connected rather than active participants in the development and display of them. This approach ignores object individuality because, without an examination of the particular qualities of the objects, which would include an examination of their functions and thus their potential effects on users, these objects could, in effect, be any objects, as long as these objects could also be readily connected to the same traits. Why, for example, does Sir Walter Elliot use looking glasses rather than portraits of himself, as gazing at either type of representation of himself could symbolize his narcissism, and why does Mary use sofas rather than beds, as either could represent her lethargy?

My answer to these questions would be that the particular objects used must have certain characteristics that make them especially suitable for the characters and their dominant personality traits. Put another way, these objects have

individuality and this individuality affects the individuality of the subjects who use them. Without reexamining *Persuasion* myself, I can only offer general suggestions based on the objects and based on how Kaplan represents the characters. Consider, for instance, the sofas Mary uses. Mary's "reclining position" on sofas, Kaplan argues, "suggests her ennui, her lack of energy." I would argue that sofas do not merely "suggest" these characteristics but also enable them by allowing Mary to recline and do nothing. By contrast, if Mary was found constantly sitting in chairs, not only would she be unable to recline, but, depending on the chair, she might also be provoked to do something. Sitting in a desk chair (particularly if it was like those from France that Hellman discusses), for example, might encourage Mary to write something, or perform some other task connected with the desk to which the chair belongs, and thus to be active.

Consider, next, the difference between a sofa and a bed, as both of these pieces of furniture would allow Mary to recline and be inactive. Sofas, in contrast to beds, are found in more public rooms, meaning that Mary can be seen reclining and thus felt sorry for, comforted, and, when this has been accomplished, she can immediately reenter the social activities such rooms permit. Kaplan does not seem to recognize these differences and, with them, the ways in which particular pieces of furniture can enable and disable certain actions, thus contributing to the characters' particular ways of being.[23] Kaplan, instead, argues: "In *Persuasion*, I

---

[23] Similarly, although Kaplan must read the looking glass as a symbol of vanity if it "defines the narcissism of the man," she does not refer to this connection (perhaps because she assumes it is obvious), or consider the ways in which

think, a sofa is simply a sofa and a chair is simply a chair." I would contend, in contrast, that a sofa is not simply a sofa, that it has certain qualities, characteristics or functions that make it particularly suitable as Mary's piece of furniture. In short, this object has individuality because, it seems to me, it is important that Mary's sofa is a sofa and not a chair. Based on the theory that objects are part of us, the traits that Austen reveals through these pieces of furniture should be both developed by and illustrated through the specific object's usage.[24] Despite recognizing the importance of objects in at least Austen's literature, Kaplan still fails to consider the role of object individuality, thus overlooking the power of objects to limit and direct the way the object can be used and, therefore, how it can affect the development of the self.

Perhaps the most literal manifestation of the way we can be defined by the objects we use is the family name. As Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton explain, in most languages, including English, "the identity of a person was often derived from his occupation." A man who "owned an anvil and knew how to forge iron with pincers and hammers" became known as "Smith," while a man who

---

mirror usage would contribute to Sir Walter Elliot's narcissism in addition to displaying it, and, therefore why (or if) it is significant that he uses a mirror rather than a portrait of himself. Kaplan also does not consider the connections between mirrors and the different connotations of reflection, despite noting that Sir Elliot looks in the mirror "never pausing for self-reflection." While Kaplan does refer briefly to the wealth that having looking glasses would have indicated at this time in history, this indication of wealth is not directly connected to the personal vanity that she suggests is Sir Elliot's central trait.

[24] Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton do admit that "[i]n all cases where actual physical objects become associated with a particular quality of the self, it is difficult to know how far the thing simply reflects an already existing trait and to what extent it anticipates, or even generates, a previous nonexistent quality" (28).

"owned large stones connected to wind or water and could grind grain" became known as "Miller." Carter, Weaver and Taylor are other examples of common last names derived from a man's occupation, which revolved around his unique ownership of and ability to use certain objects (93). What this example also naturally highlights is that "different people" refers to people who know how to use different things as well as to people of different sexes, as the "persons" to whom these occupational names were applied were men.

While men were "forced by the division of labor to learn a variety of special skills related to different categories of things, women," write Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, "developed their selves through interaction with objects that changed little with time: Kitchen utensils, gardening tools, looms, brooms, and those things involved in raising children were the universal instruments through which female productivity was expressed" (93). Despite arguing that, today, "women need not—and, in fact, no longer can—define their self exclusively with information resulting from interaction with traditional feminine objects," when describing those things that brought about the change in women's identity in modern times, Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton mention household appliances and contraceptives, which are arguably just modern versions or variations on "kitchen utensils" and "those things involved in raising children" (93).[25]

---

[25] Men, likewise, in a modern world that places much less emphasis on the ability to use certain tools, must also find new tools of self definition. The result, according to Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, is that "[b]y and large, we now define ourselves through objects of consumption rather than production"

Further, when modern men and women are asked what they cherish, the "female pattern is closer to that of the grandparents" and the male pattern "resembles that of the children," meaning that there is more continuity in what women have cherished over generations. Indeed, when one examines the list, one can see that while the top things women today cherish actually existed in the nineteenth century, many of those things that men today cherish did not. Men "mention significantly more TV, stereo sets, sports equipment, vehicles, and trophies" while women "more often mention photographs, sculpture, plants, plates, glass, and textiles" (106). Despite, that is, being "free—and in essence forced—to seek new things that will help them to define who they are," women have continued to use and cherish the same or versions of the same objects they have cherished historically

Due to the historical continuity suggested for women, we can with some certainty reason that, in addition to "[k]itchen utensils, gardening tools, looms, brooms, and those things involved in raising children," other crucial objects in women's identity formation in the nineteenth century also centered around items used for decorating the home, versions of, for example, the "photographs," "glass" and "textiles" that women cherish today. For support one need only turn to the literature written by and for women in the nineteenth century and examine the relationship between females and domestic objects that is represented therein, as I shall in the next section.

---

(93). The objects of consumption on which they focus in their study are "cherished household objects."

In addition to illustrating the continuity of women's relationship to domestic objects, Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton also show that there is and has been a difference between this relationship and the one displayed by men. They found that despite the fact that "the existence of men and women is no longer limited by the same conditions, it is remarkable how influential sex-stereotyped goals still remain," such that, even today, "the selves of men and women represent different sets of intentions or habits of consciousness: They pay attention to different things in the same environment and even value the same things for quite different reasons" (112, 106). This difference, as Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton show, is the result of historical training that would also have shaped men and women's relationships to things in the nineteenth century, which suggests that the same kinds of differences existed then. As Lori Merish suggests, however, these differences were likely even more distinct at that point in history.

In her criticism of the lack of gender consciousness in Brown's examination of nineteenth-century American literature in *A Sense of Things*, Merish writes:

> given the particularly intense ways women have been "addressed" by things and encouraged to identify with them—indeed, to imagine that their very (gendered) selves particularly depend upon them—what Brown depicts as the uncanny doubleness of objects, and their power to "captivate,"

> would surely be differently experienced by female subjects. ("The Doubleness of Things" 113)

What Merish is suggesting is that gender affects the very kind of relationship one experiences with objects. In this sense, men and women not only react to different things or react to the same things differently, as Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton argue, but they actually react with varying intensity to things in general. In the nineteenth century, as Merish suggests, this difference would have been due to the particular relationship that was encouraged between women and things—a relationship that I believe (and Merish suggests) is evident in the literature of the nineteenth century.

In this project, I am focusing on a particular kind of relationship between people and objects. I am interested in how the material culture of the nineteenth-century home could be empowering for its inhabitants in unsuspected ways. Specifically, this relationship is an intensely personal one with a range of particular domestic objects (including decorative objects like mirrors, wallpaper and textiles), in which the objects, especially through misuse, are able to influence and develop a person's sense of self, and particularly a selfhood that would go against the social grain. This relationship is, in part, that described by critics above as one particularly belonging to women, as they are the ones who "cherish" domestic objects, build their senses of selves through them, and have a particularly intense relationship to objects in general. These women must also be wealthy enough to own (by themselves or through their husbands or fathers) a number of

domestic objects as well as certain kinds of objects (such as mirrors), and must have enough personal, social, and legal freedom to allow them to cultivate such nontraditional selves through these objects. The relationship between people and objects I want to examine is, therefore, embodied by white, middle- to upper-class women.

The characters on whom I focus are the wife of a doctor, the wife or widowed wife of independently wealthy men, and the daughter of a father who runs a successful shipping company (although she, too, later becomes a wife of an independently wealthy man). At some point in their lives, these women are all, therefore, associated with gentleman and with the middle, upper-middle or upper class, and for most of their lives do not have to think about money because they have plenty of it. These women are or become women of leisure, with the time and means to seriously consider and alter their homes and themselves. Men, women of lower classes and those who were enslaved have relationships to objects that are worthy of study, but these relationships are distinctly different from the kind I wish to examine here.

For example, women who were enslaved in the nineteenth century were not granted even the limited sense of ownership that white women had. As most written work by black women in the nineteenth century are (actual or fictive) slave narratives, and as slaves were legally incapable of owning their homes or any of the objects that might have existed in them, the kind of relationship between people and objects in literature by black women is very different from the one I

wish to examine.[26] In the rare instance that ownership technically existed and was rendered by a black woman, the relationship that exists between owner and object seems to stress the fact of ownership rather than what can be done with a particular object due to its individuality.

To take one example, we might recall that in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) the grandmother of the author owns her own home after she is given her freedom. The one description of the things in that home involves Harriet Jacobs more than her grandmother, although Jacobs treats the possessions like her own. This instance is the preparation of the house by Jacobs for the inspection of white soldiers and search-party members who are searching the houses and living quarters of all black people after Nat Turner's insurrection. Jacobs writes:

> I knew nothing annoyed ["country bullies and the poor whites"] so much as to see colored people living in comfort and respectability; so I made arrangements for them with especial care. I arranged every thing in my grandmother's house as neatly as possible. I put white quilts on the beds, and decorated some of the rooms with flowers. (63)

During the search, "[e]very box, trunk, closet, and corner underwent a thorough examination. A box in one of the drawers containing some silver change was

---

[26] Even Tom and his wife, though decorating the cabin of the title as their own, and despite the use of the house as if was truly theirs, could have been torn from that home at any time, as Tom is. Furthermore, that they were able to have such a home was due to their "kind" masters who were rendered, naturally, by a white author.

eagerly pounced upon. . . . I stepped forward to take it from them" (64-5). Similarly, when some of the men begin eating her grandmother's preserves, Jacobs "stretched out [her] hand to take the jar" (66). Jacobs asserts ownership both in arranging and in retrieving objects, but it seems to matter little whether she is arranging blankets or flowers, or retrieving money or preserves, as both receive the same treatment.

At the only point in the scene where the grandmother becomes involved, her relationship with the objects also stresses the fact of ownership. Jacobs writes: "My grandmother had a large trunk of bedding and table cloths. When that was opened, there was a great shout of surprise; and one exclaimed, 'Where'd the damned niggers git all dis sheet an' table clarf?'" At this point the grandmother, "emboldened by the presence of our white protector" [a white man friendly with Jacobs's family who they have asked to remain with them during the search], asserts ownership by responding: "You may be sure we didn't pilfer 'em from *your* houses." One of the soldiers similarly stresses the issue of ownership rather than the individual objects themselves when he replies: "you seem to feel mighty gran' 'cause you got all them 'ere fixens. White folks oughter have 'em all" (65). As the soldier's reference to "all" suggests, it matters little what the "fixens" are, they should simply *belong* to the "white folks."

An interesting parallel is made in the scene when the poor white men, after discovering some pages of verse that they (unable to read themselves) believe are forbidden letters, become similarly outraged at Jacobs's ability to

read as they are at her ownership over the objects they want for themselves. The captain, who can read, recognizes the pages are only verses and yet still tears them up. Just as asserting ownership over objects appears to be more important than the items themselves, the ability to read is more important than the contents of the pages. I find this parallel interesting because the ability to read and write, and the teaching of these skills to other slaves, is commonly used in slave narratives to assert intellect (and thus humanity) and to show rebellion (and thus power over the self). Such ability is, in a sense, owned by these slaves and, unlike other possessions, cannot be taken away. This, perhaps, accounts for the greater emphasis on skills and personal traits rather than on things in slave narratives, even when the end goal is similar to that desired by an upper-class white woman who uses mirrors to develop her selfhood or who uses wallpaper to assert her intellect. By pairing objects and reading in this way in this scene, Jacobs seems to illustrate this juxtaposition.[27]

While the relationship between men and objects in nineteenth-century literature is just as compelling as that between slave women and objects, the relationship is, again, distinctly different from the kind on which I focus here. This can be illustrated most clearly by examining literary studies of works written by men that attempt, as I will, to study the role of objects in the lives of the characters. In

---

[27] Although poor white women may have legally owned their homes in the way slave women could not, they sometimes, like those who were enslaved, had to work outside of their homes in order to help support their families. They also would not have had the means or leisure time to focus on the decoration of their homes or themselves as would wealthier white women. As such, their relationship with objects is also different from the one on which I want to focus here.

"Sticky Realism: Armchair Hermeneutics in Late James," Victoria Coulson, for example, addresses the "complex, nuanced, and highly consistent lexicon of domestic furniture" that she argues is found in the "sticky realism" of James's late fictions (116). This lexicon is variously named "armchair hermeneutics," "the Jamesian grammar of furniture" and "the language of the house" (116). Unfortunately, few definitions from this "lexicon" are revealed. The most explicit include: "[a] sofa or bench promises union" but not necessarily unity, "penny chairs . . . signal ruptured or imperiled unions," and "the bench—a seat made for two—always betrays [a desperate female character seeking solitude]" (122-123). Rather than specific details we are instead given a summary of what this lexicon appears to signify: "it's simply too dangerous, in these sticky, contaminating texts, to sit on a bench or a sofa"; indeed, Coulson argues, "It's safer to avoid sitting down at all" (123).

Similar to Kaplan in her article on furniture in *Persuasion*, Coulson argues that whether a woman sits or not and what she chooses to sit on reveals information about her character and emotional state, and, although Coulson admits, as Kaplan did not, that furniture can both help and hinder the woman using (or avoiding) it, we learn so little about the furniture that the relationship still seems, as in Kaplan's article, to be symbolic rather than causal. That a sofa is a sofa and not a chair—which has room for only one—is granted; outside of this, the seat used seems not to be significant in any other way. Coulson would perhaps attribute this lack of designating features to the idea of "sticky realism," in which "[o]b-

jects lose their definition" (121).[28] Unlike traditional realism, sticky realism is "a form of textuality in which words and world are very close together and are no longer clearly separable"; it "makes meaning out of the intimacy and interdependence of subject and object" (121, 124). By its very definition, then, "sticky realism" seems to deny objects true object individuality.

Another possible reason for this lack of individuality can be found by returning to Bill Brown's study of objects in James to which I referred earlier. According to Brown, "[a]s any reader of James knows, the word 'things' in the Jamesian lexicon names a potent source of attraction, conflict, and anxiety; it does not necessarily name a group of physical objects" ("A Thing about Things" 223). James, like Twain and Brown himself, "grant[s] things not a physical but a metaphysical potency" (Brown, "A Thing about Things" 230), giving the impression that, despite claims to the contrary, these writers, as Bentley writes of Brown, "largely ignore[] actual objects" (200). Rather than attributing the lack of object individuality or even just the lack of object physicality (as one aspect of its individuality) in James to his "sticky realism" as Coulson does, I am therefore suggesting that the lack is due to gender, supported by Brown's work on James and Twain. That is, perhaps because women's relationships with objects were more intense, as Merish suggests, male authors do not provide the same view of objects as do female authors.

---

[28] Coulson argues that in contrast to traditional realism, such as in early Jamesian work, sticky realism in later Jamesian work displays "a form of representation in which there are only the most permeable, negotiable—sticky—boundaries between material substance and human significances" (119).

Another example of how the male perspective appears to provide a different view of objects is suggested in Randall S. Wilhelm's work on the early-twentieth-century American writer Ernest Hemingway in "Objects on the Table: Anxiety and Still Life in Hemingway's *A Farewell To Arms.*" Wilhelm's article is rare in that it recognizes and even highlights the importance of object individuality, and yet it manages to do this while deemphasizing the object's physicality. Wilhelm examines the "still-life" object compositions repeatedly constructed by Hemingway's text and analyzes the individual objects in the compositions, showing how they are meaningful by revealing "essential thematic information" such as the main character Frederic Henry's "hidden desires, motivations, and anxiety," particularly surrounding the death of his lover Catherine Barkley (66). Objects foreshadow events, "provide visual clues" to "characterization," and ultimately tell the story that Henry cannot tell through language (68). These objects are items that make up Henry's life as a soldier (boots, rifle, gas mask, telescope, etc.) as well as such varied items as food, bottles, a rucksack, and champagne bottles on a card table. These objects, Wilhelm argues, are anything but random: "the nature of these objects asks us to pay attention to what is being shown, perhaps as much as to what is being said" (69).

As an example, in one still-life that includes Henry's gas mask and a telescope, Wilhelm illustrates how the gas mask "speaks of fear, guilt, and anxiety" by foreshadowing the gas mask that covers Catherine's face as she dies at the end of the book, while "the mask's placement within the oblong tube (an obvious-

ly masculine symbol) also exposes Henry's guilt at failing to protect Catherine" (68). Furthermore,

> The gas mask, with its thick panes of glass protecting the eyes, distorts vision, while the telescope enables the viewer to see intimate details at great distances. These tropes of visual impairment and super-acuity are strategies at the heart of Henry's narration, for in many ways, even at the present time of narration, he still cannot see with clarity the events of his life. (69)

Generally, these objects, as this one example shows, are significant on multiple levels. Because it matters that, for instance, the gas mask is a gas mask, these objects, by my own definition, have object individuality.

As Wilhelm's focus on what he calls "still-life" object compositions suggests, the objects in his study are usually not in use when they appear in the text but are, instead, typically lying on a table or hanging on a wall, or sometimes even physically invisible, despite the fact that their meaning is usually derived from an active use. The gas mask, for example, is used for protection, for saving lives, and, in the case cited above, also for seeing through, and it is meaningful precisely because of these uses, although we never actually see Henry using it and it is even invisible in a case when it is introduced as important in Wilhelm's analysis. This focus on still-life compositions, I would argue, downplays the actuality or physicality of the object by highlighting the thing's role in/as a picture. Many of the compositions are even seen through a window or a door, providing a

frame. It seems, then, that these compositions could actually be compositions on canvas rather than collections of actual objects.[29] While meaningful due to their use, their power lies not in this use but in their ability to call to mind this use and, as Brown argues, it is not the physicality but the metaphysicality of an object that is highlighted when the object is all but absent. Although Hemingway appears to be more visually descriptive than Twain or James, he seems, like Twain, James and Brown, to derive the importance of objects from their metaphysical power, so that objects seem more important as representations than as objects.

Since objects, even in their metaphysicality, are important in Hemingway's text, Wilhelm's analysis allows us to compare the kinds, locations and meanings of objects that are found in texts by male authors with those found in texts by female authors, and what this comparison suggests is that a lack of attention to the physicality of objects is not the only difference in men's and women's approaches to things. Another difference concerns the relative lack of personal items. While not all of the objects I examine are originally personal items, they become personal through use and are all found in the interior of the home (permanent or temporary), which makes them personal to some degree. In contrast, the few personal items that Wilhelm examines all seem to be those that define Henry as a soldier, despite his desertion from the Army being one of the two "life-altering events" of the novel (66). This fits the claim made by Csikszentmihalyi and

---

[29] Literary texts are also, of course, "compositions," but my study seeks to consider the physical objects rendered in these compositions as usable objects rather than merely as representations.

Rochberg-Halton that men have traditionally found meaning in objects that are the tools of their trade. This also means that these objects are usually used outside of the home. The other, more impersonal items that Wilhelm examines are also generally found outside the home, and this also fits Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton claim that, "[f]or men, objects often point outside the home" (107). The downplay of personal objects, concentration on work tools and outside focus suggest that Hemingway's use of objects is different from that of the female authors I examine.

Another difference in the use of objects in texts by male and female authors, at least based on Wilhelm's examination of Hemingway, involves the meaning of the objects. In *A Farewell To Arms*, the bottles are (usually empty) alcohol bottles that Henry drinks in order "to distance himself from life's realities," the food seems always to be food eaten when Henry should be attending to Catherine (such as when she is in labor at the hospital while he dines in a nearby Café), the rucksack is connected to the alcohol bottles, and the card table represents the unstable foundation of the relationship between the two characters and signifies that Henry is only playing games (70). The objects under examination in this novel are thus usually negatively meaningful. That is, these objects represent death and anxiety, distance and desertion, avoidance and lack of concern, distorted vision and deception. The objects I examine, on the other hand, are connected with the positive (from a feminist viewpoint) traits and self-empowerment of the users, who, to cite another important difference, are almost always women.

One explanation for the differences between male and female attention to and use of objects in nineteenth-century literature is offered by Joyce Warren in *American Narcissus: Individualism and Women in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction* (1984). Warren suggests that men were not in need of objects though which to build up their own individualism in the nineteenth century because they used other men. That is, these male writers (based on the nineteenth-century male canonical authors Warren examines) saw others as reflections of themselves on whom they could practice their views and sound out their own ideas. It is precisely this selfish negotiation of selfhood that, Warren argues, kept women from being treated as individuals:

> Nineteenth-century individualism, particularly as reflected in the writings of Emerson and the prescriptions of the American myth, encouraged an insular self-assertion that prevented the individual from recognizing the selfhood of others. Persons regarded as outside the American experience—persons who by their society's definition did not themselves qualify as individualists—were not seen as individuals. (4)

This selfishness, furthermore, would have hindered women from creating individuality in the same way as men, as women were taught, above all else, not to be selfish and, in fact, to be selfless and self less. In the nineteenth century, women were expected to take care of the family, bind the community together, and even act as (spiritual, moral) guardians of the nation, which suggests that they were encouraged not to see themselves as individuals but only as part of a

group—the part that serves the others. It does not seem likely, therefore, that women, like these male authors, would have been able to build an individuality through this selfish view of others. As a result, they had to look elsewhere for this sense of self.

As for men writing about the developing individuality of women, one might suggest, as Baym does in her analysis of what she defines as woman's fiction, that men did not write this type of literature because "it would appear that to represent experience from a woman's point of view lay outside either the capabilities or interest of most of the male writers" (14). As the experiences I am describing are transgressive, it seems even less likely that men would render women in this way. This is not to say that male authors did not create female characters who were individuals (although Warren argues there are only two: Nathaniel Hawthorne and Henry James); however, how their female characters assert their individuality and the kind of individuality they assert is generally different from what I have observed in texts written by women. Most importantly, the decorative or architectural encoding of transgressive individualist desires that I see in the work of the women authors I discuss does not seem to emerge in works by men.

While all the texts I examine might be defined as domestic fiction, I define this fiction, as Milette Shamir does, as "includ[ing] all works that center on the inner-workings of the home as their primary subject," which, Shamir argues, follows the definition used by literary reviewers in antebellum America ("Divided

Plots" 429). In domestic fiction, as Merish writes, "domestic material culture is often depicted in great detail" and "personal possessions are endowed with characterological import" (*Sentimental Materialism* 2). It is this focus on the home and its interior objects that I am after. So, although I agree that male writers could and were also "responding to the phenomenon [of] the increasing importance of the regime of the home in middle-class antebellum culture" (Shamir, "Divided Plots" 429), they seem to approach this phenomenon differently.

THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY WOMAN AND HER HOME

That the home was the woman's sphere is a largely uncontested concept about nineteenth-century life in America.[30] Critics disagree as to how closely women were tied to this sphere and how restricted they were from the public sphere, how constraining—or even private, or feminine—the private sphere was, how great the divide was between the two spheres, how much influence women exerted on the world outside the home and how much power women possessed in general. Despite these differences, most critics agree that middle- and upper-class women, generally speaking, did not work outside the home; that women were not allowed into many, even most, public places; that, consequentially, women spent more time at home—in their own home or in the homes of others—than men; and that women were responsible for the state of the home—emotional and physical—which allowed them to know the home, even have a con-

[30] When I refer to "women" in the remainder of this project it can be assumed that I am referring to middle to upper-class white women.

nection with it, in a way men did not. Critics can agree, in short, that the home was the woman's "business" (Bronner, *Grasping Things* 53), and it was a business she took very seriously.

The concept of home in America changed dramatically during the nineteenth century, turning it into a complex system of symbols. Before this period, David Handlin writes, Americans "rarely singled out their homes for special comment or analysis" (xi). By the time of the Civil War, however, "houses had become laden with meanings that they did not previously possess" (4). Finally, "[i]n the half century after the Civil War[,] they [Americans] rarely questioned the importance they attributed to the home. On the contrary, they became even more committed to that institution and were able to think about domestic architecture more thoroughly than before" (88). As the home became invested with more and more meaning, the interest in and importance of properly decorating that home also grew.

Women, writes Harvey Green in *The Light of the Home: An Intimate View of the Lives of Women in Victorian America* (1983), were "charged with transforming the rude, brick, stone, and wood of the exterior and the blank walls and empty rooms of the interior into places which would both communicate a family's status and provide it with repose and moral uplift" (93). Aiding women in this process was a wealth of printed advice:

> Women looking for information about decorating walls, covering floors, and choosing appropriate furniture for the various rooms in the

> house could find it in books and popular women's magazines of the period. *Godey's*, *Peterson's*, and *The Household* included monthly columns which solicited homemaking advice from their subscribers, and major publishing houses issued a continuous stream of books like Harriet Spofford's *Art Decoration Applied to Furniture* (1879) throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century. (Green 94)

The "stream of books" in the strain of Spoffard's refers to the "ever-increasing number of domestic manuals . . . which helped to establish conventions governing the exercise of individual choices in domestic decoration" (Logan, *The Victorian Parlour* xiii), as well as the "etiquette" or "manner" books which "flourished especially between the Civil War and World War II" and which also provided advice on how to decorate one's home in addition to instructing women on how to act in different social situations, how to engage in conversation, how to entertain and how to dress (Bronner, *Grasping Things* 44).[31] These books, what we could collectively call domestic advice manuals, constituted "a written code of social behavior" that "prescribed what should happen in the home and, in particular, what

---

[31] Advice literature would include decoration manuals such as Spoffard's as well as etiquette/manner books which, Bronner argues, focused less on proper behavior in the second half of the nineteenth century and more on "conversation, dress and decoration" (*Grasping Things* 46). Although conduct books also provided some advice similar to what would be found in etiquette books, Sarah E. Newton in *Learning to Behave: A Guide to American Conduct Books before 1900*, refutes the common notion that conduct books are etiquette books, stating that "the term 'conduct,' as used here, does not refer to manners or civility . . . but to the broader and more important ethical concept of conduct of life" (4). Newton further argues that conduct books should also not be "lumped into the 'advice literature' category" (5).

the housewife and mother should do within it" (Bronner, *Grasping Things* 44; Bryden and Floyd 3). The very popularity of these books stresses the importance of, and widespread confidence in, what such books taught.

In terms of decorating, advice literature "argued that the physical construction of the dwelling shaped the minds and morals of the family" by "connect[ing] values to material surroundings" (Jennings 243-4; Bronner, *Grasping Things* 46). Americans were taught that "certain types of houses and furnishings induced noble sentiments. To establish these values, it was important to live in dwellings and among possessions that encapsulated and transmitted them" (Handlin 16). Part of this influence seems to lie in the "volume and variety of objects and textures in a typical house, [which,] when properly arranged, were supposed to alter immoral and unchristian behavior by the power of 'influence'" (Green 94). In this sense, in the words of prominent nineteenth-century "tastemaker," architect and author A.J. Downing, "an aesthetically pleasing domestic environment presents an 'unfailing barrier against vice, immorality, and bad habits'" (qtd. in Merish, *Sentimental Materialism* 15).

The other part of the objects' influence lies in the objects themselves rather than in their arrangement. As Merish explains in *Sentimental Materialism: Gender, Commodity Culture, and Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (2000): "tasteful domestic objects were frequently described as 'spiritualizing,' 'civilizing,' and 'humanizing,'" to the extent that "[r]efined objects were, by many, deemed essential to the emotional culture of 'civilized' persons" and "serve[d] to

distinguish the 'human' and 'civilized' from the 'nonhuman' and 'savage'" (15, 91, 15). Those who were not yet as "civilized" as was desirable "could improve, and the first step toward that end often was the desire to possess some object" (Handlin 16).

Along with an emphasis on the moralizing, civilizing, spiritualizing and humanizing effects of proper and properly arranged home decoration, women learned that "[r]eshaping one's home, dress, and table altered character" (Bronner, *Grasping Things* 44). "Character," a term that Downing coined, became a key word in the domestic advice literature that was so widespread in the second half of the nineteenth century (Merish, *Sentimental Materialism* 11). In the words of one such book: "Character is seen through small openings, and certainly is as clearly displayed in the arrangements and adornments of a house as in any other way" (qtd. in Bronner, *Grasping Things* 53).

Character, women were thus taught, was manifested in the home through furnishings, which were "seen as a seamless extension of a woman's character and appearance—'a sort of garment of her outermost soul' . . . " as one woman wrote in 1866 (Kinchin 18). The literature on "household taste," writes Juliet Kinchin, "encouraged women to see them-selves in this way with suggestions to match complexion to colour schemes," going as far as to suggest "using the same fabrics for clothes and upholstery" (18). The contiguity between women and their homes that such advice promoted turned women into metonyms for the home, showing just how close the relationship between them was believed to be.

In making women responsible for the proper decoration of the home, and by linking this decoration to character, civility, spirituality and humanity, women became responsible for encouraging these qualities in all those living within that space. When "she designed [the home's] character," the woman was also designing the character of her family (Bronner, *Grasping Things* 53). As Jan Jennings writes, "[f]rom the middle of the nineteenth century forward, women had been encouraged to express their moral guardianship of their family's character through tasteful decoration" (243). The woman's role in properly decorating the home, then, had a crucial impact on the moral state and general character of her entire family.

Women's responsibility for the home and the seriousness of this task, made apparent in the content and quantity of the domestic advice publications directed at women in the nineteenth century, makes it evident that women were expected to seriously study the subject, to make careful decorative choices, and to consciously consider and use the objects available to them in order to achieve the desired effect. My point here is both to emphasize the importance of the home, its interior and objects, in the lives of women in the nineteenth century and thus to show the uniqueness of their relationship to the home, as well as to show how such interior objects were used to create meaning and were in themselves meaningful.

OBJECT FUNCTION: USE AND MISUSE

While the focus so far has been on the creation of morality and character through the proper use of objects in decorating the home, it is not only in these ways and through this one type of usage that objects were meaningful in the lives of nineteenth-century American women. This brings me to the importance of object function. As Hellman's article on furniture in eighteenth-century France illustrates, function is an important part of an object's individuality. Not surprisingly, it is also a quality that critics of consumption particularly and specifically devalue, as evident in their privileging exchange value over use value.[32] Indeed, as the earlier quotation from Bowlby makes clear, function and consumption are antithetical: when an object becomes a commodity, "it is not so much the object in itself—what function it serves—which matters." Function, however, is arguably one of the most important ways in which objects gain meaning—a contention supported both by Hellman's study as well as the work that has been done on function classification in material culture and anthropology.

Beth Preston, for example, in her chapter "The Functions of Things: A Philosophical Perspective on Material Culture" in *Matter, Materiality, and Modern Culture*, outlines the different categorizations of functions according to various researchers of material culture. The two categorizations Preston seems to find most useful are "proper" and "system" functions. She writes: "The proper function

---

[32] In a quotation from Bowlby used earlier she refers to the "ascendancy of exchange value over use value" that arose with the commodification of the nineteenth century (2).

of a thing is what it is supposed to do, given what the ancestors it has been copied from in fact did just often enough to survive and proliferate. This means that if the thing is unable to undertake this performance it is malfunctioning. It has in effect an inherited proper function even if it is never able to perform it" (27). One might think here about a shovel: its proper function is digging; even if broken, and thus malfunctioning, it is still supposed to be for digging, whether it can perform that function or not.

The system function, in contrast, is

> a matter of what you can do with something rather than what you are supposed to do with that something. This means that the concept of system function accommodates the analysis of individual performances of things —even unique or idiosyncratic performances. All that is required is a system context and a thing with a functional role in that context, regardless of whether that thing or anything remotely like it has ever performed that role before. (42)

A system function could be, to go back to the shovel, its use as a coat rack. The proper function (digging) is thus "normative," while the system function (holding coats) is not; rather, it is "oriented toward understanding the particular capacities and actual performances of individual things" (27).

These two broader categorizations of functions, proper and system, can be further subdivided into "technofunction," which is the "utilitarian function of a thing," often spoken of in reference to tools, such as the shovel; "sociofunction,"

which "involves the manifestation of social facts" and is often spoken of in reference to things such as jewelry; and "ideofunction," which "involves symbolizing more abstract ideas, values or beliefs," and is often spoken of in reference to objects such as the cross (29). Preston explains that things can have more than one function and more than one type of function, and that things are constantly losing or gaining functions and transitioning from system to proper function.[33]

This overview of the different functions of objects helps us to envision the very different ways in which objects can potentially gain meaning through use outside of or in addition to consumption, and demonstrates how important the function of an object is as a component of its identity and individuality. This outline also provides a basis for considering what it means to misuse things. As Preston's analysis shows, misuse is not just physically mishandling things, but also thinking about them in nontraditional ways. As Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton explain, "[w]hat objects are available, how one should react to them and why, are issues already decided in advance by the social milieu into

---

[33] Examples of objects that have multiple functions include a throne, which has both a technofunction (sitting) and an ideofunction (the representation of power), and an engagement ring, which has two sociofunctions (to represent the economic status of the man who purchases the ring and to represent the engaged status of the woman who wears the ring). Examples of objects that have lost, gained, or changed functions according to Preston include the pipe cleaner and the swastika. Pipe cleaners at one time had a proper technofunction of cleaning pipes. At some point they gained a system technofunction in the arts and crafts world. Today, this system function is a second proper function, as, even if pipe smoking became nonexistent, pipe cleaners would still be produced for arts and crafts. The swastika originally had the proper ideofunction of "representing well-being." Once adopted by Hitler in Nazi Germany, it "acquired the proper ideofunction of symbolizing anti-Semitism." In this case, "the original proper ideofunction has been completely eclipsed" (31).

which one is born. Thus most people much of the time act out relationships already 'scripted' by the culture, thus developing selves that fit the cultural mold" (105). Having a relationship with objects that goes against the "cultural script" prescribed by ones "social milieu" constitutes misuse, and here includes not only physical misappropriation but also reacting to objects in ways and for reasons that were not "decided in advance" by one's society. The result is the development of a self that does *not* "fit the cultural mold."

In my analysis, an object's use is typically normative to start, but quickly turns (often very) idiosyncratic, thus changing from proper to system function, as system function "accommodates the analysis of the actions of individuals, who may use the material culture at their disposal in very creative or idiosyncratic ways" (Preston 42). The "creative" use I describe in the chapters to follow is, therefore, "improper" in two senses. As I explained in the first section, the characters I examine use objects in unconventional ways and in order to obtain goals they were not supposed to have, making this use improper in the sense of inappropriate. As Preston's analysis here makes clear, this use is also improper in that it is not the "proper" function of the object, but an idiosyncratic system function. This doubly improper use, when examined in literature, can be read as a sign of resistance on the part of characters and authors as it constitutes the development of a self that goes against two cultural scripts: the script that exists for manners and the script for proper object usage.

These two senses of improper can be very closely connected. Consider, for example, that "one important way in which systems of social order are imposed on individuals is through the generalised insistence on behaving towards items of material culture in accordance with their proper functions" (Preston 42). Using things according to their proper functions becomes the appropriate use as it upholds the social order. By way of example, Preston suggests "the most basic tenets of appropriate behavior at table are keyed to the proper functions of the tableware" (42). Her example is even more appropriate in the context of nineteenth-century America than it is for us today when one considers the rigid role of manners and social performance in middle- and upper-class society, particularly imposed upon women, and how that proper behavior (as indicated by "manner" books) includes "properly" using the objects in one's home. The story of "immodest Maria" is an excellent example.

In the anonymously authored conduct book *Advice to the Fair Sex* (1803), "Maria" enjoys her breakfast while dressed as though she has just come from bed, her hair loose, her gown soiled and still wearing her nightcap, despite being in the presence of her husband and any visitors who might happen by. After breakfast, Maria is caught "putting on her cap at the glass in the parlour," again with her husband and even a guest present. At this point her husband, in a "churlish manner," suggests "she might find some other place to dress in" (qtd. in Merish, *Sentimental Materialism* 65). In her reaction to the scene, Merish writes: "Significantly, Maria's informality of conduct and careless display of her body

result in the degeneration of domestic manners: her parlor (the room reserved for entertaining guests) has been transformed into a bedchamber . . . and Maria's inattentiveness is repaid by the 'churlish manner' of her husband" (65).

What I find so compelling about this passage is the way in which, in Maria's second "immodest act," it is the "glass" and its particular "private" use (putting on a cap) that marks a "public" space (the parlour) as a private one (the bedchamber), thus implicating some types of mirror usage as degenerative of domestic principles. That is, the line between correct and incorrect or proper and improper use of domestic objects was, according to nineteenth-century principles, a very fine one. Immodest Maria's misuse of the parlour mirror (or correct use of the wrong mirror, or correct use of the right mirror in the wrong place, depending on how one looks at it) gives us an idea of how transgressive the idiosyncratic system functions of such objects could be.

Considering the traditional role household objects have played in the formation of women's identity, as suggested earlier, what is the result of such misuse on this identity formation? What kind of subjectivity does misuse imply? And how does object individuality affect both use and misuse? These questions will be considered in the chapters that follow, but to briefly address them here we can return, once more, to Hellman. Based on her article, one could infer that improper use of objects would negatively impact the formation of a socially acceptable self, in this specific case through the inability to display polite conduct. How unacceptable this self would be would likely be based on the degree of misuse. For exam-

ple, while using a reading chair for game playing may seem more uncomfortable than impolite, using a dining table for a grooming table would be impolite and, as Maria's misuse of the parlour mirror implies, even an insult to those present.

Even more serious might be a woman's use of a piece of furniture specifically constructed for a man. A voyeuse, for example, was a seat for a spectator of a game. A woman's version had a "lower, broader seat to accommodate the full skirt and weight distribution of a kneeling woman" while the man's version had a "higher, saddle-shaped seat to suit the straddling pose of a man in close-fitting breeches" (Hellman 430). Hypothetically, if a woman were able to straddle a man's voyeuse she would not only appear impolite or even ridiculous, but this open-legged position would also suggest sexual impropriety. Of course, Hellman's point is that the specifics of the chair would actually restrict a woman from such a position due to the fullness of her dress, thereby un-enabling this type of conduct. In fact, Hellman never considers the issue of misuse, certainly not in reference to subject formation, and this seems to be the trend in literary criticism as well. That is, as an intended focus, misuse appears to absent in critical considerations of literary representations of the role of objects in subject formation.

This focus on proper use is perhaps a reflection on the way objects tend to be used (or are read as being used), in nineteenth-century literature. In her reading of sentimental literature, Merish points out how, for example, the authors she examines approve of the female character who is "offended by what she views

as a 'promiscuous' mixing of spaces, objects and uses" and who can appreciate that "[a]bove all, things have proper uses: chairs are for sitting, forks are for eating, towels for washing one's face, pocket handkerchiefs for blowing one's nose" (*Sentimental Materialism* 99-100). In the case of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Merish argues that Stowe "typically introduces her fictional characters by first presenting the particulars of their domestic environment, to show her readers whether or not the signs of civility and refinement are present there, and to indicate whether an individual 'cares for' his or her possessions" (139). As these examples show, the focus in Merish's readings, based on the focus within the novels she examines, is on proper usage of objects.

A particularly good example of a study of objects and their effect on subjectivity that focuses on proper use is Holly Blackford's examination of "female relics" ("household and girlhood objects") and their role in the development of the March girls in her article on objects in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (2). These objects are highly gendered and specific to the nineteenth-century world of (usually middle-class white) women: slippers, gloves, and other items of clothing, handkerchiefs, textiles, food, and housekeeping utensils. The objects are, further, either created by, exclusively used by, or on occasion bought with the labor of women and then given between women. These objects, which "represent mother, home and childhood" as well as "female arts, labor, and creativity" (2), function in the text to connect the girls with their mother (as well as to each other), to aid in

their development away from their mother, and to illustrate their consequent "initiation into female culture" and "apprenticeship into the home economy" (4, 32).

The ability of these objects to function in these ways and to attain meaning is derived exclusively from an apparently inherent connection between them and women: as Blackford writes, "[b]ecause they are part of mother and the shared reality of women, feminine objects become both culturally and personally meaningful to each daughter" (14). Not surprisingly, the selves these objects help to promote are deeply and "properly" gendered: The childhood creation of objects teaches the girls to perform domestic tasks such as cooking and sewing, gloves encourage lady-like behavior, and "female shoes and feet are an expression . . . of the female body" and "clearly a symbol of femininity" (21, 20). In sum: "Ladies are a composition of part-objects, objects through which a woman defines herself and the shared reality of social codes that define her" (15). As such, the function of these objects is truly to create "little women" and, indeed, by the end of the novel, all of the March girls (except Beth, of course, who dies) are domesticated housewives and mothers.

Although Blackford argues, as I will, that objects "constitute an alternative language" (2), what these (feminine) objects "say" is unsurprisingly "feminine" and conventional:

> Meg finds John's ignorance of feminine fashion and creative materials amusing, "enjoy[ing] his masculine amazement on the queer things women wanted, and mak[ing] him guess what 'piping' was, demand[ing]

> fiercely the meaning of 'hug-me-tight,' or wonder[ing] how a little thing composed of three rosebuds, a bit of velvet and a pair of strings, could possibly be a bonnet." (29)

This "coded language of feminine objects" that the "March women feel privileged to speak" revolves, as illustrated here, around the construction of the feminine ideal, the socially acceptable female self, through the proper use of the proper items. I want, alternatively, to consider objects that transgress rather than uphold the dominant patriarchal ideology and that are misused; it seems natural (even obvious), after all, that such feminized and feminizing feminine things would, when correctly used, "perform and construct a female self" (29).[34]

---

[34] Another difference between my reading of the role of objects in literature and Blackford's involves object individuality. Blackford evinces what I would call partial object individuality: on one level, for example, it seems to be important that a pair of gloves is a pair of gloves and not a pair of silk stockings due to the glove's association with the hand and thus to marriage. On another level, however, one can see that if the gloves were not gloves they could just as easily be silk stockings. Although these stockings would no longer "represent the division of a girl's flesh from the world" (since these stockings should not be seen by the world), they could still function, like the gloves, as "a shared symbol between Meg [the character who gifts a pair of gloves and who, upon marriage, is gifted a pair silk stockings], the broader [female] culture [which, Blackford insists, would share in an appreciation of gloves and stockings], and her mother [the receiver of Meg's gloves and the giver of the silk stockings]" (19). In fact, Blackford argues just this when she writes that the "silk stockings . . . reflect both meaning in a social, shared reality and the sacredness of objects representing mother-daughter continuity" (16). On this second, broader level, then, it does not matter if the object is a pair of gloves or stockings so long as it connects mother and daughter and belongs to the world of "female relics."

CHAPTER OUTLINE

I have, at this point, established what I have found to be largely missing or, in some cases, completely absent from literary material studies and why these are significant: a non-consumeristic consideration of the role of objects, attention to object individuality, acknowledgement of the importance of gender's influence on the relationship between people and things, and an examination of the outcome of object misuse on identity formation. In the chapters that follow, I will perform readings of texts that address these issues, that consider objects as meaningful based on their individuality and their ability to aid female characters in the formation of their ipseity.

The four chapters that follow concentrate on three novels and one short story written by four middle- or upper-middle-class white women in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The four texts are *Ernest Linwood* (1856) by Caroline Lee Hentz (1800-1856), *The Morgesons* (1862) by Elizabeth Stoddard (1823-1902), "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935), and *The Reef* (1912) by Edith Wharton (1862-1937). Each of the four chapters focuses on one text and specifically on the main character of each text, who is female, and, as I have described previously, a member of the middle to upper class, as these women embody the kind of relationship between people and objects on which I intend to focus.

The earliest two novels represent the pre-Civil War and Civil War period, while the later two texts represent the late nineteenth century and the pre-World

War I period. Both historians and literary critics agree that America underwent profound changes during the nineteenth century and particularly after the Civil War, giving rise to the common ante- and postbellum division that is so frequently used to describe new phases in numerous areas. Critics such as Baym go as far as to argue that there was a "major change in all woman's fiction after the Civil War" (279). By including literature from both before and after the war, extending my analysis beyond the Gilded Age, examining a short story in addition to novels, and selecting texts that represent different genres, including sentimental, realist, gothic, and romance, I hope to show that the relationship between women and objects I am examining here cuts across those differences.

The order of my chapters is chronological as the texts can all be read as reacting to specific historical events or changes, and it makes sense to follow this historical progression through the objects and the circumstances surrounding them. We begin with the emergence of mirrors as common objects in the average home at mid-century, turn next to the Married Women's Property Act of 1860 and the growing popularity of conduct book literature in the second half of the nineteenth century, proceed to the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century controversy over wallpaper, and conclude with the early-twentieth-century growth of interior decorating as a field and, with it, the popularity of the idea that rooms reflect their owners. As I illustrate in each of the chapters, understanding an object's status historically allows the reader to see one reason why a particular object might have been chosen, consciously or unconsciously, by the author.

The objects are not only historically pertinent, but are also all in one way or another suited to the transgression or particular desire on which the novel or story focuses. For example, mirrors are supposed to produce reflections and wallpaper was supposed to be "read" at the historical moment of Gilman's story, as I shall explain, making them suitable and even logical instruments for producing other kinds of reflections (in the case of the former) and other kinds of readings (in the case of the latter). What the object individuality of the objects I examine in the following chapters shows the reader is why mirrors, creature comforts and objects of property, wallpaper, and personal possessions "work" historically during the periods in which Hentz, Stoddard, Gilman and Wharton were writing, as well as why they work in a more practical sense.

Chapters one and three, on *Ernest Linwood* and "The Yellow Wall-Paper," revolve around characters who use objects privately and who are focused on discovering and developing themselves, although in very different ways. Chapters two and four, on *The Morgesons* and *The Reef*, revolve around characters who use or want to use objects in ways that would express something about themselves to others, particularly in terms of their sexuality.

All of the characters recognize that objects are part of people, although Anna in the final chapter on *The Reef* never seems to understand this in terms of herself. With the exception of Anna, all of the characters recognize on some level that the individuality of the objects they use affects how the objects function and therefore what the potential benefits of using particular objects might be. Part of

this function recognition is the ability to move beyond the proper functions of things to see the possibilities for system functions or "misuse." Anna's problem, as I will explain, lies in her inability to move beyond the proper functions. In contrast to Anna, Cassandra, in *The Morgesons,* has what I see as the most developed sense of object use and, not coincidentally, the most developed sense of self.

When characters are hindered from using their chosen objects or even forced to use others, the ramifications for their senses of self are severe, to the extent that these characters find they no longer recognize themselves. I am not claiming that the characters can all be read as consciously aware of why they are using the objects they do, just as I do not claim this about the authors. The point again is that these women, authors and characters, used what was available to them and what, even subconsciously, made sense.

In my first chapter, "Looking Glasses and Ipseity: Deciphering the Reflections in Caroline Lee Hentz's *Ernest Linwood,*" I illustrate that for Gabriella Lynn (later Linwood), the looking glass becomes the tool through which she can conceptualize and find evidence of a change in herself—a change that I will argue is the development of a "self." What her experiences show is a growing complexity in respect to how she views herself, including the ability to view herself objectivity and to see herself as having multiple selves. These developments in the way Gabriella views her *self* are encoded in Gabriella's actual visual experience of herself in looking glasses, allowing modern readers to read Gabriella's expe-

rience as a literalization of Charles Horton Cooley's "Looking-Glass Self" theory, first described nearly a half a century after the publication of *Ernest Linwood*; for Gabriella, Self Knowledge Is Self Reflection (Lakoff and Johnson 545).

Attention to the domestic object's individuality here shows the reader that the mirror was a suitable object historically and practically as mirrors, especially fairly good ones of an adequate size, were uncommon in the average home until the middle of the century. Having this expanded and more intimate view of the body due to the presence of mirrors would, therefore, have been familiar to middle-class readers and writers by the time of *Ernest Linwood*'s publication and yet the novelty of the experience would also still have been familiar. This new ability to quite literally conceptualize one's person in new ways makes the mirror a logical frame for discerning another new way of seeing oneself, that is, as an individual self, in nineteenth-century America.

Gabriella's recognition of the object's individuality, most generally as a tool for self-reflection, allows her to see the mirror's potential as a tool for a more complex form of self reflection. This use can be recognized as a switch from a proper to a system technofunction (and therefore as form of misuse) because women at this time were not supposed to think of themselves as selves, as individuals apart from their husbands. Gabriella dares to define herself with objects she has chosen—objects that represent her realistic self—rather than with those idealized *objets d'art* that her husband would have be her role models, including a painting which could be said to depict the Victorian ideal of the "Angel

in the House."[35] Through mirrors, Gabriella learns to separate herself from Ernest and his picture of her by gaining her own picture of her self.

In my second chapter, "Creature Comforts and 'Self' Denial: 'A Crusade Against Duty' in Elizabeth Stoddard's *The Morgesons,*" I illustrate that the profusion of creature comforts Cassandra Morgeson uses are not "luxuries" but "necessities" to Cassandra, as it is through these objects that she develops, defines, and displays the individuality that is essential to the existence of her being, her self. By paying attention to the object individualities of the various creature comforts with which Cassandra interacts in the novel (specifically focusing on her use of objects made out of or otherwise connected to textiles, such as clothing and home furnishings, as well as books) it becomes possible to read these items as the tools with which Cassandra marks the self specifically as independent and sexually aware, and otherwise in opposition to the standard of female selfhood prescribed by nineteenth-century society as outlined in conduct book literature.

By defining herself in opposition to the notions of Duty and self-denial so prominent in this literature, and by achieving this definition through, at times, very idiosyncratic creature comfort use or misuse, Cassandra is asserting that she has a strong sense of individuality and a developed awareness of the system functions of things and thus of object potential for self development. Cassandra is

---

[35] "The Angel in the House" is a poem by Coventry Patmore that was originally published in 1854. The title of this poem came to represent the popular Victorian image of the ideal woman that it described: "passive and powerless, meek, charming, graceful, sympathetic, self-sacrificing, pious, and above all—pure" (Melany).

able to control and in a symbolic sense "own" a range of creature comforts in order to control her self; for Cassandra, then, the metaphor Self Control Is Object Possession becomes quite literal (Lakoff and Johnson 272). When Cassandra is ultimately denied her self in being forced to fulfill her Duty, both by adhering to the socially approved definition of "necessity" which denies Cassandra her creature comforts as well as by following a socially approved role that is contrary to Cassandra's natural instincts (through, that is, the enforcement of both self-denial and self denial) Cassandra is forced to consider the difference between symbolic and actual ownership in order to discover a new way to rebuild her lost self. Through Cassandra's gradual education in the true meaning and value of actual ownership, both of property and of self, *The Morgesons* offers its own ideas about the question of what ownership and control of objects means for women and the development of their selfhood—an issue that was very real for women at the time of the novel's appearance due, particularly, to the revised Married Women's Property Act passed just two years before the novel's publication.

In chapter three, "Wallpaper and 'Meaningful Work': 'Hop[ing] for [a] better profession' in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'The Yellow Wall-Paper,'" I examine the unnamed narrator's use of wallpaper as a replacement object for the writing utensils she is forbidden to use while undergoing the fashionable nineteenth-century rest cure for her depression. Attention to the domestic object's individuality in this chapter shows the reader that wallpaper was a prominent and contentious domestic object in the later nineteenth century and therefore required considerable

examination on the part of the female purchaser who was expected to seriously study the historical discourse surrounding wallpaper colors and patterns in order to appropriately prepare herself for this critical decision.

Although the narrator also recognizes the wallpaper's object individuality in terms of readability, she seems unaware of this historical discourse and, instead, recognizes the physical marks on the wallpaper as thought on paper through a sort of literalization of the Thought As Language metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson 244). When the narrator attempts a reading of this text in a rather literal way, she misuses the wallpaper in her effort to continue to benefit from the meaningful work that her own writing normally provides her, particularly as a way of publishing of her thoughts and experiencing a sense of professionalism. Unfortunately, the paper is only able to provide her these benefits once she begins to lose her sanity, which is, ironically, what allows her to uncover the story she believes is embedded in her wallpaper. In the narrator's insanity, the wallpaper becomes such a part of her that this object is no longer just one tool for self-definition, but becomes the only tool, defining her so completely that she becomes a part of the object.

The ideas represented in "The Yellow Wall-Paper" can be seen as the germ that develops into *Women and Economics* (1898), where Gilman argues that women must be allowed to have a profession—to choose an occupation, study it in a scholarly way, and either gain some economic independence from using these specialized skills outside the home or at least gain the pleasure,

growth, personal expression and humanity that she argues meaningful work is capable of providing. This critique is historically timely since, as Baym writes, "[t]he various departments of domestic science—nutrition, health, child development, household management—proliferated between the Civil War and the First World War as ways of making woman's life more rational and more endurable" (50). Gilman's short story highlights the utter failure of this tactic by showing how, when women who want meaningful work are forced to remain at home to carry out the duties of that sphere (duties that include choosing wallpaper), even when those duties have been aggrandized, the result is not just a loss of usefulness, but a loss of self. In the narrator's case, this loss is quite literal as her insanity causes her to believe that she is the woman she comes to see as trapped within the paper.

In the final chapter, "Private Possessions and Sexual Expression: Becoming the Object of Affection in Edith Wharton's *The Reef*," I examine the character of Anna Leath. The most modern character, Anna also has the most freedom and is the only heroine not married at the end of the novel. Anna enjoys her role as mother and the idea of a role as the wife of the man she loves (a marriage she would freely and willingly choose), but is constrained by her upbringing from verbalizing—even fully knowing—what she wants, particularly in relation to sex. Unlike the other characters I examine in this project, Anna never recognizes the potential for self development and display that objects, as part of selfhood, could allow her. Anna, that is, never learns, in Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton's

words, that material objects are "part of one's self; not in any mystical or metaphorical sense but in cold, concrete actuality" (15), or, in Lakoff and Johnson's terms, that Self Control Is Object Control (270).

Based on her genteel upbringing, Anna learns there are proper relationships between individuals, which does not include the recognition of passion, as well as between people and objects, which includes learning to use objects only according to their proper functions, both in the sense of the expected, "inherited" function and in the sense of the appropriate, decorous use. This proper relationship between people and objects also forbids access to a person's private objects and spaces unless married or related, and the importance of this privacy is supported by Wharton's study of interior architecture in *The Decoration of Houses* (1897).

Because an extra-marital affair goes against all of these proper lessons, when Anna discovers that George Darrow, the man she expects to marry, has had an affair with Sophy Viner, the young woman who is to become her daughter-in-law, all of Anna's convictions about propriety are tested and she is forced her to rethink everything she has learned that has had propriety at its root, including the idea of passion. When this idea leads Anna into Darrow's private space, Anna learns how access to Darrow's private objects grants her, like Sophy before her, access to Darrow's most private self. Despite seeming to understand that objects are part of Darrow, Anna continues not to see the truth of this for herself, and thus does not learn how to use objects—how to recognize

their individuality and potential system functions—to display the new passionate self that she wants Darrow to see in her.

Anna is the only character I examine who, even by the end of the novel, does not fully grasp the importance of object individuality or the potential for objects to develop the aspects of herself that she would most like to develop. Although more liberated by the end of the novel, Anna is left with an undeveloped self and, I believe for this very reason, is also finally the least happy of all the female characters. Ending with this text provides a contrast to the other texts and allows the reader to imagine how Anna's story could have been different had she been able to appreciate and use objects the ways the other characters, and particularly Cassandra, are able.

What I want to offer here is a new way of reading women's texts, a reading that demonstrates that these texts are more complicated than they are made out to be, and that the "mere" domestic details—the objects that surround the characters—have complex functions; they are, that is, not only part of the story, but an important part. In order to take advantage of the information available through these domestic objects, we need a way of reading them. When literary critics search for "encoded" meaning, they approach the text at hand from different critical perspectives. In simplified terms, if they want, for example, to focus on sexuality in literature they might take a psychoanalytic or queer stance; for feminist issues a feminist stance; for economic issues a Marxist stance. But, if a critic

wants to focus on objects in literature, the typical choice, as I have shown, is also to approach the text from a Marxist stance because of the common focus on consumption. If we follow a model from outside the literary field, such as from anthropology or one of the other social sciences (which is arguably what Freedgood does), the focus is on the object but with the risk of losing the textual embeddedness, which I have suggested Freedgood's analysis leans towards. I want to treat objects as texts within texts, not just as texts themselves.

In order to study material objects in a literary context, we need a new theory, a "thing theory," but not precisely according to Bill Brown's model for the reasons already explored. I want, in Louise Penner's words, to create "new interpretive possibilities for domestic scenes" by bringing material studies or a version of thing theory that considers object individuality to the "critical re-examinations of nineteenth-century domestic novels" that are now beginning to "recognize[] a connection between the representation of the private, feminine sphere and the possession and strong articulation of an individual self in representations of women's lives" (Penner 131). That is, I want to stress the physicality of this "sphere."

The home, in literary studies, has largely become a mere metonym for the domestic/private sphere rather than an actual physical dwelling full of actual physical things that were used regularly. While this sphere finds its headquarters and its heart in the home, the physicality of the home itself, like the physicality of objects in our current version of thing theory, seems to be largely irrelevant de-

spite the fact that women have had and still arguably have a deep connection to the physical objects in the home and to the home itself. The reading works, I hope to show, because it retrieves complexity and provides another way of reading the literature of the past in order to understand the situation of women and their desires.

With a model of thing theory that takes objects in their object individuality seriously, the domestic artifacts in literature would receive the kind of consideration they rarely do now. This is important, I think, because I see what we might call the domestic materialism of the home as an important framework for reading women's novels in the nineteenth century. These objects are important due to the fact that, as Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton write, "[i]n our everyday traffic of existence, we can also learn about ourselves from objects, almost as much as from people" (91). If we are going to read literature as one type of historical record, then it makes sense to read the material things in this literature, including the home and its domestic objects, historically, due to the historical importance of these objects—an importance I hope this project begins to illuminate.

Although I cannot prove that actual nineteenth-century women were using articles like wallpaper, mirrors and textiles to develop themselves, or that the authors I examine here consciously recognized the benefits of using articles of domestic life in the production of selfhood, I think the works I examine are proof that women like Hentz, Stoddard, Gilman and Wharton used the books—their own "meaningful work" that I read in these chapters (Meyering 9)—in order to

deal with their own positions as middle- to upper-class white women in nineteenth-century society. This perhaps accounts for the fact that all of the characters I examine here become authors on one level or another. Gabriella, Cassandra and Gilman's narrator all admit to "writing" the text or some part of the text we are reading, and even Anna, at the end of the novel, decides that she must inform Sophy she has given up Darrow in order to make it true, which, in a sense, is a kind of publication of her story. It seems clear, therefore, that at least female authors like those I examine here recognized the usefulness of some objects—objects that include *Ernest Linwood*, *The Morgesons,* "The Yellow Wall-Paper," and *The Reef.*

CHAPTER ONE

Looking Glasses and Ipseity: Deciphering the Reflections in Caroline Lee Hentz's *Ernest Linwood*

The goal of Gabriella Lynn (later Linwood) in Caroline Lee Hentz's *Ernest Linwood: The Inner Life of the Author* (1856) is simply to be recognized by her husband, Ernest Linwood, for herself, as a being with personal characteristics that differentiate her from Ernest's idealized vision of her, and even more essentially, as *a self*, an individual with a separate existence from his, once Gabriella learns this vital lesson herself. Through the course of *Ernest Linwood*, Gabriella comes to understand that objects are part of us and, therefore, can help us define, develop, and understand our selves. In Gabriella's case, her chosen domestic object, first and foremost, helps her to discover that she is a self, that she has selfhood, personal identity and individuality, or ipseity.

Specifically, looking glasses enable Gabriella to first visually see herself as an individual, a being that exists separately from others, and then to mentally conceptualize this individuality as selfhood, the state of having a self, a personal identity, which, finally, allows her to understand the implications of this ipseity on her life and particularly on her marriage. The mirror, in this sense, becomes the "frame . . . within which things can take on a stable significance," something that,

according to philosopher and theorist of the "modern self" Charles Taylor, those experiencing an "identity crisis" "lack" (27).[36]

What the reader sees in Gabriella's experiences with mirrors is evidence of this development of ipseity through a growing complexity in the way she views herself and eventually her self, beginning with the ability to see herself objectively and culminating in her ability to develop multiple social selves, which is partially conveyed through the object individuality of the specific mirrors she uses. For example, when Gabriella views herself in a double mirror, her view of herself is literally multiplied, and this precedes her generation of multiple selves, suggesting that the double frame enables Gabriella's conception of these selves.

That these developments in the way Gabriella views her self are encoded in Gabriella's visual experience of herself in looking glasses may sound simplistic, but the experience of viewing one's self in multiple mirrors and in mirrors that were clear and large enough to provide a view of the entire body, in the privacy of one's own home, was not a common experience for the average woman until the middle of the nineteenth century, and thus around the time *Ernest Linwood* was published. Through the first half of the century, mirrors were considered luxury

---

[36] I use the terms "mirror" and "looking glass" interchangeably in this chapter as they were considered synonymous by 1755, according to Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language*. Although David L. Barquist argues that the term "mirror" was often used in the nineteenth century to distinguish "a convex or concave reflective glass" from an "ordinary looking glass," this appears to have been the practice mostly early in the century (294). Further, both terms are used in the novel and it is never suggested that the reflections provided by "looking glasses" are different from those provided by "mirrors" as they would be if the mirrors were concave or convex.

items as they were expensive to produce, and even those who could afford to own them likely had mirrors that were lacking in clarity and size. Before advances in the polishing and buffing process throughout the nineteenth century, new discoveries in the chemistry of glassmaking in the 1830s, the resolution of problems in the silvering process in the 1850s, and the invention of a special oven for melting the elements that created the mirror itself in the 1860s, mirrors were often unclear, full of bubbles, discolored, uneven, "foggy," and very small. Large mirrors in particular remained prized objects through the middle of the century, when full-length mirrors began to appear more regularly in middle-class homes, due to the difficulty of creating large sheets of glass without breaking them and due to the fact that, when larger sizes were achieved, their uncommonness made them extremely expensive. The mirror-making process, and mirrors themselves, improved dramatically in the period between 1850-1950, during which time prices declined and mirrors quickly became more common (Pendergrast 248).[37]

During the decade when Hentz's novel appeared, mirrors, especially larger and what we could describe as more accurate ones, were providing a "new geography of the body" to many women by making it possible to obtain perspectives of oneself otherwise unavailable, such as a view of one's back and profile (which is only possible with two mirrors) (Melchoir-Bonnet 1); and by enabling one to see oneself in one's entirety, in focus, and in proportion, and to view this new totalized self as if from outside the self, all in the privacy of one's own home.

---

[37] According to Pendergrast, "[b]y the turn of the [twentieth] century, every household in America had at least one and probably several mirrors" (249).

This new unlimited access arguably allowed for and even encouraged close self-scrutiny, including a careful consideration of how one appears to others, and the privacy of the encounter would have made it possible for women to view themselves in ways they might not in public buildings or in other, more affluent homes, as the only likely places in which they may have previously come in contact with multiple mirrors or mirrors of quality and size.

This expanded and more intimate view of oneself would have been familiar enough to most middle-class readers and writers by the time of the novel's publication in 1856 to allow them to identify with the experience, and yet the novelty would also still be familiar, making the mirror a conceivable and even logical frame for discerning another new way of seeing oneself, that is, as an individual self. As a poor orphan, Gabriella has likely never encountered the kind of mirrors she experiences after she is adopted by the rich Mrs. Linwood, and yet this ability to quite literally conceptualize her person in new ways is not elaborated on. Rather, Gabriella focuses on the individual self that this reflection allows her to see, suitably encoding the more difficult-to-define narrative of a rising selfhood within the narrative of standard mirror use.[38]

I do not intend to reduce woman to her physical body, but rather to see the body as the physical manifestation of the self, the part of the self that makes this self visible. As I will show, when Gabriella looks in a mirror, she sees more than a superficial body; she sees a deeper self of which this physical body is only a part.

---

[38] Many critics recognize that "[t]he changes happening to the notion of selfhood" during the mid-nineteenth century "were drastic" (Cayton 223). See also Warren.

In terms of the Subject-Self metaphor used to describe our conception of the self described by Lakoff and Johnson that I discussed in the introduction, what I am calling the self would be the Subject and the Essence, and the body would be part of "one or more Selves." These are all parts of the self—we are not really "divided up into a Subject, an Essence, and one or more Selves"—these are simply "structures imposed by [the] metaphors" that we use to "capture the logic of . . . inner experience and characterize how we reason about it" (288).

What I want to suggest is that the mirrors Gabriella uses function for her in the same way as the metaphors we use to describe our subjective experiences. The mirrors, like the metaphors, make subjective experiences conceivable by describing them in terms of physical or sensorimotor experiences, experiences we can "grasp" (to use the Understanding Is Grasping metaphor). The mirrors, in this sense, literalize (as much as is possible) by making visual the "structures imposed by [the] metaphors," which allows Gabriella to see herself as a Subject, and to then recognize her various Selves and her Essence, and thus to know her "composite" self, the self composed of all these metaphorical divisions.

The other way in which mirrors can be seen as useful tools in the perception of the self goes back to the idea of mirrors as frames in which "things can take on a stable significance." As I noted, these frames are what Taylor argues those experiencing an identity crisis lack. For Gabriella, I argue, mirrors become actual frames that provide her with visual evidence of her orientation and thus, according to Taylor, her identity. There is, Taylor writes, an "essential link be-

tween identity and a kind of orientation," making it possible to define identity as "whatever gives us our fundamental orientation" (28). This orientation is, in part, spatial.[39] As such, to lose or lack this critical orientation—to experience an identity crisis—is to "not know who one is" and to not "know where one stands" mentally and, in extreme cases, even physically (29). That is, patients facing a "radical uncertainty" about their identities sometimes exhibit signs of spatial disorientation; they both do not know themselves and are unsure of their physical location (28). Furthermore, that knowing where one stands can be used, as it commonly is, as a metaphor for knowing the mind shows that the subjective experience of understanding what one thinks—of knowing one's inner self—has been conflated with the physical experience of knowing one's location; otherwise, this metaphor would not work.[40]

While Taylor asserts that "there are signs that the link [between identity and] spatial orientation lies very deep in the human psyche" (28), Lakoff and Johnson would argue this link is neural and automatic based on "the nature of our brains, our bodies, and the world we inhabit," as suggested by the existence of a metaphor that links identity and orientation, if we agree that knowing one's mind is an aspect of identity (59). As I discussed in the introduction, Lakoff and Johnson argue that the metaphors we use to describe our conception of our selves are based on four types of everyday experience and one of these expe-

---

[39] This spatial orientation is also what Mead seems to be referring to when he states that "getting . . . a content means getting a self" (144).
[40] Lakoff and Johnson must examine this metaphor but I have been unable to locate that discussion.

riences is manipulating objects. The second of these is "being located in space" (269). This experience leads to several metaphors that could be useful in describing Gabriella's experience, such as The Self As Container, Attentional Self Control Is Having The Self Together, and The Objective Standpoint Metaphor, but what I want to emphasize at this point is the way in which one's location in space is connected to one's sense of self, as this shows how the mirror can be seen as a frame. I do not mean merely knowing that one is standing in the bedroom because the room is visible in the mirror, but rather knowing, by seeing, how one's body exists in space; indeed, Knowing Is Seeing is another primary metaphor according to Lakoff and Johnson (53). Metaphorically then, seeing one's physical location in the mirror means knowing one's orientation, where one stands, and thus who one is. In *Ernest Linwood*, this metaphor is brought to life.

A crucial aspect of this knowledge of the self through seeing the self in the mirror comes from the mirror's ability to show us how we appear from a more objective standpoint. As Lakoff and Johnson write:

> If you are inside an enclosure, you can't see the outside of the enclosure. Given the metaphor that Knowing Is Seeing, vision from the inside is knowledge from the inside—subjective knowledge. If you want to know how your enclosure appears from the outside, you have to go outside and look. Vision from the outside is knowledge from the outside—objective knowledge. (277)

When the enclosure is the body, mirrors become the tools through which we can (almost) literally get outside the self to gain objective knowledge about the self. This objective standpoint allows and, in Gabriella's case, teaches her to see herself as she is seen. This self visible in the mirror is what Charles Horton Cooley dubbed, in *Human Nature and The Social Order* (1902), "the reflected or looking-glass self" (152).[41] As George Herbert Mead (who adopted and expanded upon the "Looking-Glass Self" theory about a decade after Cooley) writes, in the mirror, we "get . . . ourselves as we see ourselves through another person's eyes," and this self is the looking-glass "I" (70).

The significance of achieving this viewpoint is that, according to Mead, it initiates selfhood: "We have a self when it has become an object to itself and has a relationship to itself in the same way as do other objects in the environment" (146). After this experience, Mead argues, we have a new level of self-awareness in that we "carr[y] with [us] a picture of [ourselves]" based on the image reflected in the mirror and believe it is this reflected self to whom others react or respond: "It is not the individual who speaks, but one's self as he sees and hears it when he takes the role of the second person" (Mead 70). This "impressibility," in Cooley's words, "is not weakness unless it swamps the assimilating and organising faculty"; rather, it signals that "a character is open and capable of growth" (176). This growth includes the ability to project, copy, and create multiple selves,

---

[41] One could suggest that Hentz's use of mirrors to describe the experience of a new sense of selfhood nearly half a century before Cooley's theory is first described suggests just how rational her choice of mirrors was.

all of which Gabriella experiences in the novel.

Gabriella's discovery of her looking-glass self corresponds with her first depicted use of a mirror. Although very poor for most of her childhood, it is likely that Gabriella has seen a mirror, if only a very small one of poor quality, by this point in history. Furthermore, when Gabriella's mother dies and leaves her an orphan, Gabriella is taken in by a rich patron, Mrs. Linwood, and her daughter Edith, to live with them in Grandison Place. Here Gabriella has access to many mirrors, including those of full length and likely all of a very high quality due to the Linwood's wealth. Therefore, we can assume that Gabriella has viewed herself in mirrors on previous occasions but, like a baby prior to Lacan's mirror stage, has not yet had a significant encounter with this image of her own self. That her first narrated experience with a looking glass corresponds with her recognition of her looking-glass self immediately ties her mirror usage to a deeper sense of reflection and emphasizes the newness of this looking-glass self experience.

Gabriella's initial discovery of her looking-glass self follows a conversation she has with her oldest friend, Richard, during which he tells her that he doubts her "self-knowledge very much" (76).[42] While he is speaking "in the first place" about her improved beauty, this phrasing indicates that there is a "second place" and thus more to her self-knowledge than an awareness of her own physical charms. The conversation, however, is immediately diverted, providing neither

---

[42] Caroline Lee Hentz, *Ernest Linwood.* 1856. Philadelphia: Peterson,1869. All references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

opportunity for a potential "second place" nor any further discussion of Gabriella's appearance.

This questioning of her self-knowledge, if only that knowledge of her own appearance, triggers Gabriella's desire to see herself as Richard has seen her, thus linking Gabriella's self knowledge with her mirror image: "When I retired that night and saw the reflection of myself full length, in the large pier-glass, . . . I could not help recalling what Richard Clyde had said of my personal improvement." Now, with an at least superficial understanding that Self Knowledge Is Self Reflection, Gabriella discovers her looking-glass self: "[f]or the first time I looked upon myself with reference to the eyes of others, and I tried to imagine the youthful figure on which I gazed as belonging to another, and not myself" (80). Gabriella, with the aid of the "large pier-glass," is able to step outside of herself and to see herself as she has never seen herself before. This objective viewpoint, as I explained above, initiates Gabriella's process of selfhood development by giving birth to the looking-glass self.

While examining her reflection, Gabriella questions whether Richard was "sincere, when with apparent enthusiasm he had applied to [her] the epithet, *beautiful*," and wonders if "the outlines" of her body were "classic and graceful" and if there was "beauty in the oval cheek, now wearing the warm blood of the brunette, or the dark, long-lashed eye, which dropped with the burden of unuttered thoughts?" (80). Despite the apparent focus on her physical appearance, Gabriella assures the reader that her desire is to see what Richard saw, to take

his point of view when "his eyes had emphasized the language of his lips." Because Richard saw Gabriella's beauty, it is her beauty that Gabriella questions when she takes this new view of herself. This is not, Gabriella asserts, a sign of vanity: "I was not vain. Few young girls ever thought less of their personal appearance. I lived so much in the world within, that I gave but little heed to the fashion of my outward form. It seemed so poor an expression of the glowing heart, the heaven-born soul" (80).

Gabriella's distinction between "the world within" or her "heart" and "soul" and "personal appearance" or "outward form" is not a separation of body and mind or body and self; as Gabriella implies, she does recognize that her body or "outward form" is one kind of "expression of" her inner world, just a "poor" one. These distinctions, along with Gabriella's assertion of a lack of vanity, is, I would argue, her way of differentiating between ways of focusing on the self.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "selfhood" is, first, "[t]he quality by virtue of which one is oneself; personal individuality; ipseity; that which constitutes one's own self or individuality." This nonjudgmental denotation is contrasted by the second definition of selfhood, which is "oneself as the centre of one's life and action; hence, self-centredness; devotion to self, selfish life or conduct." The negative connotation of this sense of selfhood is that one thinks primarily or only about oneself even at the cost of others. This same distinction is made in

the definitions of "individualism," which is both "[s]elf-centred feeling or conduct as a principle" as well as "free and independent individual action or thought."[43]

Vanity, in the context in which it is used above, suggests a sense of "being personally vain," which entails having a "high opinion of oneself; self-conceit and desire for admiration." By asserting she is not vain while clearly focusing on her-self, Gabriella is making the distinction between the negative and the neutral senses of selfhood and individualism and ruling out those that imply a negative self-centredness, suggesting that her focus must, instead, be on the other, neutral senses of the terms. That is, Gabriella is not self-centered, but she is locating her selfhood and individuality. Gabriella's use of looking glasses there-fore distinguishes, from the beginning, between a superficial and a more complex concentration on the self.[44]

Gabriella's distinction between "the world within" and her "outward form" also shows that Gabriella is aware of an inner life, illustrating a limited recognition of herself as a Subject, as she knows she is a thinking, feeling, reasoning being, and the Subject is defined as "the locus of consciousness, subjective experience, reason, will, and our 'essence,' everything that makes us who we uniquely are" (Lakoff and Johnson 268). As it later becomes clear, however, Gabriella does not yet recognize her ipseity: that she is a self with her own identity and individuality

---

[43] All of these definitions were in use in the nineteenth century.

[44] Due to this focus on a self, it is also possible to see Gabriella's renunciation of vanity as an assertion that she is also not vain in the sense of worthless, as most definitions of vanity, including the most common ones, are not tied to a sense of "personal" vanity but rather to "that which is vain, futile, or worthless," or "the quality of being vain or worthless."

composed of a Subject, Essence and one or more Selves. The arrangement of and relationship between these elements that compose our selves is what Lakoff and Johnson would call the "structure of our inner lives," the recognition of which constitutes the ability to perform a "study of the self" (267). Without a conceptualization of this structure, we cannot, they suggest, study the self. As Gabriella only later learns of her multiple Selves, for example, it is evident that she is not yet fully aware of this structure and thus of her own complexity, although her discovery of her looking-glass self is a step in this direction.

According to Mead, the ability to recognize one's looking-glass self indicates a complexity or sophistication: "An unsophisticated person is relatively unconscious of self; his responses are rather immediate. The ability of a person to put himself in another's place, and to get his reflection of himself, constitutes sophistically the view of the self which answers to the other person's view of us, the self with which we work" (72). Gabriella initially responds far more to representations of others than to representations of her own self. For example, she dwells on a "haunting face in the library, which I had only seen on canvas, but which was to me a breathing reality,—that face which, even on the cold, silent wall, had no repose; but dark, restless, and impassioned, was either a history of past disappointment, or a prophecy of future suffering" (81). The painting Gabriella refers to is of Mrs. Linwood's son, Ernest, whom Gabriella has never met but who will become her husband later in the novel.

Gabriella, as this quotation makes clear, is so familiar with the picture of Ernest that she sees it as "a breathing reality," despite the fact that he exists for her almost exclusively on canvas. This familiarity is a consequence of gazing upon it excessively, "till it was to me a living being" (70). In contrast, Gabriella is apparently so unacquainted with her own image that she surprises herself with what she sees when she smiles:

> as the image smiled back upon the original, there was such a light, such a glow, such a living soul passed before me, that for one moment a triumphant consciousness swelled my bosom, a new revelation beamed on my understanding,—the consciousness of woman's hitherto unknown power,—the revelation of woman's destiny. (80-81)

The contrast between Gabriella's knowledge of Ernest's face—a knowledge great enough to make the portrait "a breathing reality"—and her knowledge of her own, which is capable of providing a new "revelation" of a "living soul," indicates that, up until this moment, Gabriella has been more familiar with, even more interested in, the faces of others than with her own; she has lacked a self-consciousness that she is only now discovering, revealed in her ability to see herself analytically, to separate herself, the "original," from the "image" that others—including herself as other—see.

The power to which Gabriella refers in this passage seems, at first, to be connected to her beauty, as an examination of this is what has brought her to the mirror and her recognition of this power is sparked by her smiling image.

Gabriella, however, specifically connects the consciousness of this power with the "living soul [that] passed before [her]." Her "soul," as Gabriella has previously made clear, is, like her "heart," aligned with her "inner world" and not with her "outward form" or "personal appearance." This previously unknown power Gabriella feels is thus connected to a new "understanding" of her inner world, which is to say her self—a self that is suddenly spotlighted with "a light" and "a glow." This self, whether Gabriella recognizes it yet or not, is her "woman's destiny."

I argued earlier that mirrors in *Ernest Linwood* function like metaphors by providing visual images of subjective experiences with the difference being that mirrors literalize this visual imaging by projecting it onto a mirror, making it physically visible rather than visible only in the mind. This literalization is highlighted at the end of this first mirror scene when Gabriella's growing understanding of her self as other finally leads her to actually see herself as *an-other*: "A pale shadow seemed to flit behind me and dim the bright image reflected in the mirror. It wore the sad, yet lovely lineaments of my departed mother" (81). Gabriella envisions herself not precisely as her mother, but as herself overlaid with her mother's lineaments, meaning either her outline or features, which implies that Gabriella's image is still visible underneath. This picture of herself as an-other—as different from the Gabriella she saw only moments ago in the mirror but also not completely as her mother—proves that Gabriella has truly managed to view herself

objectively and not just physically. As Gabriella gazes at this vision, she is able to imagine herself having the same experiences and feelings as her mother:

> Oh how vain were youth and beauty, if thus they faded and vanished away! How mournful was love thus wedded to sorrow! how mysterious the nature in which they were united!
>
> A shower of tears washed away the vain emotions I blushed to have felt. But I could not be as though I had never known them. I could not recall the guileless simplicity of childhood, its sweet unconsciousness and contentment, in the present joy.
>
> O foolish, foolish Gabriella! Art thou no longer a child? (81)

Gabriella's experience here can be seen as a type of projection, defined by Lakoff and Johnson as the ability "to conceptualize oneself as inhabiting the body of another" (281). Further, through this projection, Gabriella is able to feel her mother's disappointed love and to see herself suffering as her mother did, and the experience is so real that it causes Gabriella to shed tears and even to wish that this new discovery of her looking-glass self had never occurred due to the pain she is now feeling. This "extension" of projection "to the realm of emotions," to "feel as someone else feels," is what Lakoff and Johnson describe as empathy (281). This "empathic projection" appears to be connected to the ability to have multiple selves and thus would seem to be connected to Mead's sense of "sympathy," in which we respond "to stimulations which other persons have called out in us" in our unconscious "copying" of them (59). "The responses,"

Mead writes, "are the material out of which he [man] builds up other selves" (59). Gabriella's experience of herself as like her mother, therefore, should allow her "the material" to envision and then to create multiple selves, and to come to a more complete sense of her selfhood by a better understanding of its structure.

As these passages describing Gabriella's first interaction with mirrors shows, the discovery of her looking-glass self is not a simple recognition of the beauty another has seen in her. Rather, it initiates a new sophistication in the way she sees herself, rendered here in the new objective view she gains of herself as well as in her ability to see herself as an-other, preparing her for the ability to build new selves. This development of what Mead would call her self-consciousness and what I would call her *self* consciousness marks a new stage in Gabriella's life, which Gabriella recognizes. She knows she will no longer be able to live in the "simplicity of childhood" because she "could not be as though [she] had never known" the "vain emotions [she] blushed to have felt." The simplicity of childhood is lost because Gabriella is becoming more complex: she is developing a sense of her own self.

What Gabriella now calls vanity is a mistaken view of what has become a prolonged focus on her self. As I have illustrated, what has been developing is Gabriella's sense of self, not a negative self-centredness or self-conceit, even if initially provoked by the question of her own beauty. Further, when Gabriella's thoughts suddenly turn negative, she transitions with "[t]he moment of triumph was brief" (81). This is a direct verbal link to the "triumphant consciousness" of

her "living soul," which I have argued is her self, suggesting that what Gabriella now calls vanity is due to the power she feels when she first recognizes a sense of her own ipseity. Although it might be clear from a modern perspective that what Gabriella is feeling is a sense of self and not conceit, such a prolonged focus on the self, in any form, may have felt like vanity and self centredness in the mid-nineteenth century because this experience of self was not usual—at least for women.

As Baym writes in *Woman's Fiction*, in the orphan story lines common in nineteenth-century women's fiction, "the protagonist—and readers vicariously—learn that women must become people to survive a difficult world; they also learn that women *can* become people, because persons, selves, is what they all potentially are" (ix). What this suggests is that the experience of selfhood is not guaranteed for women at this period in time, likely because women were not encouraged or even expected to develop in this way. As Mrs. Linwood attests in the novel, when a woman marries a man in the nineteenth century she "loses her own identity in his" (349-50). Before marriage and while still a child, a woman's identity is that of her father. Because woman's identity is in this way subsumed by the male to whom she "belongs" a woman's self is seemingly superfluous. This makes Gabriella's experience with her developing self significant and even transgressive, and explains why Gabriella would feel this focus on the self to constitute vanity.

After Gabriella's discovery of her looking-glass self, her self-consciousness increases dramatically, indicating that she is continuing to "go outside" her "enclosure" in an effort to examine herself more objectively. This self-consciousness at first manifests itself most clearly in Gabriella's seemingly sudden concern for her physical appearance, which includes both beauty and age, and which corresponds with the coming of Ernest Linwood. For example, on the day of Ernest's arrival Gabriella admits: "I had taken unusual pains with my dress," and "[t]hough not very elaborately adorned, I had an impression I was looking my best" (100). Never before has Gabriella noted any attempt to make herself attractive. Additionally, when Ernest says he was expecting a little girl rather than a young lady, Gabriella's "self-respect was gratified that he did not look upon me as a child" (102).

Gabriella's desire to appear a certain way before Ernest shows her deep interest in him, despite knowing nothing of him outside of the images provided by Ernest's sister Edith, who worships her brother, as well as the image of Ernest on canvas that, as we have seen, Gabriella studies intently in the library. Gabriella's high opinion of Ernest based on these images and his great wealth causes Gabriella to care a great deal about what he will think of her, if he will think of her at all. Due to the importance of his perspective, Gabriella cannot resist the opportunity to obtain a glimpse of it, which is provided by Edith shortly after Ernest's arrival when Edith tells Gabriella that Ernest sees "[a] very striking resemblance" between Gabriella and a picture of an Italian flower-girl in the library. Gabriella

responds with doubt and delight: "'That enchanting picture like me!' I exclaimed, 'impossible! There is, there can be no likeness. It is nothing but association. He knows I am the flower-girl of the house, and that is the reason he thought of me.'" Although Gabriella tries "to speak with indifference," her "voice tremble[s] with delight" (123).

Gabriella's "delight" can be attributed to her discovery that Ernest does, in fact, think of her, that he finds her like an "enchanting picture," and that she now has the opportunity to visually inspect his perspective by examining the picture, which she does the following day. After Gabriella returns from her morning ritual of collecting flowers, "an irresistible impulse drew [her] to the library" (123). Just as Richard's comment about Gabriella's self-knowledge and beauty cause her to seek out her image in the mirror in order to see herself as if through another's eyes, Ernest's comment about Gabriella's similarity to a picture draws her that picture. The experiences are not the same, however, and Gabriella feels this difference. She admits she "started at the light echo of [her] own footsteps" as she sneaks into the library and, once there, she "stole with guilty consciousness toward the picture, in whose lineaments the fastidious eye of Ernest Linwood had traced a similitude to [hers]. They were all engraven on [her] memory, but now they possessed a new fascination; and [she] stood before it, gazing into the soft, dark depths of the eyes" (123).

Gabriella's feelings of guilt and impropriety in taking this particular view of the other distinguish it from her experience with the mirror. That experience,

although initiated by Gabriella's desire to see what Richard saw, was not about Richard's personal perspective. Rather, Gabriella was interested in seeing herself objectively, in taking the position of the unspecified other, which is the equivalent to and thus resulted in the recognition of her looking-glass self. Gabriella was searching, we might say, for what Mead would call her "primary" self (74). In the case of the flower-girl picture, Gabriella is specifically attempting to take Ernest's view, to step into his shoes and discover his personal image of her—an activity that feels impudent due to Ernest's believed superiority over her. This experience is also not about searching for her primary self as Gabriella does not believe that the picture accurately reflects her; it is neither a mirror reflection nor a portrait of her, but merely a painting of some (probably fictitious) Italian girl who also happens to collect flowers and perhaps even looks something like her.[45] Gabriella is, therefore, searching for something new.

As Gabriella examines the picture, her "hands loaded with blossoms," she finds herself "involuntarily imitating the attitude of the lovely flower girl" (124). At this moment Ernest enters the room, causing a dramatic reaction in Gabriella: "Had I been detected in the act of stealing or counterfeiting money, I could not have felt more intense shame. He knew what brought me here. I saw it in his penetrating eye, his half-suppressed smile; and, ready to sink with mortification, I covered by face with the roses I held in my hands" (124). Gabriella attributes her

---

[45] The likeness is clearly not obvious as, when Ernest asks Edith—who is now Gabriella's adoptive sister—if she does not see the likeness, Edith must ask "to whom," and responds with surprise when Ernest answers "[t]o Gabriella" (123).

shame to the "despicable vanity" she believes Ernest will see in her, but what she means by vanity is important. Gabriella could only see her actions in terms of imitation, "stealing or counterfeiting" if she believed that the image was not hers; therefore, she is not gazing at the painting as a picture of herself and thus out of a vanity connected to a high opinion of herself and her beauty. This vanity must, instead, be connected to the sense of vanity suggested earlier in her reference to the "vain emotions [she] blushed to have felt" after experiencing a sense of power through a recognition of her self in the mirror. This vanity implies not self-centredness but simply a focus on the self, a focus that, nonetheless, would have been considered unnatural for those who should have no selfhood in the mid- nineteenth century. Gabriella is, therefore, ashamed at being caught developing a self she should not have (how this can be seen as development I will address shortly), and likely also at being caught attempting to impudently (in her perspective) take the viewpoint of Ernest.

While the ability to step into another's shoes is a sign of self-development, for Gabriella it apparently feels intrusive and thus improper. Despite her usual decorum, the draw is "irresistible" as the picture "possesse[s] a new fascination," as with it she can attempt to step into Ernest's shoes and into his mind. Rather than trying to imagine what others see, Gabriella literally stands in front of the picture where Ernest would stand in order to take his position and see "herself" through his eyes. This is not to say Gabriella is "consciously copy[ing]" Ernest's attitude. When Ernest claims that Gabriella came to "establish beyond a doubt

the truth of the likeness," Gabriella objects: "No, indeed! I did not; I cannot explain the impulse which led me hither. I only wish I had resisted it as I ought" (125). Gabriella "cannot explain the impulse" because it is unconscious; it is, as Mead writes, "not a process of imitation, but an unconscious becoming alike, functioning alike in social conduct" (58).

This, as Gabriella also recognizes, is a "natural response" and a "direct" one triggered by the "stimulations which other persons have called out in us" (59). Despite telling Ernest that she "ought" to have resisted the impulse, secretly Gabriella thinks that it may have been "foolish to wish to look at the beautiful flower girl; but it was a *natural*, innocent wish, born of something purer and better than vanity and self-love" (129, my emphasis). Telling Ernest she "ought" to have resisted the impulse to look at the picture once again emphasizes Gabriella's belief that she is not worthy of him, because it suggests she is embarrassed at being caught in an act that would indicate she believes Ernest thinks about her.

Further evidence that Gabriella has gone to the picture in search of something other than her own reflection is evident in her response to Ernest's statement that he "came on purpose to gaze on that charming representation of youth and innocence, without dreaming that its original was by it." Gabriella insists that he must be mocking her to call her its "original" as it is only in "youth and flowers" that it resembles her (124). This reference to an "original" recalls the initial mirror scene in which Gabriella learns to differentiate between the "original" and the reflected "image," the looking-glass self that others see. By insisting she is not

the original of the flower-girl picture, Gabriella shows that she is now familiar enough with her self from a more objective standpoint (a great development in itself considering how unfamiliar Gabriella once was with her own reflection) to see that she is different from the image represented in the picture, the image that Ernest connects with her. In other words, Gabriella now recognizes that there can be a difference between one's looking-glass self—the self others see—and what one feels one is in "essence," to use Lakoff and Johnson's sense of the term. This distinction is evidence of a new complexity in Gabriella's conceptualization of her self as it illustrates she is capable of imagining a multi-layered self.

By not claiming the picture as her reflection, Gabriella also informs Ernest that she does not share his view of her. This, he tells her, is due to her inability to see herself: "We cannot see ourselves, and it is well we cannot. The image reflected from the mirror is but a cold, faint shadow of the living, breathing soul" (124). Ernest's response takes Richard's earlier statement about Gabriella's self-knowledge one step further. While Richard "doubted" Gabriella's self-knowledge because she did not see herself as he saw her (which at least does not rule out the possibility that Gabriella may come to know her self in the future), Ernest suggests that she *cannot* possess self-knowledge because "we cannot see ourselves" as we are seen by others, even if we stand in front of a picture that (supposedly) resembles us or in front of a mirror that actually reflects us, as even our mirror image "is but a cold, faint shadow of the living, breathing soul." If we cannot possess outside knowledge of the self then there is no objective view of the

self, no looking-glass self, and, therefore, no selfhood, if we agree with Mead's theory that the discovery of one's looking-glass self initiates this selfhood.

Despite speaking in terms of "we," Ernest refers to his "own individuality" only moments later, which suggests that he (and all men like him) can recognize a self in himself (127). Furthermore, Ernest argues that Gabriella has no self-knowledge because she does not see, as he believes, that her reflection is the image in the picture, which grants him some privileged ability to see Gabriella as she cannot, although not, as will become clear, as a self. Richard, likewise, doubted Gabriella's self-knowledge because she did not see herself as he saw her. Both instances suggest that men have the capacity to see themselves and others in ways women cannot or simply do not; or, perhaps, this is just what they would like to believe. In the words of T.S. Arthur in his 1848 conduct manual *Advice to young ladies on their duties and conduct in life*, a young woman like Gabriella "has yet to learn that she sees only the appearances of things, and that realities are hidden beneath them, and cannot be seen by her except through the eyes of those who are older and more experienced" (138). These more experienced others are, Arthur suggests, men, as they are the focus of the chapter (entitled "Conduct Towards Men") in which this passage is found.

A lack of selfhood in Gabriella would be advantageous to Ernest, who will eventually marry Gabriella, because he is extremely jealous and will want to keep Gabriella to himself, enclosed like a possession. It is only in objectifying Gabriella and seeing her as self-less that Ernest can believe a picture could produce what

he thinks is an accurate reflection of her rather than merely a likeness, a version, or even a model. As Elizabeth Barnes similarly argues, Ernest's desire to

> fashion [Gabriella] after one of his classical statues and paint her into the image of the flower-girl whose portrait hangs in his study, attests to Linwood's proficiency in the objectification of women so central to nineteenth-century lovemaking. And it reveals that this is yet another relationship meant to keep Gabriella's self-boundaries permeable and her identity undeveloped. (168)

Part of Ernest's objectification of Gabriella is believing that she has, and can have, no self, no individuality, apart from him. Quite to the contrary, what Gabriella will discover is that she not only has a self apart from Ernest, but she can also have multiple selves; literally, selves apart from each other. Gabriella will eventually learn, in fact, that it is necessary to have multiple selves in order to live with someone like Ernest.

Although Gabriella does not yet know she will need to build a self to satisfy Ernest due to his jealousy and suspicion, she does think herself currently unworthy of him. Even before his arrival at Grandison Place, when Gabriella hears he is about to take possession of an additional fortune, she thinks: "Further and further still, seemed he removed from me. But what difference did it make? Why think of him in reference to myself? How dared I do it, foolish and presumptuous

girl!" (97).[46] While part of her assumed inequality is based on Ernest's wealth, it is not simply his moneyed status that Gabriella bases her believed deficiency upon, as, after she has met him, she also feels divorced from him socially, intellectually and culturally. Even after their marriage Gabriella continues to think of Ernest as "a benefactor, a superior" in addition to "a lover and a husband" (41). As she tells Mrs. Linwood later in the novel: "I never had the presumption to think myself his equal; never sought, never aspired to his love" (201). At the same time, Gabriella believes there could be no "happier lot than to be the wife of Ernest . . . Heaven offers nothing to the eye of faith more blissful, more divine" (201).

Despite feeling inferior to Ernest, that Gabriella has harbored thoughts about him in relation to herself indicates that she wants, even subconsciously, to be worthy of him, noticed by him, and perhaps eventually loved by him. Thus, when Edith tells Gabriella that Ernest thinks she is like the flower-girl, Gabriella is understandably anxious to see how Ernest views her, compelling her to inspect the image and then even to "imitate" it as an unconscious desire to become like the girl in the picture and thus to become what Ernest believes her to be—the embodiment of "youth and innocence." This "fashion[ing]" of one's "self on the model of other selves," Mead writes, is part of the development of the self (54).

---

[46] In a future scene, when Ernest overhears negative comments about Gabriella and her mother made by strangers, it pains Gabriella to imagine how these comments will lower her in his estimation: "he, who seemed already lifted as high above me on the eagle wings of fortune, as the eyry of the king-bird is above the nest of the swallow—it was more than I could bear" (138).

And, as Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton stress, for Mead, this model does not need to be a person:

> Mead's original meaning of the term "role model" has become narrowed, so that now social scientists tend to emphasize the behavioral patterns of an actual person as constituting a "role model," leaving out or omitting the fact that Mead includes "any object" or "set of objects" as having this power as well. The importance of a role model lies in its representativeness as a sign. (51)

The picture of the flower-girl can, therefore, be a model for Gabriella, and it is a model she will draw heavily upon despite the fact that the novel makes it abundantly clear that Gabriella is already all those things represented by the flower-girl: young, innocent, true, and beautiful. Ernest's extreme jealousy and suspicion, however, will cause him to doubt Gabriella's veracity and to believe that she is merely counterfeiting his image of her as represented by the picture of the flower-girl. This proves to be devastating for Ernest and Gabriella's relationship as it is crucial for Ernest's happiness and, in fact, his sanity, that he not be robbed of this image of Gabriella as the "original" of that "charming representation of youth and innocence," that epitome of purity. Once Gabriella recognizes the severity of Ernest's traits, she will learn that she must perform a different self to satisfy him, and this is when Gabriella will realize a self based on the model of the flower-girl.

The next stage of Gabriella's development is triggered by events occurring during and after her friend Richard's college graduation ceremony, which she attends with the Linwoods. The parallel occurrence of Gabriella's growth with Richard's serves, I believe, to stress their similarities—that Gabriella is undergoing a life-changing event similar in magnitude to Richard's—rather than highlight their differences. Richard's commencement ushers him "out from the seclusion of college life into the wide, wide world," a sort of coming out to the public eye for a man corresponding to a woman's coming out to announce her entrance into society, usually at a ball. Although this is not Gabriella's official coming out, it is her first foray into a large, public, social event. Mrs. Linwood foretells the magnitude of this occasion for both Richard and Gabriella when she tells Richard, "I pity the young man when he first girds himself for the real duties of life. The change from thought to action, from dreams to realities, from hope to fruition or *disappointment*, is so sudden, so great, he requires the wisdom which is only brought by experience . . ." (90). On the day of his commencement, Mrs. Linwood's words to Richard ring true for Gabriella as well, as she is thrust for the first time into "the wide, wide world" of society and its concomitant social evils.

The catalyst for Gabriella's development is not the graduation ceremony as it is for Richard, but what occurs before the ceremony. As she waits for the rite to begin, Gabriella overhears a conversation taking place behind her in which strangers discuss the merits of Richard, said to be "the most promising student in the university." Gabriella is brought up in their conversation, unnamed, as the

"young girl in the country, very pretty, but in most indigent circumstances" to whom Richard is supposedly (but mistakenly) betrothed. The stranger goes on to remark that the girl's "own mother was of very mysterious and disreputable character . . . whom no one visited or respected. Quite an outcast" (137). Gabriella's reaction to this disparagement is extreme, in part because it is the first to which she has ever been subjected: "Never before had I heard one sullying word breathed on the spotless snow of my mother's character" (138). Gabriella's only desire is to leave, but finds she is "a prisoner" due to "the masses of living beings on every side, crowding the pews, filling the aisles" (138). The sheer volume of the crowd only strengthens the negativity of her first public exposure as she is, in a sense, crushed physically as well as emotionally.

Thus confined and distracted, Gabriella is unable to enjoy or even understand the rest of the ceremony, including Richard's speech for receiving top honors. Instead, as Richard speaks, Gabriella thinks not about his entrance into the wide world but about her own: "Was this my introduction to that world, —that great world, of which I had heard and thought and dreamed so much? How soon had my garlands faded,—my fine gold become dim!" (139). Gabriella here experiences precisely that "sudden" and "great" change that Mrs. Linwood spoke of, "from dreams to realities, from hope to fruition or *disappointment*" that would occur after graduation, and Gabriella does experience a graduation of sorts as she leaves another part of her childhood behind. Gabriella even speaks of the

fading of her "garlands," which likely refers to her adorning flowers but could also be understood as the adornments worn by graduates.

Like Richard, Gabriella "requires," as Mrs. Linwood said, "the wisdom which is only brought by experience," and though she immediately feels "there was . . . a wondrous change . . . within my own soul," her initial reaction is to "hide [herself] from every eye," as she now knows, after the discovery of looking-glass self, how powerful the visual image is (140, 141). After the ceremony, Gabriella tells Richard, "I never wish to be in such another [crowd]," and, further, "I never care to leave home again" (141). After Gabriella obtains a few hours of privacy and rest during the graduation dinner, however, she begins to feel the growth or "wisdom" brought about by the experience. With this newfound maturity, Gabriella wonders if

> the time [had] arrived when I might claim the manuscript, left as a hallowed legacy to the orphan, who had no other inheritance? Had I awakened to the knowledge of woman's destiny to love and suffer? Dare I ask myself this question? . . . Yes! I would ask Mrs. Linwood for my mother's history, as soon as we returned to Grandison Place. (143)

In desiring the manuscript—a letter from her mother explaining her parentage—Gabriella is admitting to a maturity, even a wisdom, which she has not previously felt, as Gabriella's mother instructed her to read the history only when she entered womanhood. The timing of her decision directly attributes some of this growth to the events of the morning, designating the graduation as a coming of

age experience for Gabriella just as it is for Richard, though for Gabriella, the diploma is of a different sort. Further, now that Gabriella has experienced the way that her "dreams" and "hopes" might turn into "disappointments" rather than reach "fruition," Gabriella feels she is prepared for whatever disillusionment her mother's history might bring, even if it confirms the slander Gabriella overhears before the ceremony—a possibility that had not previously entered her mind.

As with Gabriella's discovery of her looking-glass self, this latest development is manifested visually, although it does not explicitly include a mirror. As Gabriella prepares for the party later that evening, she dons her first party dress and simultaneously removes her mourning attire for the first time since her mother's death, a change that causes Gabriella to "hardly recognize[] . . . [her] own lineaments" (148). I would argue that Gabriella's non-recognition is not simply the effect of her dress but also of the growth she has experienced, the degree of which is suggested by the multiple "years" she feels as though she "had lived" that day (148). In addition to having never before "felt so utterly miserable" (due to the slandering of her mother), Gabriella has also "never felt so supremely happy" (due to the flowers given her by Ernest, who witnessed the former experience) (148, 149).

A repetition of these extreme experiences of emotion, and what can be seen as the culmination of Gabriella's graduation experience, occurs once she returns to Grandison Place and obtains her mother's history. Reading this document causes Gabriella to feel an even greater misery than hearing her mother

denigrated, and half-way through this history, after Gabriella has discovered that her father supposedly married her mother illegally by having a wife and child in France, Gabriella falls into a semiconscious state. When Ernest finds Gabriella in this condition and fears she might be dead, he professes his love for her. After Gabriella regains full consciousness—inspired by Ernest's professions—he proposes to her, causing Gabriella to feel an even greater happiness than that inspired by his flowers. As she asks Mrs. Linwood later that day: "Do joy and sorrow always thus go hand in hand? In the last few hours I have known the two great extremes of life. I have been plunged into the depths of despair and raised to the summit of hope. I am dizzy and weak by the sudden transition" (203).

The result of these powerful and extreme experiences on Gabriella is to leave her "doubting [her] own identity," and this confusion about her self causes her to return to the mirror, the original frame of her self development: "As I passed and repassed the double mirror, my reflected figure seemed an apparition gliding by my side. I paused and stood before one of them, and I thought of the time when, first awakened to the consciousness of personal influence, I gazed on my own image" (191). Gabriella's reference to her first experience of self discovery in the mirror in this mirror scene, where Gabriella again seeks an understanding of her identity, firmly links her mirror usage with her self development. The discovery of her looking-glass self is what Gabriella here refers to as her "awaken[ing] to the consciousness of personal influence," which can be read as the ability to have an effect on the development of her own person, to have con-

trol over the self. By referencing that ability here, Gabriella is linking these two experiences together.

When Gabriella discovered her looking-glass self, she stood before a single, full-sized pier glass and learned to see herself as if from outside herself and from the point of view of another. This experience provides Gabriella with the opportunity to visualize herself as a self. When Gabriella puts herself in Ernest's "place" and assumes Ernest's view of her, as represented by the picture of the flower-girl, this proves that Gabriella is developing self consciousness, as "[t]his attitude distinguishes a self-conscious person from one who is not self-conscious" (Mead 103). By then asserting that she is not the original of the picture of the flower-girl, Gabriella distinguishes between her looking-glass self and her Essence, and thus illustrates her capacity to see the self as multi-layered and complex. This latest mirror scene, following experiences that graduate Gabriella from childhood to womanhood, demonstrate that Gabriella has also graduated to a more complex degree of selfhood, as she now displays a recognition of this multi-layeredness and complexity rather than merely the capacity for it.

As Gabriella stands before the "double mirror," she sees herself as "an apparition." Although apparition can refer to a ghost, it more commonly, according to the *OED*, denotes the action of appearing or becoming visible. As Gabriella is already literally visible, I would suggest this indicates that it is a new sense of her self that is now appearing in the glass. Indeed, by pausing and standing before "one of them" in order to reflect on her own image, Gabriella demonstrates

that she recognizes more than one of herself; that is, more than one self. Once a person is able to put him or herself in the shoes of another, as Gabriella has demonstrated, the responses these experiences call out in the individual, as Mead argues, become "the material out of which he builds up other selves" (59). Taking the role of another is a process of what Mead calls "unconscious imitation" and is "much more powerful than the presentation of ourselves in their eyes" (71). It is more difficult, in other words, to take the role of another than to imagine ourselves from their perspective, and this role-taking is what gives us the ability to develop other selves as it enables us to imagine ourselves as more than one person. Once we can do this, then we can imagine our selves as more than one self.

The ability to have multiples selves, as Mead and Lakoff and Johnson would confirm, is natural. These selves are the "one or more Selves" that Lakoff and Johnson argue join the Subject and Essence to form the structure of the self. As Mead similarly writes, "[w]e are all persons of multiple selves, but all of these have their relation to the organic fundamental self" (71). That is, once a person "has built them [other selves] up, he has other selves that are made out of the same stuff that he is made of, with the same tendencies to respond" (59). These new selves are not recreations of the original, or what Mead has also called the "organic fundamental self" and the "primary self," but additions to it, versions of it, creating what he calls a "composite" (78). This evolving composite, in a sense,

enlarges the self: "With every change comes an increase of subjectivity. There is more of the individual than there was before" (69).

This growing composite self is, I argue, what Gabriella views in the mirror, partly expressed through the growing size of this frame. In the first mirror scene, Gabriella uses a single pier glass and sees a single self, whereas in this second mirror scene Gabriella uses a "double mirror" and sees at least two selves: her original self, the self moving before the mirror, and a new self, represented by the "apparition gliding by [her] side." As Gabriella examines "one of" these selves, she recalls that "[s]ome writer has said, 'that every woman is beautiful when she loves.'" Gabriella notices in her own reflection "a light, coming up from the en-kindled heart, bright as the solar ray, yet pure and soft as moonlight, which throws an illusion over the plainest features and makes them for the moment charming." At this point, Gabriella continues, "I saw the flower-girl of the library in the mirror, and then I knew that the artist had intended her as the idealization of Love's image" (191). For the one and only time in the novel, Gabriella identifies with the painting of the flower-girl; in fact, Gabriella identifies "one of" the selves she sees in the mirror *as* the flower-girl. Gabriella, however, recognizes that this self is not her primary self; it is an "apparition" by the side of her primary self in the frame of the mirror.

This new self, represented as the flower-girl—an image that Gabriella knows to be an "idealization of Love's image"—is a result, as Gabriella recognizes, of her new experience as a woman in love and as a woman passionately

beloved. This is a new kind of love for Gabriella, one Ernest tells her is more powerful than familial love, which is the only kind Gabriella has known thus far in her life.[47] This new romantic love is a significant experience that introduces Gabriella to a new version of herself—a new self visible to Gabriella in the mirror. This is a self that is aglow with the light of love, appearing more "beautiful" and more "charming" and thus recognizably enhanced by love. The reflection of this new self is, therefore, like the image of the flower-girl, an "idealization of Love's image." Gabriella is now, if only temporarily, able to see herself as Ernest sees her—as the best or the "ideal" version of herself. The difference between these views is that Gabriella knows this image only reflects one version of her; if Gabriella sees the flower-girl reflection of herself as an "apparition" then she knows it is fleeting, and if she sees the picture as an "idealization" then she knows it is an unrealistic view to hold of her and one that cannot be maintained. Gabriella, in other words, knows this ideal self is not her original or primary self, and this is what Ernest fails to see.

Gabriella is indirectly warned of Ernest's expectation to see this idealized version of her all the time when Mrs. Linwood forewarns Gabriella of Ernest's negative traits, of those "qualities fatal to the peace of those who love him,—fatal to his own happiness; suspicion haunts him like a dark shadow,—jealousy, like a serpent, lies coiled in his heart" (202). Gabriella, in her naiveté, "fear[s] not,—my confidence shall be so entire, there shall be no room for suspicion,—my love so

---

[47] Ernest tells Gabriella "there is a passion stronger than filial love" (189).

perfect it shall cast out jealousy" (202). Love, she tells Mrs. Linwood, "should cover every fault, and jealousy be pardoned without an effort, since it is a proof of the strength and fervor of one's affection. Let me be loved,—I ask no more" (203).

When Mrs. Linwood finally resigns herself to Gabriella's decision to marry Ernest, she offers one last warning of a different sort. She tells Gabriella that a girl who goes into such a marriage after being sufficiently warned of her husband's faults must bear the consequences in silence: "She has walked with open eyes into the furnace, and she must not shrink from the flames. She must fold over her woman's heart the wings of an angel. She must look up to God, and be silent" (223). Gabriella feels "equal to the duties" outlined by Mrs. Linwood, determining to live up to Ernest's expectations, to never give him any reason to be jealous and therefore to stave off any problems before they begin. In this sense, Gabriella is determined to uphold the flower-girl image, that idealization of womanhood that Ernest so desires.

A reaffirmation of Ernest's view of Gabriella as the flower-girl appears just after their marriage, as Ernest stands before a statue of a woman in their bridal home and asks Gabriella,

> "Do you not recognize a similitude to the flower-girl of the library? This is Flora herself, whose marble hands are dripping with flowers, and whose lips, white and voiceless as they are, are wearing the sweetness and freshness of eternal youth. Do you not trace a resemblance to yourself

> in those pure and graceful features, which, even in marble, breathe the eloquence of love?" (240-241)

Ernest's comparison of Gabriella to a marble statue recalls a promise he makes to his mother before his marriage. When Mrs. Linwood attempts to persuade Ernest to postpone the wedding until Gabriella is a little older, Ernest demands, "[g]ive her to me now, in the bloom of her innocence, the flower of her youth, and I will enshrine her in my heart as in a crystal vase, which they must break to harm her" (230). The crystal vase is supplanted here by the marble statue, another nearly indestructible material in which Ernest wishes to encase Gabriella, purportedly to protect her but in reality so that she cannot be touched or influenced by the outside world, a desire Ernest makes clear in that same speech to his mother when he tells her he does not want to

> "wait till she [Gabriella] loses the freshness and simplicity that won me,—the sweetness and ingenuousness that enchained me! . . . till she has been flattered and spoiled by a vain and deceiving world; till she learns to prize the admiration of many better than the true love of one; till she becomes that tinsel thing my soul abhors, a false and worldly woman." (230)

If Ernest believes that Gabriella has the potential to become "that tinsel thing" unless protected by him, then he is admitting, on some level, to idealizing the current Gabriella while also affirming that he intends to uphold this idealization by cutting the Gabriella he now sees off from the outside world. With this

preface, the current comparison to Flora betrays Ernest's underlying desire to "enshrine" Gabriella in a marble statue so that he can be assured of the illusion of perfection: of lips, "white and voiceless as they are," that wear "the sweetness and freshness of eternal youth," of "pure and graceful features, which, even in marble, breathe the eloquence of love." Gabriella becomes, as Barnes writes, "Ernest Linwood's most priceless object" (168). As an object, Gabriella would not have control over—would not, in fact, have—her own self, and this is precisely what Ernest desires when he tells Gabriella to "remain just as you are, ingenuous, confiding, and true" (251). The only way to guarantee this constancy is to transform Gabriella into an idealized painting or statue of marble, even if that means she becomes "voiceless."

Gabriella's response to Ernest's inquiry about recognizing herself in the statue is silence, but only, I would argue, because she has just voiced her concerns about his distorted sense of reality in the discussion of another statue which takes place immediately prior. As they contemplate this other statue, Ernest says he does "not like to dwell on this image. It represents woman in too detestable a light. May we not be pardoned for want of implicit faith in her angelic nature, when such examples are recorded of her perfidy and heartlessness?" When Gabriella protests, "[b]ut she is a fabulous being, Ernest," his response is to assert that "[f]ables have their origin in truth" (240). Gabriella recognizes that the statues represent fabulous beings but also, like the rest of the house's lavish décor, "must be ideal. Reality never presented any thing so brilliant, so exquisite

as this" (239). The marble form of a statue, even when that statue is a reminder of negative attributes, is still ideal in the sense that it is *too* "brilliant" and *too* "exquisite" to be real.

Gabriella's response to the house and the statues once again establish her ability to recognize the difference between herself and the flower-girl, whether rendered in marble or paint. Despite this, Gabriella knows that, in order to keep Ernest's confidence, she must try to maintain and even develop her idealized flower-girl self, even if it means being, like the statue, "voiceless":

> Fearful of displeasing him, I repressed the natural frankness and social warmth of my nature, and I am sure our visitors often departed chilled and disappointed. The parlour was lined with mirrors, and I could not turn without seeing myself reflected on every side; and not only myself, but an eye that watched my every movement, and an ear that drank in my every word. How could I feel at ease, or do justice to those powers of pleasing with which nature may have gifted me?
>
> Sometimes, though very seldom, Ernest was not present; and then my spirits rebounded from this unnatural constraint, and I laughed and talked like other people. The youthful brightness of my feelings flashed forth, and I forgot that a clouded star presided over my young life. (244-45)

Gabriella, this passage confirms, calls forth the ideal version of her self for use when in social situations in the presence of Ernest in order to avoid his displeasure. As this self is a result of repressing her "natural" qualities and being

under "unnatural constraint" and is abandoned in Ernest's absence, it is evident that this self is not Gabriella's true or primary self, arguably that self that is released with what Gabriella calls her spirits and what Lakoff and Johnson would call her Essence. The experience portrayed in the above quotation therefore seems to be precisely what Mead is describing when he writes that "[t]he social situation is one in which we see ourselves from different points of view. Those presentations are the problems we have to solve by constructing another self" (74).

The "different points of view" from which we must "see ourselves" in a "social situation" are literalized in this scene when Gabriella sees herself "reflected on every side" in the parlour mirrors. Being in the parlour was nearly synonymous with being in a social situation in the nineteenth century, as this formal room was used specifically to entertain guests. The particular "problem" that Gabriella must "solve" in this social situation—specifically being with Ernest and other people—is what kind of a social self she should display so as not to displease her husband. The solution, as Mead argues, is to construct another self, the appropriate self for managing that particular social situation.

Just as the double mirror in the last scene manifested Gabriella's ability to see two selves, the multiplicity of mirrors in the parlour that show Gabriella multiple sides of herself suggest Gabriella now recognizes multiple selves—social selves constructed in different social situations. Gabriella, for the particular type of situation in which she now finds herself, constructs a social self to pacify

Ernest that is modeled on the flower-girl. Proof of this model lies, for example, in the fact that, while playing this self, Gabriella is clearly constrained and unusually uncommunicative, only "laugh[ing] and talk[ing] like other people" on those rare occasions when Ernest is not present, in essence making her voiceless like the statue of Flora, the marble version of the flower-girl. While the necessity of developing a flower-girl self is itself undesirable, Gabriella's ability to develop and enact this version of self is positive proof of Gabriella's selfhood and self control; that is, her control over her selves.

The multitude of mirrors and thus perspectives from which Gabriella is capable of seeing herself further suggests Gabriella now has the capacity to see Ernest, their relationship, and her role in this relationship more objectively, as she can now see it as if from outside, just as she learned to see herself in the first mirror scene. That is, the multitude of mirrors in the parlour enact different social points of view and allow Gabriella to see her relationship as outsiders see it. These different social points of view are verbally expressed on numerous occasions by friends and strangers alike: Gabriella is told that Ernest "keeps [Gabriella] too close a prisoner" (283), or that he "keeps [Gabriella] at home, like a bird in a cage, just to look at and admire" (255). On another occasion, Gabriella is informed that other gentlemen see Ernest as "a frightful ogre, who ought to be put in a boiling cauldron, for immuring [Gabriella] so closely" (253). Even a doctor tells Ernest that he keeps Gabriella "too close" and that, for the sake of her health, he must "[l]et her do just as she pleases, go where she pleases, stay as

long as she pleases, in the open air and free sunshine" (338). What outsiders see, therefore, is exactly what Gabriella sees in the mirror: that she is being watched and in this way controlled by Ernest.

Once again, then, the mirrors and Gabriella's experiences with them show that a progression is being made in Gabriella's self development, as she has now evinced the ability to construct social selves and to obtain a social view of herself and her relationship through a multitude of mirrors. As it is in a literal sense, the more mirrors Gabriella has the more she can see of her self; and the more complex the frame, the more complex the self viewed in that frame becomes. These changes are also evident outside of these mirror scenes (as they should be), as we see Gabriella discovering new versions of her self. Early in their marriage, for example, Gabriella finds "a righteous boldness[] I did not dream that I possessed" (249). Not long after, when Ernest begins to interrogate Gabriella for suspected wrongs involving other men, Gabriella discovers she has "a spirit of resistance" and recognizes "how little we know ourselves" (265).

After further similar incidents, Gabriella learns "how high" her spirit "could rebound from the strong pressure which . . . crushed it to the dust," allowing her to feel "firm to endure, strong to resist" Ernest and his dark side (291). Eventually, Gabriella's self development allows her to see herself not only as Ernest's equal, but finally his superior: "I, who had looked up to him with the reverence due to a superior being, felt that I was above him now" (332-33). With every change, as

Mead writes, "comes an increase of subjectivity. There is more of the individual than there was before" (69).

This increase in Gabriella's individuality also becomes evident in the way that these new, stronger, bolder and more confident versions of self appear to encroach on the flower-girl version of her self on which Ernest has always focused, as, with each incidence of mistrust that facilitates Gabriella's self growth, Ernest's idealization of Gabriella fades a little more. At the beginning of their marriage, the stability of Ernest's idealization is made evident when he tells Gabriella, "I do not think it is possible for you to deceive me, for you are truth itself. I begin to think you have changed my nature, and inspired me with trust and confidence in all mankind" (251). Believing Gabriella is "truth itself" renders her an abstraction, like the flower-girl picture that epitomizes truth and purity or the voiceless marble statue of Flora. Objectifying Gabriella in this way proves that Ernest recognizes no "self" in Gabriella outside of his idealized vision of her.

This idealization lasts until their first social outing, brought about by the visitation of a friend. During this outing, a man stares at Gabriella, causing her to blush uncomfortably, which Ernest witnesses. When Ernest is absent, the man shows Gabriella a miniature of her mother, which leads Gabriella to believe that the man is her father, and hands her a note demanding on Ernest's life that she conceal it from Ernest. Knowing now the history of how her father (supposedly) ruined her mother, Gabriella becomes further upset and these emotions are visible to Ernest when he returns. Once home, Ernest accuses Gabriella of acting

not like "a pure and innocent woman" would but like a "veteran *roué* [who] delights to behold" (264). Gabriella is "madden[ed] by [his] reproaches" and tells Ernest: "If I have been insulted, methinks you should wreak your vengeance on the offender, instead of me,—the innocent sufferer." Ernest looks at Gabriella "sternly and sorrowfully in the face," asking "Is this you? . . . Is this the gentle and tender Gabriella, who speaks in such a tone of bitterness and scorn?" (265).

Ernest's questioning of Gabriella's identity confirms he is seeing something in her that he has not previously recognized, something that he did not believe was part of the "true Gabriella," but something that will make him begin to question his view of her. Since this is the first time Ernest has doubted Gabriella's veracity, however, he is quickly able to recognize that it is his suspicion and jealousy speaking. When Ernest begs Gabriella's forgiveness, he calls her his flower-girl, illustrating that this incidence has passed without extreme damage to his idealization of Gabriella (268).

The following day, Gabriella secretly meets the man she believes to be her father in the park, as instructed in the note, and, although she takes precautions, is recognized. When Ernest learns of the clandestine meeting he again turns on Gabriella with anger and suspicion. This time Gabriella reveals the secret she was instructed to keep, believing Ernest can not blame her once he becomes aware that the meeting was with her father. Ernest, however, responds "with withering scorn" and expresses his belief that it is simply a tale, "marvelously conceived and admirably related," but a "falsehood so wanton and sacrilegious."

(293). Even if the tale were true, Ernest tells her, she lied to him about her destination and based on this demands "what trust could I ever repose in one so skilled in deception, so artful, and so perfidious?" (294). Gabriella meets Ernest's accusation with indignation and assertively stands up for herself, to which Ernest responds,

> "I know not what to believe. I would give worlds, were they mine, for the sweet confidence forever lost! The cloud was passing away from my soul. Sunshine, hope, love, joy, were there. I was wrapped in the dreams of Elysium! Why have you so cruelly awakened me? If you had deceived me once, why not go on; deny the accusation; fool, dupe me,—do any thing but convince me that where I have so blindly worshipped, I have been so treacherously betrayed." (295)

This time Ernest does not merely question Gabriella's identity but is convinced she is not what he believed her to be. Ernest admits that he has been living in a dream, with an idealization, but, at the same time, that he wants more than anything to go on living that way. While Ernest again eventually believes and forgives Gabriella and asks for forgiveness himself, he can no longer go on living in that dream world. Gabriella promises never again to "do anything unknown to him, or even to act spontaneously without his knowledge," but this does not erase the deception (296). Ernest can now see a crack in his statue as Gabriella's true self slowly breaks out of the marble.

A foreshadowing of the climax of Ernest's disillusionment occurs, ironically, during a period of serious atonement for his actions. This attempt comes only after Ernest and Gabriella have returned to Grandison Place and following several more incidents of distrust and jealousy, culminating with the rebuke of his own mother. Ernest repents by vowing to spend forty days in near seclusion living on bread and water and sleeping on the floor in the library. One day, halfway through this period, Gabriella determines to go to Ernest, in part to inform him of the arrival of his sister's suitor. During the twenty days that have passed, Ernest has kept his gaze from Gabriella, as though part of his penance, but when she enters he is forced to look upon her. As she stands, unintentionally, below the picture of the flower-girl, entreating him to break his rash vow and return to them, Ernest looks from the picture to Gabriella "with an expression of the tenderest compassion" and cries, "Alas, my flower-girl! how have I wilted your blooming youth! You are pale, my girl, and sad,—that bewitching smile no longer parts your glowing lips. Would to God I had never crossed your path of roses with my withering footsteps! " (380).

Despite calling Gabriella his flower-girl, Ernest finally sees a dissimilarity between her and the picture, and this, I would argue, is evidence that Ernest is finally acknowledging that Gabriella is not the ideal represented on the canvas. Even if it is now only subconscious, Ernest is realizing that Gabriella no longer looks like the flower girl because she is not that girl. The dissimilarity Ernest finally sees is not simply the result of her paleness and lack of a smile, but more the

result of the disillusionment that has come along with each of those instances of distrust and jealousy that have brought about Gabriella's physical changes. During less than a year of marriage, Ernest's vision has slowly deteriorated. In addition to this, Ernest has not really "seen" Gabriella for several weeks, is not expecting to see her, and has been, for all intensive purposes, parted from her for the first time. With his head cleared of illusions, familiarity and expectations, Ernest can finally begin to see not Gabriella as she really is, but at least what Gabriella is *not*. Indeed, this disillusionment with Gabriella as the original of the picture prefaces the complete disillusionment with Gabriella that Ernest will soon experience.

Shortly after this episode with the picture, Ernest overhears Richard asking for Gabriella at the house and follows Richard out into the woods to find Gabriella. When Ernest comes upon them, Richard has just revealed to Gabriella that they are sister and brother (later they will discover they are actually just cousins) and they are sitting together, embraced in each other's arms. Having heard nothing of the revelation, Ernest only sees Gabriella in the arms of Richard, whom he has looked upon as a rival. In Ernest's diseased imagination, this scene is the ultimate proof that Gabriella truly has counterfeited the image of the flower-girl as represented in the picture and in the marble statue. Feeling that all his suspicions are justified, Ernest shoots Richard in this climatic jealous rage and manages to also severely wound Gabriella in the process.

After awakening from a two-month coma, Gabriella learns that Richard is alive but that Ernest has disappeared and has likely gone to some foreign country. As he has left believing Gabriella has been unfaithful, Gabriella fears she will never see Ernest again, and is even more distraught by the idea that he may never know she is innocent of the presumed affair. Remembering "how the queenly locks of Marie Antoinette were whitened in one night of agony," Gabriella wonders if "[p]erhaps my own dark tresses were crowned by premature snow. I had not seen myself since the green of summer had passed into the 'sere and yellow leaf,' and perhaps the blight of my heart was visible on my brow" (392). When Gabriella asks Edith for confirmation, Edith responds by bringing Gabriella a toilet glass. What Gabriella sees shocks her: "What an astonishment to see my hair curling in short waves round my face, like the locks of childhood! And such a face,—so white, so colorless. I hardly recognized myself, and pushing back the glass, I burst into tears" (392).

By believing her hair might have turned white due to her recent traumatic experience, Gabriella confirms that she expects to be able to read the changes she has undergone in the mirror. Further, despite expecting a change, specifically white hair, Gabriella is clearly unprepared to see an image that she does not recognize, as this is apparently what brings her to tears. Edith assumes Gabriella is crying because her hair has been cut off during her illness, but Gabriella assures her "it is not that. But it is so dreadful to think of so many changes, and I unconscious of all. Such a long, dreary blank! Where was my soul wandering?

What fearful scenes may hereafter dawn on my memory?" (392). Gabriella implies that her hair could be white or cut off, she could look younger or older and this would not upset her; what is upsetting is a lack of recognition of herself based on the events that have produced her unconsciousness and the death-like state itself, through which Gabriella loses two months of her life. Considering how much Gabriella has been able to grow in short periods of time, such as the graduation experience that leaves her feeling as though she has lived years in a day, this actual loss of months that has left her unconscious of "so many changes" suggests the extent of her loss of self could be great, and her inability to recognize her self in the glass confirms this.

Given the evolution of self that has arisen during Gabriella's other mirror experiences, this lack of recognition becomes even more significant. Rather than illustrating an increase in her sense of self as the other mirror scenes have done, this experience signals a set back, a regression, indeed, a loss of self. This loss, like her previous gains, is also implicated by the physical characteristics of the mirror Gabriella uses. Rather than increasing in size yet again, the mirror in which Gabriella views herself in this scene is the smallest mirror she looks into during the course of the novel and thus provides the most partial image. Previously, Gabriella has been able to see herself full length and as a single, double and then multiple image. In the toilet glass, Gabriella would only be able to see her face, or some other small portion of herself, due to the size of the glass. As I have been arguing, the reflections Gabriella sees in mirrors are reflections of

Gabriella's self or selves. Therefore, the partial image indicates Gabriella has lost much of the self she has been building through her trauma, in part through her loss of valuable time. As Julian Keenan argues, "the individual who recognizes himself in a mirror must have a sustained sense of his own appearance," and this "sustained sense" is precisely what Gabriella's lack of consciousness has robbed her of (11).

What parts of herself or which of her multiple Selves Gabriella has lost is indicated in a letter she writes Ernest after discovering his location. This sole attempt at some sort of reconciliation can also be read as Gabriella's latest effort to "compose" herself: to set her own mind at rest by presenting her side of the events and then "leav[ing] the rest to the disposal of the God of futurity" (417), and to articulate her sense of self on paper, to literally put herself together—an idea I will return to momentarily.[48] After struggling with the letter for some time, stressing its magnitude, "words [then] came like water rushing though breaking ice. They came without effort or volition, and I knew not what they were till I saw them looking at me from the paper, like my own image reflected in a glass" (417). Like the self or selves Gabriella has been discovering and developing with the aid of mirrors, the self she is here composing becomes apparent "like [her] own image reflected in a glass," but this time the frame is in the form of a self-authored

[48] As Barnes points out, "the word 'compose' comes from the Latin *componere*, literally meaning 'to put together'" (171).

text.[49] What self Gabriella is here composing is, I want to argue, part of the reason Gabriella turns from mirrors to texts and even, later, to portraits. This self, I will be arguing, is a "unified self."

In Gabriella's letter, she determines to shed for good the self modeled after the image of the flower-girl, the self created solely to please Ernest; and, in her stead, a new and more spiritual self emerges. As she writes Ernest:

> from the deathlike trance in which you left me, my spirit has risen with holier views of life and its duties. An union, so desolated by storms of passion as ours has been, must be sinful and unhallowed in the sight of God. It has been severed by the hand of violence, and never, with my consent, will be renewed, unless we can make a new covenant . . . till passion shall be exalted by esteem, love sustained by confidence, and religion pure and undefiled be the sovereign principle of our lives. (418)

When Gabriella writes that her "spirit has risen with holier views of life and its duties," I would argue once again that "spirit" refers to Lakoff and Johnson's

---

[49] As Karen Halttunen writes, letters, particularly, have the ability to present a reflection of the composer: "just as personal appearance reflected character in face-to-face social relations, the appearance of a letter reflected character at a distance" (qtd. in Barnes 164-165). Barnes also alludes to the important role writing plays in self development when, in her examination of Ellen's writing desk in *The Wide, Wide World*, she writes: "[t]he relationship of writing to independence, improvement, and maternal influence . . . indicates that through her mastery of literary convention Ellen will be able to master both language and herself" (165). It might even be possible to suggest that Hentz is alluding to this lesson on the importance of writing and its connection to self mastery in *Ernest Linwood*, which was published six years after Warner's enormously popular novel, particularly as Mrs. Linwood uses the phrase "the wide, wide world" in her important graduation speech.

sense of Essence, which they base on Descartes: "Every kind of thing has an essence that makes it the kind of thing it is. The way each thing *naturally behaves* is a consequence of its essence" (Lakoff and Johnson 400, my emphasis). In Gabriella's previous use of the term, she clearly aligns these spirits with her "natural behavior": the false flower-girl self repressed her "*natural* frankness" and the "powers of pleasing" given her by "*nature*," and when able to cast off this self, her "spirits rebounded from this *unnatural* constraint" (244-245, my emphasis). If we understand "spirit" once more as Essence, then Gabriella is here asserting that Essence and therefore the subjectivity of which it is a part, illustrating that she will no longer attempt to conceal or control her self to please him.

By defining this new self in contrast to the self she once displayed for Ernest's benefit, a self that shared an idolizing, idealizing love, Gabriella makes it clear to Ernest that this new self has emerged to replace his flower-girl. In expecting perfection, symbolized by the flower-girl painting, Ernest has naturally been disappointed and driven to passion; in the future, the "passion" must be "exalted by esteem." By presenting her new self to Ernest on paper, Gabriella is putting her life with Ernest and this self on the line—literally and metaphorically.[50] If he can accept this new self then they may have a future, but if he cannot, then their life together is over. This refusal to uphold a flower-girl self, to remain voiceless with her essence suppressed, shows Gabriella is now "constructi[ng]" a "self

---

[50] The existence of a metaphor that connects the physical experience of committing oneself to paper with the subjective experience of situating oneself in such a way that one can either gain or lose everything, once again poses a very real link between the experiences and illustrates the significance of metaphor.

over against others" by way of "sharp revolt" rather than "conformity to the attitudes of others," confirming that even her approach to her self development has grown more decisive (Mead 73). Gabriella, through this letter, is actively taking part in shaping her "fate."

During the months that Gabriella spends without Ernest, she finds her true father (not the man who has previously claimed to be him) and discovers Richard is her cousin, although she continues to regard him as a brother. In place of the worshipping and controlling love of a husband, Gabriella gains the purer love of father and brother. Like her love for Ernest, Gabriella's love for her father, especially, is very strong: "My feelings were so new, so overpowering, I could not analyze them"; but, with her father, Gabriella knows "the bliss of confidence" (445). This missing element in her relationship with Ernest becomes one of her criteria for a future with him; as she writes in her letter to Ernest, any "love" between them must be "sustained by confidence." As this one example shows, Gabriella's relationship with her father in particular teaches her about loving men and about being loved by men, giving her another model to follow. In gaining a father and a brother, furthermore, Gabriella gains new roles, as she becomes daughter to a father and sister to a brother, and "[w]ith every change comes an increase of subjectivity. There is more of the individual than there was before" (Mead 69).

As if to attest to the growth of self, both in the sense of creating new versions and in the sense of developing a stronger sense of one's primary self, Gabriella once again sees multiple images of herself, but this time on canvas.

While Edith's artist husband commits Edith to paper, Gabriella's artist father does the same for Gabriella: "Edith and myself were multiplied into so many charming forms, it is strange we were not made vain by gazing on them" (457). Gabriella's reference to vanity links the portraits with previous self-growth experiences, particularly the discovery of her looking-glass self and her examination of the flower-girl painting, and in both cases vanity, as I have argued, has been a reference not to self-centredness, but to a focus on the existence of a self. The multiple forms presented to her now illustrate that Gabriella again sees the possibilities for multiple selves and for a focus on the self, and at least partially represent new versions of self that Gabriella is actually developing, as these selves are painted by Gabriella's father, who has a great impact on Gabriella and is the source of at least one of her new roles (daughter to a father). Furthermore, portraits are not, like mirror images, fleeting, which suggests a new sense of permanence to these multiple selves and a stronger sense of self.

It is interesting that Gabriella's self development is now encouraged through paintings, particularly due to the negativity of having been viewed as the original of the painting of the flower-girl. Instead of having as a model a painting that might only have resembled Gabriella, however, Gabriella now has multiple images or forms from which to choose and, as an artist would presumably attempt to create a true likeness when making a portrait, these paintings would be closer to actual reflections of Gabriella than the flower-girl picture could ever have been. That these new pictures actually replace the picture of the flower-girl

is suggested by the fact that the library, once home to the flower-girl, is converted into Gabriella's father's studio and the flower-girl painting is never mentioned again, allowing for the possibility that it has actually been removed and replaced with one of the many portraits of Gabriella.[51]

These portraits can also be considered models for Gabriella of another sort, and this is what I was alluding to when I said Gabriella's father is the source of at least one of Gabriella's new roles. That is, like her artist father, Gabriella now also becomes an artist herself, perhaps because she has seen the potential for the creation and re-creation of self that art allows. The portraits, in this sense, are models of biographies, and if rendered by oneself, they become autobiographies. As Gabriella has discovered in writing her letter to Ernest, the act of composition does, in fact, allow one to put oneself together, to compose a self and see it "like [one's] own image reflected in a glass." As, perhaps, the result of this experience, the role model of an artist father and the role models of the portraits, Gabriella becomes an author. Indeed, in the last scenes in the novel, Gabriella does seem to produce "portraits" by describing the characters

---

[51] It would also be possible to argue that Gabriella's father is simply replacing Ernest as the patriarch, turning Ernest's library into his studio and replacing Ernest's desired image of Gabriella with his own, created by his own hand. The sheer number of pictures, however, allows for more freedom and more possibilities in the type of self or selves Gabriella can create, even allowing for multiple selves. The suggestion is that Gabriella is freer as a daughter than she is as a wife, and this was arguably the case in the nineteenth century. As a daughter, a woman at least had the future before her, including the possibility for some choice, even if only between being a wife or a teacher, or some other such occupation. Once married, a woman's future was sealed. Ideally, of course, Gabriella would create self-portraits in a room of her own.

(including a reformed Ernest) as they move before her and asking the reader to "see" them, giving the sensation that one is being guided through a painting while Gabriella is rendering it. As we shall see with the narrator in "The Yellow Wall-Paper," Gabriella has found "meaningful work" in writing, and gained another role to enlarge her self in the process.

The question of why Gabriella chooses portraits and autobiographies over mirrors at the end of the novel still remains, and I would argue the answer lies, in part, in the degree of socialness of the experiences these different objects allow. That is, the painting and viewing of portraits and the writing and reading of texts are more communal experiences than Gabriella's individual, private interactions with looking glasses. Mead, particularly in his slightly later work, emphasizes the importance of the social experience in the formation of the self. For example, he writes, "[t]he self cannot arise in experience except as there are others there. The other is essential to the appearance of the self," and "[w]e are all . . . constructs of the group in which we live" (156, 149). Furthermore, Mead argues, "[t[he unity of the self requires the organization of attitudes that are shared by members of the group to which the individual belongs. A social process involving a number of persons provides the basis for the unity of the self" (163). A social group, in other words, is necessary for a unified self, and the desire "to bring all of these different selves within a single self," the unified self, "is essential for normal social conduct" (77, 78).

As Gabriella's social conduct was not, in the presence of Ernest, "normal," and as Gabriella no longer wants to play a role so contrary to the "social warmth of [her] nature" (244), it would make sense that she is now trying to develop this unified, "composite" self in order to achieve this "normal social conduct." In order to do this, Gabriella must be able to assume "the attitude of the entire group," which I argue is represented in these more social portraits painted by her father, and then manage to "bring[] these conflicting selves into proper relationship with one another and with the primary self" (74). This unification is achieved metaphorically in the portraits in the unique way they combine the other frames Gabriella has used in order to view her self. That is, the portraits are paintings like the flower-girl image but also presumably accurate reflections of Gabriella's looking-glass self—the self that others see—like her mirror images. Portraits, therefore, represent a certain socialness or group perspective that mirrors cannot, while also maintaining the personality of the individual in a way that paintings or statues of fabulous beings are not capable of.

It is, however, the novel we are reading—the autobiography that Gabriella claims to author—that can best be said to "bring[] these conflicting selves into proper relationship with one another and with the primary self" (Mead 74), and thus to create an ultimately unified self, through its status as the study of Gabriella's self. As Lakoff and Johnson write, "[t]he study of the self . . . concerns the structure of our inner lives"; and, as the often unnoticed subtitle "*Or, The Inner Life of the Author*" affirms, *Ernest Linwood* is a self-confirmed look at the

"inner life" of Gabriella.[52] The novel is the story of the development of Gabriella's selfhood, her recognition of her ipseity, and her negotiation of her various selves or parts of her self—her Subject, Essence and one or more Selves—which constitute the "structure" of her inner life. The novel can in this way be read as Gabriella's self-portrait, or, more accurately, her "selves" portrait, which can now join the paintings of Gabriella produced by her father and become a timeless tribute to the ipseity of Gabriella.

By switching between mirrors, paintings, portraits and even authored texts in her process of self development, Gabriella shows she is able to recognize an object's individuality and to explore, as part of that individuality, the various possible functions of that particular object. As Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton write, Mead "emphasizes the fact that when the agent interacts with the peculiar physical characteristics of an object, his or her unique personal traits will emerge" (51). Gabriella, like Cassandra in the next chapter, seems to recognize that each object has its own characteristics and its own separate "ability to reveal social goals and expectations through its use" (51), and this sophisticated view of objects is itself another proof of Gabriella's self growth.

---

[52] The text also describes the "psychological interiority" of Gabriella that Baym argues "constitutes selfhood"(xxxi).

CHAPTER TWO

Creature Comforts and "Self" Denial: "A Crusade Against Duty" in Elizabeth Stoddard's *The Morgesons*

Six years before the appearance of Elizabeth Stoddard's most notable novel, *The Morgesons* (1862), she published the following passage in her regular newspaper column, "Our Lady Correspondent."[53]

> [3 August 1856] . . . Why will writers, especially female writers, make their heroines so indifferent to good eating, so careless about taking cold, and so impervious to all creature comforts? The absence of these treats compose their good women, with an external preachment about self-denial, moral self-denial. Is goodness, then, incompatible with the enjoyment of the senses? In reading such books I am reminded of what I have thought my mission was; a crusade against Duty—not duty that is revealed to every man and woman of us by the circumstances of daily life, but that which is cut and fashioned for us by minds totally ignorant of our idiosyncrasies and necessities. The world has long been lost in a polemical

[53] Elizabeth Stoddard wrote regular columns for the San Francisco newspaper, the *Daily Alta California*, from 1854-1858.

fog. I am afraid we shall never get into plain sailing. ("Early Journalism" 325-6)

The first line demonstrates Stoddard's critique of the traditional nineteenth-century heroine and the female writers who render them, and conveys Stoddard's desire to create her own heroines differently. In *The Morgesons,* Stoddard manages to create just such a nontraditional heroine in Cassandra Morgeson, in part by rescuing Cassandra from the rigid regimen of diet, illness and abstinence from "creature comforts" condemned in the passage above. Cassandra, unlike most heroines of her day, complains of hunger if she has not had enough to eat, insists that she feels "well to [her] fingers' ends; they tingle with strength. [She is] elated with health" (67), and is anything but "impervious" to "creature comforts," as I shall illustrate.[54]

Creature comforts, according to the *OED*, are "material comforts" or "home comforts" "such as food and clothing." Like Stoddard's recommendations of "good eating" and protecting one's self from "taking cold," creature comforts, by definition, "contribute to physical ease and well-being." As it is "[t]he absence of

---

[54] Elizabeth Stoddard, *The Morgesons.* Ed. Lawrence Buell and Sandra A. Zagarell. New York: Penguin, 1984. References are to this edition unless otherwise noted and will be cited parenthetically in the text. In the footnotes, and when necessary in the body of the text, this version will be cited as Stoddard *The Morgesons* 1984 in order to distinguish it from both the 1862 version of the novel and the text of *The Morgesons* in Buell and Zagarell's "*The Morgesons*" *and Other Writings, Published and Unpublished, by Elizabeth Stoddard,* which was also published in 1984. Although the Penguin version of *The Morgesons*, along with its introduction and notes, is identical to that in "*The Morgesons*" *and Other Writings,* the page numbers are not the same. All quotations taken from the 1984 version edited by Buell and Zagarell, including its introduction and notes, are from the Penguin text.

these treats [that] compose their good women," the determination of "goodness" for women is apparently based on the ability to forgo all "enjoyment of the senses," such as those that can be obtained from creature comforts. Based on this reading of creature comforts, the Duty which Stoddard proceeds to excoriate would therefore seem to be a rejection of anything that provides one with enjoyment. Put more simply, Duty is "self-denial."

Stoddard's column suggests that she is speaking not just of denying the self material things, however, but also of something less tangible, as signified by her use of the capitalized "Duty." As Stoddard writes, the "Duty" of which she speaks is not that "duty that is revealed to every man and woman of us by the circumstances of daily life, but that which is cut and fashioned for us by minds totally ignorant of our idiosyncrasies and necessities." If duties are those physical and physically necessary tasks of "daily life" and Duty is something different, then the "idiosyncrasies and necessities" Stoddard mentions in relation to Duty would appear to refer to something more abstract than the "necessities" of, say, food and water.[55] That "idiosyncrasy" in the mid-nineteenth century referred to what is peculiar to an individual both physically and mentally further supports the idea that Stoddard is speaking of individual needs—needs to which she believed a woman's society was "totally ignorant"—that go beyond the basic necessities of

---

[55] I will also differentiate between "Duty" and "duty" in this chapter based on the difference I outline above. To be bit more specific, when I use the lower-case form "duty," I am referring to a specific duty, a task or an aspect of the larger sense of Duty, which, in its upper-case form, signifies an encompassing idea, a way of living that includes many individual tasks and duties. Some of these duties include chastity, modesty or specific tasks like reading the Bible and sewing.

physical life to encompass that which fulfills or sustains each individual woman in body *and* in mind. Finally, if individuality is "based on the concept that 'each individual has his own idiosyncratic experience of life,'" then idiosyncrasies and necessities are those things that make one an individual, that, in other words, constitute one's selfhood (Greenberg and Mitchel, qtd. in Attfield 133).

The Duty to which Stoddard is opposed can, in this way, be seen as that which compels women to feel, think, do, and be something irrespective of, and often contrary to, their own individuality. Accordingly, what is denied is any demonstration of selfhood, whether in the form of actions, desires or things. The "self-denial" imposed by Duty is thus both that which denies the self those creature comforts that bring individual enjoyment and, more simply and profoundly, that which denies any *self* at all.[56] Such a reading would explain the vehemence of Stoddard's protest; as she writes, reading books that promote self-denial reminds her of what her "mission was: a crusade against Duty."

The Morgesons, in many senses, is a development of Stoddard's column in "Our Lady Correspondent." Most importantly, in the novel, Stoddard undertakes the "mission" introduced in that earlier piece of writing by sharing her "crusade against Duty" with the heroine, Cassandra. As this crusade unfolds, we see that Duty in *The Morgesons* involves both senses of self denial that I have argued Stoddard's newspaper column introduces, and links these forms of denial even

---

[56] As a reminder, I differentiate between "self-denial" and "self denial" (and other such "self" compounds) as well as between "herself" and "her self" etc. in this project, and the difference is particularly important in this chapter. See footnote 3.

more firmly together, but with an ironic twist. I argue that the profusion of creature comforts Cassandra uses in the novel are not luxuries but necessities to Cassandra, as it is through these objects that she develops, defines, and displays the individuality that is essential to the existence of her being, her "self." When forced to fulfill her Duty both by following a socially approved role that is contrary to Cassandra's natural instincts as well as by adhering to the socially approved definition of "necessity" which deprives Cassandra of her creature comforts, Cassandra falls into depression and ultimately loses her self. The irony, in short, is that Stoddard has created a heroine who needs objects that society defines as unnecessary in order to formulate a self that society, in the name of Duty, forbids her from having.

In *The Morgesons*, Cassandra is continually possessing herself of, using (including purposefully not using or misusing), and calling the reader's attention to a variety of creature comforts, from the standard examples of clothing and food to other related "treats" such as jewelry, textiles, home furnishings, and books. In this chapter, I will be limiting myself to a focus on objects made out of or otherwise connected to textiles, such as clothing and home furnishings, as well as books.[57] These items, like all of those with which Cassandra interacts, are usually mentioned only once before they disappear from the narrative, with few excep-

---

[57] I see these objects as particularly suitable because, as Attfield writes: "Clothing and textiles have a particularly intimate quality because they lie next to the skin and inhabit the spaces of private life helping to negotiate the inner self with the outside world" (123); and books are the only objects that are repeatedly mentioned, although they are always different books.

tions, and I read this continual change of items alone as indicative of Cassandra's ongoing quest for individuality as well as for new ways of displaying this sense of self to others.

By paying attention to the object individuality of the various material items in *The Morgesons*, it becomes possible to read them as the tools with which Cassandra marks the self as independent and sexually aware, and thus in opposition to the standard of female selfhood prescribed by nineteenth-century society. This self marking is usually visible for others to read, and the display of her individuality appears to be as important to Cassandra as having it. It is, further, through attention to the individuality of one object that appears briefly in the opening scene of the novel that we gain a more precise understanding of Duty and, thus, of the kind of self (or, more accurately, lack of self) society would prescribe for women like Cassandra in the nineteenth century.

When Cassandra is finally forced, through the death of her mother, to abandon her individual self and to follow a life of Duty, Cassandra begins a downward spiral from unhappiness, to depression, to, finally, a non-existence. It is not a coincidence that Cassandra's ultimate loss of self is completed only after she also loses access to creature comforts, those objects that had previously been her tools of self definition and display, through the bankruptcy of her father. It is, then, the combination of these two tragic events that brings about Cassandra's complete *self* destruction. Through her mother's death Cassandra loses the freedom to play a chosen role (even to have no real role at all), and

through her father's bankruptcy Cassandra loses the freedom to use chosen objects in chosen ways, finally forcing her into this dual sense of self denial that I have argued Duty entails. Through these losses, Cassandra learns the true meaning and value of actual ownership, both of property and of self, because these losses teach her what it is like to be completely dependent on others for her own survival, to be, in other words, most women in the nineteenth century. In this way, Stoddard can be seen as grappling with what was a very real issue for women at the time of the novel's publication due, particularly, to the revised Married Women's Property Act (1860): what ownership and control of objects means for women and their selfhood.

The role of material objects in Cassandra's self-fashioning is introduced in the opening scene of *The Morgesons*, which also functions to distinguish Cassandra from proper models of womanhood, exemplified by the figures of Cassandra's mother and aunt. In this scene, we find a young Cassandra climbing a chest of drawers to reach her favorite book, "The Northern Regions," on polar explorations. Cassandra indicates that it is normal for her to choose one of her father's secular books (at least one of which was considered improper at the time) over her mother's neighboring "Protestant devotional literature;" indeed, according to the original version of *The Morgesons*,[58] Cassandra likes her

---

[58] The version of *The Morgesons* that is usually cited in modern scholarship is the edition edited by Lawrence Buell and Sandra A. Zagarell, published in 1984 and based on Stoddard's revised 1889 edition of the novel rather than on the original

father's books "the best."[59] Sitting precariously on the edge of the chest, Cassandra is also as far "north" as she can manage and "soon lost in an Esquimaux hut." Cassandra is so immersed in the genre that, when one of her shoes drops loudly to the floor, it reminds her of another travel story in which one explorer chews his shoes to avoid starvation (5). Cassandra, with the aid of particular books, therefore moves herself physically and mentally as far away as she can manage from the domestic sphere.

Mary Morgeson, in contrast to her daughter, sits below Cassandra in a "low, chintz-covered" chair, reading the "proceedings of an Ecclesiastical Council" in the *Boston Recorder,* a Congregationalist paper published in state (6). Cassandra's loss of shoe prompts her aunt, Mercy Warren, who is knitting in her "straight backed chair," to remark: "Mary, look at ["the holes in"] that child's

---

1862 version. Because most readers are familiar with Buell and Zagarell's publication of *The Morgesons* and because their notes enter into my discussion, I, too, use this text for the basis of my quotations. I have, however, chosen to reference the original text of *The Morgesons* when I feel this text provides more information or more textual clarity than the revised version. When Stoddard revised her text to make it more compact, she sometimes cut words or descriptions that highlighted the physicality of a thing or highlighted the role of physical objects in Cassandra's self definition. Although she may have felt that certain details were superfluous (such as saying a shoe is large and heavy rather than just large), that extra detail tells the reader, for example, that Cassandra is not wearing "kid slippers," those fashionable, delicate, lightweight shoes that will be worn by her classmates in Barmouth. Other examples include not being told, in the revision, that Cassandra has holes in her stockings in the opening scene (which supports the idea of damaged domesticity), or that her father's lavender suit is new, or that her father bought a case of soap with roses printed on the bars (both of which provide information about the father's spending habits). All quotations from and references to the original version of *The Morgesons* will be cited in the footnotes rather than parenthetically in the text and as "Stoddard 1862" to avoid confusion.

[59] Stoddard 1862, 7.

stockings" (5).[60] Mary calls Cassandra, who comes "with reluctance, making a show of turning down a leaf" of her book, and, upon examining Cassandra's stockings, Mary asks, "Why will you waste so much time on unprofitable stories?" (6). The pairing of this question with an examination of Cassandra's hosiery links Cassandra's reading choices with a sense of damaged domesticity, represented by the holey stockings, and introduces the idea that Cassandra's choice and use of objects direct Cassandra away from the domestic sphere, as does Cassandra's response to her mother's question, to which I will turn momentarily. As with Cassandra, then, it is largely through the particulars of Mary's reading experience that we learn details about the mother's character; but, in contrast to Cassandra, these details show the mother to be firmly grounded within the domestic sphere.

While many of Stoddard's contemporary readers would likely have understood what these titles indicated—that, for example, "The Northern Regions" was a book on polar explorations, that the works of Laurence Stern (which Cassandra lists as among her father's titles) was "increasingly considered improper" in the early nineteenth century, or that her mother's "Baxter's Saints' Rest" is a "classic of Protestant devotional literature" (255), most of today's readers (including myself) would only understand these references through the explanatory notes provided by modern editors, in this case Lawrence Buell and Sandra A. Zagarell. Without such information, these objects lack meaning both as individual objects

---

[60] The bracketed phrase, "the holes in," comes from the original 1862 version and is omitted from the version Buell and Zagarell use (Stoddard 1862, 8).

and as signifiers within the text. Unfortunately, few of the other objects in *The Morgesons* receive this level of explanation (the editors, after all, are simply introducing the novel),[61] leaving the reader with the task of interpreting the objects in their historical context.

This object interpretation, as outlined in my introduction, is necessary in order to appreciate the finer details of each individual's character—details revealed only in their relationships with objects—because object identity is crucially linked to subject identity. To repeat Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton's explanation,

> Objects affect what a person can do, either by expanding or restricting the scope of that person's actions and thoughts. And because what a person does is largely what he or she is, objects have a determining effect on the development of the self, which is why understanding the type of relationship that exists between people and things is so crucial. (53)

As the introductory scene to *The Morgesons* illustrates, among the objects that "have a determining effect on the development of" Cassandra's self and, there-

---

[61] I mean this somewhat ironically, as suggested by my discussion in the introduction of the way in which objects often are not seen as "part of" written texts. I would actually suggest that the notes provided by editors should perhaps include the history of particularly important objects, such as the mirrors I examined in the previous chapter or the wallpaper I examine in the next one, which had significant historical value. After all, the point of these editorial notes and introductions are to bring modern readers more to the level of contemporary readers, which is usually done by explaining the titles of, references to and quotations from works that would likely have been familiar to the author's contemporary readers but not to modern ones. Sometimes we are given explanations of architectural terms or geographical locations, but objects (outside of books), in line with the trend, are absent.

fore, that are "inseparable from who [she is]," are books (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 16).[62] These objects "expand" Cassandra's "thoughts" and, eventually, her "actions," by providing her with experiences that she wishes to have but from which she is generally prohibited. The books that Cassandra's mother reads, in contrast, seem only to restrict Mary's actions and thoughts by limiting her conception of what life and the world can offer.

The reader, through a consideration of the characteristics of such objects (here details about the various books' identities) can determine more information about the characters than could be gleaned otherwise. On the broadest level, these details allow us to read the characters of Cassandra and her mother as in opposite relations to the domestic. More specifically, readers can determine by the travel, adventure and secular nature of Cassandra's chosen reading material, her immersion in this "unprofitable" literature and her placement while reading it, that Cassandra has a desire for travel and escape from the domestic sphere. Likewise, the religious, didactic and often locally-based readings chosen by Mary and read properly in her chair reveals a devotion to God and the Congregational

---

[62] Although books are not among the examples of creature comforts given in the *OED*, a book is a material and even "home" good that can be described as "[a] thing that produces or ministers to enjoyment and content" and that is "distinguished from necessaries on the one hand, and from luxuries on the other," as books would have been considered neither necessities nor luxuries to the middle class. As such, books share the definition of "comfort" under which "creature comforts" is found.

church, a belief in moral instruction and a satisfaction with remaining within the home.[63]

Based on the important and accurate details revealed about Cassandra and her mother derived from considering the individual books mentioned as examples of their reading choices in the opening scene of the novel, I do not think we should ignore what is revealed by considering the identity of the one title named as an example of what Cassandra *should* read.[64] What attention to the object individuality of this one book provides is the model of behavior that Cassandra's mother and society as a whole wish Cassandra and other young women would follow and, indeed, proclaim it their duty to follow, and, therefore, becomes the model against which Cassandra fashions her self through the aid of various creature comforts during the course of the novel.

When Cassandra's mother, examining the holes in Cassandra's stockings, asks Cassandra why she "waste[s]" her time on "unprofitable stories," Cassandra's response is: "I hate good stories, all but the Shepherd of Salisbury Plain, because it makes me hungry to read about the roasted potatoes the shepherd had for breakfast and supper"(6). According to Buell and Zagarell,

---

[63] The novel repeatedly confirms the accuracy of these details. To give just a few examples, Cassandra spends most of the book traveling, is "eternally chasing after amusement" (63), and has "no respect for God nor man" (48), while her mother spends many of her evenings discussing religious topics with one of the neighbors, is disappointed when she discovers the absence of a Congregational church in the town of one of Cassandra's schools, repeatedly instructs Cassandra to "read the Bible, and sew more" (64), and is "averse to leaving the house, except to go to church" (24). All page numbers are from Stoddard 1984.
[64] On the accuracy of these details see the previous footnote.

"The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain" is a "tract by the popular British evangelical writer Hannah More" which demonstrates "the kind of children's literature Cassandra's mother would like her to read" (255). While the editors note that this story was "frequently reprinted," other sources claim that "[t]wo million copies of [More's] sketches were circulated in one year" and the "extraordinary sales of these tracts attest to the chord she struck in her own society" (ILAB). Of these tracts, "The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain" was by far the most popular, making it highly likely that readers of *The Morgesons* would have recognized the tale and its author. Indeed, what the editors also do not explain is that Hannah More was "one of the most successful writers, and perhaps the most influential woman, of her day" (Stott), grouped with such other public role models as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and Cornelius Vanderbilt (Newton 11). Furthermore, as a writer, More was apparently equally as well known for her conduct books as for her evangelical tracts.

According to Sarah E. Newton in her book *Learning to Behave: A Guide to American Conduct Books before 1900*, a conduct book

> is a text that is intended for an inexperienced young adult or other youthful reader, that defines an ethical, Christian-based code of behavior, and that normally includes gender role definitions. Thus "conduct book" embraces those texts whose primary aim is to describe and define a basically Protestant scheme of life, morals, and behavior, in order to encourage ideal conduct in white, generally middle-class children, young men, or young

> women. Since the conduct book is primarily a role-teaching text and its audience is assumed to be the young and inexperienced, at bottom the literature fulfills an almost anthropological function by codifying society's idealized expectations in regard to proper behavior in life. (4)

"[T]he stated or implied aim" of a conduct book was, in short, "to provide the advice young people need in order to internalize the behavior that will allow them to conduct their lives successfully" (9); or, in other words, in order to fulfill their Duty.

Conduct books gained widespread popularity during the period from the seventeenth to the end of the nineteenth centuries, assuring that "Americans, and especially women, had no dearth of early didactic literature and moral counselors to instruct them in their duties." Further, "[t]itles among these conduct books were . . . some of the most esteemed books of their time" (Newton 2). Based on the popularity of conduct books and the popularity of Hannah More, it seems almost inconceivable that Stoddard's readers would not have made a connection between "The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain" and the conduct book genre while reading *The Morgesons.* In fact, although described by Buell and Zagarell (and others) as an evangelical tract rather than a conduct book, the story, as noted, stands as an example of "the kind of children's literature Cassandra's mother would like her to read" (Stoddard *The Morgesons* 1984, 255), and, according to Newton, "because virtually all children's books embrace the good behavior and proper moral development of children as a significant

aspect of their aim (and one could argue, rightly, that in this sense all children's books are 'conduct books'), distinguishing the conduct book from other children's literature is very difficult" (13).[65]

My point here is that Stoddard may well have expected her reference to "The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain" to be familiar to her readers, so that, when these readers see Cassandra rejecting "good books" along the lines of "The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain," they would view Cassandra as rejecting the conduct advocated in the conduct book genre. This genre includes conduct books, novels by many of Stoddard's female contemporaries (such as those to which she disparagingly alludes in her newspaper column), and stories in the strain of "The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain," as all of these are, in Newton's words, "texts whose primary aim is . . . to encourage ideal conduct" (4). Furthermore, due to the conduct book genre's popularity, Stoddard's readers would almost certainly have known, at least generally, what this conduct entailed, although today's readers might not.

This literature, Stoddard seems to argue, like the conduct book itself, "delineates patterns of character and behavior that readers are assured they should desire to possess and that will, if followed religiously, form them into model children now, and into model—and successful—men and women later" (Newton 4). (And, indeed, this is generally regarded to be the theme of many sentimental novels). Because they share this theme, all forms of conduct book literature can

---

[65] "The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain," for one, "teaches the impoverished to rely upon the virtues of content, sobriety, humility, and industry" (ILAB).

be seen as sources of the "external preachment about self-denial" that Stoddard condemns. The connections are such that, when Stoddard writes, "In reading such books I am reminded of what I have thought my mission was; a crusade against Duty," "such books" could just as easily be conduct books, children's books or moral tracts as novels written by nineteenth-century female authors. Even Stoddard's choice of the word "mission" here supports the inclusion of conduct books in her target literature, as the term is "often used in nineteenth-century conduct books in regard to the American woman's place and roles" (Newton 91).

In sum, when Stoddard declares war on Duty and criticizes the traditional heroine and her author, Stoddard's crusade is against the teachings of conduct book literature as a whole; and, when Stoddard uses "The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain" as an example of the type of literature girls should be reading in order to learn goodness, this title should bring to her reader's mind the full range of literature that offers this same instruction. Recognizing this connection also provides the reader with a point of reference for understanding Stoddard's use of words such as "Duty" and "self-denial"—concepts crucial in both "Our Lady Correspondent" and in *The Morgesons*—as these terms are shared by Stoddard and writers of conduct book literature. Stoddard's use of these popular conduct book terms, moreover, offers a more direct link between Stoddard's crusade against Duty and the teachings of conduct book literature than her reference to "The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain" alone.

"Duty," a term *The Morgesons* eventually uses directly to describe what it is Cassandra spends most of the novel protesting against, is an often used and important term in conduct book literature, as any perusal of nineteenth-century conduct books illustrates.[66] Indeed, most conduct books could share the title of E. H. Chapin's 1869 text: *Duties of young women*. In a chapter specifically entitled "Duty," Chapin begins by addressing the importance of the term itself: "We talk quite fluently about '*duty*;'" but "do we," he asks, "comprehend what it means, what is involved in it, what are its claims upon us?" (113). As this particular chapter in Chapin's text makes clear, attaining an understanding of Duty is like attaining "culture" and "accomplishments"— "requisites" on which other chapters in his book on the *Duties of young women* focus (113). In fact, Chapin argues "It is evident . . . that one of [woman's] most important duties is *a comprehension of Duty itself*" (115). It seems almost certain, based on the widespread use and importance of the term in the highly popular conduct book genre, that readers familiar with Stoddard's other literary references would comprehend this meaning of Duty.

Like Stoddard, Chapin distinguishes between a capitalized and a lower-case "duty," and though not always consistent, it appears that for Chapin, as for Stoddard, "Duty" is a more encompassing and more abstract term than "duty." As he writes at the beginning of the chapter: "I wish to speak now upon the general

---

[66] Newton's examples also show "duty" to be a pivotal and recurrent term in the conduct book genre, as does her use of quotation marks around the term when she speaks of "conduct book attitudes toward woman's 'duty'" (Newton, 82).

subject of *Duty*; upon the claims of Duty; upon the view and the spirit with which it should be performed" (112). Duty with a capital "D," Chapin writes, "sets everything clearly before us. It predetermines what we must do, and when, and how" (118). The "*spirit of duty*" is "the idea of supreme and immutable principle, for which all things are to be done or sacrificed" (113). Similarly, "the *sentiment* of duty" is "the idea that wherever she acts some obligation commands her" (114). Duty, then, would seem to be the "principle" or "obligation" that "predetermines what we must do, and when, and how," and woman "should," Chapin insists, "know what it is, and why she must obey it" (114).

Women "who obey no supreme rule of duty" can be said to "act from mere *selfishness*" (119). As Chapin writes, "Every gift of faculty they possess they conceive to be for their exclusive use, and nothing seems advantageous that does not serve their interests." The result of such selfishness, according to Chapin, is that these individuals "are frequently deceived and thwarted" and are "distracted with noisy and conflicting cares" (119). T.S Arthur, in his 1848 conduct book *Advice to young ladies on their duties and conduct in life*, similarly writes: "That which separates us from God, and produces all the mental disorders under which we labor, is selfishness. There is no means of returning to God, and to true order, except by denying self; and this we do when we seek, in all the various relations of life, to discharge our duties for the sake of good to others" (198).

What I find particularly striking in these passages by Chapin and Arthur (beyond how mentally anguished undutiful women apparently are) is the

opposition that is set up between Duty and selfishness—an opposition that Newton's writing on nineteenth-century conduct books corroborates. Underlying the appropriate conduct outlined in conduct books, Newton indicates, is the necessity of instructing every woman to "understand and accept exactly her appropriate position in life, including the truth that God expects her to devote her life not to herself but to others. To do this, she must practice self-discipline and *self-denial*, terms that—with other synonyms of control—form a *constant and consistent theme* in women's conduct literature" (95, my emphasis). The "position in life" to which Newton refers is the "true position" or "lot in life" of Chapin's book, which, he writes, "indicates certain claims which she cannot innocently neglect, and forbids certain aspirations, or conduct, [in] which she cannot innocently indulge" (22, 114). To regulate one's own "claims," "aspirations" and "conduct" is to, in Newton's words, "practice self-discipline and self-denial," and, therefore, to be selfless rather than selfish. What Newton argues and what Chapin and Arthur illustrate is that nineteenth-century conduct books not just advocate but seem to actually pivot on the same opposition Stoddard evokes in her newspaper column when she suggests that women's Duty is the attainment of "goodness" through "self-denial."

The self denial promoted by conduct book literature is not only about putting others before oneself, however, but also about putting the self promoted by society before, and even over, the self that one desires. This becomes evident upon examining the ultimate goal of the conduct book: to help the reader

"achiev[e] the socially approved definition of complete and appropriate 'selfhood'" (Newton 4). This selfhood, obtained via "[t]he internalization of proper behavioral models," is apparently very specific and very static. As Newton writes, "[i]gnoring the often regrettable way real people behave in their daily lives, conduct writers argue that an absolute, virtually unchanging and unchallengeable standard of ideal behavior does exist and may—indeed must—be achieved" (Newton 4). Although Newton stresses the role of the "conduct writers" here, that the achievement of this proper selfhood "is seen as vital to the very stability of society" and is "socially approved" suggests these writers are simply marketing the brand of selfhood sold by society rather than creating a version of their own. The conduct book merely, one might say, "graphically illustrates the snares or errors that will prevent young readers from achieving [this ideal selfhood]" (Newton 4).

If we read the "internalization" of a "socially approved," "unchanging and unchallengeable" selfhood, as, in Stoddard's writing, the acceptance of that role "which is cut and fashioned for us by minds totally ignorant of our idiosyncrasies and necessities" simply because those minds consider it, as Newton writes, "vital to" their "very stability" (4), then the self-denial Stoddard speaks of in *The Morgesons*, like that suggested in "Our Lady Correspondent," does not merely refer to denying the self things, but denying—as in renouncing—the *self* in order to conform to some ideal. Based on the information gained by examining the object individualities of those books mentioned in the novel so far, and specifically what is highlighted by examining conduct book literature, we can determine that

what Stoddard is protesting against in her column and in *The Morgesons* is "the socially approved definition of complete and appropriate 'selfhood'" which has been delineated by a society without regard to individuality, outlined in the conduct book, and then perpetuated in the literature of her female contemporaries. Conduct book literature, in this way, provides the reader with a sort of historic anti-text against which to judge Cassandra's conduct, particularly through her treatment of Duty, becoming, if you will, the model (object) of the model (self).

Due to the role of conduct book literature in *The Morgesons*, one form of this literature is also, appropriately, the first of many objects suggested to Cassandra by another character as a way of counteracting what Cassandra accomplishes with her own objects. That is, while Cassandra chooses objects, such as books, to shape her identity, to make and mark her self as independent and sexual, other characters resist this development and display and attempt to guide Cassandra's self in directions and through objects of their own choosing in an effort to reshape Cassandra's identity, typically by offering her objects that would have a "restricting" rather than an "expanding" effect on her "actions and thoughts" (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 53). Sometimes Cassandra simply refuses to use the items, and at other times she appropriates the objects for her own purposes.

In the opening scene, for example, Cassandra's mother indirectly recommends that Cassandra read conduct and children's books (as Newton claimed, all children's books could be considered conduct books) instead of the adventure

and travel books that Cassandra regularly chooses, by asking Cassandra why she "waste[s] so much time on unprofitable stories." Cassandra proves that she knows what a profitable story is by naming "The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain" as an example. Like the conduct book, such a story would teach Cassandra how to "achiev[e] the socially approved definition of complete and appropriate 'selfhood'" (Newton 4). Cassandra, nonetheless, actually posits "The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain" as the exception to those "good stories" she hates, but only because it makes her "hungry to read about the roasted potatoes the shepherd had for breakfast and supper" (6).[67] By valuing this story for its ability to stimulate her appetite—something women were not supposed to have, or at least to manifest, according to proper conduct in the nineteenth century—Cassandra is appropriating the story that her mother would have her read for its "proper" influence and misusing it for her own personal satisfaction.[68]

To review the idea of misuse as described in the introduction and specifically in terms of the conduct book, the "proper function" of the conduct book is to teach appropriate conduct. The "system function," on the other hand, "accommodates the analysis of individual performances of things—even unique or idiosyncratic performances" (Preston 42). Using a conduct book as an appetite stimulant is one of Cassandra's idiosyncratic acts and thus a type of misuse,

---

[67] Buell and Zagarell also point out that if Cassandra is interested in the "right" kind of book, it is for the wrong reasons (Stoddard, *The Morgesons* 1984, 255).
[68] On the relationship between appetite and conduct see the chapter entitled "Ladylike Anorexia: Hunger, Sexuality, and Etiquette" in Helena Michie's *The Flesh Made Word.* By "proper" I mean both socially acceptable and in terms of its proper (as opposed to system) function, as described in my introduction.

which, as noted, enhances something not recommended for women: an appetite. Misuse of objects, both self-chosen and recommended by others, is a common treatment for Cassandra as it allows her to appropriate a wide variety of things in order to achieve her chosen, if improper, ends: the creation and manifestation of a socially inappropriate selfhood. The misuse alone, as I have also argued in my introduction, results in the development of a self that does not "fit the cultural mold," as it constitutes having a relationship with objects that goes against the cultural script prescribed by one's "social milieu" (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 105). Cassandra simply compounds this by misusing objects to develop a self that is already condemned by society: a self that defies Duty.

Cassandra's first conscious attempt to shape her self through objects is unique in the novel because it is the only time that Cassandra actually tries to conform rather than cultivate her own individuality; significantly, it is a superficial and eventually failed attempt. This particular instance of self definition occurs when Cassandra is sent to live with her Aunt Merce and Grandfather in Barmouth—"a good place," Cassandra's father, Locke Morgeson, states, "to tame" her (27). There, Cassandra will, her mother hopes, learn "some of the lessons she had been taught" through the religious instruction of the stern, silent and devoutly religious grandfather and the "young lady's school" she will attend (27). This school, as the epithet implies, seeks to produce "ladies"—females who have learned their Duty. The hope is apparently that, between Cassandra's grand-

father and the school, Cassandra will gain the three most emphasized aspects of conduct for children: "religion, obedience, and duty" (Newton 14).

In Miss Black's "genteel school," Cassandra, for the first time, is compelled to compare herself with a large group of girls more sophisticated than she. The result, to Cassandra's dismay, is that "[t]he girls united against me, and though I perceived, when I compared myself with them, that they were partly right in their opinions, their ridicule stupefied and crushed me. They were trained, intelligent and adroit; I uncouth, ignorant, and without tact" (35). Although Cassandra "believ[es] that their ridicule was deserved," she still wants to "prove" herself "respectable" (40). Despite sounding as though Cassandra will attempt to become more "respectable" by becoming "trained, intelligent and adroit," or even by finding "religion, obedience, and duty," what she actually focuses on is the initial difference she perceives upon being introduced to her classmates for the first time: their outward appearance.

Cassandra immediately notices "[h]ow spirited and delicate [the girls in her class] were! The creatures had their heads dressed as if they were at a party." After school that day, Cassandra returns home and makes a comparison:

> I examined myself in the glass, and drew an unfavorable conclusion from the inspection. My hair was parted zigzag; one shoulder was higher than the other; my dress came up to my chin, and slipped down to my shoulder-blades. I was all waist; no hips were developed; my hands were red, and my nails chipped. (36)

To find a solution, Cassandra continues, "I opened the trunk where my wardrobe was packed; what belonged to me was comfortable, in reference to weather and the wash, but not pretty" (36). Her conclusion is: "these things are horrid, all of them" (37). To rectify the situation, Cassandra determines that she will have a dress made in the same fashion as those worn by the other girls. Furthermore, she informs her Aunt Merce, "Miss Charlotte Alden wears French kid slippers every day, and I must wear mine" (37).

While this version of *The Morgesons* clearly suggests that Cassandra's focus is superficial, the addition of one paragraph before Cassandra's encounter with her mirror in the original version of the novel leaves little room for doubt:

> I observed that the dress and manners of the girls differed from mine. Their manners were regulated by the impression they wished to make upon each other, not by any innate principle. The fact of their being well dressed aided me to the discovery that I was ignorant of the art of dress. My clothes were ill-made, clumsy, and of inappropriate colors; theirs were stylish, harmonious, and worn with an ease which testified to the habit of considering the toilet a necessary accomplishment.[69]

Cassandra's focus here is clearly on dress, which makes her reaction to her mirror consultation (going through the clothing in her trunk and deciding to get a new dress and to wear different shoes) more fitting. As this additional paragraph makes clear, Cassandra also recognizes that there is a difference between how

---

[69] Stoddard 1862, 41.

things appear and how they actually are. Specifically, Cassandra notes that the manners of the girls in her class are based on the impression they hope to give and not on "innate principle," suggesting they are only concerned with appearances. The importance they place on "the toilet" also attests to their concern with appearances, in this sense quite physically.

When Cassandra decides to make herself more respectable, she focuses on the second of these appearances by deciding to alter her dress, which, she hopes, will make her "appear" more respectable. As Cassandra says and does nothing to suggest that she will attempt to adjust her manners or to learn "religion, obedience, and duty," we can assume that she is not trying to change her personality or character, or what might be called her "innate principle." Cassandra's only attempt to conform is thus merely cosmetic and even this, as we shall see, fails.

On her father's next visit, Cassandra informs him that she wants a pink calico dress because "the girls at Miss Black's wear pink calico." At this information Locke asks, "Why not get a pink silk?" (39). Harmless as it may seem, this suggestion can actually be read as an attempt to fashion Cassandra's identity in a direction of her father's making. Locke, Cassandra has previously informed the reader, "saw nothing beyond the material" and his "failing was to buy an immense quantity of everything he fancied" (24, 23). The excess of her father's spending is highlighted in a passage omitted from the revised version of the text in which we learn that, "[o]nce ten large boxes of fancy soap came home,

with a rose printed on each cake. . . . Another time he bought twelve lace caps for mother and aunt Merce, all of the same shape."[70] Furthermore, he "order[ed] the best that could be bought for us to eat and to wear. He liked, when he went where there were fine shops, to buy and bring home handsome shawls, bonnets, and dresses, wholly unsuited in general to the style and taste of each of us, but much handsomer than were needful for Surrey" (23).

Cassandra's father takes pleasure in his ability to earn money and to purchase expensive items and, apparently, in making this wealth recognizable. By purchasing things in excess or that were "much handsomer than were needful" for their town, it is ensured that these items leave an impression on all who see them. Indeed, Cassandra relates, the soap gave her an aversion to roses as she "fanc[ies] [she] detect[s] the smell of soap in them,"[71] while the excessively fine clothing "answered . . . as patterns for the plainer materials of our neighbors" (23). As another form of exhibitionism, Locke also regularly invites people into his house, "[t]hough [he] had no time to devote to [them]" (22). That the invitations are based on display is suggested by the fact that, "[a]s his business extended," and thus as his wealth increased, "our visiting list extended" (22).[72]

Based on Locke's eye for money and display of wealth, when he suggests pink silk knowing the other girls wear pink calico, this can be read as an attempt

---

[70] Stoddard 1862, 27.
[71] On the soap and roses see Stoddard 1862, 27.
[72] Julia Stern similarly reads Locke Morgeson's "largesse" as a "wish to flaunt his wealth in a display of the sort of nineteenth-century beneficence that translates directly into social power" (117).

to use Cassandra as another model of his wealth, and to differentiate his family from the masses in terms of class status. Calico, Freedgood tells us, was, by the mid-nineteenth century, "a low-priced and utilitarian textile" (37). Silk, on the other hand, was considered a luxury textile, and was generally used for "fine dress" only, except in the case of the upper classes, who could afford to use it for every-day wear (Reeves-Brown). Locke would likely have been aware of this difference between calico and silk, if not as common knowledge then from his extensive shopping experience, which would indicate that his proposal of silk was pointed. Cassandra, however, is firm: "I must have a pink French calico, with a three-cornered white cloud on it; it is the fashion" (39). Although Locke scoffs at Cassandra's desire to be like everyone else when he would rather she stand out as wealthier, "the dress was bought."[73]

Cassandra's pink calico dress is her foremost attempt to conform and attempt to appear as one of the girls and, according to Judy Attfield in her examination of textiles as material culture, it is a significant choice.[74] Attfield

---

[73] Cassandra, this shows, is here more concerned with being like the others than with proving that her father is "a gentleman" because she could, by wearing silk, show that her family has money.

[74] Ayse Çelikkol has also recently discussed the pink calico dress as a sign, but of the marketplace, and in direct opposition to the way in which I read it. For example, Çelikkol argues that, "Like her classmates, Cassandra wants to appropriate signs that construct and express her distinction" (39). I argue the dress is actually desired because it is a sign of inclusion, and only becomes a sign of distinction later, in opposition to Cassandra's wishes. Çelikkol also argues "Cassandra discovers that as a result of her very access to the sign, the sign loses meaning. Wearing a pink calico dress no longer constitutes a privilege" (40). Although I agree that the pink calico "no longer constitutes a privilege," I do not agree that it loses meaning. I argue, instead, that it only changes meaning,

argues that "textiles present a particularly apposite object type to illustrate how things are used to mediate the interior mental world of the individual, the body and the exterior objective world beyond the self through which a sense of identity is constructed and transacted within social relations," due, in part, to the "specific material properties of textiles" (123). Textiles are "remarkably resilient" and have the "ability to withstand and adapt to changing conditions, and still manage to retain vestiges of their original form," which, Attfield argues, "is not unlike the resiliency of contemporary identity" (132). Furthermore, "[b]ecause clothes make direct contact with the body, and domestic furnishings define the personal spaces inhabited by the body, the material which forms a large part of the stuff from which they are made—cloth—is proposed as one of the most intimate of thing-types that materialises the connection between the body and the outer world" (124).

Based on Attfield's argument, Cassandra's dress, and particularly the calico cloth, literally and symbolically forms a connecting link between Cassandra and her classmates that should effectuate a sense of identity as part of the larger social group. The calico cloth, especially in the early and mid-nineteenth century when clothing still had to be individually sewn out of rolls of cloth, could be turned into anything.[75] In Attfield's words, this means that calico, like other textiles, has

---

but certainly remains a very powerful, very meaningful sign.

[75] Attfield discusses how clothes, through "their smell and texture," are able to call memories to mind (146). This is another characteristic of cloth that would have been emphasized in the nineteenth century as clothes would have retained

"an infinite potential for change of appearance that can be achieved through the use of different fibres, techniques, structures and applied decorations" (132). Cassandra, however, chooses specifically to have the cloth made into a dress "with a three-cornered white cloud on it," signifying her desire for sameness rather than distinction (39). The dress does, in fact, quite literally "materialise" a "connection" between Cassandra and "the outer world" of her classmates, but the connection does not, as Cassandra hopes, allow her to join this world.

The pink calico is "made up by the best dressmaker in Barmouth" and, when Cassandra puts it on for the first time, she reveals, "I thought I looked better than I ever had before, and went into school triumphantly with it." The victory of inclusion Cassandra believes she has won, however, is short lived:

> The girls surveyed me in silence, but criticized me. At last Charlotte Alden asked me in a whisper if old Mr. Warren [Cassandra's tailor grandfather] made my dress. She wrote on a piece of paper, in large letters—"Girls, don't let's wear our pink calicos again," and pushing it over to Elmira Sawyer, made signs that the paper should be passed to all the girls. They read it, and turning to Charlotte Alden nodded. (40)

Unable to deny they now share a sign of inclusion and thus unsure how to preserve their separateness from Cassandra, the girls at first remain silent. Charlotte "at last" attempts to depreciate the dress by calling attention to what she supposes is its origin: Cassandra's grandfather's tailor workshop. This reminder of

---

smells longer than they usually do today due to the infrequency with which clothes (and bodies) were washed at that time.

the un-gentleman-like occupation of her family patriarch proclaims that Cassandra and her dress are, despite appearances, not the same as all the others because Cassandra comes from a different class and her dresses, consequently, must be made by a poor tailor. The reader knows, of course, that Cassandra's father is rich and that the dress "was made by the best dressmaker in Barmouth." Apparently also aware that her (erroneously) contrived difference is not enough to negate the sign of inclusion, Charlotte at last perceives that the only remedy is for the group to simultaneously cast off the sign itself. If Cassandra continues to wear the dress when the others do not, the dress will materialize her difference rather than her inclusion, as the context for that inclusion will have been removed. Despite Cassandra's attempt to conform, the other girls, in refusing to accept Cassandra and in refusing to uphold the sign, preserve Cassandra's originality for her, turning her only attempt at conformity into an enforcement of her difference.[76]

Whether Cassandra continues to wear the pink calico dress or not is never revealed as, like most objects in the novel, the dress does not reappear after its visual debut, except verbally when Cassandra relates the story to her sister. In this case, there seems to be a specific reason for this disappearance which is connected to the negativity of the experience as well as to the particular material qualities of clothing and textiles. As Attfield writes, "clothes, their smell and texture, remind the spectator of the past presence of the person to whom they

---

[76] As one final punishment for Cassandra's attempt at conformity, the kid slippers she wears because Charlotte wears them make her feet swell.

belonged, their inhabiting them, a moment when they wore them—or a moment in which they removed the item of clothing. The garment becomes imbued with the essence of the person" (146). Due to clothing's ability to foster such a connection to and with the wearer and related events, "the personal experiences associated with garments infiltrates the fabric, not to transform the garment but to change the user's practice, so that [when the article produces undesirable associations] what was once worn ha[s] to be discarded" (148). Assuming Cassandra no longer wants to be the person she was when she wore the dress (one who wants desperately to fit in) and would, perhaps, rather not recall the possibly humiliating experience of this attempt, it would make sense that the pink calico dress vanishes from the narrative and, further, that Cassandra would not wear the dress again.[77]

Whether Cassandra realizes it or not, her effort to dress in "the fashion" of the time is actually a duty. According to T.S. Arthur's *Advice to young ladies on their duties and conduct in life*, "To dress with neatness, taste, and propriety, is the duty of every young lady; and she should give just as much thought and attention to the subject as will enable her to do it, and no more" (93). Despite the injunction not to spend too much time thinking about dress, Arthur argues that it is important to have "a regard for external order, beauty, and propriety, as shall make our appearance pleasing to our friends," and that fashion should not be

---

[77] On the other hand, considering that the dress would now be a sign of difference, Cassandra's continued wear of the dress would be another sign and generator of her individuality.

disregarded: "If we dress with a singularity because of a weak prejudice against the prevailing fashions, or outrage all true taste by incongruities of attire, our presence cannot be pleasing to our friends, nor welcome in refined and intelligent circles" (106). Dressing according to fashion and propriety, Arthur's guide suggests, also becomes another form of self denial, as it states there should be no "singularit[ies]," that everyone, in a sense, should look the same, or at least fit harmoniously together: "a young lady should guard against the common fault of dressing for the purpose of attracting attention" (93). If the other girls had continued to wear the pink calico, which Cassandra tells her father is "the fashion," then Cassandra would, indeed, have looked the same as all the rest.

As an (ironically) fitting tribute of resistance to the physical/visual conformity she would willingly have upheld in Barmouth had her peers allowed it, Cassandra, once back home in Surrey, attempts to use her appearance precisely as this particular duty suggests she should not: "for the purpose of attracting attention." In Surrey, Cassandra prepares for her "debut as a grown girl" among her peers by styling her hair like the girls at Miss Black's, but "with the small pride of wishing to make myself *different* from the Surrey girls" (54, my emphasis). Cassandra knows that the girls in Surrey do not dress their hair in the same fashion as the girls in Barmouth, and so she intentionally takes this sign of social compliance and appropriates it for antithetical purposes; that is, in order to draw attention to herself as unique and independent. Cassandra even arrives at the gathering late so that she "might be observed by the assembled class," willingly

"offer[ing] [her]self to their criticism" (54).[78] Cassandra's employment of the Barmouth hairstyle for such contradictory ends—for her own new individualistic purposes rather than for conforming to local trends—can be read as a form of misuse, since the purpose of this style as Cassandra learned it was to mark affiliation: this was the way "the Barmouth girls" styled their hair.

In the wake of her experience in Barmouth, Cassandra vehemently asserts her difference in Surrey, beginning, appropriately enough, with her appearance. In addition to her unique hairstyling, Cassandra admits that she now, against the dictates of the duty, "dresses oddly for effect" rather than according to fashion and propriety. Although her Surrey peers question whether Cassandra "*can* be called a beauty" and criticize her "odd" dress and "ridiculous" manners, Cassandra sees that, at the same time, "they borrowed my dresses for patterns, imitated my bonnets, and adopted my colors," just as Cassandra had done with the pink calico in Barmouth (60). This imitation, furthermore, goes beyond dress to include activities such as sailing and horseback riding:

> When I learned to manage a sailboat, they had an aquatic mania. When I learned to ride a horse, the ancient and moth-eaten sidesaddles of the town were resuscitated, and old family nags were made back-sore with the wearing of them . . . My whims were sneered at, and then followed. Of

---

[78] Barbara Baumgartner reads this scene as a rebellion against fashion: "Recognizing that she will again be judged on appearance, Cassy uses the occasion to demonstrate her independent (if at this stage rather snobbish) spirit, preferring to be the trendsetter rather than fashion follower" (190). It is, I am arguing, not merely a rebellion against fashion but against the larger issue of conformity.

> course I was driven from whim to whim, to keep them busy, and to preserve my originality, and at last I became eccentric for eccentricity's sake. (60-1)

The emulation of her peers does not gratify Cassandra as it would have in Barmouth, but rather encourages her to cultivate her difference, to "preserve [her] originality." When Cassandra is copied, her uniqueness is compromised, "driv-[ing]" her "from whim to whim" until she is forced to become "eccentric for ec-centricity's sake."

Cassandra's misuse of the hairstyle and of dress illustrates that her Barmouth experience has taught her the potency of using things in uncon-ventional ways in order to assert her individuality against the notion of Duty, and she continues to use dress in this way. Another example of this occurs on the way to Rosville, where "cousin" Charles Morgeson and his wife Alice live, and where Cassandra has decided to spend a year. During a stopover in Boston, Cassandra asks her mother for money to make some purchases. It is fitting, based on Cassandra's use of objects in her process of self definition, that Cassandra would go in search of some new things before advancing into a new stage of her life. Cassandra buys "six wide, embroidered belts, a gilt buckle, a variety of ribbons, and a dozen yards of lace" and "repent[s] the whole" shortly after when she sees "other articles [she] wanted more" (66). As Lynn Mahoney points out, "Cassandra buys a variety of accessories to adorn her body—belts, buckles, ribbons, and lace—and yearns for even more." In contrast, Veronica,

Cassandra's sister, who has been given the same amount of money, "buys gifts for others, purchasing for herself only a 'little cross'" (Mahoney 43).

The difference in the purchases of the two sisters, like the differences in the books Cassandra and her mother choose to read, reveals much about their identities. Cassandra is more selfish than Veronica, buying things for herself alone, and is more physical, buying things to adorn and attract attention to her body. The descriptors "wide" and "gilt" suggest the belts and buckle will be visible at the waist, and all of the items are embellishments to the basic or necessary dress, which, in that sense, makes them "luxuries." The lace, which Cassandra uses to trim handkerchiefs and dresses in order to make them appear fancier and more elegant, could have been an actual luxury as high quality lace was very expensive in the nineteenth century. Even if the particular lace Cassandra buys was not of this grade, that she buys a "dozen yards" implies excess. All of these things promote, in Cassandra's mind, her selfhood, as they help her to stand out. In contrast, Veronica, who in most respects is the ideal nineteenth-century heroine, buys herself only one small piece of jewelry that will not call attention to her body and that represents Christianity, marking her as more dutiful than Cassandra both in terms of modesty and in terms of religion—a very important topic in the conduct book genre.

Conduct books emphasize religion as both a duty in itself as well as a basis for Duty. For example, Chapin writes, religion "*is the highest and only permanent sanction of duty*. I have shown you how essential to the conduct of life

are the knowledge and sentiment of duty; I now add that this knowledge and this sentiment depend upon religion" (144). Religion "bind[s] one in steadfast allegiance to duty," and it "alone can furnish the sanctions of duty—it alone gives meaning and excellence to duty" (146). What Chapin is really saying is that religion, here specifically Christianity, enforces the notion of Duty while providing a rationalization for it against which most American women would not have felt comfortable arguing. In Newton's words, "This persuasive rhetoric of religion imbues many traditional aspects of the woman's role [i.e. her Duty] with a potent spiritual argument for conformity" (69).

A crucial tool for the propagation of religion and thus of Duty was, naturally, the Bible. Chapin, for one, adjures women: "Avail yourselves, then, of every means of religious culture. In all your reading, let that sacred Book which contains the revelation of God and immortality, have the first place and the deepest attention" (146-7). Conduct books, in addition to encouraging women to read the Bible regularly, also used "biblical imperatives . . . to define (and justify) traditional differences between the sexes" (Newton 81). The Bible, like the conduct book and conduct book literature and unlike the books Cassandra chooses to read, taught women proper conduct and compliance with Duty. It is only natural, then, that, when Cassandra's mother is particularly worried about the self that Cassandra is developing, she would instruct Cassandra to read the Bible as well as to engage in other activities that are recommended for women by the conduct

book genre, and this is precisely what she does when she tells Cassandra to "read the Bible, and sew more" (64).

The pairing of reading the Bible with sewing appears repeatedly in *The Morgesons*, and becomes Mary's standard response when she wants to push Cassandra in what Mary sees as the right direction. For example, when Cassandra is thrown out of school as a child, Mary keeps her in "long enough to make a square of patchwork each day and to hear her read a Psalm—a duty" Cassandra says, "which I bore with patience" (14). As these activities—sewing and reading the Bible—are precisely the kinds of activities recommended for women by the conduct book genre, they are correctly labeled as "duties" by Cassandra, and are in themselves instructive in the ways of Duty, particularly in the case of the Bible. In fact, on another occasion when Cassandra's mother recommends she "read the Bible, and sew more," the original version of *The Morgesons* has Cassandra's mother only recommending that Cassandra "read the Bible." [79] Although the addition of "and sew more" is appropriate as it ties this recommendation in with other instances in the novel, thus creating a significant repetition, the fact that Stoddard began with just the Bible places an emphasis on it that is paralleled in the conduct book and would have been historically fitting.[80]

---

[79] Stoddard 1862, 70.

[80] Newton writes that the religious message—that "good behavior means happiness both in this world and in the world to come"—is "strong in conduct books to the end of the century, although it peaks during the period 1836-75 for children's literature in general" (27). *The Morgesons*, we will recall, was originally published in 1862.

The occasion of this particular injunction to "read the Bible" (and, later, also to "sew more") is Cassandra's decision to spend a year in Rosville with Charles and Alice Morgeson out of a desire to "hav[e] a good time" (63). This "chasing after amusement" disturbs Mary, particularly because Mary appears to understand Charles as Cassandra's friend Ben does: as "a savage, living by his instincts, with one element of civilization—he loves Beauty—beauty like [Cassandra's]" (102). When Mary warns Cassandra with the "thinly veiled sexual metaphor" (Baumgartner 196): "I foresee the day when the pitcher will come back from the well broken," Mary is alluding to the serious and important duty of chastity (to which I will return shortly) (63). When Cassandra responds with the demand, "tell me how to feel and act," Mary "answer[s] in a mechanical voice" that what Cassandra should do is "read the Bible, and sew more" (64).

Despite Mary's protests, Cassandra goes to Rosville, provoking Mary's last use of the Bible and sewing pair. When Mary departs from Rosville, entrusting Cassandra to Cousin Charles, she leaves Cassandra two gifts: a "beautiful workbox," which would have contained "instruments and materials for needlework" (*OED*) and, in the workbox, "a small Bible" (73). By providing Cassandra with the physical objects that make her advice to "read the Bible, and sew more" possible at this time, Mary reveals the level of her apprehension for Cassandra's purity during her stay at Charles's house. This time, rather than merely suggesting Duty-instructive activities, Cassandra's mother finally provides Cassandra with the tools to carry them out, thus leaving her with permanent

reminders and enforcers of her Duty. Cassandra, in response, and in reference to the Bible particularly, "put[s] it away carefully," preparing for as well as foreshadowing the sexual experiences to follow and showing once again that she will not allow the objects given her by others, which attempt to turn Cassandra's self into the "appropriate" one, to take their desired effect (73).[81]

The only times during that novel that we see Cassandra approaching something that might be loosely described as reading the Bible or sewing can be considered instances of misuse. Shortly after positing "The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain" as an exception to the good books she hates, Cassandra asks her step- grandmother to show her a Bible. Cassandra does not wish to read the book, but only to see the picture of a love scene, at which she wonders, "Did Ruth love Boaz dreadfully much?" (7). Cassandra's only act of sewing is, like her "reading" of the Bible, defined rather broadly. This instance occurs in Boston after

---

[81] The Bible, the stronger symbol of Duty and what, it is suggested, Cassandra puts away, does not return to the narrative, but the workbox makes one more appearance. During Cassandra's time in Rosville, relatives of Alice come to stay with the family. The twenty-one year old son Bill—whom Charles accurately describes as "a cub"—ends up proposing marriage to Cassandra in a letter (117). She relates that "[h]is actions denoted an admiration of me. He looked over the book I was reading or rummaged my workbox, trying on my thimble with an air of tenderness, and peeping into my needlebook" (116). Bill knows nothing about Cassandra, although he does recognize that she "was a whole team and a horse to let" and has "a smartish eye," suggesting he sees that she is somehow different from other women (116). That Bill shows his first interest in Cassandra by going through her workbox, however, suggests that Bill is looking for a domesticated version of Cassandra. This is his (if only) unconscious way of creating the identity for Cassandra that he wants to see. Cassandra refuses his offer by "pinn-[ing]" her own reply "to the pincushion" that is apparently in his room, as if to say that even a version of Cassandra that could be found in a workbox would not consent to be his wife (117).

Cassandra has made her purchases. In addition to the body-illuminating articles such as belts and buckles, Cassandra also purchases a "coarse needle," which she has bought for the select purpose of having Temperance (the primary member of the household help) pierce her ears that night after everyone else is asleep. After one ear is pierced, Cassandra admits it hurt so much "that I could not summon resolution to have the other operated on; so I went to bed with a bit of sewing silk in the hole [Temperance] had made" (67). The piercing, which I will discuss as a sexual act, has ironically been performed in such a way as to suggest Cassandra has sewn herself (or had herself sewn) turning the act into a drastic appropriation of her mother's suggestion that Cassandra "sew more."

The next morning, after Cassandra manages to have both ears pierced, she shows her mother her "ears red and sore," and "insist[s] that [she] must have a certain pair of white cornelian ear-rings, set in chased gold, and three inches long, which [Cassandra] had seen in a shop window" (68). After "scold[ing] Temperance," Mary gives Cassandra the money and the earrings are presumably bought (68). The sexual connotations, particularly with reference to virginity, are quite plain here: skin has been penetrated, painfully and for the first time, against the mother's wishes and by a roughly phallic-shaped instrument, and made "red and sore" in the process.[82] The holes are then filled by other, noticeably long (for earrings, that is) phallic-shaped objects that are flesh colored due

---

[82] The piercing is clearly painful as Cassandra cannot have both ears bored the same night, and it is also apparently somewhat indecorous as Cassandra has Temperance perform the piercing only after Mary has gone to sleep, and it earns Temperance a scolding.

to "impurities."[83] All of this, finally, occurs on Cassandra's way to Rosville, where she will have her sexual awakening. The piercing, read this way, foreshadows the permanent body markings, the facial scars, Cassandra will receive in Rosville as a result of her sexual experiences there.

The piercing can be read as a drastic measure to obtain one of the objects that Cassandra sees after she has spent all of her money, for, as she admits, she "repent[s] the whole" of her purchases shortly after making them when she sees "other articles [she] wanted more." Despite being painful, Cassandra undergoes the piercing and then uses it as the reason why she "must have" not just any ear-rings, but "a certain pair of white cornelian ear-rings." These "certain" objects are particularly important to Cassandra as, through them, Cassandra deliberately strips herself of her own innocence as a form of self-empowerment and as preparation for her experiences in Rosville. This symbolic loss of virginity before her arrival at Charles's is, her actions show, desired and controlled by Cassandra, and is marked by a gem that has historically been connected with power and energy.[84] This painful, permanent, secretly made but boldly displayed self-

---

[83] Cornelian (another name for carnelian) was a popular gem in Europe in the nineteenth century, and ranges in color from orange to red to brownish-red, due to impurities in the stone. The name, in both the forms "carnelian" and "cornelian," comes from the color, although "carnelian" is attributed to the Latin word for flesh while "cornelian" is attributed to the Latin word for cherry.

[84] Carnelian has historically been connected with power and energy and has been considered precious by believers. A general belief in the power of gem-stones dates back to the beginning of recorded history, and the specific connection between the carnelian and power can be traced back to the Egyptians, who revered the stone greatly. Cornelian was one of the most commonly used

marking signals self ownership and asserts that this self, most importantly, is sexually aware and ready for fulfillment.

Sexual purity, as one might expect, was another important duty according to conduct book literature. As Barbara Welter sums it up in "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860": "Purity was as essential as piety to a young woman, its absence as unnatural and unfeminine. Without it she was, in fact, no woman at all, but a member of some lower order" (154). This idea is perfectly echoed in the novel when Cassandra's friend Ben summarizes his—and likely most men's—reaction to Cassandra:

> "You have been my delight and misery ever since I knew you. I saw you first, so impetuous, yet self-contained! Incapable of insincerity, devoid of affection and courageously naturally beautiful. Then, to my amazement, I saw that, unlike most women, you understood your instincts; that you dared to define them, and were *impious* enough to follow them. You debased my ideal, you confused me, also, for I could never affirm that you were wrong; forcing me to consult abstractions, they gave a verdict in your favor, which almost *unsexed* you in my estimation. I must own that the man who is willing to marry you has more courage than I have." (226, my emphasis)

The instincts to which Ben refers are Cassandra's sexual instincts, which she not only "underst[ands]" and "define[s]" but is "impious enough to follow." In doing so,

---

stones in Egyptian jewelry and was even buried on the bodies of the dead, as the Egyptians believed the gem had the ability to protect both the living and the dead.

Cassandra is almost "unsexed" in Ben's "estimation," becoming, in Welter's words, practically "no woman at all." The "unnatural[ness]" of the impure woman that Welter speaks of is what "debase[s] [Ben's] ideal" and "confuse[s]" and "a-maze[s]" him, "forcing [him] to consult abstractions." The result is that Ben finds Cassandra unmarriageable and therefore of "some lower order."

Although Cassandra does not sexually consummate her relationship with Charles, Ben's reaction attests to both the clarity and the inappropriateness of Cassandra's sexual desires, indicating how unusual just this level of sexuality would have seemed at that time due to the nineteenth-century "doctrine of female passionlessness" (Goshgarian 49).[85] Such was also apparently the view in the conduct book literature composed by Stoddard's contemporaries as, according to Susan Harris, "Cass is almost alone in mid-nineteenth-century American women's fiction in conducting an unconsummated but otherwise thoroughly illicit affair and not being censored for it" (17).[86] Also unusual for the time is the fact that "Cass' illicit experience with Charles matures rather than damns her" (18).

---

[85] During this period, "femininity implied special virtue: woman was, the phrenologist Orson Fowler energetically reminded his innumerable readers in the 1840s, 'constitutionally' 'more virtuous and less passionate' than man" (Goshgarian 49). "By mid-century," this view of women as naturally passionless "was the dominant view among writers of marriage manuals and other advice books, and perhaps among medical men as well" (49).

[86] Matter-Siebel argues later that Cassandra is not "almost" but entirely "alone in mid-nineteenth-century literature in not being censured for her illicit affair, except by her own conscience" (30).

While critics celebrate this uncensured desire alone as, in Sybil Weir's words, Stoddard's "unequivocal endorsement of the sexual woman," a few go further and suggest that Cassandra would have consummated the relationship had Charles survived the carriage accident that he and Cassandra are in, and Ben's suggestion that Cassandra is "impious enough" to follow her sexual instincts supports this (433). James Matlack, for instance, states that, when Cassandra "is willing to risk an affair with Charles, he is killed in an accident" (288). Sabina Matter-Siebel similarly writes of the accident: "in its stark symbolism of the ungovernable horse running away with the lover, the episode indicates that they [Cassandra and Charles] are no longer able to hold the reins of their desire. The timely death of Charles allows Stoddard to stay within the limits of the domestic novel" (30). Cassandra's self-piercing can, in this way, be read as the consummation that Cassandra will soon desire but not achieve, reinforcing this act of "sewing" as a way of marking the self as sexual, and making it Cassandra's most profound misuse of an object in the novel.

When Cassandra returns to Surrey after her recovery from the carriage accident that ends her affair with Charles, her first act is to redecorate her room. This redecoration begins with a reconceptualization of this space: "I had a comfortable sense of property, when I took possession of my own room. It was better, after all, to live with a father and mother, who would adopt my ideas. Even the sea might be mine. I asked father the next morning, at breakfast, how far out at sea his property extended" (129). Despite Cassandra's return to the domestic

enclosure of her home, there is no suggestion that Cassandra will be giving up her self to remain there. In fact, her compliance with this living arrangement, as this quotation suggests, is contingent upon her plan to take control of things there, to influence others to do as she wills by their adoption of her ideas.[87]

Cassandra also suggests she can only be content at home if she can expand the concept of home to encompass more than just the walls of the house: "even the sea might be mine." Cassandra is proposing not just a deconstruction of the division between inside and outside, but between the domestic and nature, where nature is literally the sea and symbolically that which is natural in Cassandra. If the sea, as many critics have argued, is "a symbol of both [Cassandra's] individuality and sexuality," then bringing it into the home entails a drastic revision of the concept of home and the domestic (Penner 142).[88] As women were expected to be selfless and pure, both in deed and in thought, individuality and sexuality are not supposed to be part of the selfhood approved and encouraged by society as outlined in conduct book literature, just as the sea is not supposed to be seen as part of one's home. It is only, however, with these

---

[87] Mary later affirms in a conversation with Locke that Cassandra does have this ability: "You think Cassandra has no ways of her own! She can make us change ours; do you know that?" (142).

[88] Zagarell even calls the sea "the source" of Cassandra's "individualism" (47). Zagarell also writes "the use of the sea to symbolize sexuality marks sexual life as part of Cassandra's birthright, the potential for full experience bequeathed her by old Locke Morgeson [Cassandra's great-grandfather]" (49). Matter-Siebel argues that Cassandra "invokes" the sea "every time she cannot or dares not express her inner turmoil" (27), which I would suggest is often sexual. Dawn Henwood suggests the sea is symbolic of Cassandra's aspirations (60), and her aspirations are arguably to be an individual and to be sexually free.

elements that Cassandra can be impelled to remain home. How Cassandra achieves this reconception will be addressed shortly.

As the above passage also illustrates, along with Cassandra's new appreciation for objects has come a new awareness of the importance of ownership and thus of "property." Cassandra uses the term twice in quick succession, but not in the same way. When Cassandra says she has a "comfortable sense of property" when she moves back into her own room, she seems to highlight her physical or literal ownership (though technically not legal ownership) of that space. She then qualifies that statement of physical ownership with the importance of being able to influence others, specifically her parents, which suggests an emotional or symbolic ownership, as when one owns something that means one (usually) has control over it and can appropriate it for one's own use and towards one's own ends. Cassandra follows this with "[e]ven the sea might be mine," which might suggest an emotional or symbolic ownership due to the sea's immensity; however, Cassandra insists she seeks literal ownership when she asks her father how far out to sea his property extends.

Cassandra has shown that she has learned how to symbolically own objects, how to make them her "property" by appropriating them for her own purposes, specifically in order to use them as tools in her process of self definition, but she has not yet had to consider the difference between symbolic and literal ownership. This is also to say that Cassandra understands the metaphor Self Control Is Object Possession only metaphorically, and still needs to learn how

the metaphor can be taken literally (Lakoff and Johnson 272). By pairing and essentially blurring the lines between symbolic and literal or physical and emotional ownership as she has done in the passage above, Cassandra demonstrates that she is not yet sensible that there is an important difference between these types of ownership (or between the metaphorical and literal senses of the metaphor), although such an understanding would have been valuable for any woman desiring the selfhood Cassandra desires at that historical time. Just as Cassandra will learn the difference, so, too, would Stoddard's readers have been learning it.

The term "property" would have caught the attention of Stoddard's original readers due to the recently revised and controversial Married Woman's Property Act passed in 1860 in New York.[89] Stoddard, her writings show, supported the Act.[90] The 1860 Act was one of the most comprehensive and well known and was therefore used as a model by other states. Before these and similar acts were

---

[89] The Married Woman's Property Act of 1848 gave married women in New York limited legal rights in terms of property, and the revised 1860 Act expanded these rights still further.

[90] On January 11, 1857, Stoddard writes that she recently attended the Woman's Rights Convention in New York City. Reflecting on it she says, "[t]hese Conventions make people think, after they have done laughing. The getters-up of them have some right ideas too. Among these ideas, is an extension of the means of honorable and *honored* employment for women, and the enjoyment of property rights, and legal power to retain or dispose of property" ("Early Journalism" 326-7). Women's property rights were, in fact, one of the main topics of the Woman's Rights Convention that Stoddard attended. According to a footnote from the editors, the convention Stoddard attends is the Seventh Annual Women's Rights Convention in New York City during which "[a] wide range of issues was addressed, including women's right to own property, equal wages for women, women's access to education, marriage, and suffrage" ("Early Journalism" 331).

passed, the United Sates (like England), followed the law of Coverture.[91] The Married Women's Property Act of 1860, however, "guaranteed wives' right to own, buy, and sell property, to sign contracts, to sue and be sued, to keep their own wages, and to be joint guardians of their children" ("Married Women's Property Acts"). This and similar laws, one could say, "uncovered" a woman in many ways.

If, as Freedgood argues, nineteenth-century women in Britain could not be individuals because they were "socially, legally, politically, and economically . . . not recognizably individuals throughout most of the nineteenth century," then women with some legal or economic rights, for instance, should be able to begin to achieve this individuality (44).[92] If one considers the implications of these property acts, this assumption, in fact, makes sense. Under these acts, women were *not* the same entity as their husbands, as this autonomy is what allows them to, for instance, keep their property and wages separate from his. These acts thus made married women, at least in one way, "recognizably individuals." What Cassandra later realizes, and what Stoddard's readers would also have been realizing, is that, in being allowed to own property, women, in several legal and economic ways, were allowed to own themselves, to, in fact, *have* selves.

---

[91] Coverture described a woman's position while married, and meant that she was essentially "covered" by her husband. Upon marriage a woman was legally placed under her husband's authority and protection, including any property that was hers before she married. Furthermore, marriage meant that the man and woman became one entity in the eyes of the law, and, as many have derisively but accurately remarked, the one identity they formed was his.

[92] The British version of The Married Women's Property Act was not passed until 1882.

It is because Cassandra does not yet know the difference between symbolic and literal ownership that, when Cassandra refers to the "sense of property" she feels when she "took possession of [her] own room" in Surrey, she can suggest a physical, literal ownership. For Cassandra, it is not yet important that her sense of property is not legal, that her room, like the rest of the house, belongs to her father and will not even become hers upon Locke's death due to the fact that Cassandra has a brother. Because Cassandra certainly feels the room to be "hers" at this point in the novel, however, it is with this room that Cassandra begins her attempt to reconceptualize the notion of home. Not surprisingly, Cassandra approaches this alteration to her room in the same manner that she has been approaching her self alterations: through the use of objects.

Cassandra has learned that objects are powerful tools in the construction of an individual self, particularly when the changes she makes are visible to others, such as changing her dress, piercing her ears, and wearing certain jewels and not others. In considering these objects one could suggest they "decorate" Cassandra. If one can change one's concept of self through a "redecoration" of that self, then one can also attempt to change one's concept of home by redecorating that home. As Cassandra has suggested, her new concept of home would include the sea as it, in symbolizing individuality and sexuality, represents all that is not supposed to be part of the self or the concept of domesticity outlined by conduct book literature. In order to bring these "selfish" elements into her notion of home, Cassandra must bring the sea into her room symbolically but

also as literally as possible, and this she achieves by modeling her new room on the sea.

The primary way that Cassandra brings the sea symbolically into her room is through color. Cassandra purchases a "blue and white carpet" and "a piece of blue and white flowered chintz." Her "curtains were blue chintz, and the sofa and chairs were covered with the same." Further, there is a "row of shelves covered with blue damask," the "doors were likewise covered with blue damask, nailed round with brass nails," and damask—presumably in the same blue that covers everything else—is used to cover the mantel shelf. Like the water with its sea foam, Cassandra's room is strikingly blue with bits of white. The only variation in color, in fact, is in the walls, "painted amber color, and varnished," which could be said to represent the sand on the seashore.

Also significant here is that the blue and white colors, those that represent the sea, are all due to cloth. As discussed when Cassandra chooses to use the pink calico dress as her main tool for self transformation in Barmouth, cloth is "one of the most intimate of thing-types" because it is the basis of both clothing, which touches the body, and of "domestic furnishings[,] [which] define the personal spaces inhabited by the body" (Attfield 124). What I wish to stress here is the way cloth links domestic furnishings to clothing, suggesting that Cassandra chooses to "clothe" her room with the same substance (cloth) with which she clothes herself. Further, just as Cassandra's use of distinctive clothing shows her affinity for creature comforts, so too does Cassandra's use of blue chintz

when she uses it to cover "the ascetic aspect of my two hair-cloth arm-chairs" (143). What Cassandra "entirely conceal[s]" (143) with the material is, according to the *OED*, that aspect of her chairs that denotes severe self-denial and even "abstinence from creature comforts." This blue chintz, therefore, like Cassandra's clothing (and her new purchases), sends the message that she will not abstain from creature comforts. Cassandra is here, then, literally taking the same approach with the reconceptualization of her room as she has with herself.

Through an emphasis on blue and white cloth, which covers nearly everything in the room, Cassandra is able to symbolically, though in one sense very literally, "materialize" the sea in her room. Additionally, in the redecorated room Cassandra uses "no pictures but the shining shadows," except for a "tall mirror" (something that will literally reflect Cassandra), and the view from her windows, which, the novel points out, all face the sea. The importance of this view to Cassandra and to the atmosphere of her room is stressed when Cassandra specifically refuses to keep her blinds closed (which would protect the curtains from fading) because she could not "watch the sea then" (144). Curtains, Freedgood writes, were "meant to mark a definite boundary between the domestic and the foreign, the inside and the outside," in the mid-nineteenth century (57). By refusing to close her curtains (which, like her blinds, must remain open in order to provide her with a constant view of the water), Cassandra signals her wish to erase that boundary, specifically between her room and the sea. The same could be suggested about the doors, which are "covered with blue damask, [and] nailed

round with brass nails," and thus are made invisible as doors, instead merging into the rest of the sea-like décor of her room (143). In addition to the view, then, the lack of boundaries created by the open curtains and covered doors also brings the sea most literally into Cassandra's room, thus extending her "property" to symbolically include the sea, fulfilling Cassandra's hope that "even the sea might be mine."

Cassandra's room, through the materialization of the sea, suggests a sexual energy and a sense of individuality. Having all the obvious dividers between inside and outside concealed allows Cassandra's room to further suggest a lack of confinement, a determination not to be held back or contained in any way. All of the traits exuded by Cassandra's room are, therefore, also traits that mark Cassandra. As Cassandra says, "[i]t already seemed to me that I was like the room" (143). Veronica, too, sees the resemblance and tells Cassandra, "I recognize you here" (144). This similarity is not coincidental, but due to the fact that Cassandra has tried to create a self and a space that contain her own unique and often controversial characteristics through her furnishing and decoration of self and space, so that she may be content living at home, or, at least, in this room. The ability of rooms to reflect their possessors through symbolic ownership is a lesson Cassandra appears to have learned in Rosville.

Early in Cassandra's relationship with her bedroom in Rosville, the connection between the two is depicted as superficial, illustrating Cassandra's undeveloped ownership of that space. The room, for example, "suited the color of

[Cassandra's] hair, Alice declared, and was becoming to [her] complexion" (75). This connection intensifies the longer Cassandra remains in the room as her personal objects accumulate and the room increasingly reflects her characteristics, until, later during the year, Cassandra recognizes her room as the place she can go where she can "find [her]self again" (110).

Cassandra's most developed sense of a connection between a person and her room comes at the very end of Cassandra's stay in Rosville, when she first "totter[]s downstairs" after recovering from the accident that killed Charles:

> I was angry that there was no change in the house. The rooms should have been dismantled, reflecting disorder and death, by their perpetual darkness and disorder. It was not so. No dust had been allowed to gather on the furniture, no wrinkles or stains. No mist on the mirrors, no dimness anywhere. Alice was elegantly dressed, in the deepest mourning. I examined her with a cynical eye; her bombazine was trimmed with crape, and the edge of her collar was beautifully crimped. A mourning brooch fastened it, and she wore jet ear-rings. She looked handsome, composed, and contented, holding a black-edged handkerchief. (123-4)

Cassandra expects the rooms—the architectural interiors—to express the intimate interiors of their possessor, who, now that Charles is dead, is Alice. When the house does not reflect the "darkness and disorder" that Cassandra feels at the loss of Charles, she assumes Alice does not share these feelings,

and this causes her to examine Alice "cynically." What Cassandra sees is that, although Alice is properly dressed in deep mourning with the appropriate accoutrements, the finer details of her dress suggest a concern for more than just the proper appearance and, indeed, Alice looks "handsome, composed and contented." Like the rooms that are now hers, Alice does not appear disordered or dim.

As Cassandra and Alice begin to talk about the future, Cassandra discovers that the connections between Alice and her room are not merely physical. When Cassandra "look[s] astonished" at Alice's intention of taking over the management of Morgeson's Mills, Alice asserts "I can," and explains: "I am changed. When perhaps I should feel that I have done with life, I am eager to begin it. I have lamented over myself lately" (125). Alice admits that her life, rather than being dismantled, for the first time feels correctly ordered. Instead of feeling dark and misty and allowing her life to gather dust or remain stained with Charles's blood, she is "eager to begin" life anew. The room's state, therefore, with its lack of darkness, disorder, dust, wrinkles, stains and mist, does accurately reflect Alice's state, and neither house nor owner expresses the regret or confusion Cassandra believes they should due to the loss of Charles. If Alice's words had not revealed her emotions, her furniture would have.

Cassandra's full comprehension of the ability of rooms to reveal things about the individuals who are represented by those rooms is confirmed later in

the novel when Cassandra leaves the home of her friend Ben, where she meets his brother and her future husband, Desmond:

> I looked from the carriage window for a last view of my room. The chambermaid was already there, and had thrown open the shutters, to let in daylight upon the scene of the most royal dreams I had ever had. The ghost of my individuality would lurk there no longer than the chairs I had placed, the books I had left, the shreds of paper or flowers I had scattered, could be moved or swept away. (201)

Because this room was hers only for a month, Cassandra recognizes that she does not own the room, merely a few of the objects in it. Her reflection in the room—the display of her "individuality"—is therefore limited to the things that she brought to the room or altered while in the room. Once she leaves, those things —chairs, books, paper and flowers—will be removed or repositioned, thus removing any trace or element of Cassandra.

What Cassandra finally verbalizes here, when she recognizes that her individuality is capable of being "swept away" with the objects, is her consciousness of the way in which objects hold the key to individuality. An extension of this would be the recognition that, as objects are part of our selfhood, then rooms that hold collections of our objects represent as well as hold our selves—a premise that is taken for granted in *The Reef*, as we will see in the final chapter, and an idea that Cassandra appears to grasp based on the remodeling of her bedroom. What Cassandra is at least prepared to recognize, then, is how a loss of objects

and a loss of the rooms that house our objects can bring about a loss of self. This reminder of the fragility of selfhood is strategically timed, as Cassandra will experience a dramatic change in her self once she returns home from Ben's house to find her mother dead.

When "[t]he un-thought-of result of mother's death—disorganization, began to show itself," Cassandra realizes that someone must take control of the domestic sphere (216). Her father had never concerned himself much with the household, believing his role was merely that of the provider, and makes no attempt to change his role after Mary dies. Cassandra sees that her Aunt Merce is "distress[ed] at the responsibility which, she feared, must rest upon her" "[i]n regard to [Cassandra], and Veronica," but Cassandra knows this is not her aunt's role (213). Veronica, she herself admits, "knows[s] that [her] instincts are fine only in a self-centering direction" and "shall be no help," as she has neither the strength nor the practicality to take their mother's place (219). When Cassandra hears "*Duty* sound[ing] through [Veronica's] sighs," Cassandra recognizes that as the eldest daughter and the strongest woman in the house, it is her duty to fill the role that their mother once held, leading her to ask Veronica, "shall *I* take care of you? I think I can" (206, 207).

This use of the capitalized *"Duty"* here, highlighted through Stoddard's use of italics, ties *The Morgesons* directly to Stoddard's entry in "Our Lady Correspondent" and shows that Cassandra knows she must now live according to the sense of Duty promoted by conduct book literature and to see home and its

domestic life in the traditional way. In order to properly perform this role—a role into which nothing short of a tragedy could have forced her and against which she has hitherto resisted with every atom of her being—Cassandra must police her individuality, let go of her own hopes and dreams, and essentially give up her self, a sacrifice that even Cassandra's aunt recognizes. When Aunt Merce asks Cassandra to "see to Fanny," a member of the household help who "is lording it over us all," Cassandra responds "Yes, yes, I will do it; you may depend on me. I will reign, and serve also." This signifies to Aunt Merce that Cassandra has decided to take on the responsibility of the mother's role, to which Aunt Merce exclaims, "Oh, Cassandra, *can* you give up *yourself*?" (215; emphasis in original).

Cassandra's aunt, who has always described Cassandra as "possessed" due to her uniqueness and individuality, understands that this domestic role is so contrary to Cassandra's natural way that the two states are actually mutually exclusive: in order to become center of the domestic sphere, Cassandra must give up her natural self. Not believing she has a choice, Cassandra responds to her aunt's question with, "I must, I suppose," adding "I . . . never mean to have anything to myself—entirely, you know" (215). As Cassandra's self has been constructed with the aid of objects, and as she must now give up having a self, Cassandra recognizes that she must also give up trying to have any *thing* to herself "entirely," to, in other words, "own" things, to appropriate objects in order to build and reinforce her individual sense of self.

Cassandra's decision to give up her self unsurprisingly feels unnatural. As she tells Veronica,

> "An idea of responsibility has come to me—what plain people call Duty."
>
> "I do not feel it," [Veronica] cried mournfully. "I must yield to you then. You can be good."
>
> "I must act so; but help me Verry; I have contrary desires."
>
> "What do they find to feed on? What are they? Have you your evil spirit?"
>
> "Yes; a devil named Temperament." (219)

This second use of "Duty" reinforces the connection between *The Morgesons* and Stoddard's entry in "Our Lady Correspondent" and, with its ties to the conduct book genre, makes it perfectly clear what kind of a woman Cassandra feels she must now be, and what kind of a woman she has resisted becoming. This woman obtains "goodness" by expunging her "evil spirit." She practices "self-denial" and ignores her own "idiosyncrasies and necessities" by acting, as Cassandra explains to Veronica here, "contrary" to her "desires." She follows the approved path, practices correct conduct, and achieves the "socially approved definition of complete and appropriate 'selfhood'" (Newton 4). To become the kind of woman Cassandra believes she has to be to take her mother's place, Cassandra must, in short, give up her "crusade against Duty."

When Cassandra stops fighting Duty and allows her self to be confined by it, the change is represented architecturally, as "[a] wall [that] had risen up suddenly before [her], which divided [her] from [her] dreams." This wall forces Cassandra to remain within the domestic sphere, the "prosaic domain" Cassandra fears she "must henceforth be confined to" (216). Cassandra feels no "excitement" in this "housewifely condition" (220, 226), and, instead, finds herself "perplexed . . . with household cares," sure that she will end every day "in an irritable frame of mind" (223-224, 217). When, after months of following Duty, Cassandra attempts even a brief escape from this enclosure, she is thrust back inside of it. As Cassandra relates, "[w]ith the ruffling autumnal breezes my stagnation vanished, and I began my shore life again in a mood which made memory like hope; but staying out too late one evening I came home in a chill. From chill I went to fever, which lasted some days" (229). Just how long Cassandra is confined to her bed is unclear, but that her hair also falls out suggests it is a relatively serious illness. The implications are that if Cassandra dares to spend too much time with the sea, and therefore dares to allow herself to remember her desires and have hopes of change, she is punished.

Although Cassandra has been forced into a self denying role that is opposed to her natural instincts—what Cassandra terms as following a "destiny" that "take[s] for granted that [her] own spirit should not rule [her]" (219)—and although Cassandra has had to give up using objects in order to define and display her individuality as that selfhood is opposed to Duty, Cassandra has not, of

course, given up using objects altogether. Cassandra still presumably wears dresses, fixes her hair with combs, and eats the foreign jam imported by her father's shipping company. What Cassandra has given up, then, is the use of objects for their system functions, while retaining them for their proper functions. Because she is forced by Duty to ignore what has been for her the most important function of creature comforts, one might think that her appreciation for these objects would lessen; in fact, just the opposite seems to be true based on Cassandra's statement that "[t]he old-fashioned asceticism which considered air, sleep, food, as mere necessities was stupid" (224). What Cassandra suggests here about basic necessities being more than mere necessities actually foreshadows the reconceptualization of definitions that Cassandra will be forced to make in her near future when necessities become comforts and creature comforts become luxuries.[93] What Cassandra's renunciation of the system functions of objects seems to have resulted in, then, is a heightening of her appreciation of these creature comforts for their other uses—for their proper functions.

Due to this more heightened awareness of the traditional uses of things, Cassandra seems to be more adept at detecting suggestions in her father's passing remarks about clothes, furniture and even servants that his business is not as successful as it once was, giving Cassandra "a cold feeling" or "cold twinge" each time such a comment is made (221). Cassandra, in fact, puts these clues

---

[93] While the definition of "comfort" under which "creature comforts" is found is defined as "a thing that produces or ministers to enjoyment and content," it is further "distinguished from necessaries on the one hand, and from luxuries on the other," suggesting this is also the case for "creature comforts."

together and guesses at her father's "ailment," that he has gone bankrupt, before it is revealed to her, which occurs on the day Cassandra is well enough to leave her room after the illness that punishes Cassandra for attempting to bring the sea back into her now "proper" life (229). The timing of the news of Locke's ruin with Cassandra's illness is not coincidental. As Locke's business has been the source of the income that has purchased many of the objects Cassandra has used in her process of self definition—objects such as the pink dress, the sewing needle, and the material for the redecoration for her room—the bankruptcy reinforces what Cassandra's illness has already suggested: that Cassandra will be given no way out of her domestic role.

A loss of creature comforts is Cassandra's first thought upon receiving the news of the family's financial ruin: "I dropped into a mental calculation, respecting the cost of an entire change of wardrobe suitable to our reduced circumstances, and speculated on a neat cottage-style of cookery" (230). Food and clothing that provide for "enjoyment of the senses" are the classic examples of "creature comforts" and precisely the two things Cassandra believes she must immediately give up, transforming them into luxuries. The "suitable" wardrobe and "cottage-style of cookery" indicate that Cassandra is now focusing on the bare physical "necessities" of life and no longer on those objects that would provide her with enjoyment or, more importantly, a self. As Cassandra's prior comment on necessities foreshadowed, what Cassandra once considered "mere necessities" have become creature comforts, and comforts have become luxuries. If Cassandra

had been harboring any hope that she might be able to regain some of her past self, that hope is dashed away here when Cassandra is forced to give up completely the creature comforts that have been her tools in this self defining process, making both their system and now even their proper functions inaccessible to her.

Just as Mary's death causes Cassandra to realize that her self ownership, based on her symbolic ownership of objects, was an illusion, now her father's bankruptcy causes Cassandra to realize that her actual ownership of objects is also an illusion, as anything in the house that Cassandra might have considered hers, that she might have used as tools in the construction of her self identity, can now be sold off to pay her father's debts, and taken from her permanently. Cassandra is even temporarily forced to give up her bedroom, the room she felt was most hers, as her father believes that, "by shutting up the house in part, [they] should have less labor to perform" (231). Although Cassandra begs her father not to sell their house until Ben returns to marry Veronica, hoping that Ben can buy the house so that it will at least remain in the family, Cassandra knows this will not make it any more hers than it was before.

Now that Cassandra has been forced into a dual sense of self denial—that which denies the self those creature comforts that bring individual enjoyment and, more simply and profoundly, that which denies any *self* at all—Cassandra rapidly grows more estranged from her former self and more depressed: "[w]e could not deny it to ourselves, that home was sadly altered, or that we were

melancholy" (232). When Cassandra "find[s] time to look into [her]self," she says, "I discovered that I had lost my atmosphere. My life was coarse, hard, colorless! I lived in an insignificant country village; I was poor. My theories had failed, my practice was like my moods—variable" (232). Cassandra's atmosphere can be described as that outlook she used to have on life when she felt she owned her self and her home because she had symbolic control over them and could re-conceptualize and redecorate them to suit her. Now, however, Cassandra is faced with the harsh realities of true ownership where theories and symbols suddenly seem utterly inconsequential, utterly *immaterial*, impressing upon her the true difference between symbolic and actual ownership. Without the "theories" that blurred this distinction, Cassandra is left with a "coarse, hard, colorless" life that cannot be softened or brightened through "redecoration." Further, now that she knows the true value of ownership, Cassandra finds she is poor and owns nothing, and is reminded, along with Stoddard's readers, that, as a woman, property is difficult to obtain and even harder to hold onto, at least until the passage of the Married Women's Property Acts.

The difference between Cassandra's father's loss of self and Cassandra's loss of self, along with the very real connection between actual ownership and self ownership, is highlighted when Locke begins to recover his losses. Suggestively, this recovery begins when a ship that has never made a successful voyage comes back loaded with *sperm* oil, rejuvenating some of her father's potency and reminding the reader of his male status and thus of his power of

actual ownership. That day "at supper father said 'By George!' several times, by that oath resuming something of his old self" (234). Where Locke is able to regain some of his former self by simply regaining some of his property (both of which are possible due to his ownership of sperm), Cassandra has, she now realizes, no property to regain.

This awakening to the reality of her limited power to own anything, symbolically or legally, including herself, has shown Cassandra just how dependent on others this position of non-ownership makes her. This discovery of powerlessness, so in contrast to Cassandra's original conception of an independent self, along with a long period of self denial and adherence to Duty, results in a loss of self so dramatic that Cassandra no longer recognizes herself in a mirror: "What a starved, thin, haggard face I saw, with its border of pale hair! Whose were those wide, pitiful, robbed eyes?" (240). Finally, the ghostlike image Cassandra finds when she seeks out a reflection of herself confirms that she sees no self at all.

Without the Married Woman's Property Act of 1860, *The Morgesons* might have had to end here, with the complete loss of the Duty-defiant self that Cassandra had worked so hard to build. Instead, Stoddard seems to recognize that this new law gave women a legal way of owning objects and thus their own selves, allowing the novel to continue, and allowing Cassandra (and thus Stoddard) to pick up, once gain, the crusade against Duty.

Some time following the ruin of Cassandra's self, while watching the snow turn the ground white, Cassandra reflects on how she is different from the land:

"and I remain this year the same. No change, no growth or development! The fulfillment of *duty* avails me nothing; and self-discipline has passed the necessary point" (243, my emphasis). Cassandra sees that she is no longer natural, capable of changing and growing, but static, even lifeless, as she has achieved, through her compliance with Duty, that "absolute, virtually unchanging and unchallengeable" "socially approved definition of complete and appropriate 'selfhood'" (Newton 4). This appropriate selfhood—to have no self at all—is a result of the "self-discipline" that "has passed the necessary point," as this indicates that Cassandra has disciplined her *self* right out of existence, as self-discipline, in Cassandra's case, has meant training herself to follow a code of conduct that advocates self-denial and the denial of a self. But this loss of self is also the result of a recognition that, without the ability to own anything, one does not own one's self and, in this sense, has no self. In order to regain her self, Cassandra must address both of these problems.

After verbally making a stand against "duty," Cassandra makes a resolution: "I struck the sash with my closed hand, for I would now give my life a new direction, and it was fettered. But I would be resolute, and break the fetters; had I not endured a 'mute case' long enough?" (243). Cassandra's reference to the oppression and profitlessness of Duty reaffirms Stoddard's notion of it as expressed in the entry from "Our Lady Correspondent" and confirms that Cassandra is once again taking up the "crusade against Duty," which further means she will no longer practice self discipline and self denial. The object Cassandra "strikes" here

enlightens the reader as to her specific plans, as a sash is part of a window, a border between inside and outside, home and sea.[94] By striking this border, Cassandra indicates her desire to break through it and to rebuild her self—the self she once conceived of who "owned" the sea, and the self she housed in a room where all the borders were dissolved or made invisible. With all that she has learned about property and ownership, Cassandra knows that the only way she can truly own her self is through a more literal, even legal ownership of that self.

Cassandra, although devastated by the news, is given the opportunity for this new type of ownership when Locke announces that he has married Alice, Charles's widow. Cassandra tells him to move to Rosville and "be rich again," and asks him to "buy this house from Ben, for me" (247). If Cassandra legally owns the home, it cannot be taken away from her, even, due to the Married Woman's Property Act, if Cassandra should marry. Most importantly, this economic and legal right affords Cassandra what other women were not capable of achieving because they were "socially, legally, politically, and economically ... not recognizably individuals throughout most of the nineteenth century" (Freedgood 44). Ownership of her own home entitles Cassandra to a recognizable individuality.

The validity of these theories about true ownership is proven when Cassandra confirms, "The day they [the last of her family] moved was a happy

---

[94] Cassandra says she is looking "across the bay from my window" (243).

one for me. I was at last left alone in my *own* house, and I regained an absolute *self-possession*, and a sense of occupation I had long been a stranger to. My *ownership* oppressed me, almost, there was so much *liberty* to realize" (248, my emphasis). The connection between having her "own house" and having "absolute self-possession" is affirmed here, as is the idea that true "liberty" can only come from absolute ownership. Whether Cassandra is referring to ownership over self or house or both here when she says "My ownership oppressed me" due to the amount of liberty it provides, is, I would suggest, purposely vague. Once again symbolic and literal ownership are joined, but now due to Cassandra's recognition of how legal ownership is a critical tool for promoting one's individuality—one's ownership over self—because it provides the security that death and bankruptcy revealed she never had before.

When Cassandra marries Desmond at the end of *The Morgesons*, this would seem to show her, once again, fulfilling her Duty. I would argue, instead, that this marriage is necessary to the story of *The Morgesons* and that it cannot be seen as a duty due to the way in which Cassandra approaches it. That is, Cassandra's reasons for marrying and her concept of marriage preclude the possibility of it being considered a duty, as Duty must be done for the right reasons and in the right frame of mind. Cassandra's apparent reasons for marrying—love, sexual desire, and happiness—are precisely the wrong reasons according to Chapin in *Duties of young women.* Chapin explains that one should not "assume its [marriage's] relations from the mere desire of happiness, or from

any selfish motive" (138). If Cassandra finds any pleasure in an act, or performs any act for self-gratification, it cannot be a duty, as pleasure and Duty, like selfishness and Duty, are antithetical. As Arthur writes in *Advice to young ladies*: "If, instead of faithfully performing her duty, she seek rather her own pleasures, she acts from a selfish and debasing end" (199).

A woman must also understand Duty and not merely perform her duties in order to be successful and truly "dutiful." A woman who does not comprehend Duty may "perform many practical duties, but . . . hardly knows why she does them." "She," Chapin continues, "has the bustle of service, but not the directing consciousness and steady aim of true action; and often these labors fall like a tangled web about her feet—a web of many duties, but mixed up with poor frivolities and encroaching cares" (115). Again, because Cassandra is marrying Desmond because it is self-gratifying, she clearly does not understand her Duty or act out of any desire to accept marriage as a duty. Such a clear comprehension of Duty, according to Chapin, is particularly crucial in the case of marriage: "there is no act of life upon which the young woman should enter with more of the deliberation and the spirit of duty" than the act of marriage (131). It is, arguably, particularly this of all acts that Cassandra does *not* perform in "the spirit of duty," as her reasons are selfish and sexual, and she shows no understanding of marriage as a duty, as a religious or child-productive or even financial act. Cassandra simply does not have the right attitude towards marriage to allow her to fulfill this last duty. Even in her final acts, then, Cassandra confirms that the

conduct book does not "work" according to its proper function as it fails to permanently impart its lessons to Cassandra, a fact that Stoddard's contemporary readers would not—and indications are that they did not—fail to see.[95]

Cassandra's marriage to Desmond, furthermore, is a necessary act, as, without it, the benefits of The Married Woman's Property Act could not be properly demonstrated. Cassandra, with her own home, does not need Desmond as most women need husbands in the nineteenth century; but, with the Married Woman's Property Act to protect her, Cassandra can marry by choice and for love, and without the fear of losing ownership of house and self, as the house remains hers no matter what happens with her marriage or what happens to Desmond. Without the Act, Cassandra would have had to choose between home/self ownership and marrying the man she loves, as her marriage to Desmond would have cost her the ownership of her home and therefore, as I have illustrated, of her self.

Despite marrying, Cassandra is not giving up her own sense of self or her own power, because she has not been forced to choose between them and love. In this sense, The Married Woman's Property Act ideally allows love and ownership to coexist. At the end of the novel, Cassandra does seem to have it all: her own home, the creature comforts she needs to "suit" and fulfill her sense of self including her textiles, domestic furnishings and her books, the man she loves, the

---

[95] It is well noted in most previous examinations of *The Morgesons* that the novel was not well reviewed or highly regarded in Stoddard's day. As one critic wrote, the book was "materialistic in spirit, low in moral tone, and though a deeply interesting, not on the whole a wholesome book" (qtd. in Matter-Siebel 16).

ability to travel, and the sea, literal and symbolic, close to her. Cassandra, in fact, could have "written" the close of her novel using the same words Stoddard wrote in her journal on May 18, 1866:

> I shall never be *happier* than I am now. What makes me so? Because I am alone with *my own power!* It is the scene outside & the scene within. The soft shaded lamps, the fine pictures, the pretty furniture, the warm window curtains, my desk, its knick knacks which suit me—*my novel begun*—the pile of books on the green sofa, Keat, Byron, Wordsworth. . . . And outside, *close* to me, the gray misty sea, around me the cold moaning wind. ("Manuscripts" 352)

The Married Woman's Property Act allows Cassandra to once again use objects, properly and improperly, to define and develop her self as an individual, despite the fact that she is married and thus at the point when women historically lost any power they might have had, and lost their selves by having to share their husband's identity. While not all women benefited so well from the Act, either because they had no property or because they did not have Cassandra's vision of themselves as individualist selves, the Act at least provided the possibility for achieving this equilibrium between love, family, self ownership and power to those women who, like Cassandra, were not willing to give up one for the sake of the others, and certainly were not willing to give up their selves for the sake of achieving some abstract level of goodness as defined by conduct book literature in order to fulfill their Duty.

CHAPTER THREE

Wallpaper and "Meaningful Work": "Hop[ing] for [a] better profession" in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wall-Paper"

The narrator of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wall-Paper" (1892) is an apparently literary woman who, in her husband John's characterization, has a "habit of story-making" (170).[96] While she has never received "any advice [or] companionship about [her] work," once John, who is also her physician, subjects her to the fashionable nineteenth-century "rest cure" for what he describes as nothing more than a "temporary nervous depression—a slight hysterical tendency," the narrator is "absolutely forbidden to 'work' until [she is] well again" (170, 166).[97]

---

[96] Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wall-Paper," in *Herland, The Yellow Wall-Paper, and Selected Writings*, Ed. Denise D. Knight. New York, NY: Penguin, 1999.166-182. All references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

[97] The "rest cure" is a treatment for neurasthenia (nervous exhaustion) developed by Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell (1829-1914). Gilman does not refer to the rest cure by name in her story, but it is clear that this is the treatment she is describing. The husband in the story threatens to send his wife to "Weir Mitchell," whom the narrator describes as being similar but worse than her husband and brother, who are both "physician[s] of high standing" (171,166). Furthermore, "The Yellow Wall-Paper" is based on Gilman's own experience with (possibly postpartum) depression, her experience with the rest cure under Weir Mitchell's direct supervision in 1887, and even her brush with insanity (*Living* 119, 96-97). According to Suzanne Poirier, "Mitchell shared the general belief that the best cure for female neurasthenes was to reorient them to domestic life" (19). The "five major components to the treatment" were "rest, seclusion, food, massage, [and] electricity"

Despite John's reference to "story-making," the nature of the written "work" undertaken by the narrator is never actually revealed. John's treatment of his wife and her writing is so demeaning that we cannot assume the narrator is actually writing stories; this may simply be John's conception of it. The narrator does, however, distinguish between her work—what she "[wrote] for a while in spite of them [John and her doctor brother]"—and her journal writing, which she clearly continues as it provides the text of the story. For example, the narrator writes in her journal that "if [she] were only well enough to write a little it would relieve the press of ideas and rest [her]" (170). Further, once this work must be done on the "sly," it becomes "exhaust[ing]," which forces the narrator to write only in her journal because she "must say what [she] feel[s] and think[s] in some way—it is such a relief!" (167, 166, 173). Even with her journal writing, though, "the effort . . . get[s] to be greater than the relief," in part because the narrator must also hide this writing as John "hates to have [the narrator] write a word" (173, 168).[98]

For the narrator, as the quotations above suggest, writing, whether described as work or not, means thinking on paper. It is a way to free her "ideas" and "say" what she "think[s]," and, as her journal—our text—illustrates, this

---

(20). Poirier goes on to say that, "Rest was the one component that never varied, and it was always as complete as could be. In its "purest" form, Mitchell made sure no energy was exerted" (20).

[98] The journal must be hidden from John and his sister Jennie, which suggests the journal might be taken away if it was discovered. For instance, the narrator says "[t]here comes John, and I must put this [her journal] away,--he hates to have me write a word" (168). Similarly, in reference to Jennie, the narrator says "[t]here comes John's sister. Such a dear girl as she is, and so careful of me! I must not let her find me writing" (171).

thinking can be quite critical. Because writing as well as speaking can be seen as thinking, the two are conflated in the metaphors we use to describe our more abstract thought processes. In "The Thought As Language Metaphor," according to Lakoff and Johnson, "thinking is linguistic activity (speaking or writing)" (244). This metaphor allows us to "conceptualize thought in terms of symbols, as if a thought were a sequence of written letters. It makes the internal, private character of thought into a public, external thing" (245).

As stated in the introduction, metaphors allow us to use more concrete experiences in order to describe more abstract ones, and these metaphors work because they are based on actual connections—conflated experiences—which show the relationships described by these metaphors to be natural and even, in many cases, universal. The metaphors used to describe what goes on in our minds, including "Thought As Language," are, Lakoff and Johnson believe, so "central to our conception of what ideas are and what rational thought is" that ideas, reason, and thinking would not be the same activities without them (247). That is, these metaphors do not just describe but also "define our conceptualization of what ideas are and what thinking is" (248).

It is, I would argue, not merely the physical act of writing that John hopes to discourage or what becomes exhausting the more duplicitous the narrator must be and the more depressed and lethargic she becomes; rather, it is the thinking that takes place in and through this writing. John wants the narrator, in other words, to stop thinking in a critical, intellectual way, to not question his

"professional" judgments as a doctor, and to concentrate on getting better for "his sake" as well as for their "child's sake" (173, 174). Gilman suggests that John would instruct his wife as Gilman herself was instructed by Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell, father of the rest cure, when she underwent the cure for her own (possibly postpartum) depression. Weir Mitchell, Gilman writes in her autobiography, instructed her to "[l]ive as domestic a life as possible . . . And never touch pen, brush or pencil as long as you live" (*The Living* 96). After "follow[ing] those directions rigidly for months," Gilman reports, she "came perilously near to losing [her] mind" (96).

Because she cannot express her thoughts to her husband and is, at least during the rest cure, denied "society and stimulus," the narrator's primary outlet for serious thinking has been her writing—an activity for which, as the narrator has lamented, she receives no "advice" or "companionship" (167, 170). The narrator's thinking has, therefore, been an "internal, private" experience that only becomes a "public, external thing" through writing, as described by the metaphor that joins the activities (Lakoff and Johnson 245). When the narrator is denied the objects that she would choose to use to "external[ize]" and "public[ize]" her thinking and that would make her the kind of scholar or professional she wishes to be, she shifts her intellectual powers to the wallpaper as the only sanctioned object within reach that, as I shall illustrate, resembles text and provokes study, and that, most importantly, allows her to continue to "conceptualize thought in terms

of symbols, as if a thought were a sequence of written letters" (Lakoff and Johnson 245).

Attention to the domestic object's individuality in this chapter shows the reader that wallpaper was a prominent and contentious domestic object in the later nineteenth century, particularly in the decades around the turn of the century and, therefore, at the time Gilman's story appeared. This provides an explanation for why Gilman might have chosen wallpaper, and suggests that Gilman's readers would not have found this topic strange. Object individuality also shows us, more specifically, the significance of the particular details given about this individual wallpaper, both in terms of its appearance and in terms of its treatment in the text by the narrator. That is, the narrator's study of the wallpaper's color and pattern links her treatment of the paper to the research that women were historically encouraged to undertake as preparation for choosing wallpaper for the home. The narrator's subsequent attempt to move beyond this approved examination of the wallpaper's visual components to an actual reading of what she sees as the wallpaper's text shows that while she recognizes the object's individuality, specifically as a readable thing, her reading is not based on the approved wallpaper discourse. The narrator's unique reading demonstrates that what she wants to gain from her investigation is not to ascertain the wallpaper's suitability for the home, but its suitability as a replacement object for the writing tools that are being denied her, so that she may continue to benefit from the

critical thinking and the professionalization through "public[ation]" of those thoughts which takes place in and through her writing.

"The Yellow Wall-Paper" can be read, through the narrator's treatment of the wallpaper, as a critique of the lack of "meaningful work" available to women during the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries, work that Gilman believed was an "absolute necessity for women" (Meyering 9). This meaningful work, as I will illustrate, is chosen work for which one must be properly trained and that is treated professionally. When women who want this work are denied it and, instead, forced to remain at home to carry out the duties of that sphere—duties that include examining wallpaper—the result is not just a loss of usefulness, but even a loss of self. In the narrator's case, this loss is quite literal, as her insanity causes her to believe that she is the woman she comes to see as trapped within the paper. This illustrates that, in the weakened mental state caused by her confinement and the loss of her chosen objects, the narrator loses her grasp of the idea that objects are part of her and can be appropriated for her own development, and instead comes to believe that she is a part of the object, "not in any mystical or metaphorical sense but in cold, concrete actuality" (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 15). "The Yellow Wall-Paper," therefore, also issues a warning about the way in which the home can become, in Paul Morrison's words, a "domestic carceral" rather than a space where women can learn to control themselves by controlling the objects that are part of them, erasing rather than building their selfhood.

"The Yellow Wall-Paper" was published five years after Gilman's own experience with the rest cure and ensuing brush with insanity and is, as she admits, based on those events.[99] Gilman's depression is generally acknowledged to be post-partum,[100] although it also appears to be the result of the lack of productivity she experienced after her marriage. During her breakdown, Gilman separated from her (first) husband and returned to her work, attempting to cure the "mental injury" her experience as wife, mother, and rest-cure patient had caused, and "began to recover" "the moment [she] left home" (*The Living* 97). Once "free," Gilman writes, "there was a surprising output of work, some of my best" (98). Gilman's recovery and burst of work after her separation supports the idea that her depression was at least partly due to a lack of meaningful work, particularly as her work was the primary reason she at first refused to marry.[101] "The Yellow Wall-Paper" in this way seems to reflect not only Gilman's experience with the rest cure, but also her insistence that women must have their own meaningful work in order to be useful and even to remain mentally stable.

A story of a woman who eventually goes insane while contemplating her wallpaper may seem an unlikely vehicle for a treatise on the importance of work for women, unless one considers two particular experiences of Gilman's that

---

[99] Gilman claims in her autobiography that the story was meant "to reach Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, and convince him of the error of his ways" (121).
[100] Heather Kirk Thomas calls this a "well-documented" fact (191).
[101] See the chapters entitled "Love and Marriage" and "The Breakdown" in *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman: An Autobiography*. Gilman does not recover fully after her separation, as her autobiography details, but she does emerge from the deepest depths of her depression.

occurred during the production of this story. In 1890, Gilman received a letter from literary giant William Dean Howells praising some of her written work. As a result of this letter, Gilman writes, she "felt like a real 'author' at last" (*The Living* 113). Around the same time Gilman also undertook work as an interior decorator for the new Pasadena Opera House, which involved, among other activities, the selection of materials for coverings, curtains and hangings.[102] What I am suggesting is that "The Yellow Wall-Paper" was likely affected by these joint experiences of professional activities, one involving decoration and the other involving authorship. Like Gilman, the narrator undertakes her work with the wallpaper simply because it is available to her, but what she really desires is the professionalized role of authorship that Gilman actually gains.[103] Gilman, I argue, conflates these two experiences in "The Yellow Wall-Paper" through the narrator, who finally manages to make her thoughts "public" through the wallpaper.

Six years later, as though extending the argument that germinated in "The Yellow Wall-Paper" based on her professional experiences while writing the story and her current need for economic independence, Gilman published another text criticizing the lack of meaningful work for women. In *Women and Economics*

---

[102] I was alerted to the fact that Gilman worked as an interior decorator while writing "The Yellow Wall-Paper" by Thomas's article. In her autobiography, Gilman writes "It was fun . . . selecting materials, winding ropes and covering large wooden balls with plush like the hangings, and ornamenting the curtains to the box-entrances with impressive Turkish characters copied from a scarf I had" (112). Gilman's use of designs from her own clothing is reminiscent of the recommendation to "us[e] the same fabrics for clothes and upholstery" provided by the advice books of Gilman's day (Kinchin 18).

[103] Gilman writes that she took the job based on an "established precept of [hers]—'Always accept an opportunity unless it's wrong'" (112).

(1898), Gilman's critique appears in non-fiction form and emphasizes how work gains meaning as it becomes professionalized and economically profitable.[104] Gilman argues in *Women and Economics* that the economic dependence of women on men checks not only women's progress as individuals, but also society's progress as human beings, economically, morally, socially and otherwise. Economic independence, Gilman writes, would make women more human and would improve not just their own lives, but also the home, the institution of marriage, the relationship between mother and child, and society as a whole.

Although Gilman initially suggests that women should be paid for their work in the home, this argument evolves into the necessity of dividing up this work—this "embryonic combination of cook-nurse-laundress-chambermaid-housekeeper-waitress-governess"—into multiple "branches" or "professions" (155, 245). As Gilman writes,

> There are several professions involved in our clumsy method of housekeeping. A good cook is not necessarily a good manager, nor a good manager an accurate and thorough cleaner, nor a good cleaner a wise purchaser. Under the free development of these branches a woman could choose her position, train for it, and become a most valuable functionary in her special branch, all the while living in her home; that is,

---

[104] I would argue that these texts are related and simply reflect Gilman's position at the time of the conceptualization of each. While "The Yellow Wall-Paper" reflects her need for meaningful work after her marriage and experience with the rest cure, *Women and Economics* reflects her need for economic independence as a now single woman trying to earn a living and to support herself and her daughter. See especially the chapter "Pasadena" in *The Living*.

> she would live in it as a man lives in his home, spending certain hours of the day at work and others at home (245).

What makes these various branches into meaningful "professions," Gilman suggests, is more than financial gain. In fact, despite the economic focus of the book, Gilman argues it is a mistake to "look only at work as a means of earning money." Women need "their own work," Gilman states, because it "gives deep pleasure," "is indispensable to healthy growth," allows for the "exercise of faculty, without which we should cease to be human," and is necessary "for the sake of personal expression" (157). Indeed, in Gilman's discussion of the branches-turned-professions above, she does not even mention income. Rather, what seems to be important here is that women are allowed to "choose" a position and to "train for" that position. This training, *Women and Economics* suggests, is the key to the professionalization of work, but only when it involves what Gilman at one point calls "special study." This "special" or what might also be described as intellectual or even professional study, when applied to the profession of one's choice, is also what allows work to be meaningful.

This self-chosen and specially prepared for work is precisely the kind of meaningful profession that I argue the narrator of "The Yellow Wall-Paper" needs. That is, while there is no evidence to suggest the narrator wants to become a professional in order to earn money from her writing, there is ample evidence that she wants to be treated professionally, and while this includes the publication of her work in a way that would make her feel like a "real author," it is

not in the traditional sense. That is, writing publicizes one's thoughts in that it makes thoughts public, and these thoughts, once written, gain a sense of authority, at least where the written word is privileged. That the narrator wants not only to write but to have "companionship" for her work proves that she wants to share what she's written, which constitutes another, more advanced form of publication than that provided by writing alone, even if it does not suggest the kind of publication that Gilman herself sought. Without any indication that the narrator wants to earn a living from her work, we can only assume that she wants to do serious work and to have her writing treated accordingly for the pleasure, growth, personal expression and humanity that Gilman argues meaningful work is capable of providing, and this is what "The Yellow Wall-Paper" suggests.

Part of being a kind of professional thinker, which is to say a kind of scholar, is the higher level of training, the "special" or scholarly study that Gilman advocates in *Women and Economics.* Although I would not go as far as to say advanced education for women is a theme of the book, Gilman illustrates the importance of serious study for women through her distinction between the different levels of training men and women receive in preparation for their work. For example, Gilman writes:

> Before a man enters a trade, art, or profession, he studies it. He qualifies himself for the duties he is to undertake. . . . Those dealing with what we call "matters of life and death," the shipmaster or pilot, doctor or druggist, is required not only to study his business, but to pass an exam-

> ination under those who have already become past masters, and obtain a certificate or a diploma or some credential to show that he is fit to be intrusted [sic] with the direct responsibility for human life. (*Women and Economics* 197-198)

In contrast to the male who must "study," "pass an examination" and "obtain a . . . diploma" when he undertakes a particularly important profession, women can and, in fact, must "enter a position which gives into their hands direct responsibility for the life or death of the whole human race with neither study nor experience, with no shadow of preparation or guarantee of capability" (198). In addition to being mothers, women are also expected to be cooks, cleaners, purchasers, managers, laundresses, and all of those other roles associated with the domestic sphere, without any sort of formal education or any training except that passed on by their mothers. Even these roles, Gilman suggests, require more than simple preparation.

"The art and science of cooking," for example, "involve a large and thorough knowledge of nutritive value and of the laws of physiology and hygiene" (230). In order to "attain any high degree of scientific accuracy or technical skill," Gilman argues, one must study cooking as do "professional men cooks and chemists": "Professional cooking has taught us much. Commerce and manufacture have added to our range of supplies. Science has shown us what we need, and how and when we need it" (231, 236). The wife and mother, denied the same education as men, is "little touched by these advances," and "science,

chemistry, hygiene . . . are but names to her" (236). If a woman does go to cooking school, Gilman writes, she still does not receive scholarly training; that is, she does not "study the nutritive value of food in order to guard the health of the household," but, rather, "learn[s] how to make the rich delicacies that will please" (236).

Similarly, as the purchaser of the family's food, the "private housekeeper" does not receive "a genuine education such as all important work demands" (228, 229). If she

> had the technical intelligence . . . which is needed to discriminate in the selection of foods, if she were prepared to test her milk, to detect the foreign substance in her coffee and spices, rightly to estimate the quality of her meat and the age of her fruit and vegetables, she would then be able at least to protest against her supply, and to seek, as far as time, distance, and funds allowed, a better market. This technical intelligence, however, is only to be obtained by special study and experience; and its attainment only involves added misery and difficulty to the private purchaser, unless accompanied by the power to enforce what the intelligence demands. (228-229)

The "special study" leading to such "technical intelligence" in this case, Gilman later explains, involves reading "the literature of hygiene," learning about "special legislation as to contagious diseases and dangerous trades," and studying "sanitary regulations" (238). A woman, in contrast, receives her training for such

domestic work by "practising upon her helpless family," and thus through that "slow animal process of soaking up experience" that is "hopelessly ineffectual in protecting the health of society" (229).

What makes women's work in the home different from the work that men do in those same areas outside the home, besides a lack of wages, is the kind of special preparation described in the previous examples: the difference between studying nutrition and learning how to prepare "rich delicacies," or between studying hygiene or sanitary regulations and "soaking up experience." Such special study is what transforms the separate duties of the domestic sphere into the serious professions of the "domestic industry" and what helps to turn housework into meaningful work (xxiii). Although Gilman does not go into detail about the other occupational options for women outside of these newly developed professions in *Women and Economics*, she does refer to the existence of "business women, professional women, scientific, artistic, literary women" and "schoolteachers," proving she does see other options, as her own work as writer, lecturer, teacher, artist and even one-time interior decorator also shows (243). As these same professions, when practiced by men, require serious study, we can assume Gilman would demand the same preparation for women. I argue that, as one of Gilman's "literary women," the narrator of "The Yellow Wall-Paper" craves this kind of professionalized activity and that this is evident through her treatment of the wallpaper.

It is not this special study alone that differentiates women's work from men's and makes housework—or any work—meaningful, however, but also the ability to choose one's branch of study. This choice, in large part, is what distinguishes Gilman's arguments in *Women and Economics* from those advocated by the home economics movement during the first decades of the twentieth century. Mary Pattison's *Principles of Domestic Engineering* (1915), which promoted the goals of the movement, for example, repeats many of the ideas put forth by Gilman in *Women and Economics* a decade and a half earlier. Both women recognize the expectation for women to be, to repeat Gilman's words, that "embryonic combination of cook-nurse-laundress-chambermaid-housekeeper-waitress-governess," or, in Pattison's words, "a cook, a nurse, a seamstress, a house-worker, a doctor, a minister, a teacher, a writer, a hostess, an economist, a scientist, an artist, a philosopher, an engineer, a business manager, a public and social worker, and oftentimes a wage earner and an agriculturalist," and both writers recognize women are "expected to meet this great field" with "inappropriate . . . and inadequa[te] . . . training" (Pattison 195). Both writers, furthermore, argue for the professionalization of this housework—the necessity of seriously training women in the areas of nutrition, sanitation, chemistry, business, science and so forth—in order to bring housework to a new level of effectiveness and meaning.[105]

---

[105] What home economics would teach women is suggested in Pattison's outline of a "course of study for a Domestic Engineer," in which she recommends that the first two years alone consist of "Biology, Anatomy, Physiology, Psychology,

At this point the authors part company. For Gilman, as I have explained, this professionalization involves specialization, allowing women to choose one (or none) of the divisions for further serious study, and to make it meaningful for her, generally by gaining economic independence through the utilization of this special knowledge but also by gaining a mode of self expression and human growth. For Pattison, on the other hand, this professionalization does not include "encouraging women to enter the professions" as this would "weaken the home" (Handlin 417). Rather, Pattison wants women properly trained so that they can more efficiently and effectively continue to perform all of these duties in their own homes. Women become not professional women, but professional housekeepers, minus the salary.

Like Pattison, Ellen Richards, on whose ideas the home economics movement was based, "believed that the home was the center of civilized society and that educated women, if properly trained, would be the best homemakers of all" (Cowan 146).[106] In fact, the "greatest field offered" to women at that time,

---

Physical Culture, Mental Hygiene, Sex and Mother Study, Nursing, Child Study, and Life Processes including Fatigue," followed by "Science and Physics, Chemistry, Sanitation, Bacteriology, Study of the House, Principles and Practice of Plumbing, Heating, etc., Mechanics, Economics, Culinics [sic], Dietetics, etc." (196-197). For the similarities between what Pattison and Gilman suggest in their respective books, consider Pattison's chapter on "Food, its Preparation and Value," which discusses nutrition (such as the difference between and importance of protein, fat and carbohydrate), explains why it is unhealthy to boil foods, considers the relative benefits of a meat versus a vegetable diet, describes the methods of food decay, explains the process of digestion, and extols the virtues of whole grains.

[106] Interestingly, Richards promoted home economics for relatively conservative reasons despite her own high level of education and professional success:

Richards stated, was "the elevation of the home into its place in American life" (146). The home economics movement, in short, expected women to not only do all of the work but to thoroughly study and train for it first, and to do this, for the most part, without economic gain. There was, however, one exception. According to Ruth Schwartz Cowan, Richards

> believed that domestic science should be promoted as a suitable career choice for women who were well educated (particularly in the sciences) but who would not, for one reason or another, become homemakers and mothers. Indeed she thought that teaching or practising domestic science would be an ideal career choice for such women because it would not violate the norms for female behavior nor would it threaten the professions that women were barred from entering. (148)

In essence, Richards thought women should train to be excellent homemakers and, if they were not fortunate enough to practice these skills in their own homes—if they were denied the "greatest field" of all—then they could fall back on this training as a proper way of supporting themselves.

Unlike Richards and Pattison, Gilman believed that women should not be forced to perform all of the various branches of domestic work, for multiple reasons. One reason is for the sake of "human progress"; as Gilman writes, "[t]o

---

Richards had degrees from Vassar College and MIT, was the first female student and later the first female professor at MIT, and was "among the first women in the United States to be formally employed as a scientist" (Cowan 144).

specialize any form of labor is a step up" (*Women and Economics* 67). In order to truly specialize, one cannot be expected to become an expert in every field; indeed, Gilman suggests, true specialization makes this impossible. Speaking of the various branches of the "home cares and industries," Gilman argues, "the woman who is able to be one of these things perfectly" is "by so much less able to be all the others" (155).

Another reason why a woman should not be forced to perform all of the branches, to be "all the others," Gilman writes, is because she "suffers doubly from not being able to do what she wants to do, and from being forced to do what she does not want to do" (155). Woman suffers, that is, from being unable to choose the occupation that would provide her with the pleasure, growth, personal expression and humanity gained from meaningful work. For Gilman, this choice cannot, then, be limited to the domestic occupations, to being a homemaker, a teacher of homemakers, or a specialist in any one branch of homemaking, but must also include other unconnected occupations, so that each woman can find the work that suits her individual goals of self development. The suffering that results from a lack of this chosen, meaningful work can be, as the narrator's case in "The Yellow Wall-Paper" and even Gilman's own experience shows, a loss of self.

As a middle- to upper-middle-class woman in the nineteenth century, the narrator of "The Yellow Wall-Paper" would not be expected to do much of the physical labor of the housework, but she would be required to manage the

household, to attend to the children, and to "dress and entertain, and order things" ("The Yellow Wall-Paper" 169). Ordering "things" likely refers not just to the food that Gilman argues women must purchase with no "technical intelligence," but also to the furniture and decorations that women were to choose so as to provide the home with the right atmosphere, as I have explained in the introduction. Women, I argued, were expected to carefully study "[t]he volume and variety of objects and textures" in order to achieve the desired effect, using the quantity of periodicals, advice books and decoration manuals as their guides" (Green 94). One of the most important decorative objects to consider in the post-Civil War era and especially after 1880 was wallpaper, a fact recognizable to Gilman's readers and to Gilman herself.[107]

In her article "Controlling Passion: The Turn-of-the-Century Wallpaper Dilemma," Jennings writes that, in the period between 1890 and 1910,

> wallpaper, a seemingly benign material, became the object of friction between two groups who vied for the attention of the female consumer: manufacturers and domestic reformers. At the turn of the century, manufacturers flooded the market with ornately patterned wallpapers and resorted to various means of tempting women to purchase these products.

---

[107] Critics seem to agree that, as Thomas writes, "[f]or nineteenth-century upper- and middle-class women, wallpaper was a familiar subject" (189). Gilman, if unaware of the status of wallpaper for the same reasons as other women, would have been made aware during her experience as an interior decorator, a job she held while writing "The Yellow Wall-Paper."

> Tastemakers and domestic reformers countered by characterizing such wallpaper as a moral problem. (243)[108]

Reformers made morality an issue "by equating wallpaper purchases with women's behavior generally. Irresponsible consumption was equal to inappropriate behavior and deserved admonition." It then followed that, "if a housewife acted irresponsibly about wallpaper, then her home, and, consequently, her family, would suffer for her mistake. By inference, if a woman's papered walls were respectable, then she was too" (260). Such criticisms, Jennings argues, "were nothing new. In 1876, the editor of *Harper's Bazaar* had even claimed that 'Indiana divorce laws may be perhaps directly traced to some frightful inharmoniousness in wallpaper'" (243). Home economists also "expressed worries about the sensuousness of wallpaper as a material" and urged women "to become intelligent consumers" of wallpaper through "educat[ion] in art principles and housing design" (252, 253).

In addition to the morality question debated by manufacturers, domestic reformers and tastemakers, the issue of the healthfulness of wallpaper was also brought into question. "Interior decorators who preached sanitation and health as the key elements in design," for example, "strongly advised against wallpaper in the bedroom [because] [t]hey thought it harbored the diseases and insect life that the 'bad air' of sleeping rooms fostered" (Green 103). Some of the concern over healthfulness seems to be genuinely medically based, such as the admonish-

---

[108] For a short history of wallpaper use see Jennings 244.

ment by doctors "to use no paper that had a fuzzy green color because it was composed of arsenic," which was actually true in some cases (Jennings 255). This "fuzzy green" is an exception among colors, however, as most could not be so literally described as "health hazard[s]" (255).

The color red, for example, "generated a long-lasting criticism" because it was "found to be somewhat exciting" and was thought to provoke anger (256). "[J]arring colours" in general were not recommended for wallpaper, particularly in bedrooms, because they lead to a state of "nervous irritability" and thus were believed to be "deleterious to bodily health" (Green 103). Color, nineteenth-century author Candice Wheeler summarized, when

> [p]roperly understood . . . is the most powerful mental influence in the home; but if totally disregarded or ignorantly dealt with, it is able to introduce an element of unrest, to refuse healing to tired nerves and overtasked energies, to stir up anger and . . . all unseen enemies that lie in wait for victims of weakness and fatigue. (qtd. in Jennings 256)

The negative effect of wallpaper on health was not only the result of jarring colors, but also "jarring . . . patterns" (Green 103). Scrolls, as an example, were considered by some nineteenth-century writers to be a "distressing pattern" (qtd. in Jennings 257). Women were, therefore, "urged to consider the effect the chosen paper would have on someone confined to the room by illness" (Green 103), as "[e]veryone," warns Mary Gay Humphreys, "can . . . recall the restlessness with which a fevered brain will torment itself over set patterns,

unreasonable designs, and impossible flowers in wall-paper" (qtd. in Green 104, ellipses original). Various other nineteenth-century writers argue that wallpaper is "a source of infinite torture," can have "a ghastly and nightmarish effect upon the brain," and can "render . . . intolerable" the hours a "nervous invalid" "counts and combines over and over again the meaningless recurrence of a marked angle or curve, or the ever-repeated big, awkward rose or tiresome convolvulus" (qtd. in Roth 149). As Green concludes, "[f]or those who persisted in using wallpaper, the message was clear. They were to be very careful in their selection, choosing only those papers with restful, soothing patterns and designs" (104).[109]

Women examining the sources readily available to them also found recommendations about the appropriate patterns and colors for wallpaper that had little or nothing to do with health or morality, focusing instead on pleasing aesthetics or artistic value, which seem to be based solely on personal preferences. Famous wallpaper designer William Morris, for instance, cautioned women never to "fall into the trap of a dingy bilious looking yellow-green," not because of any connection between green and arsenic, but because it was a color, he stated, "to which I have special and personal hatred, because . . . I have been supposed to have somewhat brought it into vogue. I assure you I am not really responsible for it" (qtd. in Thomas 195). Others recommended that "[w]omen always select colors for their background that they think will harmonize well with their dress and

---

[109] Critics argue today that "the exasperating effect of pattern wallpaper on invalids was a medical commonplace of Gilman's time" (Jonathan Crewe, qtd. in Roth 149).

themselves" (qtd. in Jennings 257). In terms of patterns, another home decoration writer defined "[m]edallions and shield-shape and scroll patterns with 'scrolly outline'" as "frivolous" and "meaning-less" (Jennings 257). The manufacturers of wallpaper, in contrast and in order to counter the criticisms, "blurred aesthetic lines to sell more paper" by describing papers as artistic, giving women yet another source of information (256). As the advice naturally varied, in the end, a woman's choice of wallpaper was based on the particular "research" she had done.

What I want to highlight at this point is that magazines, home decorating books, etiquette manuals and other such sources were expected to be consulted by women choosing wallpaper in the later nineteenth century so that the visual components of the paper, the color and pattern, could be evaluated in order to determine what was morally suitable, mentally and physically soothing, as well as aesthetically pleasing. In fact, having the proper knowledge to choose wallpaper became a social responsibility, as the moral status, respectability, physical well-being and mental health of women and their families was believed to be at risk.

As a middle- or upper-middle-class woman who "order[s] things," the narrator would also presumably be aware of the wallpaper discourse of that time and of the importance of learning how to read the paper for suitability. The narrator calls the wallpaper "horrid" and admits that she "never saw a worse paper in [her] life" (169, 173,168). The color, she writes, is a "smouldering unclean yellow" with "lurid orange" and "sickly sulphur tint[s]" that she char-

acterizes as "repellant, almost revolting" (168). It is, further, "the strangest yellow" which "makes [her] think of all the yellow things [she] ever saw—not beautiful ones like buttercups, but old foul, bad yellow things" (177).

The narrator's consideration of the wallpaper's color seems to follow the recommended study, as it comments on the paper's suitableness in terms of aesthetics, which she decides is not pleasing, and even in terms of healthfulness, which she also seems to recognize as unsatisfactory due to her use of the adjectives "unclean," "foul" and "sickly." Furthermore, her reference to the sulphur tint is suggestive of the arsenic-laced green wallpaper that was known to be unhealthy, as sulphur as a color refers to a greenish-yellow, and sulphur as a chemical element is, like arsenic, potentially poisonous. Sulphur, furthermore, was also a component in a chemical mixture that produced a green tone that was used to color wallpaper, although it is unclear whether this was widely known (as was the case with arsenic) and whether there were any health concerns over its use.[110] Even without this one direct link to the warnings provided by nineteenth-century critics, the narrator's description of the wallpaper's color still illustrates a

---

[110] In her article "Colors and Other Materials of Historic Wallpaper," Catherine Lynn reproduces text from late-eighteenth to late-nineteenth-century books that describe the materials used for "'staining' paper hangings" (59). From these texts we learn that some of the green dyes used during that period are "the Schweinfurt green, made with arsenic, [and] sometimes a green from Ultramarine" (65). "Artificial ultramarine," according to another source Lynn reproduces, was made of a chemical mixture that included sulphur (64). Whether Gilman could possibly have known this or not I cannot say, although Lynn does write that articles published in the 1880s that dealt with wallpaper "tend toward vagueness" in their "descriptions of coloring materials" (65). No other critic, to my knowledge, has made this connection.

concern with aesthetics and health, and therefore shows her approaching the paper in what would appear to be the socially recommended way.

In addition to the color, the narrator also, in line with the expected reading, notices the wallpaper's pattern, which is apparently even worse than the color: "[t]he color is hideous enough, and unreliable enough, and infuriating enough, but the pattern is torturing" ("The Yellow Wall-Paper" 175). This torture, furthermore, again applies both to aesthetics and health. The pattern is "[o]ne of those sprawling flamboyant patterns committing every artistic sin," making it, like the color, disagreeable (168). While the pattern is also determined to be unhealthful, this unhealthfulness seems to be primarily mental rather than physical as it was in the case of the color, although the narrator does claim that following the pattern is "as good as gymnastics," and the exercise does seem to actually tire her physically (173). The mental unhealthfulness, however, is far more distressing. In direct contrast to the recommendations of choosing wallpaper patterns that are restful and soothing, this paper is described by the narrator as irritating (168, 171, 175), angering (170, 181), and "pronounced enough to constantly . . . provoke study" (168). Indeed, the narrator admits that the pattern "dwells in [her] mind so" and that she spends hours following it (172). The paper, according to the narrator's description of the pattern, is distinctly not "soothing" or "restful."

As though also "harshen[ing] and intensif[ying] previous criticisms based on good taste or art principles," the narrator, like nineteenth-century wallpaper critics, "[a]nimat[es] [the] wallpaper into a metaphorical beast" by describing the

pattern anthromorphically (Jennings 260). The narrator writes: "the pattern lolls like a broken neck and two bulbous eyes stare at you," and these "absurd, unblinking eyes are everywhere" ("The Yellow Wall-Paper" 170). The wallpaper, further, seems "as if it *knew* what a vicious influence it had!" (170). According to Jennings, "[i]n making wallpaper anthropomorphic, advice writers equated the material with a living being—a monster. They gave the monster a masculine temperament—bold, aggressive, strong, and overbearing" (259). The most scathing criticisms of these types of patterns are those that suggested sexual impropriety through the invitation of such male figures into the home. The narrator, therefore, may even be commenting on the paper's unsuitableness in terms of moral as well as physical and aesthetic standards.

After such an evaluation of the wallpaper, an informed wallpaper consumer would probably have been convinced of the unsuitableness of the paper and may even have recognized that the paper might be "deleterious to bodily health." The narrator does, at first, find the wallpaper awful enough to repeatedly request new paper or a different room, but this request comes not from any intellectually based judgment about the paper in terms of morality or healthfulness. This request, she says, is merely "a whim" based on a preference for a particular room downstairs that "had roses all over the window, and such pretty old-fashioned chintz hangings!" (167). Had the narrator actually been aware of any evidence that might support her desire to change rooms, particularly evidence with a scientific basis, she would almost certainly have used this to con-

vince her husband to let her take a different room, knowing, as she does, that John is "practical in the extreme. . . . [H]e scoffs openly at any talk of things not to be felt and seen and put down in figures" (166). Instead, the narrator decides that she "would not be so silly as to make him uncomfortable just for a whim" (169).

Even when the narrator suspects that she might be starting to lose her sanity, specifically when she worries that she may be hallucinating, she still does not link her mental condition to the jarring wallpaper, as Gilman's readers may have, again suggesting that she was not, in fact, aware of a discourse that may well have been familiar to Gilman's readers. After all, "[e]veryone," as one writer I quoted previously warns, "can . . . recall the restlessness with which a fevered brain will torment itself over set patterns, unreasonable designs, and impossible flowers in wall-paper." Even if "everyone" was just "nineteenth-century upper- and middle-class women," for whom, critics seem to agree, "wallpaper was a familiar subject" (Thomas 189), this would still suggest that Gilman's readers generally should not have been surprised at what they may have seen as the negative effects of the wallpaper, and even should have wondered how the narrator could have missed the obvious indications after seeming to "correctly" identify the unfavorable details of the paper's color and pattern, which seems so distinctly in line with the historical discourse that is assumed to have been familiar to these women. The clear lesson, at least for many of Gilman's readers, would then have been that, had the narrator had the appropriate training in wallpaper analysis, she could have saved her sanity.

Other critics, most notably Jennings and Heather Kirk Thomas, have argued that Gilman's readers were supposed to make the connection between the wallpaper and the historical discourse surrounding that paper, that the details of the wallpaper were consciously chosen, and that the effect of "jarring colours and patterns," particularly on those already ill, speaks directly to the narrator's case in "The Yellow Wall-Paper." Jennings writes, for example, "[w]hen Gilman made wallpaper a metaphor for madness, it appears that she chose the material deliberately. She read women's magazines and witnessed both the groundswell for the ornamental aesthetic and the subsequent criticism against it" (260). More specifically, Jennings suggests that, in describing the paper anthromorphically through descriptions such as those that claim the "pattern lolls like a broken neck and two bulbous eyes stare at you," Gilman "borrowed from early [wallpaper] critics" (259).

Even more pointedly than Jennings, Thomas argues that the story "authentically delineates [wallpaper designer William] Morris's fashionable gilded olive, monochromatic yellow, and khaki Craftsman designs," and, further, that "Gilman's artistically precise delineation of the wallpaper seems a clever strategy conceived to ensure that her contemporary reader would imaginatively associate Morris's popular arabesque designs with the attic bedroom's sinuous pattern, bilious color, and nightmarish aquarium effect" (189, 194). Jennings and Thomas both argue that Gilman would expect her readers to recognize that this particular wallpaper was detrimental to the woman's physical and mental health, and that

these readers would, therefore, be likely to attribute most of the blame for the woman's condition on the wallpaper because, as Ann Heilmann writes, "[i]n the context of the 1890's, the color and strange floral pattern of the wallpaper literally and literarily take on a specific cultural meaning" (177).

While I agree that the story sets up the wallpaper for blame, Gilman's criticism is certainly much deeper than this. After all, the narrator, like Gilman, is clinically depressed long before she is exposed to the wallpaper. In addition to the new baby that the narrator says she "*cannot* be with" because "it makes [her] so nervous" (169), the narrator's characterization of her life suggests that it is simply not fulfilling. In addition to experiencing only "opposition" to her work—the only activity in which the narrator appears to find joy—she must also engage in activities that she finds dull and draining, such as "to dress and entertain, and order things" (167, 169).[111] The narrator's husband does not take her seriously, laughing at her and her concerns and even disbelieving that she is actually sick, and he treats her like a child.[112] These potential causes of her depression are not treated by the rest cure, and the treatment, in fact, makes the narrator worse because it denies her her writing—the one thing that gave her life any meaning and perhaps what was keeping her sane despite her depression. "The Yellow

---

[111] Warren notes that Margaret Fuller believed that "[f]inding no outlet for her electricity . . . the woman of ability often lapses into sickness" (72).

[112] The narrator suspects that John "does not believe [she] [is] sick," and this assumption appears to be true, as at one point he even tells her she "shall be as sick as she pleases," as though being sick is her choice (166, 175). The child-like treatment includes being carried to bed and even being addressed as "little girl" (174).

Wall-Paper" does not, therefore, suggest better wallpaper as an antidote to the narrator's pre-existing depression.

Once the reader recognizes that this lesson on proper wallpaper training has a satiric edge, other deficiencies in this reading become apparent. One important flaw lies in the level of training. Despite the apparent rigors of the wallpaper research, if we compare it to the special study Gilman describes in *Women and Economics*, it becomes clear that this research is not scholarly. That is, Gilman would not have seen the kind of preparation women were expected to make—the study of color and pattern based on recommendations in magazines and decorating books—in order to determine a wallpaper's suitability in moral, aesthetic and quasi medical terms, as serious preparation for a profession, such as interior decoration, which is perhaps the field into which a serious study of wallpaper might evolve. Although gaining information about the arsenic in some green papers might seem to be an exception due to its basis in science and actual relation to health, Gilman would arguably want women to learn how to test the papers themselves, as she recommends with milk, in order to see this preparation as truly effectual "in protecting the health of society" (*Women and Economics* 229).

That special training for professional work is what the narrator really needs is suggested by the connection she makes between this lack and her deteriorating sanity. Rather than seeing this decline as the result of jarring wallpaper, the narrator suggests it is due to a lack of work. After the narrator "fanc[ies]" she

"see[s] people walking in these numerous paths and arbors" in the garden of the house and is "cautioned" by John "not to give way to fancy in the least," the narrator's conclusion is: "I think sometimes that if I were only well enough to write a little it would relieve the press of ideas and rest me," but finds "I get pretty tired when I try." This tiredness is linked to the opposition she faces in her writing, as she immediately goes on to say, "[i]t is so discouraging not to have any advice and companionship about my work" (170). Essentially, the narrator's mental instability, which could be improved through work, actually worsens due to the inability to work. As the narrator becomes unstable, she grows more depressed and more lethargic, which causes her to spend even more time in bed with only the wallpaper to stimulate her. The narrator, in this sense, is practically forced to see this paper as a substitute for the paper she once used to express her thoughts in order to find some degree of the mental release and meaningful work she is lacking.

The narrator apparently wants to develop herself in ways other than as wife, mother, and home decorator, one who "order[s] things" and examines wallpaper. She needs, as I have argued earlier, to be a professional, and this desperate need for the public thinking only her writing has provided her is what allows her to see the potential for this wallpaper to provide the intellectual activity that is vital to her sanity, her happiness and her sense of self. While the narrator, like Gilman's readers, recognizes the wallpaper's object individuality in terms of its readability, her movement beyond the "obvious" problems indicated by the

color and pattern suggest she is not reading the paper according to the criteria of the historical wallpaper discourse, but according to some other. That is, her recognition of the paper's readability does not end with its moral, physical, mental and aesthetic suitableness, but expands to its suitableness as a substitute expression of thought.

Specifically, the narrator's description of the pattern is suggestive of writing, and her own attempt to follow, understand and interpret the lines mimics the act of reading. As the narrator delves deeper into this reading, she slowly changes her mind about the paper, not because she decides it is suddenly aesthetically pleasing or mentally soothing, but because of the stimulation and expression she finds it provides her. By the end of the story, the narrator does not want to leave the wallpaper, as it alone makes her life "very much more exciting than it used to be." The developments in her reading of the paper, whose pattern she now describes as writing rather than as an unpleasing and mentally jarring jumble of lines, provides the narrator with "something more to expect, to look forward to, to watch" (177).

Johnathan Culler, in *On Deconstruction*, argues that "[w]riting presents language as a series of physical marks that operate in the absence of the speaker. They may be highly ambiguous or organized in artful rhetorical patterns" (91). The "series of physical marks" recognized by the narrator are "curves," "flourishes," "waves," "bars," "shape[s]" and "figure[s]" that are "numerous" and "repeated," "[u]p and down and sideways," "horizontally," in "columns," and "by

the breadths." These physical marks, further, are both "organized in[to] artful rhetorical patterns" and are "highly ambiguous," as demonstrated by the narrator's description of the pattern as a "sprawling" and "florid arabesque" that "provoke[s] study" and is "confus[ing]" due to the "unheard of contradictions," "lack of sequence," "defiance of law," and "endless convolutions" (168-176). In recognizing the pattern as writing, as physical marks both artfully and ambiguously arranged, the narrator sees the wallpaper as a representation of language, and, therefore, as thought.

According to the Thought As Language metaphor, where thought is conceptualized "in terms of symbols" and specifically as "a sequence of written letters," "simple ideas are words and complex ideas are sentences" (Lakoff and Johnson 245, 244). As the narrator's description of the pattern as arabesque explains, the "figures" or marks are connected, like alphabetical characters joining to produce words, and they are repeated "horizontally" and in "columns," like words joining to produce sentences and paragraphs. The narrator, further, "follow[s] the . . . curves for a . . . distance" and "follow[s] the pattern about by the hour" in such a way as to suggest the act of reading: "I start, we'll say, at the bottom, down in the corner over there where it has not been touched, and I determine for the thousandth time that I *will* follow that pointless pattern to some sort of conclusion" (168, 172). Despite calling the pattern pointless, her "follow[ing]" of it is not aimless but rather seeks a "conclusion," suggesting that this "linear sequence of written symbols" is "the structure of thought," which, as Lakoff

and Johnson argue, is "accurately representable" by such a sequence (245). The narrator, in short, is reading these words and sentences, these simple and complex thoughts, and not merely to reach an end point; the narrator seeks meaning.

In describing the pattern as "provok[ing] study," "confus[ing]," and full of "contradictions" and "convolutions," the narrator implies that she is not simply following lines with her eyes from one point to another but, instead, is seriously studying them in search for a level of understanding. In order to reach this understanding, the narrator turns to what may be the only scholarly training she has had, which again suggests that what she wants is serious work: "I know a little of the principle of design, and I know this thing [the pattern] was not arranged on any laws of radiation, or alternation, or repetition, or symmetry, or anything else that I ever heard of" (172). Like a literary critic who uses different theories to try to unlock the meaning of a text, the narrator attempts to apply different principles of design to the pattern in an attempt to come up with a reading of it.

After ruling out "repetition" because the pattern "is repeated, of course, by the breadths, but not otherwise," the narrator continues to study the possibilities:

> Looked at in one way each breadth stands alone, the bloated curves and flourishes—a kind of "debased Romanesque" with *delirium tremens*—go waddling up and down in isolated columns of fatuity.
>
> But, on the other hand, they connect diagonally, and the sprawling outlines run off in great slanting waves of optic horror, like a lot of wallowing seaweeds in full chase.

> The whole thing goes horizontally, too, at least it seems so, and I exhaust myself in trying to distinguish the order of its going in that direction.
>
> They have used a horizontal breadth for a frieze, and that adds wonderfully to the confusion. (172)[113]

Finally, after spending hours trying to understand the marks in a scholarly way, the narrator begins to believe she sees some principle of design in the pattern after all: "There is one end of the room where [the paper] is almost intact, and there, when the crosslights fade and the low sun shines directly upon it, I can almost fancy radiation after all,—the interminable grotesques seem to form around a common centre and rush off in headlong plunges of equal distraction" (172-173). The results of the narrator's study are, her analysis illustrates, contingent upon the right reading conditions, and even then they remain uncertain.

Regardless of the results, the narrator's analysis of the wallpaper through the principles of design is distinctly different from reading etiquette manuals in order to decide if one's wallpaper is suitably soothing and pleasing, although it does follow the recommendation of home economists who wanted women "to become intelligent consumers" of wallpaper by becoming "educated in art principles and housing design" (Jennings 253). The narrator, of course, is not studying the paper because she will be purchasing it, and is not applying the principles of design to the paper in order to judge it, but, rather, out of an attempt to make

---

[113] In addition to design, the narrator also suggests she knows something about architecture by describing the pattern as "a kind of 'debased Romanesque.'"

sense of it, making her study distinctly different from the kind of study women were expected to do when choosing wallpaper and distinctly more serious.

The narrator's apparent study of design shows a serious interest in scholarly study and writing. The narrator, in fact, turns her attention away from design principles after they fail to satisfactorily explain or rationalize the text before her and begins to examine the pattern more like a literary text and therefore more like the work she wants most to do. Rather than concentrating on trying to make sense of the characters, the physical marks of writing, she begins to focus on the levels of meaning in the text, on the thoughts she finds represented by the marks, and she accomplishes this by reading between the lines, metaphorically and literally, by analyzing what she refers to as the subpattern and front pattern of the wallpaper.

The subpattern is resonant of the underlying message that close readers seek to uncover in their texts and which can only be found through analysis and interpretation. In the early stages of a critical reading, this deeper, underlying narrative is often—like the subpattern—unclear and untenable, perhaps presenting, as in the narrator's case, only a "strange, provoking, formless sort of figure" (171). With increased study, however, what exists below the "front design" becomes "clearer," until the "formless . . . figure" in the subpattern becomes more concrete. For the narrator, this figure turns into something "like a woman stooping down and creeping about behind that [front] pattern," and then, finally, "as plain as can be," a woman behind bars (174, 176).

Because the marks on the wallpaper are not, of course, Latin alphabetic letters and the pattern is not, therefore, truly composed of sentences, the characters appear to be meaningful for the narrator as hieroglyphic type symbols, particularly in a logographic sense where the characters represent ideas rather than words.[114] Since these are not, again, "actual" hieroglyphics, the narrator's seeming ability to read the characters and to, even more importantly, make sense of them to the extent that she uncovers a story about a woman trapped behind bars who is crawling around looking for way to escape, shows that this story must be a projection of the reader's own mind. Finally, then, the wallpaper's realistic object individuality (as opposed to that individuality suggested to a diseased and starving imagination) limits and directs its meaning and usage so that it cannot be converted into a true literary text. When the narrator, therefore, can uncover no interpretation "within" the text, she begins—as her work with the subpattern illustrates—to project her own story onto the wallpaper.

This woman in the paper, as becomes clear to the reader, is the narrator, and the story the narrator reads about this woman is her own. The wallpaper's recurring, "pointless pattern" represents the narrator's life; the "monster" in the anthropomorphic wallpaper is both the medical profession and the narrator's husband, and both only exacerbate her condition; and the bars behind which this woman is trapped are those actually on the windows of the narrator's room as

---

[114] By seeing the wallpaper text as hieroglyphics, the narrator is literalizing the reading I will do, which, as I stated in the introduction, treats objects, in this case wallpaper, as "social hieroglyphics" (Marx, qtd. in Freedgood 51).

well as the even more constraining mental bars they symbolize: her husband's refusal to let her leave, to let her fully vocalize her thoughts and fears and, most importantly, to let her work. The narrator, finally, is the woman who is "subdued" by the pattern during the daytime; as she admits, "[i]t is so puzzling. It keeps me quiet by the hour" (176).

The narrator's desire to understand and find the meaning of the wallpaper can finally be seen as an unconscious attempt to understand, even learn to appreciate, her own life, lest this life become, like the wallpaper, so "dull" and "lame" and "uncertain" that the only identifiable resolution is, like the swirls in the pattern, to "suddenly commit suicide," to "plunge off at outrageous angles, [and] destroy themselves in unheard of contradictions " (168).[115] This connection between her life and the paper fuels the urgency to understand the wallpaper and quickly turns it into an obsession: If she can find the point of the pattern in the wallpaper, if she can uncover the meaning of the text she believes she sees there, then perhaps she can also find the point of the pattern that is her senseless life and discover enough meaning to make her want to continue to live it.

In her declining sanity, the narrator is, in fact, able to find a point to the pattern, to read the text her imagination creates, which makes her, for the first

---

[115] Linda Wagner-Martin also argues that "the labyrinth of the wallpaper . . . becomes the labyrinth of her life," and that the narrator has thoughts of suicide, but argues that what the narrator sees as "dull" and "lame" is not her life, as I am suggesting, but herself: "the wallpaper . . . reflects her impression of herself as somehow sinning, dull, irritating, repellant, unclean, and suicidal" (56).

time, declare, "I'm feeling ever so much better!" (177).[116] This improvement not coincidentally coincides with an increase in her writing. In fact, of the twelve entries that comprise the journal that makes up the text of "The Yellow Wall-Paper," five are written during the final week, which means the narrator is writing almost daily beginning with the entry about feeling better. As she previously complained that exhaustion kept her from writing, we can infer that lethargy is no longer a problem. Indeed, her final entry is the longest entry after the first two. The narrator also admits that she "eat[s] better," and this physical improvement is noticed by her husband, who tells his wife she "seemed to be flourishing in spite of [her] wall-paper." The narrator has "no intention of telling him it [i]s *because* of the wall-paper," as "he would make fun of [her]. He might even want to take [her] away," which the narrator does not want to do until she has completed her reading of the text (177).

Despite the narrator's physical improvement, it is clear she is actually deteriorating mentally, particularly when she admits that, in order to combat a strange "yellow smell," she "thought seriously of burning the house, to reach the

---

[116] Prior to this improvement the narrator writes that she "cr[ies] at nothing, and cr[ies] most of the time," and does not "feel as if it was worth while to turn [her] hand over for anything" (172). Furthermore, she admits, "It is getting to be a great effort for me to think straight" (173). When she tries to talk to John about her mental deterioration, however, he does not allow her to even verbalize the thought, telling her she must "never for one instant let that idea enter [her] mind!" (175). As though trying to combat her mental deterioration on her own, the narrator also, beginning with this last entry, begins to increase the frequency with which she writes in her journal; however, it appears to be too late. After this one last attempt to reach out to her husband, the narrator's mental state declines rapidly, and though she writes more frequently, she writes solely about the wallpaper, the analysis of which engrosses the majority of her time.

smell" (178). Her mental decline is also clear in her decision to help free the woman who, the narrator discovers, crawls around in the paper looking for a place to "climb through" the bars and, when she cannot find one, she takes hold of the bars and "shakes" them (178). "[A]s soon as it was moonlight and that poor thing began to crawl and shake the pattern," the narrator writes, "I got up and ran to help her. I pulled and she shook, I shook and she pulled, and before morning we had peeled off yards of that paper" (180). Knowing this story is the narrator's own, the reader recognizes that the narrator's goal is to free herself. As if it is her mind's remedy for her inability to bodily escape her life—when the rope she has hidden cannot be used to hang herself and when the bars on the windows block jumping out of them—the narrator's descent into insanity becomes complete.

As the only paper with which she has freely been able to "publicize" her thoughts in the last three months, and as the paper that has, perhaps for the first time, allowed the narrator to "see" her reality, if even unconsciously, in a very textual way, the narrator allows this object to become such a part of her that it is no longer just one tool for self-definition; it becomes the only tool.[117] The wall-paper now defines the narrator so completely that she becomes a part of the object: "I wonder if they all [the numerous creeping women she now sees] came out of that wall-paper as I did? . . . I suppose I shall have to get back behind the pattern when it comes night, and that is hard!" (181). The positive result of this

---

[117] Many critics share the idea that the narrator becomes capable of seeing more the more insane she becomes. Jean Kennard calls this "madness as a higher form of sanity" (82).

insanity, of actually becoming this woman trapped in the wallpaper, is that the narrator is able to gain some freedom, to be rid of a degree of her bars, by simply removing the wallpaper that depicts them, showing that the narrator is also, once again, able to physically use an object of her choosing for her own benefit. When John finally enters the room to see the narrator creeping along the walls and demands an explanation, her response is "I've got out at last . . . And I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!" (182). When she can no longer use paper to externalize her thoughts and authorize her self through writing, the narrator uses the wallpaper to free the part of her that is suffering the most, by disrupting the pointless pattern of her life by virtue of destroying the narrative of that unbearable life as it is written onto the wallpaper.

Critics disagree over whether the narrator's insanity is empowering or disempowering, and while I argue for some liberating qualities, this is only because the narrator's situation is beyond alternative repair. The reality of the narrator's damaged mental state, however, is that she will now actually be kept locked up in a room, perhaps for good, where men would symbolically keep women, and will be forever dependent on medical (and thus male) discourse. One might argue, in this light, that the female discourse of wallpaper may be preferable. While the story could therefore be read as a criticism of professional discourse, embodied in the husband/doctor who arguably helps the narrator into her current state and who will probably keep her there through the very same tactics of "treatment" that pushed her over the edge in the first place, I think the

real criticism lies in the fact that men alone gain this professional privilege, which allows them to wield too much power, even when their prescriptions seem clearly ridiculous and damaging. Without the professional training and concurrent confidence to argue against the male professional discourse, women can be mishandled in the same way the narrator and Gilman were. The proper training, as the narrator's case suggests, might have given her the knowledge and confidence through knowledge to verbalize her disagreements with her husband's ideas, ideas she expresses only in her journal, which may then have saved her from his treatment and perhaps protected her insanity. The criticism, in this way, is not of men's professional training and discourse but women's lack of it.

Nineteenth-century society and home economists alike treated women as though all the mental stimulation they needed could be found in the home and in the "study" of what they could do to improve it. As Sheryl Meyering writes in her introduction to a book of critical essays on Gilman, "[c]reative women were trapped inside the rigid nineteenth-century ideology of the 'woman's sphere,' a world defined by domestic concerns. A woman fulfilled her life's calling by providing succor and a peaceful haven-home for her husband, enabling him to conduct the important business of the world" (2). While this may have seemed sufficient to some women, like the narrator's sister-in-law Jennie, who "is a perfect and enthusiastic housekeeper, and hopes for no better *profession*," for those women seeking intellectual stimulation and meaningful work, even a position in the "important

business of the world," it was not enough (171, my emphasis).[118] In fact, as the "The Yellow Wall-Paper" illustrates, for women who *are* "hop[ing] for" a "better profession," being forced to settle for wallpaper texts and the kind of training that can be found in etiquette books can have depressing and eventually devastating results.

"The Yellow Wall-Paper" reinforces what most women in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries already knew, that wallpaper could be dangerous, but not because of unhealthful colors or disturbing patterns. This yellow paper, with its strangling bars, symbolizes the constraints the women's sphere places on them by not providing them with sufficient options for meaningful work, and by forcing them to exert so much energy on home decoration and maintenance, particularly if this work is not chosen by them and if they are expected to perform all of the work themselves and without reward. The problem is not being trapped in the home with bad wallpaper, but being trapped in the sphere with no opportunity for escape or any intellectual stimulation or professional work.

Gilman warns women that they must have meaningful work to do in order to not let wallpaper, metonym of the domestic, become their lives—what very literally happens with the narrator once she goes insane, and what happens more symbolically with women who become so engaged in their homes that they have no other purpose, becoming, in Gilman's words, house servants (*Women and Economics* 15-18). Without their own chosen meaningful work, Gilman

---

[118] The narrator believes that Jennie even "thinks it is the writing which made [the narrator] sick" (171).

warns, the wallpaper and everything it stands for will, perhaps even literally, drive them crazy. Gilman encourages her readers, like her narrator, to not just shake the bars, but to climb through, and eventually to tear them down so they can no longer imprison.

CHAPTER FOUR

Private Possessions and Sexual Expression: Becoming the Object of Affection in Edith Wharton's *The Reef*

In the previous chapters I have illustrated how objects can be empowering for female characters and, once the characters have recognized this potential, what happens when they are prohibited from using chosen objects. In Edith Wharton's *The Reef* (1912), I examine a character who, through her own inability to recognize the potential for self development and display that objects, as part of selfhood, allow, is unable to use objects for her own self empowerment and specifically, like Cassandra, for displaying the sexual self she wants others to read. The difference between Wharton's Anna Leath and the other three heroines is that Gabriella, the narrator of "The Yellow Wall-paper," and Cassandra have all been able to recognize an object's individuality and to explore, as part of that individuality, the various possible functions of that object. This exploration involves moving beyond the proper functions of objects—what one is expected to do with them—to a consideration of their various possible system functions—what one can do with objects even if that use is idiosyncratic.

As I have demonstrated, what the other heroines have discovered is that, among the system functions of such objects as textiles, books, mirrors and wall-paper is the ability to help one develop, define and display one's individuality or

sense of self. These characters have all learned, in other words, that Self Control Is Object Control (Lakoff and Johnson 270). Anna, in contrast, has been so sheltered and so ingrained with propriety that the only object function she comprehends is the proper one. That is, as part of her training in the "systems of social order," Anna has learned how to, in Preston's words, "behav[e] towards items of material culture in accordance with their proper functions" (42). Anna, for example, has certainly learned "the most basic tenets of appropriate behavior at table," and these, Preston writes, "are keyed to the proper functions of the tableware" (42). As this example emphasizes, using objects properly or correctly, in the sense of according to their "proper function," can also be the grounds for proper, as in decorous, behavior. Using an object according to a system function would, accordingly, constitute improper behavior. Based on her upbringing, Anna believes in and, in fact, only seems to recognize the proper functions of things, both in the sense of the expected, "inherited" function and in the sense of the appropriate, decorous use.

When Anna Leath's indoctrination with propriety is tested through her discovery of an affair between George Darrow, the man she expects to marry, and Sophy Viner, the young woman who becomes Anna's daughter's governess and affianced to her stepson, a distubring though not completely unwanted knowledge is suddenly granted Anna that forces her to rethink her own ideas about the reality of passion and the proper relationships between individuals, especially as she begins to experience new desires. Additionally, because so much of what a

nineteenth-century upper-class woman like Anna has learned about propriety has involved the proper use of things and revolved around the proper relations between people and objects, this assault against propriety also forces Anna to reconsider her conception of object function and the relationships that exist between subjects and objects, particularly once she reaches the height of her own passion.

The affair, through Darrow and Sophy's relationships with each other and with the objects in the hotel rooms in which the affair unfolds, illustrates the important idea I have been stressing throughout this project: that objects are part of us. The affair also highlights, in particular, the link between the private selves of individuals and the private objects and spaces in which these objects are found. Even when it seems as though Anna finally recognizes this link, when she experiences firsthand the power of Darrow's personal objects as stimulants to her passion for him, she nevertheless continues to be blind to the way in which objects are also part of her and thus could be used for empowerment. Because objects are such a part of selfhood, Anna's inability to see this suggests that Anna is not yet fully developed. Unfortunately, in *The Reef*, Anna will only find a small fraction of what she is missing.

Anna's maintenance of propriety appears to be the result of the particularly repressive atmosphere in which she was rasied. The young Anna Summers is taught that anything "unusual was regarded as either immoral or ill-bred, and

people with emotions were not visited" (68).[119] Although Anna read about "passions and sensations" in poetry, "[i]n a community composed entirely of people like her parents . . . she did not see how the magnificent things one read about could ever have happened" (68). The result is that, "[l]ittle by little the conditions conquered her, and she learned to regard the substance of life as a mere canvas for the embroideries of poet and painter" (68). This learned disbelief in the real-life existence of passion is what makes Anna different from other girls who, "leading outwardly the same life as herself, . . . were yet possessed of some vital secret which escaped her" (68). This secret made them "wider awake than she" and perhaps even "cleverer," and lead to their ability to have and be considered a "good time" (68, 69). Knowing herself to be different but unsure why, Anna grows even more reserved, "which made envious mothers cite her as a model of ladylike repression" (69).

Anna's "ladylike repression" keeps her from expressing her feelings for her first love, George Darrow, despite there being "things she really wanted to say" to him (70). This repression also causes Anna to insist on discussing books instead of kissing, and although Anna correctly recognizes this "prude[ry]" in herself when she is away from Darrow, she cannot seem to escape the duties of propriety and chastity when in his presence (69). Anna has, her behavior illustrates, learned what Jennings describes as the proper behavior for women at this time:

---

[119] Edith Wharton, *The Reef.* 1912. Ed. and intro. Stephen Orgel. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998. All references are to this version and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

"Applying restraint, holding emotions in check, and curbing desire constituted a virtuous life. The physical control and self-discipline demanded by nineteenth-century etiquette were supported by equally exacting standards of emotional control" (261). After losing Darrow, presumably through this kind of behavior, Anna meets the stodgy Fraser Leath whose main occupation is collecting snuff-boxes.[120] Anna feels that Fraser Leath understands her because he, too, would prefer discussing books to kissing, leaving Anna still "[un]used to full or strong emotions" even after her marriage (67). Anna's adulthood turns out to be just as repressive and passionless as her childhood, leaving a "veil" still hanging "between herself and life," and she "resign[s] herself again to the belief that 'real life' was neither real nor alive" (68, 75).

Anna's life, until the death of her husband and the reappearance of George Darrow, has only prepared Anna for proper actions and feelings. It has not prepared her for the possibility that a passion like the kind she read about existed in "real life," or that it might have consequences that went contrary to the proper relations between people and objects she has been taught, because she has never seen or experienced such passion outside of its artistically rendered state. Anna has been taught to believe that passion is a romantic and exaggerated concept, one of those "magnificent things one read[s] about," and that the proper function of the books and pictures that depict this passion is to

---

[120] Anna writes that "Mr Leath collected his social instances ["deeds" to be "investigated" so as to examine "the momentous question of 'what people did'"] with the same seriousness and patience as his snuff-boxes" (73).

produce the idea but not to initiate action, as this would "mix up things you read about with things you do" (149). This conventionalization of art, which limits its object individuality, is why Anna wanted to "talk to [young Darrow] about books and pictures, and have him insinuate the eternal theme of their love into every subject they discussed," rather than act upon that love by expressing her feelings and responding to his kisses (69). And yet, Anna is vaguely aware that there is something missing in her courtship with Fraser Leath: "it was only in the rare moments when Mr Leath's symmetrical blond mask bent over hers, and his kiss dropped on her like a cold smooth pebble, that she questioned the completeness of the joys he offered" (73).

Anna's experience with books is distinctly different from a character's like Cassandra in *The Morgesons*, who uses books to learn about life, whether in terms of adventure, romance or Duty, and then either acts or purposefully does not act on that new knowledge. As I have shown in chapter two, Cassandra recognizes that books have multiple functions, including system functions, and are not only for pleasure or artistic expression. Travel books provide information about foreign places Cassandra wishes to visit, Bibles and conduct books dictate rules that one either follows or acts against depending on the self one is constructing, and novels relate experiences that can make one long for them (after reading Childe Harold, for instance, Cassandra says she "long[ed] to be a wreck!" (70)).

Cassandra, that is, believes, like Wharton, that "life follows art: we take our models of aesthetics and ethics from art. Thus poetry and fiction, painting and dance, have the power to instruct us in ways of living—and they can also mislead us" (Benstock 56). Anna, in contrast to Cassandra, has been taught that life and art are distinctly different, that they do not reflect each other, and thus that those magnificent things found in books did not exist in reality. Anna would not, therefore, consider acting upon what books depict because she does not see them as "models" of real life. As the proper function of books and other art forms for Anna is entertainment, then this kind of education would be a system function, an idiosyncratic use, because one does not "mix up things you read about with things you do."

Anna's relationship with objects, as suggested by her proper use of books and pictures, is not personal or imaginative, which is also to say it is not developed. Although Anna professes to possess a "sensitiveness to the appeal of inanimate things," this sensitiveness must not include her own objects, as these things are markedly missing from the text (183). Anna's sitting-room, for instance, is described as "the spacious book-lined room above stairs in which [Anna] had gathered together all the tokens of her personal tastes: the retreat in which, as one might fancy, Anna Leath had hidden the restless ghost of Anna Summers" (123). Despite the fact that the room contains "tokens" that reflect Anna, that make the room, as Darrow tells Anna, "just like you—it *is* you," we never see these tokens (124). In fact, besides the books that line the room, the only other

objects referred to specifically are mentioned in similarly vague terms and are scattered throughout the novel: "her writing-table," "a pile of letters," "an arm-chair," "the sofa-corner," "the table," "a photograph of [Anna's daughter] Effie," "small ornaments on the mantel-shelf," "knick-knacks" and, lastly, "a photograph of Darrow" (124, 128,127, 143, 144,183).

When compared to descriptions of other rooms, the picture we are given of the space that is supposed to *be* Anna, the room she describes as "a good place to be alone in," seems remarkably hazy (124). Compare, for contrast, just the initial description of the sitting-room belonging to Anna's mother-in-law, who is only a marginal figure in the novel: "Its looped and corded curtains, its purple satin upholstery, the Sèvres jardinères, the rose-wood fire-screen, the little velvet tables edged with lace and crowded with silver knick-knacks and simpering miniatures, reconstituted an almost perfect setting for the blonde beauty of the 'sixties" (148). The significance of these details about Madame de Chantelle's room and thus about Madame de Chantelle is confirmed both by Darrow, who comments on how the "apartment 'dated' and completed her" and by Anna's mother-in-law herself when she affirms, "I'm old-fashioned—like my furniture" (148, 150).[121]

As this example of object detail begins to suggest, rooms, as spaces that contain objects, also grant access to the self via these objects; and, as rooms

---

[121] A similar scene in *The House of Mirth* shows how Mrs. Peniston, Lily's aunt, is "caricatured through her out-of-date ornaments" and shown to be one of those "dreary old conservatives" through her furnishings (Cohn 545).

can hold a collection of one's objects, these spaces can be seen as reflections and even embodiments of the self housed there, as the variety of objects should come together to paint a larger picture of that self. Consider, for example, the wealth of details revealed about Cassandra's sexual nature in *The Morgesons* provided by the full view of her redecorated bedroom, compared with what we would likely learn if we were only told that Cassandra covered a few arm chairs with blue chintz. As Cassandra's case also makes clear, access to specifically private objects in private spaces permits access to the private self. In the case of Anna's sitting-room (which, it will shortly become clear, is also a private room), the seeming lack of any private objects or any details about the objects that are mentioned, suggests that the private self this room reflects is an underdeveloped one. Put another way, if, as Lynne Tillman writes, "[a]rchitecture, to Wharton's thinking, can reveal the whole of a character," then the "whole" character re-presented by Anna's sitting-room is certainly incomplete (138).

The connection between intimate self and private room that I pointed to in the case of Cassandra would be at home in Wharton's world, especially when one considers her views on privacy in the home as expressed in the book on interior design that she coauthored with architect Ogden Codman, Jr., *The Decoration of Houses*. "Privacy would seem to be one of the first requisites of civilized life," she writes, and yet it is too often ignored in the "planning and

arrangement of the average house" (25).[122] The importance of rectifying this omission reappears throughout the book, and is particularly evident in Wharton's concern with access. Bedrooms expressly, as one might expect, should be kept sacredly apart.

First, the staircase leading to the family's bedrooms should not be accessible from the main entrance hall of the house, as this means it is available to every visitor who enters the front door (116). The bedroom itself should also ideally be a suite divided into four separate rooms that would be arranged in order of increasing privacy from an antechamber, which would connect the bedroom suite to the main corridor, and would ensure that anyone who entered the suite would not actually be entering any of the private rooms. The antechamber would lead to the boudoir or "sitting-room," where one would sit, write, and receive intimate friends or family. If the antechamber were absent, then the boudoir, the least private of the private rooms, would be the connection to the main corridor. The boudoir would then connect to the bedroom proper, where one would sleep, which would be followed by a dressing room and a bathroom. Having the bedroom behind the boudoir, and then the dressing room and bathroom behind the bedroom, assures that the most private rooms—where one

---

[122] I refer only to Wharton when quoting from *The Decoration of Houses* for simplicity and because I am writing about Wharton and not Codman, but this focus on Wharton alone does not seem unfair based on Benstock's view of the text. Benstock argues that although the book was "published as a co-authored text with architect Ogden Codman, it was Wharton who conceived the project, wrote the book, chose the illustrations, and prepared the bibliography. The book is in every way her work. . . ." (60).

prepares one's self for the public, bathes, dresses, and, especially, undresses—are the most difficult to reach and the most hidden (171).[123]

That Anna's sitting-room is described specifically as a "room above stairs" would suggest it is the "boudoir" of Wharton's recommended bedroom suite, rather than a form of the more public parlour that would be found on the ground floor (123). This assumption is also supported by Anna's description of the room as the place where she has always gone to be alone: "I don't think I've ever before cared to talk with any one here" (124). When Anna invites Darrow in, he reveals that "the thought of a talk with her there had been in his mind ever since [his introductory glance into it]," confirming the intimacy implied by such an invitation (123-4). Additionally, Wharton's description of the boudoir in *The Decoration of Houses* indicates that this is the room in which a woman would have her writing desk and would attend to her correspondence, and this is true for Anna and her sitting-room. Whether or not this room is literally connected to Anna's bedroom, it is the equivalent of the bedroom suite's boudoir where only the most intimate members of the household would be invited.

Wharton, I would argue, recognized that, like the most private rooms in a house, the private self is the part that is protected from invasion from the general public as well as from all but the most intimate acquaintances. The sexual self, arguably the most concealed side of the private self, is like the most concealed of the private rooms: the dressing rooms, bathrooms and bedrooms of a bedroom

---

[123] The bathroom could have its own separate entrance but solely for the access of servants (*The Decoration of Houses* 171).

suite. On the simplest level, the most intimate parts of one's self and one's body are those that are revealed through undressing, both in removing layers of self-protection and clothing, just as the most secluded of one's private rooms are the innermost spaces where one physically undresses. Furthermore, these spaces can only be penetrated by passing through layers that grow increasingly private the deeper one goes, from the most public antechamber to boudoir to the more intimate bedroom and beyond.

Wharton's agreement with the connections I have made here between private selves and spaces would seem to be expressed in one of her early short stories, "The Fullness of Life," where the heroine describes a woman as a house:

> I have sometimes thought that a woman's nature is like a great house full of rooms: there is the hall, through which everyone passes in going in and out; the drawing-room, where one receives formal visits; the sitting-room, where the members of the family come and go as they list; but beyond that, far beyond, are other rooms, the handles of whose doors perhaps are never turned; no one knows the way to them, no one knows whither they lead; and in the innermost room, the holy of holies, the soul sits alone and waits for a footstep that never comes. (qtd. in Benstock 68)

In this early piece of writing, Wharton clearly aligns public rooms with public selves and private rooms with private selves, and confirms that the most private

rooms, like private selves, are those that hold the "holy of holies" and are hardest to reach.

Considering the link that Wharton herself makes between private rooms and selves, the importance she places on privacy, and her description of a sitting-room as a private room, the lack of objects with individuality in Anna's sitting-room seems even more profound. This absence of private and personalized objects in a space that "is" Anna, I argue, reflects the insufficient role that objects play in Anna's own sense of self. That is, Anna does not recognize that objects are part of us, "not in any mystical or metaphorical sense but in cold, concrete actuality" (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 15) and, therefore, she does not recognize the ways objects can be used in order to develop or express a self, particularly if this self and this use are not the proper ones.

If Anna does have objects, including private objects, they appear to have little meaning for her, because we barely see them. If we do see them, like the books Anna reads as a girl or that now line her sitting-room, we do not learn anything about them; they do not, for example (and in direct contrast to Cassandra's), have titles that could emphasize their individuality. This lack of objects and lack of emphasis on objects seems, however, almost natural if one only recognizes the proper functions of objects, if one believes, for instance, that tableware is only for dining, textiles are only for covering one's body and furniture, and books are only for describing things that one can never experience in one's real life.

In not understanding that objects are part of us and by not using objects to develop and define her sense of self, Anna, unlike the other heroines I have examined, is not developing herself to her full potential. The particular aspect of Anna that appears most underdeveloped, as suggested by the lack of object individuality in her private sitting-room and her approach to objects like the books that describe passion, is Anna's most intimate self, a self capable of feeling, expressing and, most importantly, experiencing passion.[124] That the novel allows that a connection between private selves and objects exists, and therefore could potentially become apparent to Anna and finally allow her to develop her own passionate self, is suggested in the affair between Darrow and Sophy as well as in the result it has upon Anna once she learns about the relationship, and, particularly, once she finds herself in Darrow's bedroom.

Just as the lack of object individuality in Anna's private space accurately reflects Anna's undeveloped intimate self, the details provided about Darrow and Sophy's hotel rooms accurately reflect the individuals represented by them, including their uncontrolled passion, at least from the viewpoint of Darrow as it is through his perspective that we see the affair. While Darrow's hotel room is

---

[124] Based on such a connection, it would come as no surprise that an even more private room—Anna's bedroom—is left completely undescribed, as if there would be no objects there to signal a self capable of such feelings and expression, no bed like Cassandra's, for example, that is "big enough for three" (Stoddard 1986, 146). Sarah Luria argues that, "[w]hen we consider Wharton's description of her writing process, we see that the bedrooms are perhaps spaces where one sublimates, rather than consummates, one's inner desires" (312). If this is true, then this could account for the complete lack of depicted objects in Anna's bedroom.

described with some detail, Sophy's hotel room, like Anna's sitting-room, lacks any kind of object individuality. While the lack of object individuality in Anna's space reflects Anna's lack of an intimate self, the reason for this lack in Sophy's room cannot be the same. Sophy, we know, has the passionate side that Anna is missing, evinced both in her willingness to engage in an affair and by her possession of that "look" that Anna sees in the eyes of the girls she grew up among, "the girls who seemed possessed of a secret she had missed. Yes, Sophy Viner had their look" (186). This evidence of a developed private self should, based on the connection between people and objects, be evident in Sophy's room.

I would suggest that the lack of object individuality in Sophy's hotel room, given, as it is, from Darrow's perspective alone, reflects more on Darrow than on Sophy.[125] Anna has the opportunity to provide details about her room, if they exist, but the novel never provides Sophy's perspective. We are not allowed to see Sophy's objects except as they described by Darrow and Anna, and we are not allowed to see Sophy's thoughts except as Darrow and Anna interpret them. Therefore, when Darrow fails to provide the personal details that must exist in Sophy's hotel room (as the room that would contain anything that would be important to Sophy in her homeless state), this reflects the lack of personal intimacy with which Darrow knows Sophy, despite his intimacy with her body and her room, rather than an actual lack of personal qualities in Sophy.

---

[125] Koprince argues that Sophy is "well matched" with the setting and has an "affinity with the hotel," but this is based on Darrow's room and Darrow's perspective, and therefore, I would argue, disputable (18).

Through this lack of personal intimacy, Darrow comes to see Sophy as not merely represented by the impersonal objects he sees in her room, but *as* one of these objects—the one that marks the room as Sophy's. This stems not only from what we might call Darrow's insensitiveness, but also from the fact that Darrow's passion has been ignited by imagining what is happening in Sophy's room based on the sounds he hears of her interacting with the objects in this space. The room, in this way, becomes the object of Darrow's attraction, with Sophy providing the appealing details, as might a warm fire or a comfortable, attractive chair. This aspect of the affair shows the danger of actually becoming, rather than using, an object for definition (think here about the narrator becoming part of the wallpaper in her insane state in "The Yellow Wall-Paper") and suggests the importance for women especially to own their objects in the senses I explored in chapter two. Unless Anna learns this, the novel suggests, she could end up replacing Sophy as only an object to Darrow herself—a process that seems to have already begun when Darrow imagines Anna as "a picture so hung that it can be seen only at a certain angle: an angle known to no one but its possessor" (103).

The conjunction of Sophy with her room is so immediate that it seems almost automatic for Darrow: on their first morning in Paris, Darrow's awakening thought is: "The girl was there, in the room next to him" (28). This conjunction, based here on the nearness of Sophy due to the proximity of the two rooms, introduces the way in which Darrow will think of Sophy while they are in Paris (in

terms of her room), initiates the process whereby Sophy becomes indistinct from her room in Darrow's mind, and provides the rationale for Darrow's passion. Darrow recognizes that Sophy is only a "few feet" away because her room is divided from his by so "thin" a "partition" that the sounds of Sophy interacting with the objects in her temporary bedroom are audible to Darrow. These sounds attract Darrow, although he claims Sophy's nearness only makes him feel "less drearily alone because of her being there, on the other side of the door" (46). In this claim, however, Darrow also reveals more about Sophy's accessibility via his accessibility to her room: rather than a thin but solid and impenetrable wall that would only allow sounds to travel between the rooms, we discover here that the rooms are conjoined by an inner door—a barrier that can be easily overcome if both parties are willing, as the door presumably remains locked from both sides unless the parties agree to open it.

That Darrow enjoys Sophy's proximity for reasons other than loneliness is confirmed by the increasingly sexual nature of his thoughts about her. As Darrow listens to the "sound[s] in the next room," he "become[s] conscious" that close to him is a "small keen flame of life . . . quivering and agitating the air" (45). As Darrow continues to listen to the "sound[s] from her room," Sophy's accessibility becomes more vivid, until Darrow is able to imagine Sophy's dress sliding to the floor and her naked feet moving towards the bed, and thus in a blatantly sexual way (46). As these quotations also illustrate, the distinction between Sophy and her room are not clear for Darrow, as it is specifically the sounds from Sophy's

room rather than from Sophy herself that catch Darrow's attention, just as, later, it is not specifically the cessation of Sophy's sounds but "[t]he sounds in the next room" that causes Darrow to once again feel "alone and unhappy" (46). This emphasis on sound further supports the idea that what titillates Darrow is imagining Sophy interacting with the objects in her room.

Due to the proximity of the two private rooms and the thinness of the partition between them, Darrow is granted limited (audible, imaginative) access into Sophy's private space and therefore to Sophy herself, as the intimately sexual image of Sophy undressing makes clear (46). The next step would be to physically gain access to Sophy's room and to her body, and this Darrow accomplishes the following morning when he is forced to reveal that he never mailed a letter that would place Sophy in contact with friends and therefore remove her from the hotel. The chapter begins: "Darrow was still standing on her threshold. As she put the question [about the letter] he entered the room and closed the door behind him" (54). That "her threshold" at which Darrow stands is, for him, both Sophy's hotel room and her body is supported by his physical reaction when he crosses that threshold: "His heart was beating a little faster than usual and he had no clear idea of what he was about to do or say" (54). If Darrow is merely entering Sophy's room for a talk he would not be worrying about what he was about to "do," only, perhaps, about what he was about to "say," which would offer little cause for the increase in his heart rate.

What Darrow does upon entering Sophy's room also suggests that Sophy and her room are unequivocally connected for Darrow, as he immediately takes her hands, claiming it is only a "friendly touch to help out with insufficiency of words" (54). During their discussion, however, Darrow gets increasingly close to Sophy and touches her hand several times, confirming the idea that being in Sophy's room automatically grants Darrow access to Sophy's body. This seems to be taken for granted by Sophy as well, as she shows no discomfort at having Darrow in her room and even offers him two hands when he asks for one, pulling them away when she is not sure if she can trust him, and then giving them back in submission.

The final suggestion that Darrow has crossed the threshold to both Sophy's room and body is the effect that his presence has on Sophy and the result of their interaction. As Darrow unfolds his plan for Sophy to remain in Paris with him for a few days, presumably because he wants to give her "a child's holiday to look back to," he becomes "intensely aware that his nearness was having an effect which made it less and less necessary for him to choose his words, and he went on, more mindful of the inflections of his voice than of what he was actually saying" (59, 58). As it is certain that Darrow and Sophy have been this close or even closer before (while riding in a car, sitting at the theater, or walking arm-in-arm under his umbrella, for instance) it is unlikely that it is Darrow's nearness alone that is affecting Sophy. Rather, I would argue it is the combination of Darrow being near her inside her room. If gaining access to

Sophy's room is gaining access to her body, then Darrow and Sophy are now not simply close in proximity, but physically intimate. Indeed, their discussion ends with what could easily be read as the agreement to have an affair, and the extent of this affair is revealed in the familiarity Darrow later shows with Sophy's room.

Darrow's knowledge of Sophy's room, first of all, confirms that Darrow has spent a considerable amount of time in it, with Sophy, and as she performed private acts. He had to have been there, for instance, when Sophy opened and closed the wardrobes and drawers, perhaps in the acts of dressing or undressing, if he is now able to hear the "creak of a hinge" and "instantly differentiate[] . . . it as that of the wardrobe against the opposite wall," or hear "the mouse-like squeal of a reluctant drawer, and kn[o]w it was the upper one in the chest of drawers beside the bed" (62). Darrow, further, must have gained some awareness of Sophy's habits, at least physically, if he is now able to tell, by sound, "which way [Sophy's] step was directed, what pieces of furniture it had to skirt, where it would probably pause, and what was likely to arrest it" (62). Darrow's knowledge of Sophy's room, in his opinion, is so complete that his mind is able to produce a "precise photographic picture of that other room," a picture so clear that "[e]verything in it rose before him and pressed itself upon his vision with the same acuity of distinctness as the objects surrounding him" (62). Darrow's picture, however, does not reveal "everything" in the room, only everything he has noticed.

Sophy, like Darrow, must have toiletries, clothing, and other such "traces of" Sophy's "passage," particularly as Sophy is, unlike Darrow, moving to Paris; however, Darrow either does not see these objects or does not find them significant enough to mention (60). In his description of Sophy's room, Darrow lists only objects that are permanently part of the room: chimney-piece, hearth, wardrobe, chest of drawers, bed, and mahogany toilet-glass. The only exception is an umbrella, and this umbrella is most likely Darrow's.[126] The things Darrow sees are not only *not* personal items belonging to Sophy, but, as part of the hotel room, are things that, according to Darrow, also lack any kind of personality on their own; these things are thus completely "impersonal." This lack of personal detail in Sophy's private room shows that Darrow is lacking those details about Sophy herself.

Darrow admits, when he again hears Sophy's step on the floor of her room, "it was strange how much better he knew it than the person to whom it belonged!" (63). I would argue that Darrow does not know the sound of Sophy's step better than he knows Sophy, but, rather, that Darrow knows Sophy only as well as her step. Darrow, in other words, knows Sophy only as he has been able to imagine her, and only as he has truly experienced her, and that is as part of

---

[126] When Darrow meets Sophy, her umbrella has been completely destroyed by the wind, and he has offered to give her his umbrella. We know Sophy has very little money, and as this destroyed umbrella had been purchased only the day before, it is highly unlikely Sophy has money to buy a new umbrella. If the umbrella is new—giving it, at first, little connection to Sophy personally—then Darrow must have purchased it, potentially without Sophy's input, which would also decrease its connection to Sophy, at least this soon in her relationship with the object.

her room. Throughout the entire chapter in which the affair is revealed, Sophy is never once mentioned by name or even referred to by a gendered pronoun, despite the fact that she enters Darrow's room, unbidden, through the door of communication, puts her hands over his eyes when she finds him supposedly asleep, and leans over him for a kiss, which he delivers. Despite the intimacy of Sophy's actions, Darrow refers to her in objectified terms: Sophy is "a step," "the step," "a wavering soft advance," "the rustle of a dress," "two hands," "[t]he palms of the hands," "an arm," "the arm," "the face," and "it," as a reference to the step and the face (62-64).

Sophy has become not just an object, but specifically a piece of furniture, as these have all been recognizable to Darrow by the noises they make: the wardrobe creaks, the chest of drawers squeals, and the mirror clatters (63). Sophy, likewise, has been "a sound in the next room" since the very first day, but is also recognized as a step, a knock, and a rustle.[127] Sophy, like the other objects in her room, is an impersonal and physical presence to Darrow because Sophy's depersonalized room is the only aspect of Sophy to which Darrow has paid any attention, and even this attention is minimal. Despite Darrow's access to Sophy's private space and her body, despite clearly knowing Sophy, like her private room, in a sexual way, what Darrow knows about Sophy personally (in the

[127] The fact that Sophy covers Darrow's eyes when she enters his room, which at first seems simply like a playful gesture, even suggests that Darrow needs only the sounds to recognize Sophy and that Sophy is somehow aware of this.

sense of as a person) is very limited. Sophy is, like Darrow's own hotel room, a "provisional shelter," and one to which Darrow has had unlimited access.

In contrast to both Sophy's and Anna's rooms, the first objects we see in Darrow's room when he examines it carefully are his personal items, the "traces of his passage," that have accumulated since his arrival ten days prior: "brushes and razors" are "spread out" on a chest of drawers, "a stack of newspapers" lies on a table, and "half a dozen paper novels" mingle with "cigar-cases and toilet bottles" on the mantel. Despite the fact that these are all items that Darrow has brought to the room and include some very private articles, Darrow claims that these things make "no mark on the featureless dullness of the room" (60). Darrow suggests that the room, in fact, has no personality at all, as it is decorated "all in noncommittal drabs and browns, with a carpet and paper that nobody would remember, and chairs and tables as impersonal as railway porters" (60). The room lacks personality, Darrow suggests, because it was not designed to have it; instead, it was designed to play "its anonymous part" as the "makeshift setting of innumerable transient collocations" by creating the perfectly forgettable setting for fleeting meetings (60).

What Darrow is doing here, in effect, is invoking the room's lack of personality and devious purpose to blame it for the affair, and this is not completely without merit in Wharton's world based on her own sensitivity to

rooms and buildings.[128] Furthermore, this lack of personality and even dubious purpose is, we can imagine Wharton saying, the problem with hotel rooms in general. According to Susan Koprince, hotels are the structures that Wharton "criticizes most caustically in her novels." Hotels are "always associated with transience, a disregard of the past, and a lack of family ties," as well as "with a perverse freedom, a drive for self-gratification, and a longing to rebel against or to deviate from the conventions of one's social class," making the hotel "an especially appropriate setting for extramarital love affairs" (13-14). Koprince further argues that Wharton's hotels are not "passive backgrounds" but rather "seem to have the power to cast an Aladdin-like spell over her characters, tempting the hotel dwellers with wealth or unlimited pleasure, and inevitably luring them into a life of profligacy" (16).

Sarah Luria suggests one explanation for why Wharton may have felt such disdain for hotels in her article on architecture in Wharton's work. A hotel is what Luria would describe as "a house without manners" as, in such a house, "the privacy of the principal floor" is "violated" as is "the home's most important distinction—between upstairs and downstairs, between the bedrooms and the

---

[128] One example can be found In Wharton's autobiography, *A Backward's Glance* (1933), where she describes how affected she was by her Aunt Elizabeth's house as a child: "The effect of terror produced by the house of Rhinecliff was no doubt partly due to what seemed to me its intolerable ugliness. My visual sensibility must always have been too keen for middling pleasures; my photographic memory of rooms and houses—even those seen but briefly, or at long intervals—was from my earliest years a source of inarticulate misery, for I was always vaguely frightened by ugliness. I can still remember hating everything at Rhinecliff" (28).

rooms of public reception" (307). Hotel rooms are public and private, reception and bedroom, and therefore do not accord with Wharton's ideas about privacy as expressed in *The Decoration of Houses*.

A further crime of hotel rooms, in Wharton's view, would be their lack of personality or purpose. Because they are decorated without any specific inhabitant or purpose in mind, hotel rooms cannot be decorated according to the "individual tastes and habits of the people who are to occupy [them]" or "in strict accordance with the requirements of [a] purpose" (Wharton *Decoration* 19, 11). Such rooms have neither personality nor specific purpose and are only capable of taking on the personality and purpose of the occupant temporarily through the objects that the occupant brings to the room. Once the occupant checks-out and the chambermaid remakes the room for the next guest, the result is an erasure of that limited reflection of individuality.[129] Hotel rooms, in short, are distinctly unmannered, impersonal and malleable, making them the perfect "setting for illicit love affairs" or "the dwelling place of persons of questionable repute" (Koprince 13).

Although Darrow does note what he considers to be the lack of personality in the hotel room, he does not suggest that these rooms lack purpose. On the

---

[129] This expereince is described by Cassandra in *The Morgesons* when she leaves Ben's home in Surrey after remaining there a month: "The ghost of my individuality would lurk there no longer than the chairs I had placed, the books I had left, the shreds of paper or flowers I had scattered, could be moved or swept away" (201). As Cassandra reveals, while one's individuality can be brought to a room in degrees through the objects that one brings and with which one interacts, that individuality is both partial and fleeting.

contrary, Darrow sees them as the "makeshift setting[s] of innumerable transient collocations" and the holders of secrets (60, 46). If hotel rooms, according to Wharton, can have no true purpose of their own, then the purpose Darrow reads in his, as well as the personality (or lack of) he finds, is actually a reflection of his own. Therefore, in blaming his hotel room for the affair, Darrow is effectively blaming himself, because Darrow's hotel room reflects at least the Darrow who temporarily resides there due to the connection between people and their objects and spaces. By claiming not to see his personality in the room despite his personal items, what Darrow is actually admitting is that the self reflected in the room is not his usual, identifiable self (what Lakoff and Johnson would call his Subject or Essence), that nothing like this "had ever happened to him before" and was not something "in which he had ever pictured himself as likely to be involved" (62). The Subject-self Darrow recognizes is the self who lives in London and participates in a "daylight world of recognized activities" where he is a "busy, responsible, relatively necessary factor in the big whirring social and official machine" (61). That this is not the self reflected in the room is clear, as whenever Darrow tries to concentrate on this London self, "the room jerked him back into the circle of its insistent associations" (61). As Darrow's room does not reflect his usual self (the Subject), and as this self is differentiated from the one of many "Selves" he discovers in Paris by his conduct in the affair, then Darrow's room must reflect that conduct.

In order to illustrate this link between Darrow's conduct and his room, the novel matches Darrow's conduct in, or approach to, the affair with his approach to the room. That is, Darrow treats the room and the affair in the same way and both the room and the affair produce the same effect on Darrow. Just as, at first, Darrow is able to disregard the room and to feel "for it only the contemptuous indifference of the traveller [sic] toward a provisional shelter," so too is he able, "[a]t the outset" of the affair, to feel "no special sense of responsibility" (61, 62). Now that Darrow is leaving the room and the affair is ending, he can no longer disregard them. The room "seemed to have taken complete possession of his mind . . . Every detail pressed itself on his notice with the familiarity of an accidental confident" and "jerked him back" (61). Darrow is, similarly, "forced into the unwilling contemplation of [the affair's] every aspect," despite the fact that it "was the kind of situation that was not helped by being thought over" (62).

The result of such contemplation is that the room becomes "an ugly indelible blot" that he "hated" with "a microscopic minuteness of loathing" right down to the "framed card of printed rules under the electric light" (61). The affair, too, is "thrown . . . out of perspective" in the sense that the "mystery of the middle distance" is "blotted out" and "every commonplace fact of the foreground" is "thrust into prominence" (62). That Darrow also hates the affair is clear when he states that, of all the details in the room, he "hated the door most of all . . ." (61, ellipses in original). Architecturally, the door is part of the room, but its main function has been to provide Darrow and Sophy (and likely "innumerable" other

lovers) direct private physical access to each other and thus a means, perhaps even a rationale, for misconduct.[130] The door, as both part of the room and part of the affair, links them together, actually as well as narratively, as the ellipses that follow Darrow's statement of hatred segues into his reminiscences of the "whole incident" that had occurred in this "vulgar setting" (62).

Darrow's approach to the room and the affair are so similar that he blurs the line between them and it is sometimes only clear to which he is referring by the variance of a single term like "incident" or "setting." This suggests that the two are not clearly separable in Darrow's mind, despite his attempts to both blame the room and to assert his difference from it by arguing that his personal effects make no mark upon it. Darrow simply does not want to see the ways in which his room resembles him or even a side of him (one of his Selves), and, based on his description of the room, it is easy to see why Darrow shrinks from such a comparison. The details Darrow now provides reveal that the carpet and wallpaper are "grimy" and there is dust on the clock, showing the room to be dirty and neglected. That the clock has a "gilt allegory," that the mantel-piece is "black marble," and that the "brown-counterpaned bed" is "high-bolstered" suggests a deceptiveness, as these objects are intended to cultivate a veneer of refinement and elegance that the room as a whole does not actually possess, as the dust,

---

[130] If "[m]anners for . . . Wharton functioned as doors" (Luria 305), then Darrow and Sophy's use of the door for the purposes of sexual intimacy can be considered a misuse. Darrow and Sophy's use of the door also conflicts with Luria's argument that "[t]hrough physical barriers—walls, doors, secluded chambers—literary architecture [in Wharton's work] provides the tangible support needed to resist transgression" (302).

the grime, "the framed card of printed rules under the electric light switch, and the door of communication with the next room" makes clear (61).

Although these details seem to describe the room alone, they become more nuanced when considered alongside the details that Darrow has previously provided. These details show the room to be "featureless" and dull, decorated in "*noncommittal* drabs and browns" with "carpet and paper that *nobody would remember*, and chairs and tables as *impersonal* as railway porters." The room, further, has a "sardonic, almost sinister . . . appearance of having *deliberately 'made up'* for its *anonymous* part" as "the makeshift setting of *innumerable transient collocations*" (60, my emphasis). These details of the room, in describing its impersonality, transitory nature, and ability to be forgotten, also describe what makes an affair an affair and not a long-term relationship. They, specifically, describe Darrow's affair and his conduct in it, and this affair, the additional details now make clear, is dirty, shabby, and deceptive, at least on Darrow's side.

In support of this description of the affair, we learn that Darrow has treated Sophy and their relationship with emotional reserve, neglect, and inconsideration, as, indeed, nothing more than a "provisional shelter." Once the physical side of the affair begins, for example, Darrow no longer listens to Sophy's words when she speaks as they no longer matter (209). It also never occurs to Darrow that Sophy might fall in love with him, or that he could be damaging her future. Darrow, in fact, admits he "never" thought of Sophy at all, either during or after

the affair, and that his "own vision of the part he had played in the brief episode of their relation" was "vague, in comparison with hers" (162, 120). When Darrow finally admits that the "incident had left in him a sense of exasperation and self-contempt," that he "had cut a sorry figure in the business," it is not only or even primarily because of his treatment of Sophy, but because "[h]e had fallen below his own standard of sentimental loyalty" (121). Darrow has disappointed himself.

Darrow's room, therefore, does reflect Darrow's conduct in the affair and, as an accurate reflection, forces Darrow to consider it in a way that "blotted out the mystery of the remoter planes and the enchantment of the middle distance, and thrust into prominence every commonplace fact of the foreground" (62). By forcing him to consider the situation and his conduct unromantically and objectively, Darrow eventually sees, as Koprince argues, "that his shabby hotel environment is actually a reflection of his own indecorous conduct" and that the affair is as "impersonal and transient as the room which he occupies at the Terminus Hotel in Paris" (15).

If Darrow truly does recognize this mirroring, then this would offer another reason why Darrow, despite claiming he could see everything in Sophy's room "with the same acuity of distinctness as the objects surrounding him," does not mention the kinds of objects that do surround him, objects like toilet bottles and brushes and razors, in Sophy's room (62). Just as Darrow, at least at first, claims not to see the mark of these things on his own room because he does not recognize that room as himself, so, too, would Darrow, in recognizing such

objects in Sophy's room, be unable to identify that room as the Sophy he knows, because these objects would personalize the room and thus Sophy, and this is the Sophy Darrow does not know and does not want to know, as this would show him that he had "cut a sorry figure in the business," not because he fell below his own standards of loyalty, but because he toyed with a human life for his own sexual gratification. If he does see the same things in Sophy's room as in his own as he claims (again minus the personal effects of private objects), then this means Darrow sees Sophy as "anonymous," "impersonal," "featureless" and forgettable. Sophy's personal objects would make the room a real Sophy with individual qualities, personal and unforgettable, and this is precisely what Darrow does not want.

Based on Darrow's conduct in the affair and his descriptions of the affair itself as revealed in his descriptions of the rooms, the relationship between Darrow and Sophy is not at all what would be considered proper in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As such, Anna's reaction to the affair is to try and convince Darrow that he must marry Sophy as this is the only solution, in Anna's world, to this improper relationship. That is, those who would not be "ruined" by nineteenth-century standards would not have engaged in sexual intercourse before marriage and would also have found it improper to enter a private space such as a bedroom where instruments of grooming and other private objects would be kept. Access to private objects and spaces and to their owner would, therefore, be granted simultaneously and properly upon marriage, so that access

to these objects and spaces would indicate access to the owner (and vice versa). As Darrow and Sophy already have this access, the only way to maintain any level of propriety—to save the ruined Sophy—would be for Darrow and Sophy to marry. Based on the proper relations between people and objects, marriage, Anna assumes, is what Sophy must have "expected" and "relied on" (231).

When it is suggested that Darrow and Sophy could have had access to each other's private selves and posessions and yet somehow ignore the very personalness of it, Anna cannot understand this and demands of Darrow, "what *is* she? What are you?" (231). The relationship and the actions of the two do not make sense to Anna because Anna has experienced nothing in her "real life" that would prepare, explain or justify such a disruption of the proper relations of things. The affair shows Anna that although access to private selves and spaces is granted simultaneously, such access is not only granted properly, but can also result from passion and, thus, is not tied to and does not necessarily lead to marriage, which leaves Anna questioning what constitutes such a passion. When Darrow tries to explain, Anna wonders what he means by "a moment's folly, a flash of madness" and how "people enter on such adventures, [and] how [they] pass out of them without more visible traces of their havoc." When Anna admits that she does not understand and does not want to understand "such things," Darrow "almost harshly" responds, "[d]on't be afraid . . . you never will." Anna, Darrow tells her, is "too high . . . too fine . . . such things are too far from you"

(233, ellipses in original). As Anna begins to perceive what her life is going to be like without Darrow, however, "such things" begin to make sense.

After Anna has spent a few days in agony over her loss, Darrow reappears and tells Anna it is not "anything to be proud of, to know so little of the strings that pull us," and insists that if Anna "knew a little more," he "could tell [her] how such things happen without offending [her]; and perhaps [she would] listen without condemning [him]." Anna admits to herself that she does understand and has "understood ever since" Darrow's arrival: "For she was aware, in her own bosom, of sensations so separate from her romantic thoughts of him that she saw her body and soul divided against themselves" (249). This understanding, through a recognition of her own budding passion, leads to Anna's belief that she "could never give him up" (251). Anna's feels an "added intensity" in her feelings for Darrow, a sense of "passionate dependence," as though she has "passed through some fiery initation" which teaches her that she has "weaknesses and strengths she had not dreamed of" (251, 252). But, when Anna realizes how little trust she now has in Darrow, she decides once again that they must part.

During what Anna believes is to be their final goodbye, she is so overcome with emotion outside Darrow's bedroom door that Darrow leads Anna into the room and closes the door in order to keep others from hearing her and thus to, ironically, maintain propriety. Once in this private space, Anna suddenly understands that the proper functions of objects, like the proper relationships between people, are not allways adequately described by these designations. In

Darrow's room, Anna sees that there is a connection between people and things, beginning with Darrow's ability to affect his room at Givré so that it now reflects Darrow. Anna sees how the lamp shines on his books and papers, that he has brought an arm-chair by the fire, and that his "objects" are "scattered" on the dressing-table, and smells his cigars in the now "faintly smoke-scented" room. In her consideration of these things, Anna realizes that this "was the first time she had ever been in a room he lived in, among his personal possessions and the traces of his daily usage," and what Anna discovers is that "[e]very object about her seemed to contain a particle of himself: the whole air breathed of him, steeping her in the sense of his intimate presence" (269). Anna discovers that being in a room where Darrow lives and among Darrow's "personal possessions" constitutes an intimate knowledge of Darrow himself, a way in which to feel "his intimate presence" such as Anna has never considered before, because, she finally sees, Darrow's objects are part of Darrow.

This experience, even more so than the physical, sexual act itself, seems to cause Anna the most pain when she thinks of Sophy and Darrow. When "she pictured them alone in such a scene" she realizes "[t]his is what Sophy Viner knew," the experience of being in Darrow's private room where "the things he used had been strewn about." This experience, this way of feeling another's "intimate presence" through access to that person's private space and personal possessions naturally seems to lead, in Anna's mind, to the most intimate way one can know another's presence, as it must have for Darrow and Sophy.

Therefore, when Darrow seems not to consider giving Anna access to his body as he had with Sophy, despite the fact that Anna is in his bedroom and has access to his private objects, this hurts and confuses Anna, making her wonder "why not?" (270). That is, now that Anna should have that simultaneous dual access that she once believed was only granted properly upon marriage, she does not understand why she only seems to have access to Darrow's private objects. It is as if Darrow has kept his side of the partition locked while Anna stands with her door wide open. Being in this position of intimate proximity to Darrow through her intimate proximity to his objects and space has, in Anna's reconsideration of proper relationships, what Anna would now consider the proper effect. That is, Anna has decided that, "once before they parted—since part they must—she longed to be to him all that Sophy Viner had been" (270).

Despite this position and due to her proper training, Anna is unable to find a way to relate her desire to know the most intimate side of Darrow, to "find a word or imagine a gesture that should express her meaning," and thus to finally experience passion. In her "helplessness," Anna notices "a note-case she had given [Darrow]. It was worn at the corners with the friction of his pocket and distended with thickly packed papers. She wondered if he carried her letters in it, and she put her hand out and touched it" (270). Anna, inexperienced as she is with the system functions of things, does not know how to use the note-case (or any other object) to express herself and her desires as Cassandra could. The result is that, rather than becoming an expression of her desire, the note-case

becomes the object of it, a substitute for Darrow, and the experience is, indeed, almost sexual.

Anna's erotic experience with the note-case is possible because of what Anna imagines is within it: her letters. With this expression of their relationship, this link between Anna and Darrow in mind, "[a]ll that he and she had ever felt or seen, their close encounters of word and look, and the closer contact of their silences, trembled through her at the touch [of the note-case]." Anna remembers things Darrow said and "ways he had" been, and "[t]he faint warmth of her girlish love came back to her, gathering heat as it passed through her thoughts; and her heart rocked like a boat on the surge of its long long memories. 'It's because I love him in too many ways,' she thought; and slowly she turned to the door" (270). Anna makes no further attempt to seduce or be seduced by Darrow, as her contact with the note-case that she imagines is filled with her letters provides Anna with what she believes is the intimacy she is seeking.[131]

The letters Anna imagines are in the case become like the books and poetry describing passion Anna has read. These texts function only to tell a story, to produce feelings, and to describe concepts—concepts that Anna still does not fully know herself, because she does not know how to find it outside of her proper world. The concept these texts, books and letters, produce, Anna still apparently believes, is all they are meant to produce; there is no action to follow. Just as

---

[131] Anna's conduct here seems to prove Luria's argument that, in Wharton's life and in her writing, the rooms deepest in the house ultimately "led to restraint—to a space where one imagined, but resisted, the actual possession of one's innermost desires" (301).

Anna, as a young girl, found kissing less real than discussing books and having Darrow "insinuate the eternal theme of their love into" them, Anna is now once again satisfied with the representations of feelings in texts instead of acting upon those feelings and experiencing them physically. Anna, despite her growing understanding of passion, again confirms her grasp of the lesson that one should not "mix up things you read about with things you do," and things maintain their proper functions (149).

Anna's failure with the one object on which she truly focuses is not only her inability to use it for expression, allowing it, instead, to become a substitution, but also in the fact that she does not grant the object individuality. These mistakes are in fact linked, as it is in her ignorance of this individuality that the note-case is able to provide Anna with her near sexual experience. Anna assumes that the case holds her letters because this is, in her view, the object's proper function: A note-case is supposed to hold letters, Anna has given this case to Darrow, and she believes, despite his affair, that Darrow loves her as much as she loves him. This love is apparently a love that would cause Darrow to save every letter Anna has ever written him, including those from their first romance (those that evoke her "girlish love"), and even encourage him to carry these letters around with him. (This seems unlikely from the readers' point of view, as we know that once Anna's letter finally arrives in Paris to explain the delay she has requested, Darrow throws it into the fire unopened, and then kisses Sophy). The attachment to her letters that Anna imagines exists leads her

to believe they might be in the note-case, and the memories, stories and feelings these letters evoke causes Anna to feel a sexual heat.

Anna, however, never opens the case to confirm that her letters are, in fact, held there. Had Anna opened it, or at least questioned its contents, this would have illustrated that she is not mislead by proper function but is actually able to consider the other possible functions of an object based on that object's individuality. That Anna has not achieved this level of object appreciation is evident in the fact that she does not even consider the simplest alternative function: that the object is a case that holds things other than her private letters. By not opening Darrow's note-case, Anna allows the case to maintain its secrets, as Bachelard would say, as once objects are opened, "[t]he outside has no more meaning" because "the dimension of intimacy has just opened up" (85). Anna, by not considering the case's "intimacy" or object individuality, therefore allows boxes to be just boxes, so that Darrow's note-case can actualy become indistinguishable from Fraser Leath's snuff-boxes.

Just as Darrow's note-case, based on Anna's assumptions rather than a consideration of object individuality, represents Darrow's passion and love for her, Mr Leath's snuff-boxes simply represent, for Anna, her husband's stuffiness, seriousness, lack of passion, and conventionality. Details about these snuff-boxes, like the notecase, are absent. Even after Anna becomes more aware of the realities of life, by discovering that affairs take place between otherwise respectable people and that she harbors passion within herself, she still does not

reconsider the snuff-boxes, despite suddenly questioning what it was that her husband might have done when he went to Paris "rather regularly[,] ostensibly to attend sales and exhibitions" (253). Anna even imagines him "walking furtively down a quiet street, and looking about him before he slipped into a doorway." Anna admits that "if she had been asked what she supposed he thought about when they were apart, she would instantly have answered: his snuff-boxes. It had never occurred to her that he might have passions, interests, preoccupations of which she was absolutely ignorant." Anna still, that is, links her husband's snuff-boxes with passionlessness even after temporarily "transposing Fraser Leath into a Don Juan" (253). If Anna had examined these boxes more deeply, perhaps she would have discovered important information about her husband and Darrow, but Anna never seems to consider the potential, despite seeing both boxes as part of the men who own them.

As Anna prepares to leave Darrow's room, unable, as she is, to use these objects to her advantage, Darrow recognizes Anna's need for physical contact with something of his for what it is: as a substitute for physical contact with him. Understanding that Anna does not know how to tell him what she wants, Darrow meets Anna at the door and takes her in his arms. What follows this action is Darrow and Anna's consummation, a conclusion generally accepted by critics. Not only is it clear Anna wants to have sex with Darrow—"to be to him all that Sophy Viner had been"—but the following day Anna also reveals that "[s]he was now his, his for life, there could never again be any question of sacrificing herself

. . ." (272, ellipses in original). This statement suggests that Anna and Darrow have finally engaged in sexual intercourse both because it reveals that something dramatic has happened to make Anna change her mind, again, about her and Darrow's future, and because whatever happened leaves Anna believing marriage is the only possible outcome, proving, once again, that she has not completely overcome her ideas about propriety.

The result of this consummation, in addition to revealing true passion to Anna, is a "suspicious tyrannical tenderness [in Anna's love for Darrow] that seemed to deprive it of all serenity" (273), as well as a new suspiciousnes in her approach to objects and spaces. In Paris, where Darrow and Anna have gone the day after their consummation, Anna cannot help but imagine that everyplace she goes with Darrow, Darrow has been there before with Sophy. Every restaurant, theater and private room becomes a source of suspicion, and Anna "could not shake off her superstitious dread of being with him in any of the scenes of the Parisian episode," despite knowing that "whenever she was in Darrow's arms she was where the girl had been before her" (281).

In a sense, Darrow becomes his room in the eyes of Anna. Whenever Anna is anywhere with Darrow, whenever she is among his personal possessions in his private spaces, even whenever she is in his arms, Anna will recall that Sophy has been there, too. As Darrow himself recognizes, "[w]henever you see me you remember . . . you associate me with things you abhor" (282). Darrow is a room Anna cannot live in, and yet cannot live without: what is dingy

and deceptive will always haunt her, and what is mysterious will always attract her. While the novel remains somewhat ambiguous as to whether Anna and Darrow remain together, the novel makes it clear that Anna will be unhappy in either case: If they remain together, they will continue to live on opposite sides of an "insurmountable wall" (280), and if they separate, Anna will feel forever homeless.

CONCLUSION

Shaking the Secret Selves out of Snuff-Boxes

Imagining how things might have been different for Anna if she had been able to use objects in the ways the other characters do also leads one to imagine how various the stories of object use in nineteenth-century women's literature would be if they were examined. Even with just the four examples I have considered here, one can imagine the possibilities depending on the object, the desire, and the character. Consider what the result might have been if the narrator of "The Yellow Wall-Paper" had had a mirror in her room along with the wallpaper, or what Gabriella might have done if she had been able to decorate her own home rather than face the paintings and statues adored by her husband, or even what might have happened if she had simply covered them all with blue chintz. Cassandra, as the most self developed character, would, one can also imagine, have torn down the wallpaper before it made her crazy, smashed the statues and opened the various boxes to reveal their secrets. Variations on these stories, those actually in the texts and those hypothetically presented here, are what await readers of nineteenth-century women's fiction if only we acknowledge women's ipseity and allow objects their individuality.

In stressing an object's individuality in this project, I do not mean to suggest objects are completely, inherently meaningful. In this regard I agree with

Bronner that "[o]bjects do not speak for themselves. They are interpreted" (*Grasping Things* 212). I would also argue that objects are not empty signifiers devoid of any meaning because their individuality limits and directs the ways in which they can be interpreted. When Bronner further writes that "objects made and used are not meant to be understood by all. They have hidden messages waiting for explanation, a fact that in itself holds a story" (212), I would contend that an object's individuality determines who understands it and what messages it may contain, as well as what effects it has on the possessor and her developing selfhood, and that this fact "in itself holds a story."

This story, as Gilman's "The Yellow Wall-Paper" models, is revealed through a reader's act of examining a text in order to uncover another layer of meaning, meaning that is bound to an appreciation of a domestic object's individuality. The reading done in "The Yellow Wall-Paper"—the treatment of a domestic object as a scholarly text—in this sense mimics the reading done throughout this project. What the narrator learns in her own examination of the domestic object—an object which, for her, is the entire text—suggests what I hope my work as a whole here illustrates. This lesson is that, if we do not treat the seemingly benign objects that surround women as significant narrative signs, we might never be able to free the selves of women trapped within the descriptions of the domestic interiors depicted in nineteenth-century women's texts, no matter how hard we pull and they shake.

Bibliography

Alaimo, Stacy. "Elizabeth Stoddard's *The Morgesons*: A Feminist Dialogue of Bildungand Descent." *Legacy: A Journal of Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers* 8.1 (1991): 29-37.

Alcott, Louisa May. *The Inheritance*.1849. Ed. Joel Myerson and Daniel Shealy. New York: Dutton, 1997.

---. *Little Women*. 1868. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998.

---. *A Long Fatal Love Chase*. New York: Random, 1995.

Alkana, Joseph. "Translating the Self: Between Discord and Individualism in American Literary History." *The Social Self: Hawthorne, Howells, William James, and Nineteenth-Century Psychology*. Lexington, KY: UP of Kentucky, 1997. 1-27.

Alves, Jaime Osterman. "Home Coming and Home Leaving: Interrogations of Domesticity in Elizabeth Stoddard's Harper's Fiction, 1859-1891." *American Culture, Canons, and the Case of Elizabeth Stoddard*. Ed. Robert McClure Smith and Ellen Weinauer. Tuscaloosa, AL: U of Alabama P, 2003. 149-79.

Andrews, William, ed. *To Tell A Free Story. The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760-1865.* Urbana: U of Chicago P, 1988.

Appadurai, Arjun. *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1986.

Ardener, Shirley. Introduction. *Women and Space: Ground Rules and Social Maps*. By Ardener. New York: St. Martin's, 1981. 11-34.

Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1958.

Arneil, Barbara. "Colonialism: Locke's Theory of Property." *John Locke and America: The Defense of English Colonialism*. New York: Oxford UP, 1996. 132-67.

Arthur, T.S. (Timothy Shay). *Advice to young ladies on their duties and conduct in Life*. Boston: Phillips and Sampson, 1848. *Everyday Life & Women in America c. 1800-1920*. Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture, Duke University and The New York Public Library. Adam Matthews Publications. 2 Oct. 2007 <http://www.everydaylife.

amdigital.co.uk/collections Document. aspx?docref= Advicetoyoungladiesontheirdutiesandconductinlife>.

Attfield, Judy. *Wild Things: The Material Culture of Everyday Life*. Oxford: Berg, 2000.

Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Trans. By Maria Jolas. New York: Orion, 1964.

Bailin, Miriam. "The New Victorians." *Functions of Victorian Culture At The Present Time*. Ed. Christine L. Krueger. Athens: Ohio UP, 2002. 37-46.

Bak, John S., "Escaping the Jaundiced Eye: Foucauldian Panopticism in Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper.'" *Studies in Short Fiction* 31.1 (1994): 39-46.

Banner, Lois. *American Beauty*. New York: Knopf, 1983.

Barnes, Elizabeth L. "Mirroring the Mother Text: Histories of Seduction in the American Domestic Novel." Singley and Sweeney 157-71.

Barquist, David L. *American Tables and Looking Glasses: In the Mabel Brady Garvan and Other Collections at Yale University*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1992.

Basch, Norma. "Invisible Women: The Legal Fiction of Marital Unity in Nineteenth-Century America." *Feminist Studies* 5. 2 (1979): 346-66.

Bates Dock, Julie, et. al. "'But One Expects That': Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper' and the Shifting Light of Scholarship." *PMLA* 111.1 (1996):52-65.

Baumgarnter, Barbara. "Intimate Reflections: Body, Voice, and Identity in Stoddard's *The Morgesons*." *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 47.3 (2001): 185-211.

Baym, Nina. *Women's Fiction: A Guide to Novels By and About Women in America 1820-70*. 2nd ed. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1978, 1993.

Beecher, Catharine E. and Harriet Beecher Stowe. 1869. *The American Women's Home*. Ed. Nicole Tonkovich. Hartford, CT: Harriet Beecher Stowe Center 2002.

Bellamy, Edward. *Looking Backwards*. 1888. New York: New American

Library, 2000.

Benstock, Shari. "Edith Wharton's House of Fictions." *Rivista di Studi Vittoriani* 9. 5 (2000): 55-73

Bentley, Nancy. "Matter on the Mind." Rev. of *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature*, by Bill Brown. *American Quarterly* 56.1 (2004): 193-200.

Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing.* London: British Broadcasting Corp. and Penguin, 1972.

Berlant, Lauren. "The Queen of American goes to Washington City: Harriet Jacobs, Francis Harper, and Anita Hill." *American Literature* 65.3 (1993): 549-74.

Blackford, Holly. "Vital Signs at Play: Objects as Vessels of Mother-Daughter Discourse in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women.*" *Children's Literature: Annual of The Modern Language Association Division on Children's Literature and The Children's Literature Association* 34 (2006): 1-36.

Bontemps, Arna. *Great Slave Narratives.* Boston: Beacon, 1969.

Bowlby, Rachel. *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing and Zola.* New York: Methuen, 1983.

Bronner, Simon J., ed. *Consuming Visions: Accumulation and Display of Goods in America, 1880-1920.* New York: Norton, 1989.

---. *Grasping Things: Folk Material Culture and Mass Society in America.* Lexington: U of Kentucky P, 1986.

Brown, Bill. "Reification, Reanimation, and the American Uncanny." *Critical Inquiry* 32 (2006): 175-207.

---. *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature.* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2004.

---. "A Thing About Things: The Art of Decoration in the Work of Henry James." *The Henry James Review* 23.3 (2002): 222-32.

---. "Thing Theory." *Things.* Spec. issue of *Critical Inquiry* 28.1 (2001): 1-22.

---. "The Tyranny of Things (Trivia in Karl Marx and Mark Twain)."*Critical*

Inquiry 28.2 (2002): 442-69.

Brown, Gillian. *Domestic Individualism: Imagining Self in Nineteenth-Century America.* Berkeley: U of California P, 1990.

Brown, William Hill. *The Power of Sympathy.* 1789. *The Power of Sympathy and The Coquette.* Ed. Carla Mulford. New York: Penguin, 1996. 1-103.

Brumburg, Joan Jacobs . *The Body Project. An Intimate History of American Girls.* New York: Random, 1997.

Bryden, Inga, and Janet Floyd, eds. *Domestic Space: Reading the Nineteenth-Century Interior.* Manchester: Manchester UP, 1999.

Buehr, Walter. *Home Sweet Home in the Nineteenth Century.* New York: Crowell, 1965.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity.* New York: Routledge, 1999.

Cayton, Mary Kupiec. *Emerson's Emergence: Self and Society in the Transformation of New England, 1800-1845.* Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1989.

Çelikkol, Ayse. "The Morgesons, Aesthetic Predicaments, and the Competitive Logic of the Market Economy." *American Literature.* 78.1 (2006): 29-57.

Chapin, E. H. (Edwin Hubbell). *Duties of young women.* Boston: Universalist, 1869.*Everyday Life & Women in America c. 1800-1920.* Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture, Duke University and The New York Public Library. Adam Matthews. 2 Oct. 2007 <http://www. everydaylife. amdigital.co.uk/ Document.aspx?docref= DutiesofYoungWomen>.

Chodorow, Nancy. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender.* Berkeley: U of California P, 1978.

Chopin, Kate. *The Awakening.* 1899. Ed. Nancy A. Walker. 2nd ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000.

Cohen, Margaret and Christopher Prendergast, eds. *Spectacles of Realism: Body, Gender, Genre.* Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1995.

Cohen, William A. "Material Interiority in Charlotte Brontë's 'The Professor.'"

Nineteenth-Century Literature 57. 4 (2003): 443-76.

Cohn, Jan. "The Houses of Fiction: Domestic Architecture in Howells and Edith Wharton." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language: A Journal of the Humanities* 15 (1973): 537-49.

Colley, Ann C. "Bodies and Mirrors: The Childhood Interiors of Ruskin, Pater and Stevenson." Bryden and Floyd 40-57.

Comstock, Helen. *The Looking Glass in America 1700-1825.* New York: Viking, 1968.

The Concise Oxford English Dictionary, 11th ed. revised. Ed. Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson. Oxford University Press, 2006. Oxford Reference Online. Oxford University Press. Rice University. 17 August 2007 http://www. oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview =Main&entry=t23.e12982.

Cooley, Charles Horton. *Human Nature and The Social Order.* 1902. 22 March 2007. *Internet Archive.* 5 March 2008 <http://www.archive.org/ details/humannaturesocia00cooluoft >.

Cott, Nancy F. *The Bonds of Womanhood.* 2nd ed. New Haven: Yale UP, 1977, 1997.

Coulson, Victoria. "Sticky Realism: Armchair Hermeneutics in Late James." *The Henry James Review* 25.2 (2004): 115-26.

Cowan, Ruth Schwartz. "Ellen Swallow Richards: Technology and Women." *Technology in America: A History of Individuals and Ideas.* Ed. Carroll W. Pursell. Cambridge, Mass: MIT P, 1981. 142-50.

Craft, William and Ellen. *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom or The Escape of William and Ellen Craft from Slavery.* 1860. New York: Arno, 1969.

Crafts, Hannah. *The Bondwoman's Narrative.* Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. New York: Warner, 2002.

Crane, Stephen. *Maggie: a Girl of the Streets.* 1893. *The Red Badge of Courage, Maggie: a Girl of the Streets, and Other Selected Writings.* Ed. Phyllis Frus and Stanley Corkin. Boston: Houghton, 2000. 77-129.

Crary, Jonathan. *Techniques of the Observer. On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century.* Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 1990.

Creamer, Hannah Gardner. *Delia's Doctors.* 1852. Intro. Nina Baym. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2003.

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly and Eugene Rochberg-Halton. *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self.* New York: Cambridge UP, 1981.

Culler Johnathan. *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism.* Ithaca, New York: Cornell UP, 1982.

Cummins, Maria Susanna. *The Lamplighter.* 1854. Ed. Nina Baym. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1988.

Cutter, Martha J. *Unruly Tongue: Identity and Voice in American Women's Writing, 1850-1930.* Jackson: U P of Mississippi, 1999.

Dant, Tim. *Material Culture in the Social World: Values, Activities, Lifestyles.* Buckingham: Open UP, 1999.

Davidson, Cathy. *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America.* New York: Oxford UP, 1986.

Davis, Cynthia J., "Love and Economics: Charlotte Perkins Gilman on 'The Woman Question,'" *American Transcendental Quarterly* 19. 4 (2005): 243-58.

De Grave, Kathleen. "The Writer as Confidence Woman." *Swindler, Spy, Rebel: The Confidence Woman in Nineteenth-century America.* Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1995. 188-234.

de Wolfe, Elsie. *The House in Good Taste.* 1914. 17 Jan. 2005. Project Gutenberg. 27 Nov. 2007. <http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/DLDecArts/DLDecArts-idx?type=turn&entity=DLDecArts.deWolfeHouse>.

Dickinson, Emily. "Poems." McMichael 2271-305.

Dobson, Joanne. "'Read the Bible and sew more': Domesticity and the Woman's Novel in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America." *American Studies* 36.1 (1991): 24-30.

Donald, Moira. "Tranquil havens? Critiquing the Idea of Home as the Middle-Class Sanctuary." Bryden and Floyd 103-20.

Donawerth, Jane. "Nineteenth-Century United States Conduct Book Rhetoric by Women." *Rhetoric Review* 21.1 (2002): 5-21.

Douglas, Ann. *The Feminization of American Culture.* New York: Farrar, 1977.

Douglas, Mary. "The Genuine Article." Riggins, *The Socialness of Things* 9-22.

Douglas, Mary and Baron Isherwood. *The World of Goods: Towards An Anthropology of Consumption.* New York : Basic, 1979.

Douglass, Frederick. *My Bondage and My Freedom.* 1855. Ed. and intro. William Andrews. Urbana: U of Chicago P, 1987.

Dreiser, Theodore. *Jennie Gerhardt.* Ed. and intro. James L. W. West III. 1911. New York: Penguin, 1992.

---. *Sister Carrie.* 1900. Ed. Berkey, John C. et al. Intro. Alfred Kazin. New York: Penguin, 1981.

Dubois, W.E.B. *Souls of Black Folk.* 1903. Millwood, NY: Kraus-Thomson, 1973.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson.* 2nd series. Ed. Alfred R. Ferguson. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1994.

---. "Friendship." *Collected Works* 341-54.

---. "Gifts." *Collected Works* 535-38.

---. *Selected Essays.* Ed. and intro. Larzer Ziff. New York: Viking, 1982.

Entwistle, Joanne and Elizabeth Wilson, eds. *Body Dressing.* New York: Berg, 2001.

Erlich, Gloria C. "The Sexual Education of Edith Wharton." *Literature and Psychology* 36.1/2 (1990): 26-49.

Feldman, Jessica R. "A Talent for the Disagreeable": Elizabeth Stoddard Writes *The Morgesons.*" *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 58.2 (2003): 202-29.

Fern, Fanny [Sara Payson Willis]. *Ruth Hall: A Domestic Tale of the Present Time*. 1855. Intro. Susan Belasco Smith. New York: Penguin, 1997.

Fine, Ben. *The World of Consumption: The Material and Cultural Revisited*. New York: Routledge, 2002.

Foster, Frances. "'In Respect to Females . . .': Differences in the Portrayals of Women by Male and Female Narrators." *Black American Literature Forum* 15.2 (1981): 66-70.

Foster, Hannah Webster. *The Coquette*. 1797. *The Power of Sympathy and The Coquette*. Ed. Carla Mulford. New York: Penguin, 1996. 105-242.

Foster, Patricia. *Minding the Body. Women Writers on Body and Soul*. New York: Doubleday, 1994.

Freedgood, Elaine. *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2006.

Freud, Sigmund. *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. New York: Basic, 1975.

Fryer, Judith. *Felicitous Space: The Imaginative Structures of Edith Wharton and Willa Cather*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1986.

Fuller, Margaret. *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. 1855. *The Portable Margaret Fuller*. Ed. Mary Kelley. New York: Penguin, 1994.

Funston, Judith E. "Clocks and Mirrors, Dreams and Destinies: Edith Wharton's The Old Maid." *Edith Wharton, New Critical Essays*. Ed. Alfred Bendixzen and Annette Zilversmit. New York: Garland,1992. 143-57.

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman: An Autobiography*. 1935. New York: Arno, 1972.

---. *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution*. 1898. Berkeley: U of California P, 1998. <http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft896nb5rd/>.

---. "The Yellow Wall-Paper" (1892). *Herland, The Yellow Wall-Paper, and Selected Writings*. Ed. and intro. Denise D. Knight. New York: Penguin, 1999. 166-82.

Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The*

Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination. 2nd ed. New Haven: Yale UP, 2000.

Glazener, Nancy. *Reading for Realism: The History of a U.S. Literary Institution, 1850-1910.* Durham: Duke UP, 1997.

Godey's Lady's Book. 1830-1882. Accessible Archives. 2007. 24 March 2007. <http://www.accessible.com/accessible/search>.

Goldberg, Benjamin. *The Mirror and Man.* Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1985.

Golden, Catherine, "The Writing of 'The Yellow Wallpaper': A Double Palimpsest," *Studies in American Fiction* 17.2 (1989): 193-201.

Golden, Catherine J., and Joanna Schneider Zangrando, eds. *The Mixed Legacy of Charlotte Perkins Gilman.* Newark: U of Delaware P, 2000.

Gordon, Beverly. "Woman's Domestic Body: The Conceptual Conflation of Women and Interiors in the Industrial Age." *Winterthur Portfolio* 31. 4 (1996): 281-301.

Gordon, Jean, and Jan McArthur. "Living Patterns in Antebellum Rural America as Depicted by Nineteenth-Century Women Writers." *Winterthur Portfolio* 19.2/3 (1984): 177-92.

Gorsky, Susan Rubinow. *Femininity to Feminism: Women and Literature in the Nineteenth Century.* New York: Twayne, 1992.

Goshgarian, G. M. *To Kiss the Chastening Rod: Domestic Fiction and Sexual Ideology in the American Renaissance.* Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1992.

Green, Harvey. *The Light of the Home: An Intimate View of the Lives of Women in Victorian America.* New York: Pantheon, 1983.

Griffin, Amy A. "Tearing Down Walls: The message Behind Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper.'" *Notes on Contemporary Literature* 30.1 (2000): 10-12.

Hager, Christopher. "Hunger for the Literal: Writing and Industrial Change in Elizabeth Stoddard's *The Morgesons.*" *American Literature* 77.4 (2005): 699-728.

Halttunen, Karen. *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-*

Class Culture in America, 1830-1870. New Haven: Yale UP, 1982.

Halprin, Sara. *Look at my Ugly Face. Myths and Musings on Beauty and Other Perilous Obsessions with Women's Appearance*. New York: Viking, 1995.

Haney-Peritz, Janice. "Monumental Feminism and Literature's Ancestral House: Another Look at 'The Yellow Wallpaper.'" Meyering 95-107.

Handlin, David P. *The American Home Architecture and Society, 1815-1915* . Boston: Little,1979.

Harper, Frances. *Iola Leroy*. 1892. Intro. Frances Smith Foster. New York: Oxford UP, 1988.

Harris, Susan K. "Stoddard's *The Morgesons*: A Contextual Evaluation." *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 31.1 (1985): 11-22.

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. "The Birth Mark." 1843. McMichael 1099-110.

---. *Blithedale Romance*. 1852. Intro. Annette Kolodny. New York: Penguin, 1983.

---. *The House of the Seven Gables*. 1851. Afterword Brenda Wineapple. New York: Signet, 2001.

---. "The Minister's Black Veil." 1836. McMichael 1090-99.

---. "Monsieur du Miroir." *Tales and Sketches by Nathaniel Hawthorne*. Comp. Roy Harvey Pearce. New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1982. 395-405. <http://www.netlibrary.com/>.

---. "My Kinsman, Major Molineux." 1831. McMichael 1060-73.

---. *The Scarlet Letter*. 1850. McMichael 1181-1295.

---. "Young Goodman Brown." 1835. McMichael 1073-82.

Hedges, Elaine R. Afterword. *The Yellow Wallpaper*. 1892. By Charlotte Perkins Gilman. New York: Feminist, 1973. 37-63.

Heilman, Ann. "Overwriting Decadence: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Oscar Wilde, and the Feminization of Art in 'The Yellow Wallpaper.'" Golden and Zangrando 177-86.

Hellman, Mimi. "Furniture, Sociability, and the Work of Leisure in Eighteenth-

Century France." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32.4 (1999): 415-45.

Hentz, Caroline Lee. *Ernest Linwood.* 1856. Philadelphia: Peterson,1869.

Henwood, Dawn. "First-Person Storytelling in Elizabeth Stoddard's *The Morgesons*: Realism, Romance, and the Psychology of the Narrating Self." *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 41.1 (1995): 41-63.

Herbert, T. Walter. "Domesticity as Redemption." *Dearest Beloved: The Hawthornes and the Making of the Middle-Class Family.* Berkeley: U of California P,1993.199-211.

Herndl, Diane Price. *Invalid Women: Figuring Feminine Illness in American Fiction and Culture, 1840-1940.* Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1993.

Hochman, Barbara. "The Reading Habit and 'The Yellow Wallpaper.'" *American Literature* 74.1 (2002): 89-110.

Hollander, Anne. "Mirrors." *Seeing Through Clothes.* Berkeley: U of California P, 1993. 391-455.

Humphreys, Debra. "Power and Resistance in Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl.*" Singley and Sweeney 143-55.

ILAB: International League of Antiquarian Booksellers. Moore [sic], Hannah. The Shepherd of Salisbury-Plain. 3 Oct. 2007 <http://www.ilab.org/db/search.php?Author=&Title=shepherd+of+salisbury+plain>.

Ingemanson, Birgitta. "The Political Function of Domestic Objects in the Fiction of Aleksandra Kollontai." *Slavic Review* 48.1 (1989): 71-82.

Irwin, Michael. *Picturing: Description and Illusion in the Nineteenth-Century Novel.* Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1979.

Jacobs, Harriet. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl.* 1861. Ed. Jean Fagan Yellin. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1987.

James, Henry. *The Awkward Age.* 1899. Ed. and intro. Ronald Blythe. New York: Penguin, 1987.

---. *The Bostonians.* 1886. Ed. and intro. Charles R. Anderson. New York: Penguin, 1986.

---. *The Europeans.* 1878. Ed. and intro. Ian Campbell Ross. Oxford: Oxford

UP, 1985.

---. *The Golden Bowl.* 1904. Ed. and intro. Virginia Llewellyn Smith. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999.

---. *Portrait of a Lady.* 1881. Ed. Priscilla L. Watson. London: Everyman, 1995.

---. *The Spoils of Poynton.* 1897. Ed. and intro David Lodge. New York: Penguin, 1987.

---. *The Turn of the Screw and other Short Novels.* Fwd. Willard Throp. New York: Signet, 1962.

Jennings, Jan. "Controlling Passion: The Turn-of-the-Century Wallpaper Dilemma." *Winterthur Portfolio* 31.4 (1996): 243-64.

Jones Suzanne W. "Edith Wharton's 'Secret Sensitiveness, *The Decoration of Houses*, and Her Fiction." *Journal of Modern Literature* 21.2 (1997-98): 177-200.

Kahane, Clair. "Gothic Mirrors and Feminine Identity." *The Centennial Review* 24 (1980): 43-63.

Kaplan, Amy. "Crowded Spaces in The House of Mirth." *Edith Wharton's The House of Mirth.* Ed. and intro. Carol J. Singley. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003. 85-105.

---. "Manifest Domesticity." *No More Separate Spheres! A Next Wave American Studies Reader.* Ed., preface, and intro. Cathy N. Davidson and Jessamyn Hatcher. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2002.

Kaplan, Laurie. "Sir Walter Elliot's Looking-Glasses, Mary Musgrove's Sofa, and Anne Elliot's Chair: Exteriority/Interiority, Intimacy/Society." *Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal On-Line* 25.1 (2004): n. pag.

Keenan, Julian, et al. *The Face in the Mirror: The Search for the Origins of Consciousness.* New York: Harper, 2003.

Keetley, Dawn. "A Husband's Jealousy: Antebellum Murder Trials and Caroline Lee Hentz's *Ernest Linwood.*" *Legacy* 19.1 (2002): 26-34.

Kennard, Jean E. "Convention Coverage or How to Read Your Own Life." Meyering 75-94.

Kete, Mary Louise. *Sentimental Collaborations: Mourning and Middle-Class in Nineteenth Century America.* Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2000.

Kinchin, Juliet. "Interiors: Nineteenth-Century Essays on the 'Masculine' and the 'Feminine' Room." *The Gendered Object.* Ed. Pat Kirkham. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1996. 2-29.

Kinman, Alice H. "The Making of a Professional: Edith Wharton's *The Decoration of Houses.*" *South Atlantic Review* 65. 1 (2000): 98-122.

Kleinberg, S. J. "Gendered Space: Housing, Privacy and Domesticity in the Nineteenth-Century United States." Bryden and Floyd 142-61.

Knappett, Carl. "Photographs, Skeuomorphs and Marionettes: Some Thoughts on Mind, Agency and Object." *Journal of Material Culture* 7.1 (2002): 97-117.

Kolodny, Annette. "A Map for Rereading: Or, Gender and the Interpretation of Literary Texts." *New Literary History: A Journal of Theory and Interpretation* 11.3 (1980) : 451-67.

Koprince, Susan. "Edith Wharton's Hotels." *Massachusetts Studies in English* 10.1 (1985): 12-23.

La Belle, Jenijoy. *Herself Beheld: The Literature of the Looking-Glass.* Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988.

Lacan, Jaques. "The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience." *Ecrits.* Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Norton, 1977.

Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought.* New York: Basic, 1999.

Lancaster, Jane. "'I Could Easily Have Been an Acrobat': Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the Providence Ladies' Sanitary Gymnasium." *American Transcendental Quarterly* 8.1 (1994): 33-52.

Larcom, Lucy. *A New England Girlhood.* 1889. New York: Corinth, 1961.

Lerner, Gerda, ed. *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History.* New York: Vintage, 1972.

Levine, Donald N., ed. and intro. Introduction. *On Individuality And Social Forms*. By Georg Simmel. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1971.

Levy, Andrew. "Edith Wharton: The Muse's Strategy." *Genre* 24.2 (1991): 155-71.

Logan, Thad. "Decorating Domestic Space: Middle-Class Women and Victorian Interiors." *Keeping the Victorian House: A Collection of Essays*. Ed. and intro. Vanessa D. Dickerson. New York: Garland, 1995. 207-34.

---. *The Victorian Parlour: A Cultural Study*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001.

London, Jack. *Before Adam*. New York: Macmillan, 1907.

----. *Call of the Wild, White Fang, and To Build A Fire*. New York: Modern Library, 1998.

----. *Daughter of the Snows*. London: Nelson, 1913.

----. "The Game." London: Heinemann, 1905.

Luria, Sarah. "Henry James, Edith Wharton, and The Mount." *Domestic Space: Reading the Nineteenth-Century Interior*. Bryden and Floyd 186-209.

Lynn, Catherine. "Colors and Other Materials of Historic Wallpaper." *Conservation of Historic Wallpaper*. Spec. issue of *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation* 20.2 (1981): 58-65.

Mahoney, Lynn. *Elizabeth Stoddard and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2003.

Marblehead Historical Society. *Looking Glasses in America:1700-1840*. Marblehead, MA: Marblehead Hist. Soc.,1996.

"Married Women's Property Acts." *The Reader's Companion to American History*. Eds. Eric Foner and John A. Garraty. Boston: Houghton, 1991. Answers.com 06 Nov. 2007 <http://www.answers.com/topic/married-women-s-property-acts>.

Matlack, James H. "Hawthorne and Elizabeth Barstow Stoddard." *The New England Quarterly*, 50.2 (1977): 278-302.

Matter-Siebel, Sabina. "Subverting the Sentimental: Elizabeth Barstow Stoddard's *The Morgesons*." *Flip Sides: New Critical Essays on American Literature*. Ed. Klaus H. Schmidt. Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1995. 15-41.

Maupassant, Guy de. "Bric-A-Brac." *Complete Short Stories* 782-85.

---. *Complete Short Stories of Guy de Maupassant*. Intro Artine Artinian. Garden City, NY: Hanover, 1955.

---. "Madame Hermet." *Complete Short Stories* 95-100.

---. "Who Knows?" *Complete Short Stories* 1268-76.

McMichael, George. *Anthology of American Literature. Volume 1: Colonial Through Romantic*. 5th ed. New York: Macmillan, 1993.

Mead, George Herbert. *The Individual and the Social Self*. Ed. David L. Miller Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1982.

Meir, Natalie Kapetanios. "'A Fashionable Dinner is Arranged as Follows': Victorian Dining Taxonomies." *Victorian Literature and Culture* 33 (2005): 133–48.

Melany, Lilia. "The Angel in the House." Brooklyn College, Department of English. 2005. 31 July 2007. <http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/ english/melani/novel_19c/thackeray/angel.html>.

Melchoir-Bonnet, Sabine. *The Mirror*. Trans. Katharine H. Jewett; preface Jean Delumeau. New York: Routledge, 2001.

Melville, Herman. "Bartleby, The Scrivener." 1853. McMichael 1301-26.

---. *Moby Dick*. 1851. New York: Penguin, 1992.

Merish, Lori. "The Doubleness of Things." Rev. of *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature*, by Bill Brown. *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 38.1 (2004): 111-13.

---. *Sentimental Materialism: Gender, Commodity Culture, and Nineteenth-Century American Literature*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2000.

Meyering, Sheryl L., ed and intro. *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: The Woman and Her Work*. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1989.

Michie, Helena. *The Flesh Made Word: Female Figures and Women's Bodies.* New York: Oxford UP, 1987.

Notaro, Anna. "Space and Domesticity in 'The Yellow Wallpaper' by Charlotte Perkins Gilman." *Journal of American Studies of Turkey* 10 (1999): 59-68.

Newton, Sarah E. *Learning to Behave: A Guide to American Conduct Books Before 1900.* Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1994.

Norris, Frank. *McTeague.* 1899. New York: Signet New American Library, 1964.

Otto, Celia Jackson. *American Furniture of the Nineteenth Century.* New York: Viking, 1965.

Owens, E. Suzanne. "The Ghostly Double Behind the Wallpaper in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper.'" *Haunting the House of Fiction: Feminist Perspectives on Ghost Stories by American Women.* Ed. Lynette Carpenter and Wendy K. Kolmar. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P,1991. 64-79.

The Oxford English Dictionary. 2nd ed. 1989. OED Online. Oxford University Press. 4 Apr. 2000 <http://dictionary.oed.com/>.

Pattison, Mary. *Principles of Domestic Engineering; or the What, Why and How of a Home.* New York: Trow, 1915. 21 February 2007. Internet Archive. 21 February 2008 <http://www.archive.org/details/principlesofdome00pattrich>.

Peiss, Kathy. *Hope in a Jar. The Making of American's Beauty Culture.* New York: Metropolitan, 1998.

Pendergrast, Mark. *Mirror Mirror: A History of the Human Love Affair with Reflection.* New York: Basic, 2003.

Penner, Louise. "Domesticity and Self-Possession in *The Morgesons* and *Jane Eyre.*" *Studies in American Fiction* 27.2 (1999): 131-47.

Pfister, Joel. Introduction. *The Production of Personal Life. Class, Gender, and the Psychological in Hawthorne's Fiction.* Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1991.

Poe, Edgar Allan. "Annabel Lee." 1849. McMichael 848-49.

---. "The Cask of Amontillado." 1846. McMichael 907-12.

---. "The Fall of the House of Usher." 1839. McMichael 860-73.

---. "The Philosophy of Furniture." *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe.* Vol xiv. Ed. James A. Harrison. New York: Crowell, 1902.

---. "The Purloined Letter." 1845. McMichael 890-903.

---. "The Raven." 1844. McMichael 842-45.

---. "The Tell-tale Heart." 1842. McMichael 878-81.

Poirier, Suzanne. "The Weir Mitchell Rest Cure: Doctor and Patients." *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 10.1 (1983): 15-40.

Preston, Beth. "The Functions of Things: a Philosophical Perspective on Material Culture." *Matter, Materiality, and Modern Culture.* Ed. P.M. Graves-Brown. London: Routledge, 2000. 22-49.

Putzi, Jennifer. "'Tattooed still:' The Inscription of Female Agency in Elizabeth Stoddard's *The Morgesons.*" *Legacy* 17.2 (2000): 165-73.

Reeves-Brown, Jessamyn. "An Examination of the Fabrics of the Regency." *Jessamyn's Regency Costume Companion.* 6 Dec. 2005. 2 October 2007 <http://www.songsmyth.com/fabric.html>.

Richards, Sylvie L.F. "Nathaniel Hawthorne's 'Monsieur du Miroir' Through Jacques Lacan's Looking Glass." *The Nathaniel Hawthorne Review* 18.1 (1992): 15-20.

Riggins, Stephen Harold. "Fieldwork in the living room: An autoethnographic essay." Riggins, *The Socialness of Things* 100-47.

---, ed. *The Socialness of Things: Essays on the Socio-Semiotics of Objects.* New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1994.

Rogers, Annie G. "In the 'I' of Madness: Shifting Subjectivities in Girls' and Women's Psychological Development in 'The Yellow Wallpaper.'" *Analyzing the Different Voice: Feminist Psychological Theory and Literary Texts.* Ed. and intro. Jerilyn Fisher and Ellen S. Silber. Fwd. Carol Gilligan. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998. 45-65.

Rogers, Meyric R. *American Interior Design: The Traditions and Development of Domestic Design from Colonial Time to the Present.* New York: Norton, 1947.

Romero, Lora. *Home Fronts. Domesticity and its Critics in the Antebellum United States.* Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1997.

Roth, Marty. "Gilman's Arabesque Wallpaper." *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 34.4 (2001): 145-62.

Rowson, Susanna. *Charlotte Temple.* 1794. *Charlotte Temple and Lucy Temple.* Ed. and intro. Ann Douglas. New York: Penguin, 1991. 1-132.

---. *Lucy Temple.* 1828. Douglas, *Charlotte Temple and Lucy Temple* 135-265.

Ruiz de Burton, Maria Amparo. 1885. *The Squatter and the Don.* Ed. and intro. Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita. Houston, TX: Arte Publico, 1997.

Rush, Rebecca. *Kelroy.* 1812. Fwd. Cathy N. Davidson. Ed. and intro. Dana D. Nelson. New York: Oxford UP, 1992.

Sedgwick, Catharine Maria. *Hope Leslie.* 1827. Ed. Mary Kelley. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1987.

---. *A New England Tale.* 1822. Fwd. Cathy N. Davidson. Ed. and intro. Victoria Clements. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995.

Scarry, Elaine. *On Beauty and Being Just.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1999.

Shamir, Milette. "Divided Plots: Interior Space and Gender Difference in Domestic Fiction." *Genre* 29.4 (1996): 429-72.

---. *Inexpressible Privacy: The Interior Life of Antebellum American Literature.* Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2006

Shumaker, Conrad, "'Too Terribly Good to be Printed,' Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper.'" Meyering 65-74.

Simmel, Georg. "Individual and Society in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Views of Life." *The Sociology of Georg Simmel.* Trans., comp. and intro. Kurt H. Wolf. New York: Free, 1950. 58-84.

Singley, Carol J., and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, eds. *Anxious Power: Reading, Writing, and Ambivalence in Narratives by Women.* Albany:

State U of New York P, 1993.

Smith-Rosenberg, Carroll. *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America.* New York: Oxford UP, 1985.

Spacks, Patricia Meyer. *The Female Imagination.* New York: Knopf, 1975.

Sparke, Penny. "Elsie de Wolfe and her Female Clients, 1905-15. Gender, Class and the Professional Interior Decorator." *Women's Places: Architecture and Design 1860-1960.* Ed. Brenda Martin and Penny Sparke. New York: Routledge, 2003. 47-68.

Stern, Julia. "'I am Cruel Hungry' Dramas of Twisted Appetite and Rejected Identification in Elizabeth Stoddard's *The Morgesons.*" *American Culture, Canons, and the Case of Elizabeth Stoddard.* Ed. Robert McClure Smith and Ellen Weinauer. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2003. 107-27.

Sterling Laurie A. "'A frail structure of our own rearing': The Value(s) of Home in *The Marble Faun.*" *American Transcendental Quarterly* 14.2 (2000): 93-111.

Stoddard, Elizabeth. "Early Journalism." 1856. Stoddard, "*The Morgesons" and Other Writings.*

---. "Manuscripts." 1856. Stoddard, "*The Morgesons" and Other Writings.*

---. *The Morgesons.* New York, 1862. *Wright American Fiction 1851-1875.* Indiana University Digital Library Program. Sept. 1, 2007. <http://www.letrs.indiana. edu/web/w/wright2/>.

---. *The Morgesons.* Ed. and intro. Lawrence Buell and Sandra A. Zagarell. New York: Penguin, 1984.

---. "*The Morgesons" and Other Writings, Published and Unpublished, by Elizabeth Stoddard.* Ed. and comp. Lawrence Buell and Sandra A. Zagarell. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1984.

Stott, Ann. "Hannah More: Biography." *The Victorian Web.* 26 Oct. 2002. 2 October 2007 <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/more/bio.html>.

Stowe, Harriet Beecher. *Pink and White Tyranny.* Toronto: Canadian News, 1871.

---. *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* 1852. Ed. and intro. Ann Douglas. New York:

Penguin, 1981.

Suess, Barbara A. "The Writing s on the Wall: Symbolic Orders in 'The Yellow Wallpaper.'" *Women's Studies* 32.1 (2003): 79-97.

Swart, Koenraad W. "'Individualism' in the Mid-Nineteenth Century (1826-1860)." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 23 (1962): 77-90.

Sweeney, Susan Elizabeth. "Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall: Gazing in Edith Wharton's 'Looking Glass.'" *Speaking the Other Self: American Women Writers.* Ed. and intro. Jeanne Campbell Reesman. Athens: U Georgia P, 1997. 54-75.

Taylor, Charles. *Sources of The Self The Making of the Modern Identity.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1989.

Tenney, Tabitha Gilman. *Female Quixotism.* 1801. Fwd. Cathy N. Davidson. Ed. and intro. Jean Nienkamp and Andrea Collins. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992.

Thomas, Heather Kirk. "'[A] Kind of "Debased Romanesque" With Delirium Tremens': Late-Victorian Wall Coverings and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'The Yellow Wall-Paper.'" Golden and Zangrando 189-206.

Thoreau, Henry David. "Walden." 1854. McMichael 1489-1663.

Thrailkill, Jane F. "Doctoring 'The Yellow Wallpaper.'" *ELH* 69. 2 (2002): 525-66.

Tillman, Lynne. "A Mole in the House of the Modern." *New Essays on the House of Mirth.* Ed. Deborah Esch. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001. 133-58.

Tintner, Adeline R. "'The Old Things': Balzac's *Le Curé de Tours* and James's *The Spoils of Poynton.*" *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 26. 4 (1972): 436-55.

Totten, Gary. "The Art and Architecture of the Self: Designing the 'I'-Witness in Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth.*" *College Literature* 27.3 (2000): 71-87.

Treichler, Paula A. "Escaping the Sentence: Diagnosis and Discourse in 'The Yellow Wallpaper.'" *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 3.1/2 (1984): 61-77.

Twain, Mark [Samuel Langhorne Clemens]. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.* 1876. Ed. Susan K. Harris. Riverside ed. Boston: Houghton, 2000.

----. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer.* 1876. New York: Amsco School, 1991.

Van Der Meer, LB. *Interpretatio Etrusca: Greek Myths on Etruscan Mirrors.* Amsterdam: Gieben, 1995.

Van Slyck, Abigail A. "The Lady and the Library Loafer: Gender and Public Space in Victorian America. *Winterthur Portfolio* 41.4 (1996): 221-42.

Veblen, Thorstein. "Conspicuous Consumption." *The Theory of the Leisure Class.* 1899. New York: Dover, 1994. 43-62.

Wagner-Martin, Linda. "Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper': A Centenary." Meyering 51-64.

Walker, Lynne, and Vron Ware. "Political Pincushions: Decorating the Abolitionist Interior 1787-1865." Bryden and Floyd 58-83.

Wall, Cynthia. "Gendering Rooms: Domestic Architecture and Literary Acts." *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 5.4 (1993): 349-72.

Warren, Joyce W. *The American Narcissus: Individualism and Women in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction.* New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1984.

Weir, Sybil. "*The Morgesons*: A Neglected Feminist Bildungsroman." *The New England Quarterly* 49.3 (1976): 427-39.

Welter, Barbara. "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860." *American Quarterly* 18.2, Part 1. (1966): 151-74.

Werness, Hope B. *The Symbolism of Mirrors in Art from Ancient Times to the Present.* Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1999.

Wexler, Laura. "The Domestic Unconscious." *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism.* Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2000. 209-61.

Wharton, Edith. *The Reef.* 1912. Ed. and intro. Stephen Orgel. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998.

---. *A Backward's Glance*. 1934. New York: Scribner's, 1985.

Wharton, Edith, and Ogden Codman, Jr. *The Decoration of Houses*. 1897. The Revised and Expanded Classical America ed. New York: Classical America and The Arthur Ross Foundation, 1997.

Whitman, Walt. "Song of Myself" from *Leaves of Grass*. 1855. McMichael 2149-95.

Wiegman, Robyn. *American Anatomies. Theorizing Race and Gender*. Durham: Duke UP, 1995.

Wilhelm, Randall S. "Objects on the Table: Anxiety and Still Life in Hemingway's A Farewell To Arms." *The Hemingway Review* 26.1 (2006): 63-80.

Wills, Geoffrey. *English Looking Glasses*. New York: Barnes, 1965.

Wood, Ann Douglas. "The Literature of Impoverishment: The Women Local Colorists in America 1865-1914." *Women's Studies* 1 (1972): 3-45.

---. "Mrs. Sigourney and the Sensibility of the Inner Space." *The New England Quarterly* 45. 2 (1972): 163-81

Zagarell, Sandra A. "The Repossession of a Heritage: Elizabeth Stoddard's *The Morgesons*." *Studies in American Fiction* 13.1 (1985): 45-56.